

Ariadne Strategic Plan 2017-20

1. Introduction

As Ariadne enters its 8th year of operation, this plan sets out the direction of travel for the network for the next three years. In preparation of this plan, Ariadne conducted a survey of members and in-depth interviews with a collection of key stakeholders, including active members, donors to the network, and Advisory Board members. This plan reflects the feedback received during that process and aims to provide members with an overview of Ariadne's future work and priorities. It will be supplemented by annual workplans.

2. Basis for the plan

The research conducted for this plan suggests that there are six key starting points for discussion about the plan:

1. Ariadne has made good progress in the recent past, is in a good place, and the plan is based on capitalising on its assets, performance and reputation;
2. The plan is based on a consolidation of what has already been achieved rather than radically new directions;
3. Ariadne needs to be put on a firmer footing to address some organisational fragilities and to regularise the way that it operates;
4. Ariadne needs to be active in pressing an agenda of response to the deteriorating external environment for human rights and social justice;
5. Ariadne will continue to be responsive to the needs and interests of members, while helping them to identify important issues in the field; and
6. A leitmotif for the work will be 'support and development in difficult times'.

3. Vision

A Europe where a strong philanthropic sector helps protect and promote human rights and social change.

4. Mission

Ariadne is a network of European funders who work together to strengthen philanthropy, help funders act strategically, and encourage new donors to enter the field with maximum impact.

5. A changing context

There have been significant changes of context in the three years since producing the last plan for Ariadne that have had a significant impact on human rights and social change donors and thereby affect how Ariadne needs to plan its work for the next three years.

The current external environment is very dynamic, and the next three years could bring many more changes. As described in the 2017 Forecast, there has been a shifting of the geopolitical plates across the entire world since the last strategic plan was prepared. With Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, we are seeing the emergence of a new world order; however, that order is not yet settled, and the current state is creating huge uncertainties for both individuals and organisations.

The environment for human rights and social change has deteriorated over the past year and with the prospect of right-wing governments in elections across Europe could get much worse. Across Europe, social divisions and polarisation are deepening, and certain groups within society including LGBTI, women, migrants, refugees and other minorities are increasingly marginalised. Space for civil society is closing even further, with human rights activists and foundations under attack in 141 countries.¹

Although the human rights community has been active in discussing the issues and has recognised the need to work together, a comprehensive and organised response has not yet been identified. The field is aware that its old practices are no longer working and that a new narrative is required to cover the work. Human rights foundations have been coming together to strategise, for example through the Funders' Initiative for Civil Society, but there is more to be done to respond to and get out ahead of attacks on the sector.

On the other hand, citizens in many countries are more politically active than they have been in the past, and social movements are growing. There are real opportunities for foundations to support these grassroots demands for change and to learn from one another as they do so. Many foundations have expressed a desire to work more collaboratively in the future in response to the growing challenges in Europe and globally, and this also creates an opportunity for Ariadne to assist foundations by providing a platform for exchange and collaboration.

Ariadne has also changed internally over the past three years. There has been growth in membership and a growth of diversity in that membership. There has been growing recognition of the role that Ariadne plays. At the same time, there has been a change of leadership, with the founding director leaving and Julie Broome taking her place.

The Ariadne community is changing, too. There is a move across Europe towards a smaller number of bigger grants, a more holistic approach, and an emphasis on evaluation and impact. Foundations are also thinking about what they can offer grantees beyond simple funding and are looking for opportunities to leverage their networks, trustees, and other resources to assist social change efforts.

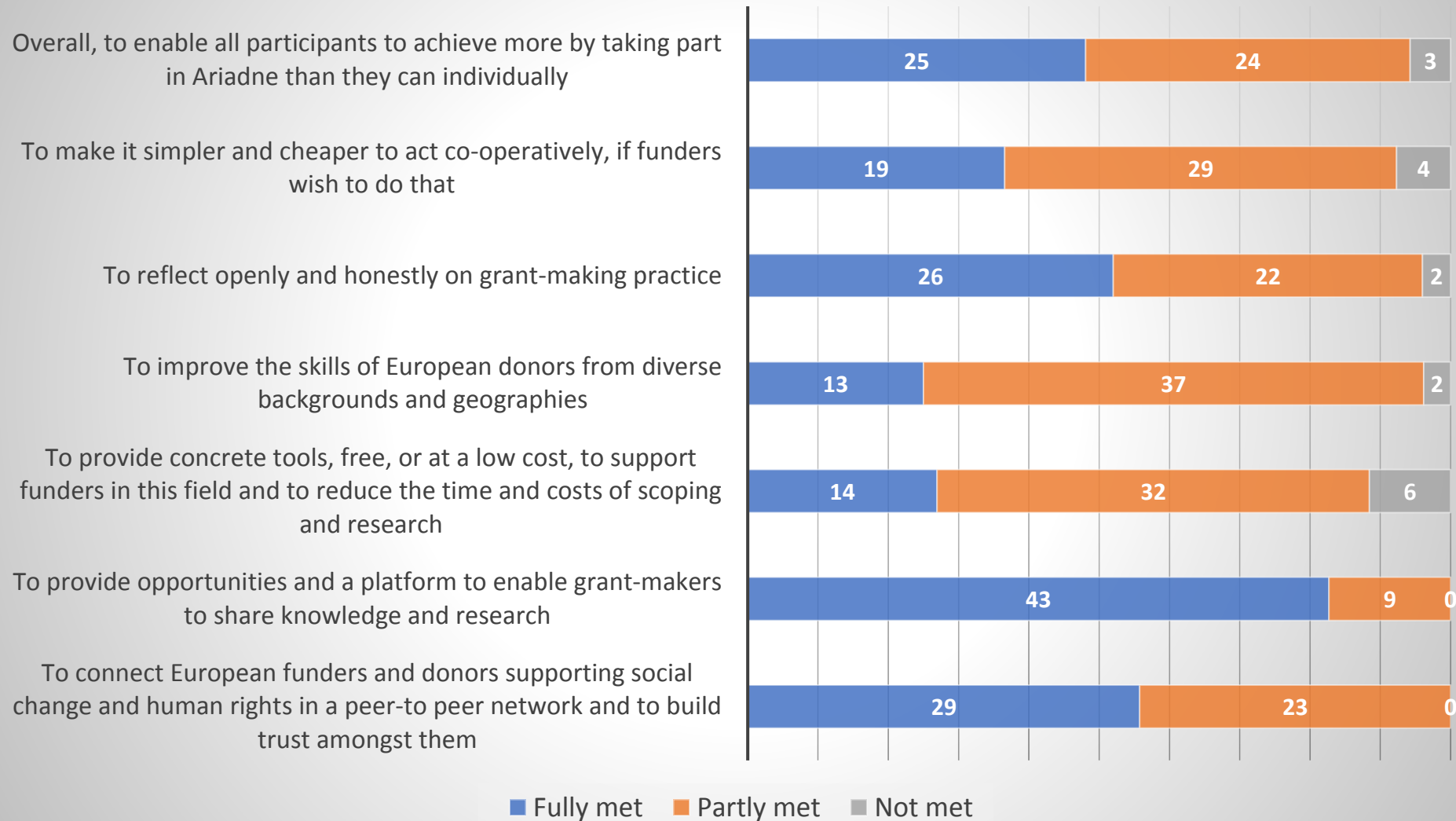
6. Current condition of Ariadne

As noted, various studies were taken in preparation of this plan. These include a members' survey, interviews with the advisory committee, interviews with key stakeholders, and consultations with the staff.

¹ Doug Rutzen, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

Overall perceptions of Ariadne and its work are positive. For example, the survey of members asked: 'Ariadne has a twofold vision. Please say whether you consider that the two vision statements have been (a) "fully met", (b) "partly met" or (c) "not met".' The distribution of responses is shown in the following chart.

Extent to which ARIADNE's aims have been met



By any criteria, these results are good.

Spontaneous comments from members included:

'I Love Ariadne!'

'The team are impressive and hard-working - I appreciate their professionalism - thank you!'

'Great team, excellent network and well worth the value.'

'Thank you to the Ariadne team for its hard work and continued efforts at building a diverse community of professionals who exchange and collaborate effectively.'

'Ariadne fulfilling a vital role in dangerous and turbulent times - need to have a clear focus and added value for grant makers to be members and to get more out than put in (we are stronger sharing and learning together). Needs tweaking rather than major surgery.'

Advisory committee members are in general highly positive about the work, too.

Comments included:

'Events, energy; good staff; good events; good speakers; safe space; looks smooth but lots of effort; global perspective.'

'Very well done generally. Expanded members; good attendance; buy in.'

'There is constant and steady growth across more geographies.'

Interviews with stakeholders give a similar picture. A commonly recurring theme across all groups is 'safe space'. This is the key added value of the network. Many feel under pressure and having somewhere where they could talk to their peers is central.

While generally positive, improvements were suggested. Several people suggested that longstanding grantmakers tend to get comfortable in the way that they do things and that Ariadne could help challenge their ways of working. The rapidly changing environment requires a nimble and more innovative approach.

The expansion of Ariadne into South and East Europe has increased the diversity within the network, which, while positive, presents a challenge to Ariadne going forward. We must find ways to remain relevant for donors in different contexts and offer them a depth of engagement.

We also need to remain vigilant about maintaining a pan-European identity. Some continental donors feel that Ariadne has an Anglo profile and need encouragement to take ownership over the network. Expansion into Eastern Europe, in particular, has raised questions about membership for re-granters and operational foundations, as there are

relatively few endowed foundations in the region. In The Netherlands, the network has been challenged by the funding and staffing cuts suffered by hybrid foundations such as Cordaid and Hivos, resulting in the loss of previously committed individual members of Ariadne NL.

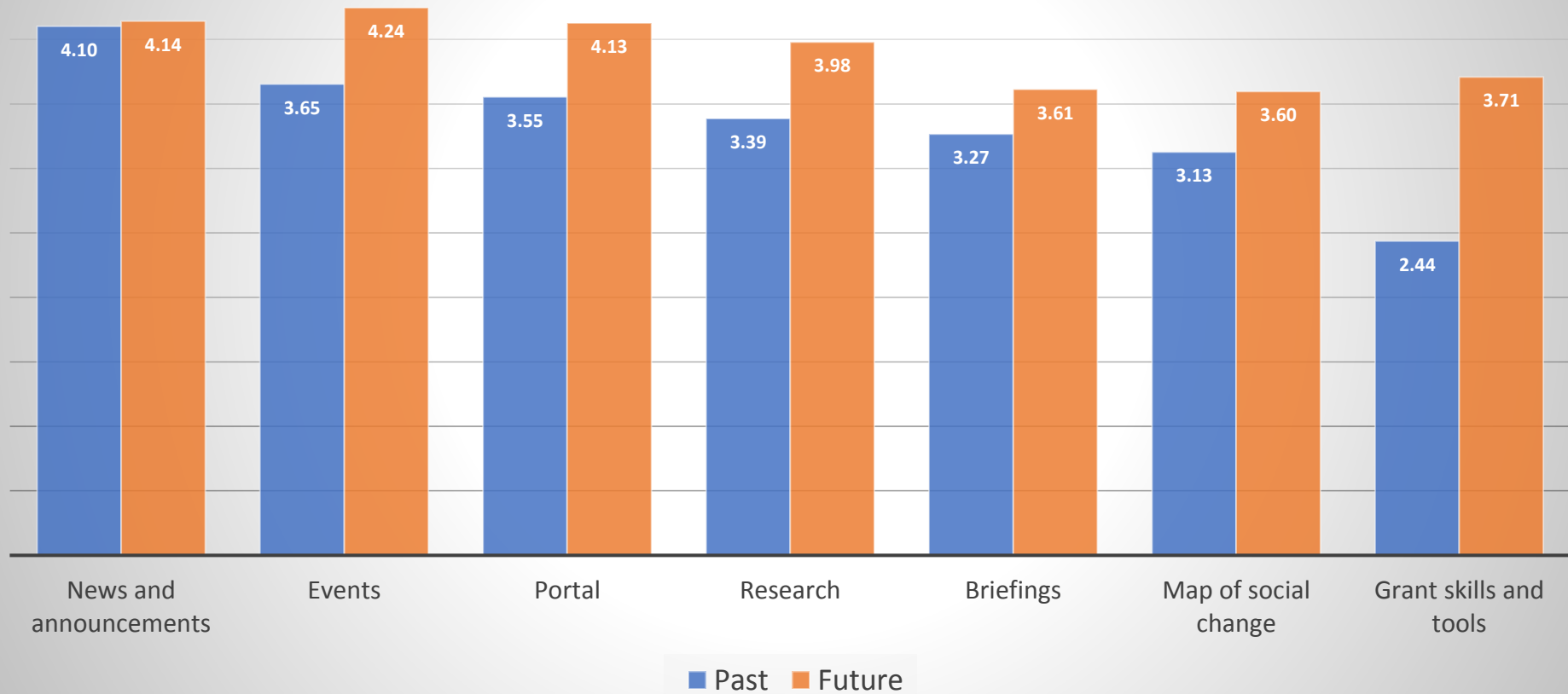
Finally, there remains a slight divide between those donors who identify explicitly as human rights donors and those who do not, and there is a sense that Ariadne could do more to foster social change donors.

7. Programme priorities

To assess programming priorities, in the members' survey we asked two questions. One gave a list of activities currently undertaken by Ariadne and asked people to rate the performance of these activities on a five-point scale where '1' was 'very low' and '5' was 'very high'. We repeated the question, this time asking about the importance of these activities in the future using the same scale.

Results of the survey are shown in the next chart. The blue line refers to past activities and the red one to the future.

Evaluation of past activities compared with importance of future activities (mean ratings on scale 1-5)



We intend to carry on all these activities in the future and to make improvements where we can. The survey indicates a high demand for grant skills and tools, an area in which Ariadne has done relatively little outside of its annual Grant Skills Day. We will seek out opportunities to increase our activities in this area, bearing in mind that Ariadne's contribution will always be focused on human rights and social change grantmaking. Where appropriate, we will investigate collaborations with national associations of grantmakers to build off the training and resources already offered by them.

Given that we have experienced a number of years of rapid growth, the next three years should be a period of deepening existing relationships with current members rather than focusing on growth. There will be a conscious effort to hold events in locations outside of London and to ensure that events take on the complexion of the locality in which they take place to try to deepen our connections in different countries. This will work most effectively where we have coordinators in place, but events can also be a useful vehicle for introducing Ariadne to new audiences in countries where membership is lower. Participation in Ariadne among German donors, for example, is still relatively low, and that will be an area where we will try to engage more.

In the current context in Europe and globally, Ariadne has an important role to play in helping philanthropy respond strategically to the threats to human rights. Therefore, we will develop events and resources, in collaboration with partners where appropriate, related to the closing space for civil society, rising populism and xenophobia, and the future of the European project. These are issues at the forefront of members' concerns, and we will support them wherever possible to develop responses to these challenges and encourage solidarity and collaboration among donors. In this environment, many donors are interested in making exploratory grants to innovative projects, and Ariadne will support learning among donors as they experiment with 'riskier' new grants.

Ariadne will also seek to strengthen the next generation of leaders in the philanthropic field through development of a mentorship scheme and programming to encourage greater diversity among philanthropic staff and boards.

8. Communications

The portal remains the central means of communication between Ariadne members, but it is clear that improvements need to be made to make the portal easier and more inviting for members. We are currently in discussion with tech developers regarding how we can upgrade the portal and hope to roll out a newer, more user-friendly version of the portal in 2017. The newsletter received high marks and is currently Ariadne's most effective communication tool.

Use of Ariadne's social media account is low. However, Ariadne does not seek a high public profile, and many of its activities are 'tweet-free'. Few members regularly use the website, but that is likely because the most interesting content is available on the password-protected portal. The website and Twitter are useful for bringing Ariadne to the attention of potential new donors; however, the emphasis will continue to be on communicating with existing members and ensuring that our communications tools are useful for them.

9. Membership

During the research, we explored the question of membership criteria. This has become increasingly important both because of Ariadne's geographic expansion and because of reductions in available resources for hybrid foundations.

Members emphasized the importance of maintaining Ariadne as a safe space for donors. Although there is interest in having a diversity of membership in Ariadne in terms of geography, being a grantmaker first and foremost is an important criterion for many members, as is independence in decision-making.

Therefore, we have reviewed the membership criteria and have decided to maintain those criteria that stipulate that the majority of an organisation's activities must be grantmaking, and we have also added independence as a criterion. In addition, we have developed an application form and application process to ensure that prospective members are adequately vetted.

10. Alliances

There has been a growth in the sophistication of the infrastructure supporting philanthropy in recent years. It is important to form strategic alliances with the European Foundation Centre (EFC), the International Human Rights Funders Group (IHRFG), the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) in the UK, and the Association of Foundations in The Netherlands (FIN).

With the exception of IHRFG, where the main distinction is one of geography, Ariadne is seen as the specialist on human rights and social justice in comparison with other networks that provide more general support to the philanthropic sector. Ariadne will seek to maintain good relations with peer networks and identify collaborations where possible.

11. Governance

Ariadne is currently hosted by Global Dialogue, a UK-based charity. It is therefore governed by the Global Dialogue Board of Trustees and guided by the Ariadne Advisory Board, a body drawn from the membership. At this point in Ariadne's development, it would be useful to formalise the relationship with Global Dialogue and delineate the roles of the Global Dialogue board and the advisory board.

At the same time, it is important to increase the size and diversity of the Advisory Board. We will expand the Advisory Board over the course of the next three years and put in place terms for board members.

12. Staffing

The staffing will follow the dictates of the programmatic needs. We do not envision significant expansion of staff but ideally would have a German language coordinator in place by the end of the period covered by this strategic plan.

13. Finances

Ariadne draws on five main streams of income:

- Grants from donors (both core and project-specific grants)
- Membership contributions
- Participation fees for events
- Sponsorship for events
- Fees for hosting private communities on the portal

At the start of the previous strategic plan, Ariadne had an annual income of roughly £270,000, of which 18% was drawn from membership contributions, 5% from conference fees, and 4% sponsorships for events. The remainder was in the form of grants. In 2016/17, we are projecting an income of close to £430,000, and just over 50% of that will come from grants, and our target is to bring in 35% from membership contributions.

Ariadne has historically relied on a small number of stalwart foundations to provide core support. These foundations have been lifelines for Ariadne, but it is unrealistic to expect them all to continue to support the network in perpetuity. Some foundations are also undergoing internal changes that may reduce their support to human rights and/or to Europe. Therefore, we should seek to diversify the number of foundations providing grant support while also seeking to bring down the percentage of income from grants to no more than 50%.

At least a third of our income should come from membership contributions, and ideally it would be even higher than that. This can be accomplished by enforcing mandatory membership contributions. We will review the suggested levels of contributions and keep them low, but we will move towards the full membership providing support to the network. It is understandable that some foundations will wish to try out the network before committing, and we will give prospective members a year to trial membership. This may result in a slight decrease in membership in the short term but will also lead to a more committed and engaged membership overall. We may also consider tiered participation fees for events that give a more preferential rate to contributing members than to non-members.

Event sponsorship has proven difficult to obtain. In the future, we should try to recoup as much as possible through event fees and clearly identify which portions of the event budget are feasible for sponsorship. Requests are more successful when they are for specific and discrete costs.

The newest form of income is drawn from hosting agreements with other networks or coalitions that want to set up private communities on the portal. We currently charge £1,500 per annum for hosting a community. We can also provide in-house support for an additional fee of £1,500. This arrangement works well and provides Ariadne with a small stream of income, but if the number of hosted communities (currently four) grows to the

point that support by existing staff becomes too onerous we may need to re-evaluate the structure.

14. Outcomes

By the end of the three-year period covered by this strategic plan, we hope to have achieved:

- A thriving and engaged network of donors whose membership better reflects the diversity of Europe. This will be measured by the ratio of members in different countries.
- Deeper engagement with members in continental Europe, demonstrated by more events outside of the UK and more events in languages other than English.
- A more user-friendly portal and a corresponding increase in the use of the portal among members.
- Development of strategies for donors seeking to tackle rising populism and growing social divisions and greater collaboration among donors working in this area.
- Creation of a mentorship scheme to encourage the development of professionals new to the philanthropic field.
- A healthy diversity of income sources that will lend the network greater financial sustainability.