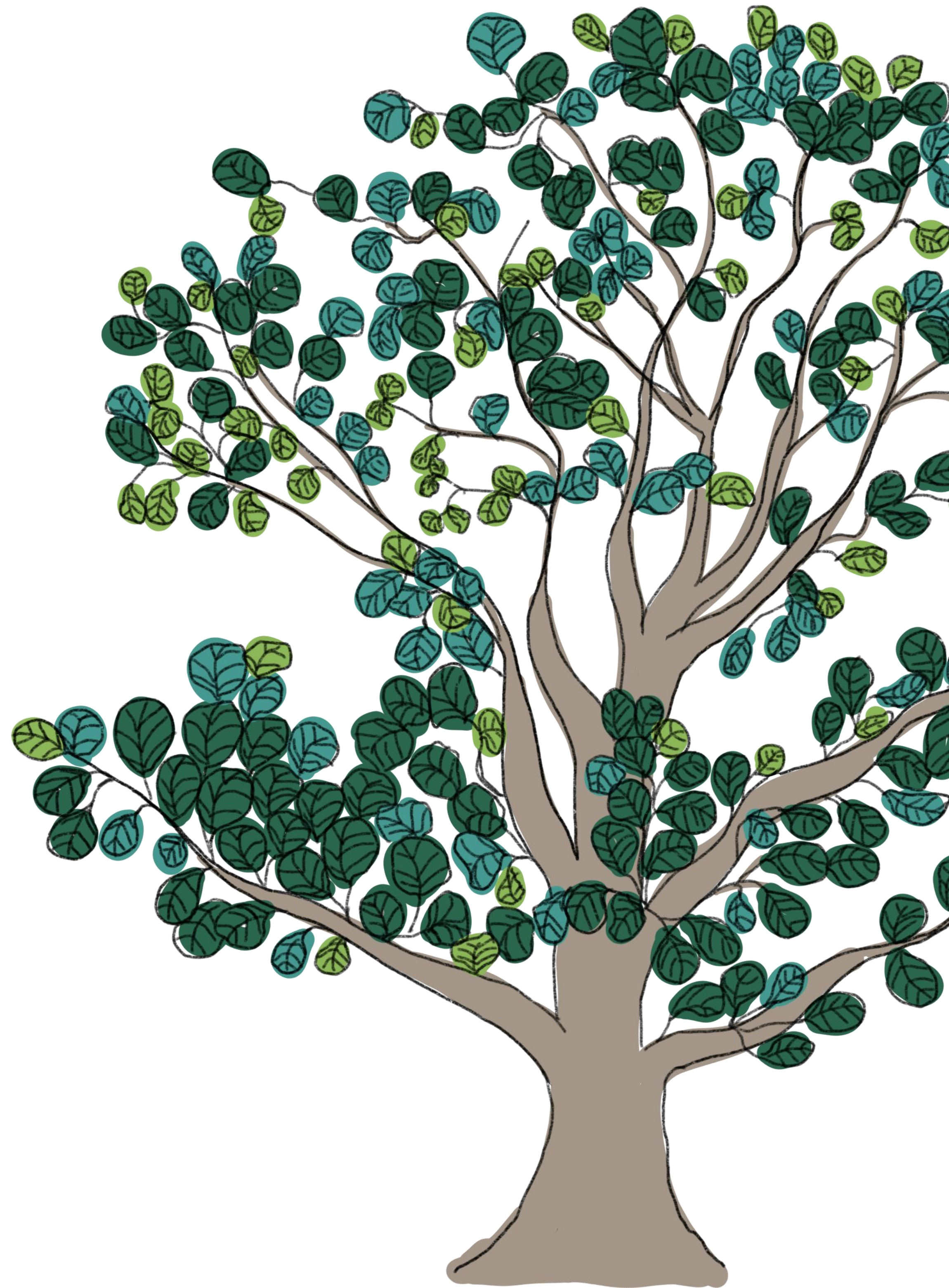


RE-IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF IRISH INGOs

A process convened
by Dóchas

Produced and facilitated by Reos Partners
April 2021

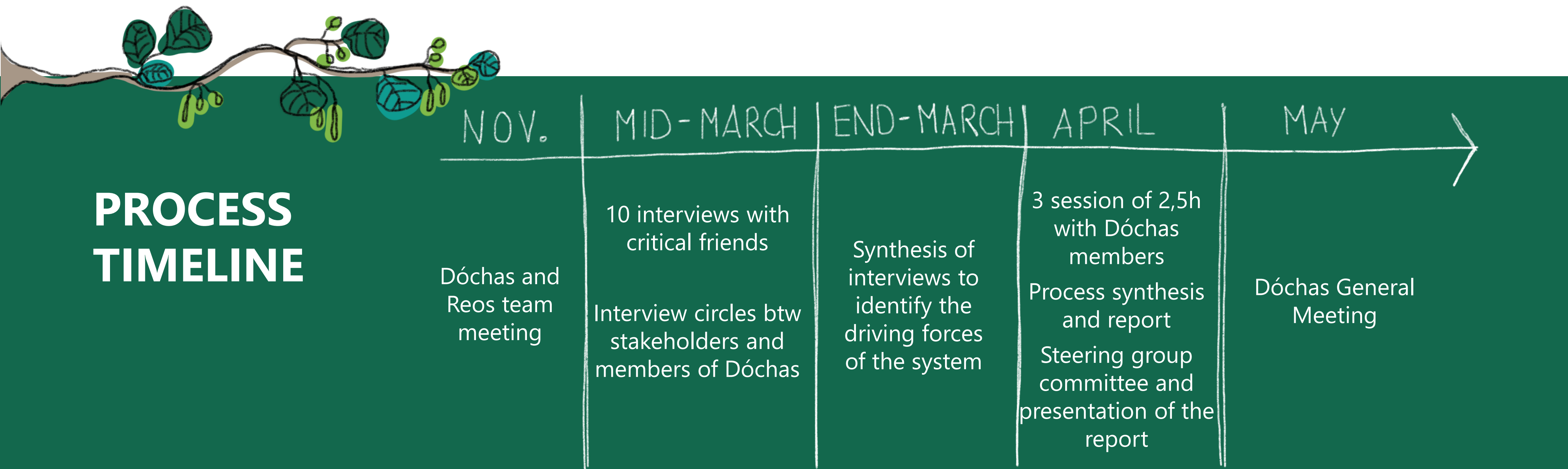


PROCESS OVERVIEW

Dóchas is currently preparing a new strategy to cover the years 2022-2026. To ensure the strategy responds to the external environment and builds on the collective strength of its members, Dóchas started a participatory process to re-imagine the future of Irish INGOs.

Objectives

- To better understand challenges and opportunities of the rapidly **changing context of Irish INGOs**
- To **imagine possible future roles** for the Irish INGO sector broadly within this context
- To strengthen **relationships** and identify opportunities to work together for change
- To ensure that the new **Dochas strategy responds** to the external environment and builds on the collective strength of its members





Elements we looked at

What are **driving forces** of the changing context, Irish INGOs are operating in?

What are **opportunities** arising from that?

What is the **best possible future** of the Irish INGO sector in 2031?

What needs to **change** (stop, start, continue) to get there?



LOCALLY-LED DEVELOPMENT

"Real change has to be driven in the countries themselves, that's been our policy for a long time, but it hasn't meant that it has happened."

Push for Southern Ownership

There is growing awareness and demands for the need for more local and southern ownership and truly locally led development. This includes the need to re-think and interrogate the language and approach to local actors.

Digitalisation as enabler

COVID demonstrated that a lot can be done without INGOs being present. Digitalisation enabled this.

Unclear implications

While the call for localization is loud, it stays unclear to many in the sector, what this will imply (e.g. in terms of risk sharing, compliance) and how to deliver on this agenda.

OPPORTUNITIES

- A shifting role for INGOs – more focus on capacity building and being braver on advocacy.
- Build genuinely equal north-south civil society partnership
- Collaboration on navigating through localisation responsibly.

???

How could a space look like, where the sector can learn & think together how to address locally-led development responsibly?

STOP

START

- Unpacking risk - securing transformative change and protecting stakeholders in that change process.

CONTINUE

- Work even more in partnerships.
- Co-create solutions with local communities.



DIVERSITY, INEQUALITY & DECOLONIZING STRUCTURES

"The global trend towards addressing inequalities and to be actively anti-racism is going to require members to respond – saying that 'we're Irish and we didn't colonise anybody is not enough'; we need to get serious about coloniality within development and the work of our organizations."

Lack of diversity within INGOs

There is a lack of diversity (background, race, gender, generations) in leadership positions and in boards. This results in limited perspectives being taken into account and groupthink.

Checking our privilege

Are we interrogating our privileges enough? In our work locally as well? Is the system representing the realities of Ireland? What are the post-colonial assumptions that we're bringing into our work?

OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to focus on diversity and inclusion as a driver for change: Go beyond just conversation.
- Strong and diverse leadership also translated in including younger and older activists.

???

What is the shift in mindset that is needed?

STOP

- Thinking diversity is just about race or colour - its about ensuring equality of voice and representation.
- Believing we are a homogenous group.

START

- Allow more diversity in conversations.
- Give space to all organisations so all become visible.

CONTINUE



COURAGEOUS ADVOCACY

"We have not been successful at building a sense of identity that connects the broadest possible sense of civil society. (...) We have been so starved of resources, we end up fighting against each other and competing against each other."

Courageous sector leadership

Need for a stronger, more confident and courageous leadership, advocating for our cause from sectoral rather than organisational perspective.

One voice?

Potential of bringing INGO voices together, with a coherent message to the public, politicians,

Connect to global agendas

Engage the public pro-actively with a strong vision of what global solidarity and interconnectedness means for Ireland and partners

OPPORTUNITIES

- Outward focus, courageous leadership, moral and political vacuum to fill.
- To look at international development as global rather than them and us.
- Be more transparent and engage more with the public.

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How to do advocacy when unrestricted funding is so constrained?

STOP

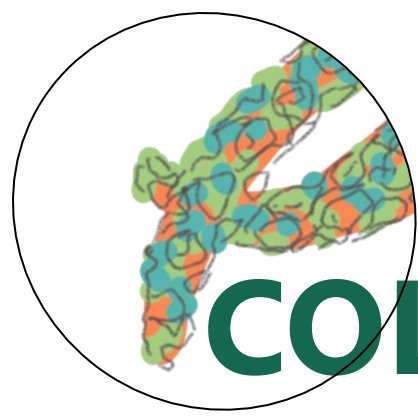
- Thinking them vs us.
- Speaking jargon.

START

- Give space to all organisations so all become visible.
- Two way communication with partners, public, ...
- Discovering ways to influence internationally.
- Be brave and name the fundamental issues.

CONTINUE

- Deepening leadership.
- SDG's at the center.
- Focusing on what we have in common.



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING CULTURE

"We have so much to learn from the people that we serve and work with to bring back to our own communities. I mean, it's often perceived the other way around, isn't it?"

Competition of NGOs

Irish INGOs are competing for funds, attention and talents, which results often in distrust and high competition. The increased number of INGOs within the sector is also seen as a concern for certain, and a strength for others.

Collaborate more

There is a willingness to collaborate more systemically, to have a system where we all take action together, with more solidarity, and INGOs bringing all of their complementary capabilities together.

Failure culture

There is a longing for a more innovative, less risk-averse culture that accepts failures as precondition for learning.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Use the COVID disruption to permanently change the way we work.
- Build a civil society ecosystem between all kind of types of organisations – building on each others strength and connecting to other groups that might not be our typical partners.

???

"How can we incentivise collaboration within the network in a time of digitalisation when we often feel we have to beg people to attend events, workshops?"

STOP

- Being competitive.
- Closed in / insular.
- Doing the same thing and expecting different results.
- Relying solely on dedicated innovation funds to find new / better ways of doing things - innovation can be applied across all areas of work.

START

- More formal and informal spaces for debating, sharing, listening
- Allow more diversity in conversations.
- Expand our network beyond what we know.
- Learn from past risks/mistake,

CONTINUE

- Cross learning./Sharing Working groups.
- Developing understanding how change and transformation work (ToC).
- To disseminate what does/ does not work so that others do not have to make the same mistakes.



Accountability & Governance

*"Every year there is another scandal or crisis.
This year it is racism. We need to move beyond
the crisis mode."*

Growing requirements

Demands for transparency, safeguarding and accountability are increasing. Challenging for small organisations to keep up with all requirements and set up comprehensive governance structures (it takes resources).

Being reactive (to scandals)

Sector is reactive/ not getting ahead of the discourse.

Reputational risks through social media

Social media platforms are amplifying the risks of reputational damage to the sector.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Looking at standardised models, positions around governance, compliance etc.
- To pro-actively establish a world class internal accountability and governance system – so that we can move beyond crisis mode .

???

What would enable us to be pro-active on internal accountability and governance again?

STOP

- Being reactive.

START

- Develop standard models around e.g. compliance, governance .
- Unpacking risk - securing transformative change and protecting stakeholders in that change process.

CONTINUE

Thank You!



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<http://www.reospartners.com/>