

Making a difference to public policy and facing the challenge to advocacy work by community and voluntary organisations in 2019. What can new research on Ireland's Advocacy Initiative tell us about its long-term lessons ten years on?

The Centre for Social Innovation at the Business School, Trinity College Dublin in cooperation with the Campaign for Civil Society Freedom invites you discuss the future of civil society advocacy in Ireland in the light of new research on the meaning and significance of the Advocacy Initiative.

The event will be held on 4th April, 2019 at The Science Gallery from 11.00am to 1.00pm followed by a light lunch. The event is free.

It will be an opportunity to reflect on the goals of the Campaign for Civil Society Freedom and current challenges to advocacy work in the light of the story that the Advocacy Initiative told about what was important about advocacy work to community and voluntary organisations at the time of the 2008 financial crisis and the recession that followed.

The campaigning and advocacy work of community and voluntary organizations in Ireland continues to be under sustained pressure.

In the face of these challenges, community and voluntary organizations have to continually reassert their right to contribute to public policy debate and the importance and value of doing so.

Just over ten years ago the Advocacy Initiative was born out of a desire among community and voluntary organizations to rethink the place of social justice advocacy in the challenging circumstances immediately before and following the financial crisis and the onset of the "great recession".

Many of the themes and issues that informed the Advocacy Initiative debates still resonate in the context of 2019.

The Advocacy Initiative emerged from a discussion promoted by what was then the Centre for Nonprofit Management at Trinity College Dublin over the challenges facing community and voluntary organisations at the time. Almost ten years later its successor, the Centre for Social Innovation has facilitated research on the Initiative's meaning and wider significance carried out by visiting research fellow, Dr Nick Acheson and the Initiative's former project manager, Dr Anna Visser. The research process has provided this opportunity for reflection.

The findings of the research will be launched at the event. In brief, they focus on three themes:

1. The centrality of advocacy, in particular social justice advocacy as core to the identity of many community and voluntary organizations;

2. An emphasis on preferred insider consensual change strategies based on clear structures of engagement with government;
3. A clear articulation of the legitimacy of community and voluntary organizations' contribution to public debate on policy and on the right to be heard.

The research also revealed the high value the participants put on the spaces curated by the Advocacy Initiative in promoting honest reflection among people with differing experiences and views.

Many of the pressures felt by community and voluntary organizations in Ireland are similar to other countries, but from an international perspective the Advocacy Initiative was an unusual response and reflected both the strengths and weaknesses of Irish political culture.

Agenda:

10.30 – 11.00 coffee and registration

11.00 – 1.15: welcome and introductions - Professor Gemma Donnelly Cox, co-director of the Centre for Social Innovation

11.15-11.45: Presentation of the findings of research on the Advocacy Initiative - Dr Nick Acheson and Dr Anna Visser

11.45 – 12.10: Ireland in an international context: the future of civil society advocacy in Europe, Dr Mike Aiken, Open University and Institute for Voluntary Action Research

12.10 – 12.30: Current challenges to campaigning and advocacy in Ireland: what's at stake – Liam Herrick, Chief Executive of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, lead organization for the Coalition for Civil Society Freedom

12.30: Questions and answers and panel discussion
Frances Byrne, [Director of Policy and Advocacy at Early Childhood Ireland](#), will [join the speakers on the panel](#)

1.00: lunch for those able to stay.