

Increasing Local Giving Through a Match-Funding Mechanism: A Case of **Belgium's** Growfunding



Why this case matters

Belgium shows how governments and partners can expand access to funding for grassroots initiatives through match funding and civic crowdfunding. By combining public, private and community contributions, the Growfunding model mobilises new resources and increases local participation, without requiring major legal reform.

Belgium's story of change

In Belgium, [Growfunding](#)¹ applied a match-funding model to support community-led projects by combining contributions from companies, philanthropic actors, service clubs² and local governments. Local authorities also contributed to operational costs, helping sustain the platform.

Since its launch, the Growfunding Fund has mobilised **over EUR 900,000**, including **more than EUR 300,000 in match funding**. The model demonstrates how philanthropic environments can be strengthened through practical financing mechanisms rather than solely relying on substantial legal reform.

Relevant EE Guide recommendations

This case illustrates the following recommendation in practice:

- **Rec. 7:** Enable innovative giving instruments

Policy lever

Public and private match funding, supported by a civic crowdfunding platform and a complementary fund to mobilise larger contributions.

1 "Growfunding" refers to the civic crowdfunding platform and organisation, while Growfund or the Growfunding Fund refers to the fund linked to the platform, used to channel larger donations and match funding.

2 In the Belgian context, service clubs (e.g. Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis) are voluntary membership networks that fundraise for local community causes – a traditional part of Belgian civic giving.

Country snapshot: Belgium

Country overview	▶ High-income country with an open enabling environment ▶ Global Philanthropy Environment Index (GPEI) Score (2025): 4.78/5 ▶ Well-established and mature philanthropic sector
Policy lever	▶ Multi-stakeholder partnership to increase local giving, supported by match funding and fiscal incentives ▶ Use of innovative financing mechanisms and digital platforms to mobilise individual and institutional giving
Outcome type	▶ Increased resource mobilisation and strengthened community-level philanthropy
Key challenges/ barriers prior to the intervention	▶ Philanthropy environment was well-resourced and structured, but local projects struggled to access traditional funding and public grants

Introduction: the background

In Belgium, public authorities were responding to a persistent funding gap. NGOs, informal collectives and small, local, citizen-led initiatives often struggled to access traditional philanthropy and public grants, which could be slow, bureaucratic and difficult for grassroots actors to navigate.

As a result, many locally driven solutions remained underfunded and community engagement in social

development was fragmented. In response, Growfunding began as a research project financed by the [European Social Fund](#) (now called the “European Social Fund Plus”), aimed at promoting participation in social networks and strengthening community resilience in Brussels and beyond. It offered an alternative way to support local initiatives by fostering new forms of [civic crowdfunding](#) rather than relying solely on traditional grantmaking.

Intervention: the what



Growfunding's match-funding model enables companies, philanthropic actors, service clubs and local governments to co-finance community-led projects through a civic crowdfunding platform. In addition to financial contributions, partners gain visibility and opportunities [to involve their customers, partners and/or employees in the project](#).

As a social enterprise, Growfunding's operations are funded by a diverse funding mix:

- ▶ **Contributions from Growfunders:** 10% of each successful project is allocated to support Growfunding's operations.
- ▶ **Partnerships:** Partners co-finance part of the costs of coaching the projects and maintaining the platform.
- ▶ **Businesses and philanthropy:** Match funders contribute to project support and operational costs.
- ▶ **Authorities:** Local and regional authorities also finance the platform's operations. The regional governments of Flanders and Brussels put their resources towards Growfunding's general operational costs and the research and development programme. The Brussels-Capital Region co-finance the support for social and circular start-ups in Brussels.
- ▶ **Consultancy and advice:** Income is generated through advisory services, training and lectures.
- ▶ **Knowledge institutions:** Contribute to funding for the research and development programme.

Growfunding projects are reward-based. If a project does not reach its target amount before the deadline, contributions are refunded. Growfunding acts as an intermediary between match-funders and project owners.

Match funding can happen in three different ways:

1. **For individual projects:** Sponsors contribute to a specific campaign and receive visibility and agreed returns.
2. **For thematic matching funds:** Sponsors support a group of selected projects within a theme or region, with consolidated reporting on financial and social impact.
3. **For structural matching funds:** Introduced in 2022, in partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation, this model enables larger, more sustained contributions through a dedicated fund, helping to support campaigns beyond a single project and scale match funding more systematically.

In Belgium, most contributions made through Growfunding do not qualify for a tax certificate because the platform primarily uses a reward-based crowdfunding model. Tax certificates are only available in specific cases where projects are linked to eligible intermediaries, such as the King Baudouin Foundation, and this is clearly indicated to contributors.

Implementation: the how

A diverse coalition of actors, including local authorities, philanthropy organisations, companies, service clubs³ and community leaders, came together to develop and scale the Growfunding model. After its launch in 2014, the match-funding approach expanded significantly in 2022 with the creation of the Growfunding Fund, established in partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation.

► **Early academic research:** Growfunding began as a [research initiative](#) led by the social work research group at Odisee University of Applied Sciences in Brussels, supported by the European Social Fund. The aim was to test whether civic crowdfunding could help small, local initiatives mobilise funding and strengthen community participation.

► **Reform trigger:** This work responded to a clear gap: many citizen-led and community-based initiatives struggled to access traditional funding. For public authorities, this highlighted a limitation in the existing funding system where smaller projects often lacked the scale, track record or institutional form needed to secure grants or other formal support.

► **Moving from research to implementation:** The model was gradually tested and refined in practice. Embedded within Odisee, the initiative aimed not only to raise funds but also strengthen engagement by connecting online and offline communities and supporting ideas that traditional funding mechanisms often overlook. In 2014, Growfunding was launched as a civic crowdfunding initiative by a group of practitioners, including Frederik Lamote, Hanne Lahousse, Dennis Marcelis and Sylvie Leullieux, with support from the Brussels and Flemish Governments.

► **Early leadership and institutional consolidation:**

As the model developed, the focus shifted to building a stable organisational base. Growfunding was formally established as a non-profit in 2016, allowing it to move beyond the pilot phase and operate more sustainably. This enabled the organisation to coach project leaders, manage campaigns and build trust between local initiatives and external supporters.

Following its formalisation, Growfunding expanded its networks and experience by working with communities, NGOs and cultural projects.

According to [Growfunding's 2023 annual report](#), public subsidies make up most of its income, with around 66% coming from the Brussels-Capital Region and the Flemish Community Government. This funding supports core operations, coaching, platform maintenance, and research and development.

► **Expansion of match funding:** As the model matured, crowdfunding alone proved insufficient to meet demand. From 2022 onward, match funding was introduced to increase scale and reliability. This brought in companies and philanthropic actors to co-finance campaigns while maintaining the platform's community-based approach. These partners provide co-financing for campaigns by matching crowd contributions (e.g., for every EUR 3 from a contributor, a partner adds EUR 1), thus raising more total funds and signalling support.

Early partnerships – such as with the Triodos Foundation, which supported four projects totalling EUR 38,315, including EUR 11,314 in co-financing – demonstrated the value of institutional co-funding, and broader support followed in 2023 from partners including Umicore and Rotary Brussels International.

3 Service clubs are membership-based civic organisations, such as Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis, that support community projects through fundraising, donations and volunteer engagement.

- **Role of King Baudouin Foundation and other partners:** The King Baudouin Foundation played a pivotal role in scaling the model. By partnering with Growfunding to establish the Growfunding Fund in late 2022, the King Baudouin Foundation provided the fiscal and administrative infrastructure that Growfunding needed to attract larger contributions and expand match funding. Other partners,

including companies, philanthropic organisations, service clubs and educational institutions, helped strengthen the model through co-funding, outreach, mentoring, expertise and training. At the same time, citizens, NGOs, collectives and grassroots organisers continued to lead and implement projects on the platform.

Outcomes and early signals of impact



- **Strong resource mobilisation:** According to annual reports (2022, 2023 and 2024) –
 - Since its inception, Growfunding has raised more than **EUR 4.7 million for social impact projects across Belgium**.
 - In 2023, Growfunding launched **62 campaigns** and 87% reached or exceeded their funding targets.
 - That same year, **4,321** unique Growfunders made **6,383 contributions** to **54 projects**, reaching an estimated **11,089 participants**.
 - In 2022, **Growfunding raised EUR 511,910** (37% above its pre-COVID 2019 record), with **3,135 Growfunders** making **5,306 contributions** to **44 successful projects**, reaching an estimated **7,144 participants**.
 - In 2021, **5,570** unique **Growfunders** made **7,488 contributions** to **62 successful reward-based projects**.
- **Match-funding expanded the pool of capital:** Since its launch in 2022, the Growfunding Fund has mobilised more than **EUR 912,515, including over EUR 317,885 in match funding**, adding a structured co-funding layer to the platform. In 2023,

26 campaigns received match funding, **totalling over EUR 126,000**.

- **Increase in projects supported:** The model increased the number of projects receiving institutional support. In 2023 alone, **26 projects** were co-financed, with the number continuing to grow in the following years.
- **Leverage ratio:** The match-funding model increased financial mobilisation. For every EUR 1 invested by institutional partners, EUR 2.10 was invested in community projects.
- **Increase in number of individual donors:** Since the launch of the Growfunding Fund in late 2022, **66 patrons** have contributed **EUR 50,800**, reflecting growing engagement from both individual and institutional donors.
- **Ecosystem simplification:** The partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation enables tax certificates for eligible contributions, making it easier for companies, philanthropists and citizens to contribute significant amounts. The introduction of match funding has also diversified funding sources and strengthened the enabling environment for community investment.

Caveats for policymakers

While the Growfunding case offers useful lessons, its transferability depends on context, particularly where the civic, institutional and philanthropic foundations for such a model are less developed.

- **Cultural and social context:** Belgium's tradition of civic engagement, social entrepreneurship and NGO activity created a favourable environment for co-financing community-led projects. Communities

were willing to participate, and companies were often receptive to supporting local initiatives.

- **Existing platform and infrastructure:** Growfunding has been operating since 2014 as a trusted platform for local social and cultural projects. This existing infrastructure – along with established networks and experience – made it easier to introduce match funding without starting from scratch.

Lessons for policymakers

Belgium's experience shows how match-funding models can build on existing philanthropic ecosystems to expand support for community-led initiatives. While the country has a strong network of foundations, corporate giving and service clubs, these are often concentrated in larger institutions. The Growfunding model demonstrates how these resources can be mobilised more effectively at the local level through structured collaboration.

The model's success reflects a combination of factors: a civic crowdfunding platform embedded in existing legal and fiscal frameworks, institutional co-financing, access to tax incentives through the King Baudouin Foundation, public support for operations and active partner engagement and trust-building.

Key lessons include:

- **Provide early and ongoing support:** Public authorities in Brussels and Flanders provided early and ongoing subsidies, enabling Growfunding to sustain operations, train project leaders and support the co-financing model.
- **Work with trusted intermediaries to build support and credibility:** A partnership with the King

Baudouin Foundation enabled Growfunding to build on an existing legal and fiscal infrastructure rather than creating a new one. King Baudouin Foundation brought the legal and administrative capacity to issue tax certificates for eligible donations and manage pooled giving, while Growfunding brought in the platform. Further, investment in infrastructure led to the unlocking of additional resources. This made it easier to attract larger contributions and manage pooled funding.

- **Use fiscal incentives strategically:** Tax incentives made contributions more attractive, particularly for companies and high-net-worth individuals.
- **Strategic design and coaching choices:** Active matching, coaching and clear co-financing structures helped ensure that both institutional partners and community actors saw tangible outcomes.
- **Invest in active intermediation, not just the platform:** Growfunding did more than host campaigns. It matched partners with projects, coached project leaders and structured co-financing arrangements to ensure effective participation on both sides.

► **Anchor models in local civic ecosystems:**

Successful implementation depends on aligning with existing patterns of civic engagement, social entrepreneurship and collaboration between public, private and community actors.

Final reflections



A broader lesson for other governments is that even in well-resourced, institutionally mature philanthropy environments, important funding gaps can persist, especially for small, local, citizen-led initiatives that do not fit traditional funding channels. Governments can help address these gaps by supporting models that combine civic crowdfunding, institutional match funding and fiscal incentives. These approaches can widen access to finance, strengthen community participation and support social innovation.

The key consideration for other countries is that such models work best when they are adapted to local conditions, including the strength of civic engagement, the presence of trusted intermediaries and the willingness of public and private actors to collaborate.

Annex

Timeline of events

Year	Event
Launch	
2013	▶ In response to the challenges faced by small community initiatives in accessing traditional funding, the social work and community development department at HUBrussel (now part of Odisee in Brussels) launched a research project with support from the European Social Fund, to explore whether civic crowdfunding could strengthen participation and community resilience ▶ This was the precursor to what would later become the Growfunding platform
2014	▶ From 2014, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Flemish Community Government supported the initiative as it moved from research into practice, eventually evolving into Growfunding, which was formally established as a non-profit in 2016 ▶ Growfunding partnered with the Governments of Flanders and Brussels to secure funding via participatory crowdfunding
Legal establishment	
2016	▶ Growfunding was formally registered as a non-profit association (vzw) in Belgium on 1 July 2016, providing an institutional structure and enabling more sustained operations
Match-funding mechanism	
2022	▶ Growfunding partnered with the King Baudouin Foundation to establish the Growfunding Fund, enabling larger-scale contributions and match funding. ▶ Additional partnerships, including with the Triodos Foundation, supported early co-financed projects.

References and resources

1. Eurocrowd. Scaling Up Partnerships: A Blueprint for the Implementation of Match-funding Schemes Between Public Authorities and Crowdfunding Platforms (2021).	4. Interreg Europe. “International Crowdfunding and Match-funding Workshop: Showcasing of Match-funding Initiatives across Europe” . Eurocrowd (2022).
2. Growfunding. Annual Report (2023).	5. Triodos Bank. “Impact Report of the Call for Projects: Taking Action for Change” (2023).
3. Interreg Europe. Guidebook of Existing Fund-Matching Good Practices & Analysis of Key Fund-Matching Barriers (2024).	6. Vermeersch, Laurent. “Growfunding: ‘We Support Small Businesses in the Big City’” . Bruzz (2018).