

Fundraising Fellowship Ireland



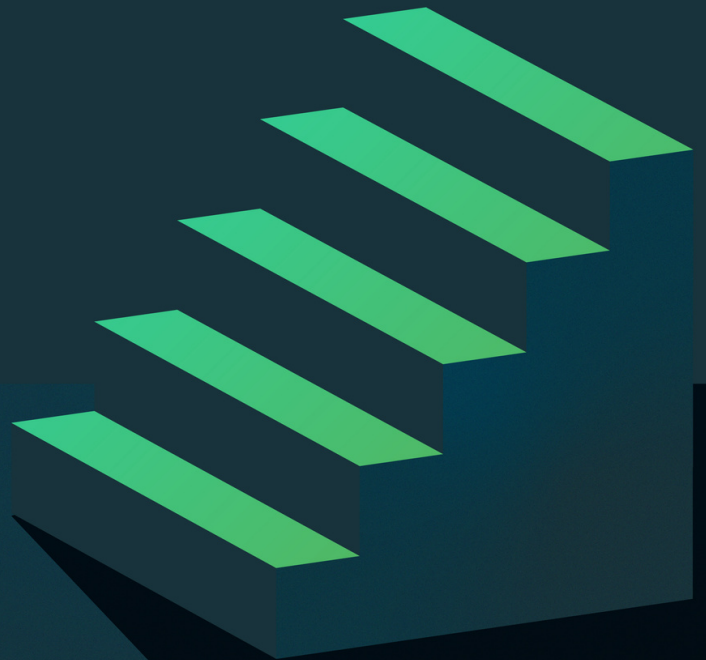
An Roinn Cultúir,
Cumarsáide agus Spóirt
Department of Culture,
Communications and Sport



Case Study:

Galway Community Circus

Fundraising Fellowship Ireland 2024- 2026

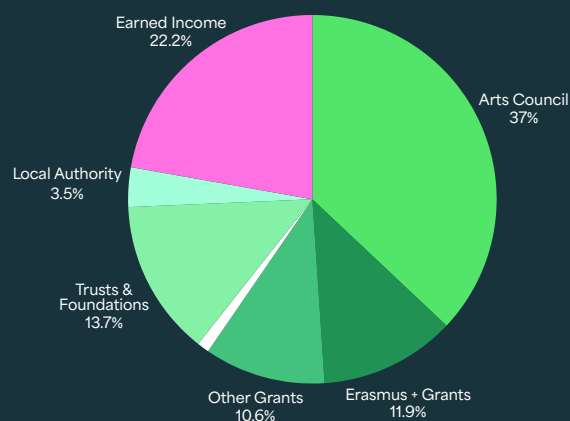


Galway Community Circus Profile

Founded in 2002, Galway Community Circus (GCC) is Ireland’s flagship organisation for youth and community circus, using circus arts as a tool for creativity, inclusion, confidence-building and connection. From its dedicated training and performance space in Galway City, the organisation delivers a wide range of programmes for children, young people, artists and communities across the region.

Over the past two decades, Galway Community Circus has built a reputation for creating welcoming, supportive environments where people can learn new skills, express themselves, develop social skills and resilience through participation in circus arts. The organisation works closely with schools, youth services and community groups, with a particular focus on engaging young people who may face barriers to participation.

Under the leadership of CEO Lynn Carroll, Galway Community Circus has continued to grow its artistic ambitions, strengthen partnerships and deepen its impact within communities. At the same time, the organisation has been exploring new ways to diversify income and build long-term sustainability.



Sources of Funds at Galway Community Circus

Fellow Profile

Maeve Keane joined Galway Community Circus in 2024. Her career path had taken her through marketing, media, communications and television production, giving her a broad range of skills and experiences.

During the pandemic, she transitioned into television production, producing programmes in Connemara and developing a growing interest in funding strategy and project development.

The Fellowship offered an opportunity to combine many of her professional interests. With a background in music, sport and communications, Maeve was immediately drawn to GCC’s unique blend of creativity, physical activity and social impact.



The Opportunity

Like many arts organisations, Galway Community Circus had a strong track record of securing public funding and delivering high-quality programmes. Support from the Arts Council, Erasmus+ and local authorities provided an important foundation for its work.

However, the organisation recognised the need to strengthen fundraising capacity and diversify income sources. While staff had significant expertise in programme delivery and grant applications, there was limited time available to explore new opportunities, develop partnerships or build longer-term fundraising strategies.

At the same time, the arrival of a new CEO created an opportunity to review priorities, strengthen planning processes and develop a clearer fundraising narrative.

For Maeve, one of the first challenges was helping potential supporters understand the organisation's impact. While Galway Community Circus was well known within the sector, the wider social value of circus arts was not always immediately understood by funders and partners.

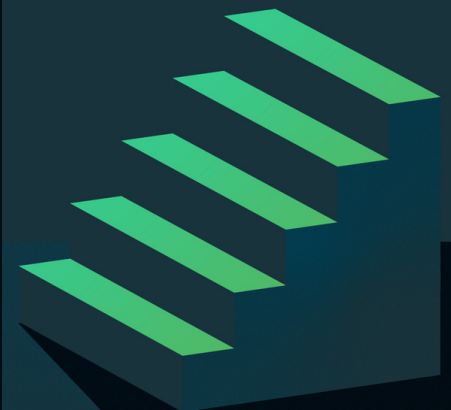
Developing a clear and compelling story about the organisation's work became a key focus of the Fellowship.



Challenges

One of the earliest challenges Maeve identified was the need to clearly articulate Galway Community Circus' work and impact to potential supporters.

Circus as an art form often carried misconceptions, and the organisation needed concise, compelling ways to communicate both its artistic and social value.



Building Fundraising Capacity

The early months of the Fellowship focused on creating the foundations for future fundraising success.

Working closely with colleagues and mentors, Maeve helped develop fundraising plans, partnership materials, grant calendars and presentation resources that could support future funding conversations. She also worked to refine the organisation's messaging, helping staff communicate the impact of Galway Community Circus in a concise and engaging way.

Although much of this work happened behind the scenes, it proved transformative. The resources developed during the Fellowship continue to support fundraising activity across the organisation and have created a stronger platform for future growth.

Rather than focusing only on immediate funding opportunities, the organisation invested time in building systems, processes and tools that would support fundraising well into the future; these included shared fundraising calendars, prospect development processes, partnership development materials and grant tracking systems.

The Fellowship created capacity to proactively seek out new opportunities rather than simply responding to funding calls as they arose.



"From learning how to develop and pitch fundraising proposals to writing successful funding applications and more, I've gained so much experience and insight into the world of fundraising over the past two years."

Key Partnerships and Projects

One of the most significant outcomes of the Fellowship was the strengthening of Galway Community Circus's fundraising capacity and its ability to develop strategic partnerships that supported new funding opportunities.

The Fellowship provided dedicated time and resources for relationship-building, partnership development and collaborative fundraising activity, enabling the organisation to engage more deeply with a range of stakeholders across the arts, education, disability, youth and community sectors.

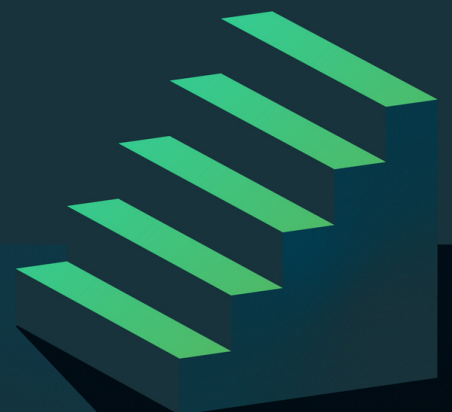
This strengthened fundraising infrastructure helped Galway Community Circus secure support from organisations including Rethink Ireland, Community Foundation Ireland, Galway City Council and the Arts Council. Through these partnerships, the organisation was able to support a range of collaborative initiatives, including the Circus Is For Every Body project, which focused on improving access to circus arts for disabled, neurodivergent and Deaf young people.

Importantly, the Fellowship did not fund programme delivery itself. Rather, it created the capacity needed to build relationships, develop proposals, coordinate partners and secure resources that made projects such as these possible.

The Fellowship also enabled Galway Community Circus to strengthen and expand its network of strategic partners. New collaborations were developed with organisations including Enable Ireland, Galway Autism Partnership, Scoil Chaitríona, Extraordinary Bodies, Galway Sports Partnership and a range of schools, community organisations, higher education institutions and funding bodies.

These relationships created opportunities for joint funding applications, knowledge exchange, programme development and long-term collaboration, while also increasing the organisation's visibility and credibility across multiple sectors.

"The biggest thing about this funding was that it gave us the time and space to really work collaboratively with young people and allow them to tell us how they wanted to access circus."



Achievements and Impact

The impact of the Fellowship extended far beyond fundraising alone.

The organisation also strengthened its fundraising infrastructure and improved its ability to communicate impact through storytelling, participant feedback and evidence gathering. The benefits were felt directly within communities.

GCC now holds a bank of lasting fundraising resources, including fundraising plans, grant pipelines, pitch materials and partnership proposals that will continue to support the organisation beyond the Fellowship.

As Maeve reflected:
"You need to be clear on your aims, but also prepared to pivot and adapt depending on opportunities, organisational capacity and changing priorities."

In 2025, Galway Community Circus delivered 23 community partnership programmes reaching almost 1,300 participants. By the middle of 2026, hundreds more participants had already engaged through outreach and partnership activities.

Many of these programmes focused on groups who may face barriers to participation, including disabled and neurodivergent young people, young people from disadvantaged communities, asylum seekers, and girls less likely to engage in traditional sporting activities.

The Fellowship also helped position the organisation for future opportunities in education, accessibility and community development, ensuring that the impact of the programme will continue long after the Fellowship itself has concluded.

Across the two-year Fundraising Fellowship, Maeve led fundraising that secured €436,034 in new funding for Galway Community Circus.

Period	Funds raised by Fellow	Funds raised by Organisation
2024 (from June)	€3,753*	€100,844
2025	€311,073*	€1,034,348
2026 (to June)	€121,208*	€459,020

*Fellow secured funds from Rethink Ireland, Community Foundation Ireland (via the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal), The Ireland Funds, the Arts Council of Ireland (new funding), Galway City Council, Galway Sports Partnership, Galway Childcare Committee, Tesco, Claddagh Credit Union, the National Lottery (via the National Lottery Good Causes Awards) and Pobal.

Learning and Professional Growth

For Maeve, the Fellowship represented a significant professional development opportunity.

Over the course of the programme, she developed expertise in strategic fundraising, partnership development, grant management, impact evaluation and stakeholder engagement.

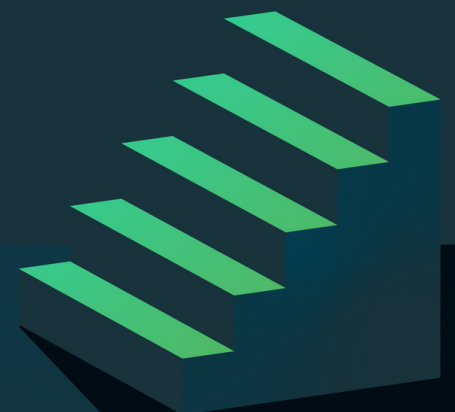
Equally important was the confidence she gained in representing the organisation and leading fundraising conversations.

The mentorship element of the Fellowship played a particularly important role. Through guidance from Joanne O'Hagan, Director of Development at The Lir, and Robert Crabbe, Head of Group Sponsorship at ESB, Maeve gained valuable insight into how organisations can position themselves effectively and build stronger relationships with funders and partners.

One of the most important lessons she took from the experience was the importance of flexibility. Fundraising rarely follows a straight line, and opportunities often emerge in unexpected ways.

Key Achievements

- During the programme, Maeve secured €436,034 through her fundraising activities, supporting a wide range of new projects and initiatives.
- Developed strategic relationships with funders and partners, including Rethink Ireland, Community Foundation Ireland, Pobal, Galway Sports Partnership and the University of Galway.
- Enhanced GCC's storytelling and impact reporting by securing funding for the production of the 'Circus is For Every body' documentary (the documentary was funded by both Rethink Ireland and RTE's Toy Show Appeal (via Community Foundation Ireland))



Looking Ahead

The legacy of the Fellowship continues to shape Galway Community Circus' future.

The fundraising systems, planning tools and partnership networks developed during the programme remain embedded within the organisation's day-to-day operations.

The experience has also strengthened confidence in pursuing ambitious projects and building long-term partnerships.

In 2026, the organisation secured additional funding to expand its circus programmes into early years settings—a new area of work for GCC made possible by its increased capacity. This expansion demonstrates the lasting value of the fundraising expertise developed through the Fellowship.

Looking ahead, Galway Community Circus continues to explore private investment in accessibility programming, educational partnerships, and future organisational development.

With stronger fundraising foundations in place, the organisation is well-positioned to continue growing its reach and impact.



Galway Community Circus Team & Board

Team

Leadership & Administration

Lynn Carroll, Chief Executive Officer
Becca Clayton, Chief Operating Officer
Maeve Keane, Development Coordinator
Alex Stewart, Communications Coordinator
Anet Moore, Company Administrator
Hazar Azzeh, Outreach Coordinator
Alan Meaney, Producer
Shiela Monaghan, Finance Administrator (freelance)
Fiona Hession, Governance (freelance)

Board

Dr Sarah Hofmayer
Ailbhe Slevin
Mairéad Ní Chualáin
Cameron Keighron
Ian Walsh
John Jordan

Technical & Training Team

Tony Mahon, Technical Manager, Artist/Educator
Marjolein Wagter, Artist/Educator (Lead Trainer)
Lisa O'Farrell, Artist/Educator
Freddy Burrows, Artist/Educator
Peter Duncan, Artist/Educator (Freelance Trainer)
Maríosa Hume, Artist/Trainer
Ines Garcia, Artist/Educator (freelance)
Joanna Reynolds, Artist/Educator (freelance),
Gill Byrne, Artist/Educator (freelance)
Caoimhe O'Dochartaigh Barr, Artist/Educator (freelance)

Find out more about Galway Community Circus
www.galwaycommunitycircus.com

With thanks to Fundraising Fellowship mentors, funders and subject matter experts

Joanne O'Hagan, Robert Crabbe, Oonagh O'Donovan, Ian Murray, Sam Javid, John McEvoy, Valerie Ringrose Fitzsimons, Louise O'Reilly, Jonny Boyle, Jane McDaid, Aisling McCaffrey, Cathal Quinn, Jane Trenaman, Gillian Fenton, Maree Baker & David Slattery, John Kennedy and the Department of Communication, Culture & Sport and the Business to Arts team.

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Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



Business
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