

Opening Up the Charities Data Set

Background

The World Giving Index has consistently ranked Ireland the most charitable nation in Europe and fifth worldwide.

Irish charities receive an estimated €5.7bn each year, €2.3bn of which comes from government and institutional funding.

A nationwide survey conducted by the Irish Charity Engagement Monitor in July 2014, however, showed that trust in the charity sector had reached a record low, down from 74% in 2012 to 51% in 2014.

This is largely due to a number of high profile controversies in December 2013 resulting in an 11% annual drop in charitable donations (measured in March 2014 compared to the same period in 2013).

Public trust in how charities govern themselves and spend their funding has been eroded and the decline in donations has forced many charities to significantly scale back services. Irish charities are in crisis.

The Challenge

Most charities raising €1m+ per annum from public fundraising have an independently audited report on their website with financial statements and detailing activities for the year. In most cases, the financial report is signed-off by the senior auditor in a high-profile accounting firm.

These should read as credible and reassuring documents to any donor. However, very few donors actually read them.

The reports are rarely provided on the charities' websites and when they are, potential donors would often need a grounding in accounting to take any practical information from them.

It is even more difficult to compare charities based on their reported financial activities. An individual may have to spend several hours reviewing separate charities' annual reports before gaining any sense of who to support.

Key Open Issues

There is no standardised format for tracking income and expenses. When published, income and expense data is not published in an 'open' format. Not all charities make income and expense data publicly available on their websites.

The Solution

OK Ireland, along with charity sector volunteers, are helping to reverse this trend by converting information from annual reports and other trusted sources to an Open Data format.

Over the past few months, data were extracted from the annual financial reports of 24 of the largest charities in Ireland (€1m+) and converted into a comparable and openly accessible format.

This will show people in under 30 seconds how any large charity spends its money through an easy-to-understand visual dashboard that supplies information from an independent and trusted source.

As a result, Ireland now has one centralized location that allows a quick comparison of charities' data.

The Benefits

Through the Irish Charities Dashboard, potential donors and Irish charities have gained immediate benefits including:

- Reassurance to existing donors that their money is being well spent;
- Encouragement for people who ceased donating following the controversies to start giving again.
- Increase in the overall effectiveness of charitable giving as people can choose to donate only to charities who spend wisely
- Improved performance within charities by creating market pressures which reward efficiency and openness.
- Creation of a centralized database for charities' financial data.
- The HackDay dataset which is available on the Open Knowledge Ireland website.
- Deployment of a prototype tool which makes it easy for anyone to assess how charities use donations.
- First draft of a future website where charity data can be displayed in an easily understood fashion.

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Irish Charity Market
€ 5.7 Billions

Trust in Irish Charities
↓ - 23% (2012 vs 2014)

Donations to Irish Charities
↓ - 11% (2013 vs 2014)

Trust Crisis for Irish Charities

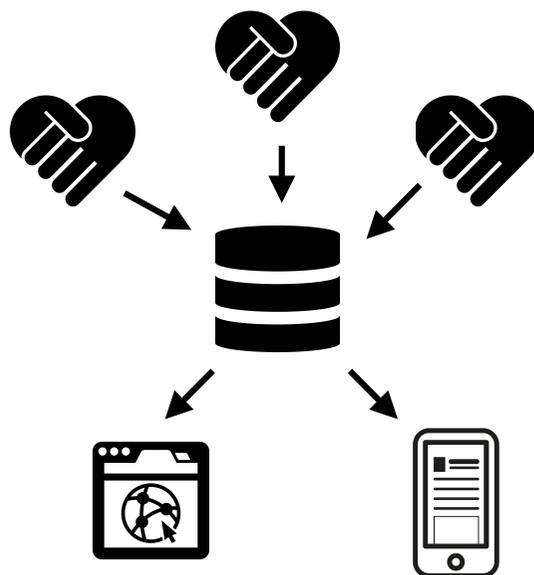
- Reduced trust means:
- less donations
 - less social work in Ireland
 - less social work globally
 - less international prestige for Ireland

Need to Rebuild Trust in Irish Charities

- Big charities already publish their annual budgets, but the format is not
- easy
 - transparent
 - open enough for everyday citizens

Our Solution:

- Charities provide each year very basic information on secure webpage: basic budget information and board salaries
- Easy to handle and self-sustained
- Data is controlled for plausibility and then saved in data base
- Data is published as **Open Data** and available via API for app developer



Effects in Ireland:

- Increases transparency in charity sector
- will increase trust in charity sector
- will increase readiness to donate
- builds environment for third party app developer, e.g. a *Charity Navigator made in Ireland*
- data can be used for research
- data can be used by charities themselves for PR