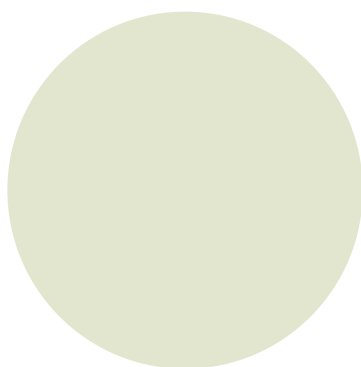
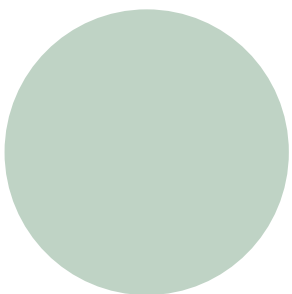
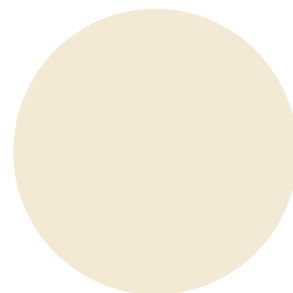
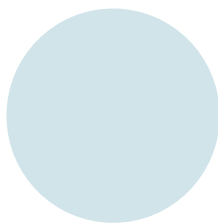
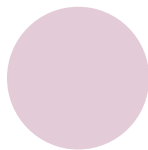
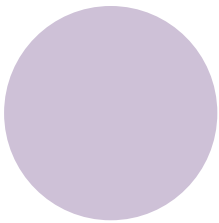
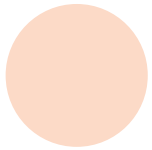




## WALKING THE CLIMATE TALK:

Stories of community foundation climate  
action journeys from around Europe



# IMPRINT

**Bibliographic information of the German National Library (DNB):**

This publication is listed in the German National Bibliography of the German National Library. Detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

**Publisher:**

Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen e.V. (Association of German Foundations)

Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 34 | 10178 Berlin | Germany

Telephone +49 (0)30 897 947-0

[www.stiftungen.org](http://www.stiftungen.org)

[post@stiftungen.org](mailto:post@stiftungen.org)

© Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen e. V., Berlin 2024

This report and its content can be shared, adapted, remixed under the Creative Commons license Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA)

**Authors:**

Francesca Mereta, James Magowan

**Project lead climate:**

Kathrin Dombrowski

**Design:**

Nina Reeber-Laqua, reeber design, Kronberg

ISBN 978-3-948796-16-7

# CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION ..... 4
- FROM PLEDGES TO ACTIONS:  
KENT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION CLIMATE JOURNEY..... 5
- MAKING THE CASE FOR CLIMATE IN TIMES OF WAR:  
THE BOYARKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION CLIMATE JOURNEY..... 8
- FROM A SWINGING FOCUS TO AN INTENTIONAL COMMITMENT:  
FONDAZIONE COMUNITÀ NOVARESE CLIMATE JOURNEY..... 10
- A NEW CLIMATE ACTION BLUEPRINT:  
RHEDA-WIEDENBRÜCK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION'S  
STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY..... 12
- MAKING CLIMATE AN INTERSECTIONAL  
PRIORITY FOR THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:  
THE FUNDACIO TOT RAVAL CLIMATE JOURNEY ..... 14
- NAVIGATING CLIMATE LEADERSHIP:  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IRELAND'S JOURNEY,  
ACTIONS AND FUTURE PATH..... 16
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... 19
- ABOUT ECFI'S CLIMATE ACTIVITIES ..... 20
- ABOUT ECFI – EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE ..... 21

# INTRODUCTION

Community foundations play a pivotal role in addressing pressing global challenges, such as the climate crisis. Deeply rooted in the local level, leveraging a holistic approach, they can mobilise local assets and convene actors to foster community-driven solutions. Even though it might not be explicit in their DNA, more and more community foundations have been recognising the need to step up and address how climate change is impacting the lives of people and organisations in the local community. And since 2022, ECFI has striven to be by their side, to help the wider European community field to make sense of the relevance and impact of climate change at local level and to determine options for community foundations regarding both mitigation and adaptation.

This report is a collection of six stories from community foundations across different countries that have embarked on their climate journey. Five are from organisations

which were represented as participants in the ECFI cohort of the Active Philanthropy Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey. In all five cases, their approach to climate action was greatly helped by the opportunity to take time out of their day-to-day business to reflect strategically on the ways the climate crisis intersects with their work and develop their own personal action plans. They also all emphasised the enormous value of connecting with and experiencing the support from like-minded individuals (in this case the other members of the ECFI Climate Action Peer Group) - showing that effective climate leadership is about building the right relationships and connections just as much as it is about creating an effective strategy.

We hope this reading will shed light on community foundations' creativity, persistence and strength across Europe in integrating the climate lens in their organisations and that it will inspire others to do the same and join this journey.

# FROM PLEDGES TO ACTIONS: KENT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION CLIMATE JOURNEY

Kent Community Foundation embarked on a transformative climate journey by first exploring ways to embrace the 2030 Agenda fully. Indeed, as a place-based grant maker, it became increasingly aware that it could be, along with other community foundations, a pioneer of the statement “think global, act local,” advancing local community-led solutions for global problems. As one of the most significant foundations in the Kent and Medway area, seeing the impact that climate change has on its community first hand, and given that only 4% of all donations in the UK go to environmental causes, Kent Community Foundation decided to step up meaningfully and integrate the climate lens in different parts of its organisation, ranging from grantmaking, to operations, to its investment strategy.

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

The overall national discourse, led by UKCF, the UK network of community foundations, on how community foundations could align core work areas with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was one of the most important triggers that kickstarted Kent Community Foundation’s climate journey. In response to UKCF’s call and by exchanging with its peers, the organisation identified those SDGs with most relevance for itself and the community: SDG 13, Climate Action, was one of them!

At the same time, the wider philanthropic sector in the UK was working in this direction with the launch of the **Funder Commitment on Climate Change** by ACF, the Association of Charitable Foundations, that gave birth to the global **Philanthropy for Climate** movement.

Another co-driving force in the journey was entering the new strategy period in 2020-2021, which provided the opportunity to put the very first **KCF Environmental Strategy & Implementation Plan** in black and white. Additionally, a staff member’s internal push and enthusiasm were vital. However, this was a new field to explore, and new competencies were needed: taking part in the ECFI Cohort of the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey, for instance, was an effective way to fill the knowledge gaps and learn from peers across the country and Europe.

Finally, the Board’s full support was pivotal in propelling the climate agenda forward, emphasising the community foundation’s proactive stance as a grantmaker and catalyst.

## Actions and impact

Kent Community Foundation made the first outspoken commitment to embark on the climate journey by signing the **Funders Commitment on Climate Change** and setting out its first Environmental Strategy

and Implementation Plan, which touches upon how to concretely advance the climate work in different areas of the organisation in line with the commitment principles.

One of the most significant turning points has been the shift in the investment strategy towards environmental sustainability. It was a lengthy and engaging process, backed up entirely by the Board, that entailed first having a clear vision of why that was an essential piece of work and how the organisation could achieve it. Secondly, the community foundation developed a clear messaging and communication strategy to share and engage in deep, meaningful conversations with its fundholders to make them understand the importance of such a move and that the financial returns on investment could not be the only relevant KPI in this new vision.

On the grantmaking side, Kent Community Foundation underwent a whole new positioning process as an environmental funder in the community by expanding its portfolio and setting up the brand new **Fund for the Environment**. To kickstart this new line of funding, the organisation raised the first pot of money, £500,000, by making a compelling case among the existing donors. Today, while fundraising efforts continue, the fund has an endowed capital of £2,000,000 perpetually allocated, which gives stability in terms of financial resources available. Finally, one of the first impacts was to get in contact with and support

local organisations that have never been on the radar, building new partnerships and further strengthening the community foundation's credibility at the local level.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

Kent Community Foundation wants to capitalise on the momentum and attention around climate that has been building up. It aims to boost a spill-over effect by having local organisations integrate the climate lens independently from their mission. For this reason, the community foundation organised in March 2024 the Green Impact Forum to empower and upskill those already delivering significant initiatives within the voluntary sector and act as a catalyst for those who want to get started, even with small steps, and be a platform for new ideas to emerge. The underlying principle is to provide inspiration and a sense of achievability by sharing case studies and peers' experiences and making available training programs for such organisations.

Another question for the immediate future is how to assess its climate impact and report on it for itself and other organisations on the territory. The community foundation, being part of the Funder Climate Commitment, has already undergone the regular reporting requested; however, it would like to bring it to the next level and understand the broader impact on the community that its climate work is having. Furthermore, in the future,

it would like to provide some guidance to organisations it supports, a light touch way to understand the environmental impact of their programs and actions that would not necessarily force them to develop and embrace a full climate policy.

Finally, having a deeper understanding of the community foundation's carbon footprint is another element at the centre of attention. Indeed, before COVID-19 hit, the staff and an external consultant conducted a carbon footprint analysis and found that the most significant impact was related to people coming into the office daily rather than the staff meeting charities in the community. That changed in the past couple of years, considering the implementation of hybrid work, mobility incentives, and new schemes. Therefore, the Kent Community Foundation is now undertaking a new audit of its carbon footprint to get more clarity and encourage sustainable practices among staff and stakeholders.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

Having a champion in the team makes all the difference. Of course, you need to have a favourable internal culture, be open to exploring new possibilities, and have a board that backs your vision. However, having one person passionate about strengthening the team's competence and willing to nudge and build consensus among colleagues is a crucial boost and success factor for meaningfully undertaking such a journey.



# MAKING THE CASE FOR CLIMATE IN TIMES OF WAR: THE BOYARKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION CLIMATE JOURNEY

You cannot press pause on climate change, not even in war times. And that is something that Boyarka Community Foundation (Фонд Боярської громади) knows well. The organisation, serving approximately 50,000 people spread across the city of Boyarka and 10 surrounding villages, located 20km from Kyiv, has made the conscious and intentional decision to keep the climate high on its agenda, all the while responding to the many urgent needs generated by the ongoing war in Ukraine.

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

Since its inception in 2020, Boyarka Community Foundation has made tackling climate change and developing local solutions to address it one of its priorities. Its broad mission is to solve community problems and foster local action by leveraging community assets. The push to prioritise climate in the organisation's agenda came from the people who led the establishment and consolidation process and who have been active in the territory for a long time. They ensured that the statute made a clear reference to the climate from the outset.

A Boyarka Community Foundation representative joined the ECFI Cohort of the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey to further enhance and professionalise their work on climate change. The Climate

Action Plan developed as part of the course allowed the organisation to put its efforts strategically into writing, further integrating the climate lens into its mission and activity. In addition, the community foundation has been using this plan as an outreach tool to attract like-minded people and potential partners who want to advance climate solutions in Boyarka.

## Actions and impact

Boyarka Community Foundation has a specific funding programme dedicated to the environment from research and data gathering to waste management, training, educational activities, and on-the-ground projects. It also pays attention to advocacy issues in this space, particularly how to shift towards a mindset and an enabling context that would see the local environment and nature as critical stakeholders, equal to humans, when decisions are taken.

On top of the community foundation's agenda, since the beginning of the war, there has been a willingness to intersect climate in the different emergency responses and solutions that have arisen during the conflict. In addition to continuing to give grants to environment-related projects, the organisation has raised awareness and supported efforts to ensure the territory's energy efficiency and independence. For instance, it financed the installation of 26 new insulated windows in the local Veteran Centre.



Another issue the community foundation is tackling is the war's environmental impact. Along with Zero Waste Alliance Ukraine, within the Ukraine Community of Civil Society called "Recovery," it launched the project "Waste of Destruction: Exploring the Prospects of Implementing a Circular Economy." The objective is to investigate, firstly, in three regions, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kerson, management practices to demolish waste provoked by the conflict's shelling and flood. Secondly, clear recommendations should be given to authorities on how to recycle and reuse them safely and efficiently from an environmental point of view. The team has involved experts from different backgrounds, e.g., law, economics, engineering, and sociology, to work together to provide a multi-perspective approach and systemic solutions.

Finally, environmental restoration ideas with climate benefits have also been used as community healing mechanisms. In 2022, as soon as the Ukrainian army repelled the Russian attacks in the Kyiv region during the full-scale invasion, Boyarka Community Foundation, keeping its commitment alive, started planning the landscaping of the community parks. In the summer, the organisation launched a campaign to collect trees, not money. The subsequent planting process created, unexpectedly, an atmosphere of hope within the community. Indeed, while anxiously preparing for the expected blackouts and the extreme winter weather, residents felt – despite the challenging circumstances - a sense of agency and that they were able to contribute positively to the future of their community.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

The ongoing war poses several challenges and obstacles to the community foundation's ability to pursue its work, in general, and on the climate issue. Making the case for focusing on the environment while other urgent and critical needs emerge along the way, like support to the army, food crisis, and mental support to survivors, takes work and perseverance. But Boyarka Community Foundation is more determined than ever to keep climate high up on the agenda and focus on gathering financial and social resources to advance this work.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

Keep working on what you believe in. Whether it's climate, in particular, or any other topic, understand your role as a community foundation: anticipate the needs and ambitions of your community and accompany the people and organisations into making new visions of sustainable development real. There will be obstacles to overcome and consensus to build, but with time, patience, and motivation, everything will be achievable.



# FROM A SWINGING FOCUS TO AN INTENTIONAL COMMITMENT: FONDAZIONE COMUNITÀ NOVARESE CLIMATE JOURNEY

Even though climate, with a broader environmental focus, has been on the Novarese Community Foundation's (Fondazione Comunità Novarese) radar since its inception, its commitment has been steady and boosted in recent times. To give some numbers, between 2012 and 2022, the community foundation launched six calls for proposals for 410,000€, supporting 12 projects. But then, in 2023 alone, the organisation issued its first climate-dedicated line of funding, Climate Chan(ce)ge – Opportunità Clima, making available 100,000€ and leveraging an additional 70,000€ from other sources. How did this change take place? What was the journey, and what possibilities have been opened ahead?

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

Signing the [Italian Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change](#) and officially becoming part of the broader global Philanthropy for Climate movement was one of the first turning points. Making the community foundation's commitment to climate explicit forced the organisation to integrate it intentionally in its strategic framework to begin shifting how the Novarese Community Foundation listens to and addresses the community issues through a climate lens to convey community power and ideas around the topic and to trigger accountability mechanisms.

The territory also played a crucial role in moving the commitment to climate forward. Indeed, in March 2022, the community

foundation joined the Contratto di Lago Cusio, a formal pact to coordinate the conservation effort of bringing together 130 among institutions, private entities, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. This pact resulted from a project the community foundation supported in 2014. Later in December, based on the community needs and inputs, it also applied to the Energy Community Repository. This EU initiative assists local institutions in building and spreading community energies across different countries.

As always, people in the organisation make the difference: having one officer fully dedicated and committed to bringing this perspective to the community foundation daily and strategic work has been crucial to advance in the journey.

Finally, as this is uncharted territory for community foundations, whose specialisation is at the local level and not on particular issues, making sense of how to integrate the climate lens in the organisation concretely was very challenging. But that is when the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey and the ECFI Climate Action Peer Group stepped in. Joining a path with others was essential to building a practical understanding and having a community of practice to refer to for concrete issues and to learn from.

## Actions and impact

Novarese Community Foundation launched in 2023 a dedicated line of funding, Climate

Chan(ce)ge- Opportunità Clima, for which it allocated 100,000€ (9% of the organisation's total grantmaking capacity). It also managed to further lever other resources from, for instance, existing donor-advised funds and individual donors. The money supported four projects directly and other side initiatives that also tackle climate mitigation and adaptation at the local level.

The other specific action was to include clear guidelines for each grant issued, inviting organisations to integrate the climate perspective into their mission and projects. Doing this helped to start the conversation around the intersectionality of the climate crisis among local civil society.

Actively participating in a community of peers, namely the ECFI Climate Action Peer Group and the Italian Foundations Climate Group, was also one of the critical points in the community foundation's strategy for advancing its work. Building on other community foundations and philanthropic experiences has been essential to developing a well-informed strategic plan for the present and the future.

Finally, the community foundation made its commitment visible by integrating it into its communication channels to promote transparency and accountability and raise awareness among its key stakeholders.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

One of the community foundation's short- and medium-term opportunities is to expand and consolidate its Board's involvement. It will be essential to build a shared knowledge base on the complexity and intersectionality of the climate crisis and its impact on its territory, going beyond individual sensitivities or formal and informal knowledge. Some potential solutions could be developing dedicated training courses, organising exchanges, and sharing peers' experiences. In addition, the

community foundation proposes to leverage its internal communications channels better, focusing more on delivering content on national and international philanthropic debates around climate and best practices from other contexts. These steps could favour the opening of an internal discussion about how to integrate climate principles in the endowment management that external consultants currently handle.

Another challenge ahead is to keep building the community foundation's profile as a thoughtful leader for advancing the climate issue in the community and beyond. On the one hand, this means continuing to provide dedicated resources: the organisation has decided to increase the grant funding by up to 150,000€ (50% more than the previous year). At the same time, it means building a local culture of recognising the multiple intersections of climate with the work of its partners, nudging change through different tools, e.g., grant proposal requests, one-to-one conversations, and dedicated support.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

Start where you are. Act now. Fail fast, move forward. There is no magic recipe to get everything right the first time, and you will often feel outside of your comfort zone. The climate journey can be bumpy, and the first step is always the hardest. But once you do it, trust yourself and your intuition, build on the shoulders of your peers, and do not be afraid of making mistakes.



# A NEW CLIMATE ACTION BLUEPRINT: RHEDA-WIEDENBRÜCK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION'S STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

Serving the city of Rheda-Wiedenbrück, with its 50,000 inhabitants, the Rheda-Wiedenbrück Community Foundation (Bürgerstiftung Rheda-Wiedenbrück) has undergone a new strategic path to integrate the climate lens in the organisation for the past two years. Having laid a solid basis to make this work permanent, namely changing the statute, enlarging its financial capacity, and starting to be acknowledged as a relevant actor in the climate space by its stakeholders in the community, the community foundation looks at 2024 as the year of action, where it will concretely start funding local projects and initiatives.

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

Rheda-Wiedenbrück Community Foundation started its journey in 2022 in response to a shared feeling among the foundation's staff and local citizens that climate action had to assume a higher priority within the organisation and the community. What started as a vague conversation initially, soon became the basis for concrete next steps.

At the same time, the organisation received a significant new financial contribution, resulting from the merging with another small local foundation and the donations from a private individual, that gave it some 'breathing space' and the needed flexibility to explore new funding opportunities with the Board, including climate.

Finally, joining the ECFI Cohort of the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey helped move the climate journey from talk to action. The training and the possibility of exchanging with other community foundations provided the necessary input and ideas on moving forward with the conversation with the Board and the organisation and setting the basis for concretely integrating the climate lens.

## Actions and impact

The first step was to change the Rheda-Wiedenbrück Community Foundation's statute to include climate action as one of its objectives. That was not immediate; instead, it took some time to bring on board the different community foundation's governance bodies: the Board, the Supervisory Committee, and the Advisory ones. Even though none was vehemently opposed, the general feeling was that climate was not the most urgent matter to address. The organisation's team tabled meaningful conversations to shift this perspective and bring climate as a cross-cutting and unavoidable issue rather than a top-ranking priority competing with others.

As always, when approaching a new topic, the community foundation was keen to explore its unique positioning and how it could have the most impact. Indeed, in the past couple of years, Germany has seen a rising availability of public (from municipality to state level) and private funding dedicated to the environment

and climate change. For this reason, understanding where the resources were going and what the community was already doing about climate was crucial to developing an informed strategy.

To do so, it participated in a local event, the Climate Fair, for the first time in October 2023. That was the opportunity to dive into new conversations and set the basis to formally position the community foundation's interest and commitment to work on climate in the eyes of different actors. Subsequently, the organisation held dedicated meetings with experts on climate-related topics to finetune its strategy. After these conversations, it decided its fund would focus on three areas: climate adaptation, species protection, and climate education.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

The first step for the community foundation in 2024 was to earmark a dedicated 'learning budget' for climate. The underlying idea is to test the modalities and processes of funding this new space and find ways to reach new constituencies. This latter is a delicate point: while the organisation already has an established network of partners for implementing the work on climate education, regarding climate adaptation and species protection, the work starts practically from scratch. It will require a specific effort to expand the relationships within these fields. At the end of the year, the team will strategically reconvene to adjust and inform the formal future strategy.

Managing its 2.7€ million endowments in a more climate-aligned way is also an objective for the Rheda-Wiedenbrück Community Foundation. The organisation is considering investing part of its wealth in the local wind and solar energy cooperatives. It would also be a way to support the development of the local real economy.

Finally, the community foundation aims to explore its unique positioning and potential synergies with the actors already funding this space, particularly the local municipality. Even though the public sector can offer access to substantial additional resources, its calls for proposals can be overwhelming for small local entities and involve lengthy and resource-consuming processes. The community foundation, by contrast, can be faster and more flexible than anybody else in supporting programs and initiatives. It can leverage its convening power to inform the local administration strategy, making sure that needs and solutions are developed from the ground up.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

The local level is an excellent space for testing and innovating: it gives a clear, close sense of what people are interested in, what drives them, and what their red buttons are. It is a space for community foundations to be bold and make a difference, testing out initiatives and solutions that can be scaled up. However, seeing and operating only at the local level can make you feel lonely and isolated. This is why it is vital to connect and exchange with peers across Europe to imagine and exchange how we can, together, respectively, in our communities, drive local solutions to the biggest challenges of our time.



# MAKING CLIMATE AN INTERSECTIONAL PRIORITY FOR THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION: THE FUNDACIO TOT RAVAL CLIMATE JOURNEY

The climate journey is not one you buy the ticket for. We are all heading through climate change and its impact, but how we get there is up to us. And the Fundacio Tot Raval (Tot Raval Community Foundation), based in the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona, is equipping itself to transform how the community and the organisation perceive and deal with the issue. A long journey made of ups and downs has just begun.

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

Recognising existing climate actions in the community was one of the first sparks and leverage to start addressing this conversation more systemically. Indeed, for instance, the local landmark cultural festival, Festival Cultural Raval(s), which involves over 100 organisations, started integrating climate and sustainability from the neighbourhood perspective.

Also, funding opportunities were a primary factor: Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation, for instance, launched a grant programme in Spain dedicated to arts and cultural projects that would foster community imagination towards possible futures and solutions to the climate crisis. Even though the idea proposed by Tot Raval was not awarded a grant in the end, it was an opportunity to start thinking about how climate could be integrated into other streams of work.

Having someone in the organisation ready to take up this journey and actively advocating for making climate a priority was also crucial to starting conversations internally and externally. The opportunity of joining the ECFI Cohort of the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey has been an essential support for building the individual and organisational capacity to concretely kick off the climate lens integration and develop a first action plan. Finally, the related community of 'climate action' peers that was created to continue the learning journey has been an essential support and exchange group to test our ideas and actions and learn from one another.

## Actions and impact

Among the main actions undertaken as of today, the introduction of climate and sustainability principles in the statute of the community foundation was a significant step. Indeed, the board, comprising 53 organisations, reviewed and accepted the internal proposal and formally introduced it to the community foundation mission.

Building an internal culture on climate intersectionality has also been a significant focus. One primary action has been sharing the main learnings from the Climate & Philanthropy Learning Journey among colleagues through dedicated ad hoc moments or conversations. Even though the effects and impacts are not immediate, intentionally integrating a climate learning

culture in the community foundation provides the potential sparks to enhance actions further and build a more strategic approach to the topic.

Finally, the Tot Raval Community Foundation and its constituency have developed concrete initiatives and actions. For instance, during the summer of 2023, one of the hottest of all times, the organisation **created a map** of cultural facilities and spaces in the neighborhood that could be a good place to escape from the heat. Called "climate shelters," these spaces provided parents and their kids on one hand the opportunity to escape the blazing heat, making fresh water and air conditioning available. On the other hand, they also offered reading groups, playgrounds, and dedicated areas for children aged 0 to 6.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

Tot Raval recognises different challenges and opportunities in continuing this journey, starting from its governance. The organisation is a great example of a community-led foundation, with an inclusive wide board and highly participatory processes in decision-making. For this reason, it will be critical to map internal stakeholders and identify champions ready to advocate for this kind of work and the so-called movable middle, actors who can be inclined to act and shift their mindset but do not have the tools yet.

One of the questions is also how to move from an emergency, reactive approach that mainly focuses on immediate needs to a long-term systemic view, able to permanently include the climate perspective at the strategic level. Indeed, climate often becomes a postponed issue, and the organisations looking for resources and providing responses focus on what are perceived as more immediate and evident crises - and often miss their interconnection to climate change.

Finally, one of the opportunities for the community foundation would be the enabling funding system. If foundations and philanthropic organisations in Spain and beyond actively integrated climate principles and requests in their grants, Tot Raval and other grant seekers would be forced to incorporate the climate lens concretely in their strategy and actions.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

Find allies within and outside the organisation. Even though we are, knowingly or unknowingly, traveling this climate journey, many community foundations, and people inside, are not equipped to address it and make the necessary changes in the short term. If you are alone in your organisation to advocate for climate as a priority, take time to identify others that might be willing to join you. And rely on and exchange with your peers across the country and continents facing the same challenges to learn and grow together.



# NAVIGATING CLIMATE LEADERSHIP: COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IRELAND'S JORUNNEY, ACTIONS AND FUTURE PATH

In navigating the intricate landscape of climate action, Community Foundation Ireland's journey has been marked by pivotal triggers and transformative opportunities. Despite facing initial constraints and challenges, the foundation's steadfast commitment to climate consciousness paved the way for substantial growth and impact.

## Triggers and opportunities to kick off the journey

While climate has always been high in Community Foundation Ireland's strategic vision, the road to leading significant efforts was bumpy. Indeed, the organisation started the first conversations on this topic in 2003, with little funding to support realities such as the Irish Environmental Network. The 2009 financial crash put a further constraint on the community foundation's climate journey, which properly began a few years later.

Today, looking back, building up the organisation's funding capacity throughout almost 25 years of work was essential to ensure stable and concrete support. The community foundation went from granting 80,000€ back when it started up to over 20 million Euro in 2023. Along with this increase, there was a growing understanding and focus among donors on the importance of tackling climate change.

From a governance point of view, there has always been consensus around the need to prioritise climate issues. This favourable

environment was a key factor in making Sustainable Futures, that is focusing on climate and biodiversity, one of the key areas defined in Community Foundation Ireland's latest strategic plan.

Even at a national level, climate change is not as polarising an issue in Ireland as it is in other countries. For instance, according to [Climate Change's Four Irelands](#), an analysis carried out by the Irish Government, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and National Dialogue on Climate Action, the vast majority of the Irish population is either alarmed or concerned by the climate crisis and even among the doubtful, climate scepticism is extremely rare.

## Actions and impact

In executing its strategy, the organisation always considers two crucial target groups: the community, composed of micro-local constituencies, and the Government. This ensures that policies are informed by what is happening on the ground and that stable enabling conditions are ensured.

Biodiversity preservation and action kicked off in 2019, and this is one line of work that shows this approach. The community foundation partnered with the National Parks, Wildlife Service, and the Government; together, they have provided matched experts to communities to develop evidence-based Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Some of them would then be subsequently funded. Up to now, 217



Biodiversity Local Action Plans are in place, supported by just over €1.7 Million in grants, of which more than €1 Million has been sourced from philanthropy.

To spread this effort even further and inform its strategy, Community Foundation Ireland also leveraged its convening power by organising in September 2023 a Conference called Community Action for Biodiversity, which brought together 130 grant recipients over the past four years. The aim of this conference was two-fold: documenting successes and challenges on the one hand and developing ways to accelerate progress on the other. Furthermore, during this occasion, the organisation launched a new online information hub called **Action For Biodiversity** that maps the national wildlife and shares resources for communities to take action.

Another focal point for Community Foundation Ireland's climate strategy is the circular economy, with a dedicated fund aiming to invest strategically to raise awareness on the topic, support skills development, and support local organisations' work. The underlying approach is the same as the biodiversity action. By pairing local organisations with experts and consultants, the community foundation provides competencies to grassroots realities to develop territorial action plans and the seed funding to support their implementation. Since 2019, it has awarded over 200,000€.

Strengthening the overall civil society constituency working on climate to advocate effectively for itself is another crucial work

axis for Community Foundation Ireland. By leveraging its convening power, it brought together several organisations to develop a shared understanding and vision of what should be done. Furthermore, it invested in their capacity as it recognised that they were severely underfunded and hence in a weak position to lobby for change against well-established interest groups, like farmers' associations.

Moving to its long-term restricted endowment, amounting to over 46 million euros in 2022, the community foundation has applied a negative screening and exclusion policy since its inception to avoid investments in areas, like fossil fuels, that are not aligned with its mission. Ten years ago, it decided to move even further towards being a social impact investor, even in the climate realm, and it plans to strengthen its position and efforts further.

## Opportunities and questions ahead

When looking at the future, several questions lie ahead. First, even though significant steps forward were made, more than the current pace of change is needed to adapt and mitigate climate efforts effectively and adequately. Inertia at all levels is one of the biggest threats that the organisation sees.

Political and societal development could also hinder the further development of climate work, from the possible exclusion of the Greens from the Government in next year's elections to strengthening farmers' lobbies across Europe and the country.

On the grantmaking side, one strategic question for Community Foundation Ireland is how to apply the climate lens to all lines of funding. Furthermore, given the substantial work achieved at the local level through the Community Action Plans, one key strategic topic on the agenda is to support communities in achieving their goals in a more systemic way and, at the same time, to unlock further the collective power and intelligence of such a wealth of solutions and ideas.

## ONE ADVICE TO PEERS

Ask yourself: What is our sphere of influence, and how can we foster systemic change? As community foundations, we need to understand, stand by and empower grassroots local communities to develop and scale local solutions. And ensure they have the capacity and support them to bring evidence, ideas, and insights to our local and national governments and cooperate with them to drive informed, long-lasting, effective change.

**Community  
Foundation  
Ireland**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We truly thank for their time, kindness and passion to share their organisation's climate journey:

- Josephine McCartney, CEO of Kent Community Foundation
- Lidia Volodymyrivna Savenko, Director of Boyarka Community Foundation
- Andrea Cognata, Culture and Environment Officer of Novarese Community Foundation
- Merce Garet, Program Coordinator of Tot Raval Community Foundation
- Bettina Windau, Chairwoman of Rheda-Wiedenbrück Community Foundation
- Tina Roche, former CEO of Community Foundation Ireland

## ABOUT ECFI'S CLIMATE ACTIVITIES

Building on its longstanding work around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ECFI began to focus more specifically on SDG 13 (Climate Action) in 2021. Responding to a growing interest and demand from the field, in 2023 ECFI joined forces with **Active Philanthropy** to make the **Climate and Philanthropy Learning Journey** accessible to community foundations and their support organisations from across Europe. As members of a dedicated community foundation cohort, the ECFI scholars were able to exchange learnings and insights and collectively explore the many facets of climate action at a community level. In September 2023, supported by Stiftung Mercator, ECFI

convened engaged community foundation practitioners both online and in-person in Berlin as part of the ECFI Climate Action Days with the objective of encouraging community foundations to take the next steps on their climate journeys. ECFI continues to host the online ECFI Climate Action Peer Group and is working to onboard a new group of community foundations (again via participation in the Climate and Philanthropy Learning Journey) in 2024.

If you would like to learn more about ECFI's climate activities and how to get involved, reach out to Kathrin Dombrowski at **[kathrin@communityfoundations.eu](mailto:kathrin@communityfoundations.eu)**

# ABOUT ECFI – EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE

ECFI is an initiative committed to strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe. The initiative, hosted by the German Association of Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen), collaborates with a range of partners inside and outside of the community philanthropy ecosystem to achieve this goal.

ECFI works with community foundations (CFs) and community foundation support organisations (CFSOs) primarily through facilitating and stimulating interactions to enable learning, knowledge-building and empowerment. ECFI is also engaged in the mapping and analysis of CF activities and in disseminating information that will facilitate development of the field. ECFI strives to be a central point of contact for wider engagement within the global community foundation movement.

## ECFI'S THEORY OF CHANGE

ECFI believes in order to achieve long-term change in local communities (in relation to building trust and collaboration; enhancing the potential for self-determination and empowerment; and achieving social cohesion), that community foundations have an important role to play by building and utilising resources; convening and connecting people and organisations; and adding value through local knowledge and expertise.

## ECFI'S APPROACH

ECFI's approach is to empower those operating in the community foundation field – community foundations themselves and the array of support organisations that operate at national and regional level. We aim to add value to their work through providing a European dimension, consistent with values of promoting local democracy and civic participation; fostering the establishment of productive international relationships and knowledge exchange; helping bring financial and non-financial resources into the field; inspiring and driving momentum for development of practice.


## ECFI'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Facilitate interaction and learning, and share new knowledge and fostering collaboration among CFSOs in Europe to strengthen the support infrastructure;

1. Inspire and facilitate growth in the CF field in Europe;
2. Stimulate CFs in Europe to exercise their community leadership role and collaborate on pressing issues, including inequality, migration and climate change;
3. Build and share knowledge about the CF field in Europe;
4. Leverage financial resources and other support for the development of the CF field in Europe;
5. Increase awareness and understanding of the SDGs and their relevance to the work of community foundations in Europe.

## CONTACT

<https://www.communityfoundations.eu/>



This collection of climate stories is part of a joint project between the European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) and the German Association of Community Foundation (Bündnis) on the topic of community foundations and climate change, supported by Stiftung Mercator.

STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR

The work of ECFI has been supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Porticus Foundation, the Mercator Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Körber Foundation and the Lipoid Foundation.



Robert Bosch **Stiftung**



**Lipoid**Stiftung

**European Community Foundation Initiative**

c/o Association of German Foundations  
Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 34 | 10178 Berlin | Germany  
info@communityfoundations.eu | www.communityfoundations.eu