



## Benefacts Who Funds What<sup>BETA</sup>

### Outcome report

March 2021

### Summary

Benefacts [Who Funds What<sup>BETA</sup>](#) provides users of the demo service with a single point of digital access to the names of nonprofits receiving funding from one or more of 9 central Government departments and agencies, the levels of funding provided by each State funder, along with a unique ID, regulatory and geo data.

Benefacts is the unique source of this merged dataset which includes some data not published by the public sector bodies (PSBs) concerned. Benefacts [Who Funds What<sup>BETA</sup>](#) is the sole means whereby users can access the full spectrum of grant data, which may not be otherwise available (e.g. from the financial statements of grant recipients) for various reasons.

Benefacts [Who Funds What<sup>BETA</sup>](#) was launched as a 'minimum viable product' or proof of concept project to more than 1,200 senior public officials and public representatives in central and local government and to a sample of professional academics. 10% of those canvassed viewed it, and these were independently surveyed in Q1 2021. Most users (mainly civil servants) reported that they trusted the data and valued the service for a variety of purposes including policy and statistical analysis, briefing Ministers, grant compliance reporting and due diligence in verifying grant application data.

The status of Benefacts [Who Funds What<sup>BETA</sup>](#) now is that it awaits updating with 2020 data, and further promotion – perhaps as a machine-readable service via [Data.Gov.ie](#) – among public sector and perhaps wider audiences. This in turn requires agreement among PSBs as to their use for the service as developed to date, and for further development/deployment of the data, especially given the provisions of the new [Open Data Directive](#), due to be transposed into Irish law in July 2021. The status of Benefacts after 2021 is yet to be determined.

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Patricia Quinn  
Managing Director, Benefacts  
March 2021

## Introduction

Benefacts **Who Funds What** <sup>BETA</sup> is a directory of current information about State funding for Irish nonprofits. It is produced (in the main) by re-using public information and was published as a free-standing web service for registered users in the public service. It was released initially as a proof-of-concept project in Q3 2020, as the final output of Benefacts Analytics, co-funded by six public sector bodies<sup>1</sup> in 2018-2019.

It provides a unique point of digital access to the latest available grant expenditure (aggregate value €6.6bn) of 9 of the principal funders of nonprofits in Ireland under 45 distinct current funding programmes: The Arts Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation & Science, the Department of Justice, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Social Protection, the Health Service Executive, Sport Ireland and Tusla - the Child and Family Agency.

This report has been produced for the co-funders and for other stakeholders. It describes the sources, quality and consistency of the data, the approach to data presentation, how users were signed up to the demo, feedback from users, and learnings from the process.

The effort involved in devising, procuring and cleaning the data, building and deploying **Who Funds What** <sup>BETA</sup> was approximately 70 days, given the prior existence of Benefacts Database of Irish Nonprofits which provided a normalised dataset and unique IDs to ensure valid identification of grant recipients.

Maintaining it live would require c.35 days per annum (plus any further development and communications effort), assuming the continued availability of Benefacts live database. Next steps will be for discussion with stakeholders, once the deliberative process about the future uses and direction of Benefacts data and technologies has been concluded.

## State expenditure data used in **Who Funds What** <sup>BETA</sup>

The sources of expenditure data vary by agency. In some cases, the data is not published at all. In others it is distributed across various publishing forms including press releases and annual reports. In only two cases (Arts Council, Sport Ireland) is current grant expenditure data available on a searchable website. Although local authorities cooperated in providing grant expenditure data for Benefacts Analytics, the data in **Who Funds What** <sup>BETA</sup> is limited to central government sources.

None of the public grant expenditure data in **Who Funds What** <sup>BETA</sup> is currently available from any State source in machine-readable form.

A summary of the data sources and features is provided overleaf. Note that

- a) The latest available data is derived from different years, according to the agency's disclosure policies; some is audited data published 12m+ in arrears; in other cases the data (unaudited) indicates commitments in the current year.
- b) In some State bodies, grant expenditure data is available only for some (not all) programmes within a given agency

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<sup>1</sup> The Departments of Foreign Affairs, Health, Social Protection; Tusla; Kildare and Fingal County Councils. Read more about the Benefacts Analytics project 2018/19 [here](#).

- c) Expenditure reported in *Who Funds What* <sup>BETA</sup> accounts for the majority of State funding to nonprofits, with one exception – current grant support for social housing provided by the Department of Environment & Local Government via local authorities.

## Sources of State grant data in *Who Funds What* <sup>BETA</sup>

Agency	Number of grant programmes reported	Source(s) of data	Data format	Latest data available in Q4 2020
The Arts Council	6	<a href="http://www.artscouncil.ie/funding/">http://www.artscouncil.ie/funding/</a>	Website	2020
Department of Foreign Affairs	2	<a href="https://www.dfa.ie/about-us/accountability/annual-report/">https://www.dfa.ie/about-us/accountability/annual-report/</a>	Annual report and financial statements (pdf)	2018
Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science	4	Higher Education Authority (voluntary disclosure on request to Benefacts)	Data file	2018/19
Department of Justice	5	Not published (voluntary disclosure proffered to Benefacts)	Data file	2019
Department of Rural and Community Development	2	<a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/?type=consultations&amp;organisation=department-of-rural-and-community-development">https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/?type=consultations&amp;organisation=department-of-rural-and-community-development</a>	Press releases (pdf)	2019
Department of Social Protection	7	a) Voluntary disclosure to Benefacts from DSP b) Pobal published report	Data file	2018
Health Service Executive	2	<a href="https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hse-annual-report-and-financial-statements-2019.pdf">https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hse-annual-report-and-financial-statements-2019.pdf</a>	Annual report and financial statements (pdf)	
Sport Ireland	7	<a href="https://www.sportireland.ie/high-performance/high-performance-investment/high-performance-programme-funding/high-performance">https://www.sportireland.ie/high-performance/high-performance-investment/high-performance-programme-funding/high-performance</a>	Website	2020
Tusla - the Child and Family Agency	10	<a href="https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla-Annual-Report-2019-eng-web.pdf">https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla-Annual-Report-2019-eng-web.pdf</a>	Annual report and financial statements (pdf)	2019

## Data quality/data consistency issues

### 1. Data cleaning

Data consistency issues arose mostly in relation to matching the names of nonprofits as listed by the funders with their legal registered identities. For example, Carp - Killinarden Company Limited by Guarantee (its registered name) is known as 'Killinarden (KARP)' by the HSE and 'CARP Killinarden CLG' by the Department of Social Protection. Dublin Aids Alliance Company Limited By Guarantee (its registered name) is known as 'Dublin AIDS Alliance (DAA) Ltd' by the HSE, and 'HIV Ireland' by Tusla.

Now that the dataset has been cleaned by Benefacts, these issues don't need to be addressed again especially if State funders will agree to common naming conventions, and ideally adopt Benefacts Unique ID in their record-keeping.

### 2. Variable reporting of grants made/received

Another form of inconsistency arises where the reported grant given by a State body (as documented in its audited financial statements) is compared with the reported grant received by a nonprofit organisation – these can vary by as much as +/- 10%.

This can be for a variety of reasons including the date at which the transfer is recognised, provision for accrued funding etc. However, the availability of both sets of data (grants given, grants received) provides a source of expenditure validation for State funders not otherwise available unless they verify these case by case. Benefacts' experience is that this does not happen, notwithstanding the provisions of DPER Circular 12/2014, which are observed in full by very few State-funded nonprofits in the preparation of their accounts.

### 3. Variable reporting of salary grants in the accounts of nonprofits funded under DSP Tús and RSS

In the case of the Department of Social Protection (DSP)'s Tús and RSS schemes, the nonprofits receiving funding are supported in two ways by the Department: through a direct grant from one or both schemes, and through the payment to their employees of salary costs, paid by Pobal using funds provided to them for this purpose by the DSP.

In some cases, the beneficiary nonprofits report in their audited financial statements the value of *both* the core grant from the DSP *and* the salary subsidy from Pobal; in other cases they don't, on the basis that the transaction is with their employees and not with their company. In either event, this explains anomalies as between what is reported by the nonprofits concerned (analysed and freely republished by Benefacts on its main public website [www.benefacts.ie](http://www.benefacts.ie)), and the combined data that appears on the [Who Funds What](#) <sup>BETA</sup> website.

There is no other public source of this amalgamated data.

## Presentation of the data

Benefacts Who Funds What BETA uses a 3rd-party open-source Javascript grid component - ag-grid - for data presentation. This was chosen because it provides flexibility in terms of customisation and user-friendliness, as well as offering a wealth of features such as out-of-the box MS Excel export, column customisation and data filtering. It also provides excellent browser compatibility.

The web service consumes data from a flat JSON file at present, and this is updated whenever Benefacts receives fresh data. When further fresh data/more data from more sources become available, or if we are able to retrieve data from external sources via APIs, ag-grid will be modified to consume its data from a web API. Equally, the service, or parts of it could be made available for example by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer for wider (including public) consumption.

Further technical information is available on request.

## Registration, sign-up and engagement

For the proof of concept demo, [Who Funds What](#) <sup>BETA</sup> was initially shared solely and exclusively with public servants. Access was by means of online registration and this process was made as simple as possible, with users asked only to provide an email address and to identify whether they were civil servants, public servants (central or local government), public representatives or academics.

Personal emails were sent directly to 1,200 senior public officials in central departments, grant-making agencies, regulators (including the Charities Regulator), and to all public representatives in central and local government, inviting them to view the service. 159 individuals accessed the site and of these, 138 proceeded to sign up to view the service. These conversion rates are considered good by reference to industry norms, especially given the lack of any marketing effort.

Civil servants	64 %
Public servants (central or local government)	4.5 %
Public representatives – local Government	14.5 %
Public representatives – Central Government	1.5 %
Academics	4.5 %
Other	11%

Further analysis of user behaviour available on request.

## Feedback

In February/March, Benefacts asked web services supplier Made in Context to survey users of the site. Registered users received a series of emails asking them either to have a conversation about their experience/views of the demo service, or to complete a survey. 8 people completed the survey and five people were interviewed, a response rate of 10% of the demo user group.

### 1-to-1 feedback

Among the five one-to-one interviewees, one is an academic, one a local councillor, one a public servant on secondment from local government to central government, and two are civil servants in central government.

This is a summary of their suggestions and comments, which were broadly either positive or very positive, and which indicated a high level of engagement with the service even in a demo release:

- “It would be helpful to have alerts when the data is refreshed”
- “I use Benefacts all the time with my students. I’m curious to know why the grant data is different as between the accounts of individual nonprofits and the grants data reported by State bodies”
- “How does [Who Funds What](#) <sup>BETA</sup> cope with changes in the responsibilities of Departments?”
- “It would be very helpful if Local Authority funding was included here”
- “I’m not an Excel user, I really like being able to access the data on a website like this – I’ve no interest in downloading it – but I’d like it even better in graphic form”
- “I’m delighted with the fact that Benefacts is capturing data on this part of the economy – it’s often not that well understood yet it is very important”
- “Nonprofits are effectively operating as franchisees of Government in delivering public services – we need to understand the profile and the extent of this market”
- “The fact is, community development is often a labour of love, people are constantly looking for funding from different public places – it’s very helpful to have all that information put together like this”
- “One of my students has been researching social enterprise; it would have been so helpful if this resource had been available before she started”
- “It’s really useful to have this information not just because it’s all together in one place but because some of it hasn’t been available at all up until now; State funding can be very opaque”
- “I know that philanthropies are using Benefacts data – it’s so helpful to have a clean data set that helps to see the picture clearly. Will [Who Funds What](#) <sup>BETA</sup> become more widely available in the future?”

## Survey feedback

Most respondents to the written survey were civil servants, one was a public servant. In response to the survey, the responses were these:

**Q.** Overall, how would you rate the Benefacts Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> Directory?

**A.** Excellent or very good: 75%

**Q.** How useful is the data in the Benefacts Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> Directory to you?

**A.** Extremely useful or very useful: 62.5%

**Q.** How easy was it to find the data you were looking for?

**A.** Easy or very easy: 75%

**Q.** Benefacts Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> helps me complete important tasks.

**A.** Strongly agree or agree: 50%

**Q.** On a scale of 0 (worst) - 10 (best), how easy is Benefacts Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> to use?

**A.** Score of 7 or more: 85%

Asked what types of tasks do you use Benefacts Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> for?, respondents said

- “Checking governance of organisations applying for funding”
- “I'm new to the public sector, so it was useful to see the range of funding. In time, I can see it being exceptionally useful”
- “I signed up for access to data about level of community/charity orgs etc. I had a specific piece of work I thought I may need doing but it hasn't transpired as of yet so I haven't made much use of the website though I see the value in it”
- “Finding out info, particularly around who funds an NGO, usually for a Ministerial meeting with the organisation. It provides a bit more information than the Charities Regulator”
- “It is used in macro estimates within the National Accounts framework - in the non-profits and Government sectors”
- “For review of our statistical requirements work”
- “Hi, unfortunately, in spite of trying a number of times, I wasn't able to access the system. I think I also tried on personal device in case it was being restricted by my work firewall. I would like opportunity to try it in the future as I generally find Benefacts very useful”
- “Researching organisations who receive some State funding”

Asked did you have any issues with the data shown in the Who Funds What <sup>BETA</sup> Directory?, respondents said

- “No”
- “None - but again, I was only using it to familiarise myself with a particular department”
- “No - I guess given the nature of it some data is patchy i.e. not consistent across all of the organisations”
- “No”
- “More granular data, e.g. on income and expenditure items would be very useful”

Asked to rank the following statements, respondents said they valued being able to:

	Very important	Fairly important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
search for specific organisations	100%				
filter and sort groups of organisations	57%	29%	14%		
download data to excel for further review offline	72%	14%			14%
rearrange the screen view to only show specific selected funders and regulators	43%	43%	14%		
adjust the screen view to only show specific funding programmes	29%	57%	14%		
search and filter organisations by location	29%	43%	14%	14%	
get updates on specific organisations in the future when new data is available	29%	57%	14%		

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For more information, contact

Patricia Quinn  
 patricia.quinn@benefacts.ie  
 (0)1 536 7134