

# **Irish in Britain Communications Toolkit**

## **A guide for member organisations and partners**

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### **1. Introduction**

This toolkit is designed to help any individual or team with responsibility for communicating the purpose, activities and achievements of their organisation.

It has been produced for Irish in Britain as guidance for its members and partners.

It is a template that can be adapted as necessary to meet the different requirements of members.

This document will address both pro-active and re-active communication and includes a section on the basics of good issues and crisis management.

It is appreciated that many larger organisations will have well-established communications operations already doing much of what is outlined below, whilst other bodies with limited resources may feel this toolkit is a stretch.

The toolkit is designed to add value at every level. It is based on tried and tested principles of best practice and clear processes to communicate more effectively to build, enhance and protect reputation and to help every organization achieve their goals.

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### **2. Why communicate at all?**

There is little point in communicating just for the sake of it.

Effective communication has a purpose and that is generally to raise positive awareness and understanding of what you do so that ultimately people will support you.

3. Focused, audience-centric communication is a more effective use of resource than a 'scattergun' approach.

To achieve this, it is worth, right at the beginning of any outreach, asking:

- Who are you trying to reach?

- Why do you want to reach them?
- What do they need to know?
- What do you want to them to do as a result of your communication?

For example, if you are trying raise more funding, you will need to reach the right decision-makers or budget holders in Government or say, a Lottery good causes distributor. They will need to understand your challenges and how your work will meet those challenges, to achieve your - or their - objectives. So then, ultimately, they will commit to sustainable long-term financial support or partnership.

### 3. Planning: preparing to succeed

News is not always spontaneous. The typical newsroom for broadcast, print or online media has a planning desk which looks ahead to what will happen in the coming days, weeks and months.

It can be very effective for organisations to think the same way and develop a planning diary – or timeline – of future events, launches, milestones, opportunities and potential pressure points.

This means you can prepare content, approve quotes, ensure the availability of spokespeople well in advance of the day the news ‘breaks.’

A content calendar or planner guarantees a regular output of quality content, promotes greater engagement and allows you to envisage down periods where little coverage or activity is expected and when you will be busy and may need further resource.

#### Example of news planner (indicative)

Date	Event	Actions	Status/outcome
Mar 8	International Women’s Day	Social media posts to recognise women in Irish community	Posts received xxxx likes and xxxx positive comments
Mar 17	St Patrick’s Day	Peg to make announcements and to comment on Irish community issues	Raised profile and supported activities of other Irish community organisations
April	Appointment of new officer (at any time)	Issue press release to relevant sector/trade press and websites	Profiled future plans of organisation through new appointment
May	In-house research published	Use your own research as basis for thought-leadership report/editorial/ blog	Publish content and amplify through social media

June 2-5	The Queen's Platinum Jubilee (2-5 June) with bonus UK bank holiday	Highlight Irish community events In UK	Demonstrate involvement with other UK communities
June 14 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of Grenfell Tower tragedy	Remember Irish victims and those affected by Grenfell	Reflect wider issues of social housing
July	Membership survey	Release details of survey of own members on current issue.	Demonstrate organization listens to its members and represents interests
August 28 <sup>th</sup>	Notting Hill Carnival	Highlight London Irish community involvement in multi-cultural events	Historical connections with immigration issues
Sep 24	Labour Party conference held in Liverpool.	Liverpool Irish community involvement	Lobby Irish community interests
Oct 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Conservative Party Conference	Opportunity to comment on impact of Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on GRT community	Lobby Irish community interests
November	Campaign launch around soaring heating bills due to gas crisis.	Launch campaign on community health issue, 'Keeping Warm' ahead of winter months	Example of topical campaign linked to energy crisis
Nov 21 <sup>st</sup>	FIFA World Cup Qatar	Ireland may still qualify.	Potential opportunity to highlight Irish sporting heritage
Dec 6 <sup>th</sup>	100 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of "Irish Free State" which preceded Irish Republic.	Community events/comment	Mark moment of history
Dec 15 <sup>th</sup>	Leo Varadkar takes back over from Micheál Martin as Taoiseach under terms of coalition agreement.	Opportunity to comment.	Reflect UK Irish community relevance to Republic's domestic political agenda.

### 3.1 Planning: Useful materials – simple ‘building blocks’

#### The ‘Boilerplate’

- This is a one paragraph description of your organization which describes who you are. This may well already exist on your website. This can be included as a footnote on all external communications.

#### Example of a boilerplate

*Irish in Britain is the national membership body for Irish community organisations in Britain – providing support and representation for our diverse network and championing our community's interests. We bring together many different groups and individuals, share expertise, represent their interests and campaign for and support the growth and wellbeing of our community.*

#### Cases studies

The media are always looking for real life examples they can use when reporting on current issues affecting your organization.

It can be very useful to create a small bank of case studies of your work, activities or achievements involving people who are in the organisation or have been supported by it.

#### Example of case study:

*(Case study to illustrate recent Covid Vaccination Campaign)*

#### **96 people received jab at Liverpool pop-up**

*In Liverpool, a pop-up vaccine unit was opened at a wider community health event with 96 people receiving a jab or booster jab during the day. Local people the city's Irish community who attended the event at Liverpool Irish Centre were also offered diabetes and other health checks.*

*Pictured receiving her jab is Mrs A.N. Other who says she had doubts about the vaccine but after speaking to health professionals at the pop-up decided it was best to protect "herself and others"*

*One of the organisers Amy Beck (available for interview) said "our aim was to give community members, who have felt isolated during the pandemic, the opportunity to link in with other Liverpool-based organisations, surrounding health and well-being."*

*More than two hundred people were at the event including 50 staff from various different support organisations and NHS workers.*

#### Fact sheets.

Simple fact sheets can be extremely useful for background briefings and for raising awareness and understanding of what you do. They can also be very helpful for rebutting or responding to criticism

They should be concise and use only carefully checked information

Generally, fact sheets are:

- One side of A4
- Made up of bullet points
- Easy to read and understand
- Use key metrics

**Example of content for fact sheet.**

- Founded when ...
- Based where ...
- Number of members ...
- Core purpose ...
- Covering which region (s) ....
- Key milestones for organisation ...
- Services provided ...
- Successful outcomes ...
- Funded by ...
- Partner with ...

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## **4. The Press Release.**

The traditional press release is still a highly effective way to deliver your announcement/initiative/campaign or response. In a digital world this would usually be supported and amplified by social media postings which is covered later.

In order to convey a newsworthy story to local, national and trade media (print, broadcast and online), a press release will be drafted to support the event/launch/charity announcement etc.

Often a release is issued before an event, to tell people it is happening, and after the event with photos from the day, to tell people how successful it was.

A press release is designed to make journalists' lives easier by supplying them with the correct information they need to draft a story.

Regional and national newspapers can receive thousands of press releases on a daily basis.

In order for your story to stand out you need to avoid the following common traps:

**Wrong story** – not relevant to their readers/viewers

**Too much of a plug** – an advert not a story

**Arrived too late** – journalists work to deadlines for print and online and often press releases arrive too late

**So badly written** – journalists cannot understand it

**Story was buried in detail** – the opening paragraph is key so journalists can read and understand the story quickly

#### **4.1 Writing a good press release**

The next time you speak to a journalist, ask them how many press releases they receive a day. The answer will most likely be 100+. And with e-mail, it is very easy to delete without reading it fully. So, whatever you send needs to be short, strong, and straightforward. Journalists do not have the time to wade through pages of prose. If it is not working upfront, it is going to get canned.

##### **Headline**

Whilst the media will write their own headline, the headline you write for the release should help the journalist spot the potential of the story and make them want to read on.

The headline should encapsulate the whole story in a few words

##### **First Paragraph**

The first paragraph should pinpoint **exactly** what the release is all about – *what is the story?*

It is the most important sentence in the release, and it can be helpful to revisit it, once to the whole release is completed to see it can be further honed.

The first paragraph should be not more than about 40 words, should state why the story is important and why it is important now.

##### **Second and (if necessary) Third/Fourth Paragraphs**

The second paragraph goes into a bit more detail about the story, be it an event, an initiative, some research or new report or an appointment. It will have more detail but should still only include *essential* detail. Anything else can go at the bottom in the *Note to Editors*.

##### **The Quotes Paragraph**

The next paragraph is for quotes. Keep them short and usable. Are quotes relevant to the story? If not, they will not get used. If a second person is to be quoted, then make sure the first quote is the most newsworthy.

Quotes are an opportunity to provide insight and a point of view beyond the basic facts.

### **Final Paragraph**

The final paragraph wraps up the story, it is the “so what” that brings the story to a conclusion.

Additional details can be captured in bullet points in the Note to Editors which is in effect an appendix.

### **Note to Editors**

This is where you can fill in any background information, contact information, availability of spokespersons, pictures etc. and the description of the organization – the “boilerplate” (see above)

## **4.2 Press release formatting points**

At the top, make sure you have the dateline and mark it 'For Immediate Release' *that says it is a live story*.

If you need an embargo because it is sensitive or it is for an event about to take place, then mark it 'Embargoed' then add the date and time after which it can appear. So '00.01 Weds 1 July 2022' means it can go live after that time. (Journalists will respect embargos but will be irritated if they see no reason for the delay.)

At the end point put in 'Ends' to indicate the stop point.

Always add 'For further information, please contact:' and put in the details -- telephone and e-mail are needed. A mobile number is strongly recommended for out of hours,

Finally, you have 'Notes to Editors' which should be bulleted or numbered. As previously stated, here you can put in web addresses, further biographical or corporate details, specifications, information on how to get images, and any other relevant information.

Maintain due process. Be sure to give it a proof-read and sense-check. A hastily written, hastily sent press release is no good to anyone. It reflects badly on the writer and the story.

If emailing the press release always include the content in the body of the email as well as an attachment. Many journalists will read it on their phone or other mobile device when opening attachments can be a hassle.

Also, if going out by e-mail, ensure the distribution list is in the BCC box. Journalists do not want to see who else has received it and if they do, they may not write the story.

## **4.3 ‘Selling in’ a press release or statement to a journalist**

To increase the chances of a release being used it can help a lot to pick up the phone to the newsdesk, planning desk or the reporter.

This can be quite daunting so the following tips may help.

- Time your call carefully - check there is no major breaking story before calling
- If the story is for the future, ask for the planning desk

- When you get through have your “top line” ready and a reason to call
- If you call a correspondent directly ask if they have time to talk
- Mention you have seen recent story written by correspondent
- If they are clearly too busy say you will call back or send them a short email
- Do not show fear or appear reluctant to call – they need stories, you are trying to help them
- If they are really not interested, even rude, politely back off and keep the relationship for another time.

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## 5. Social and digital media

To use the PR jargon, we talk about “earned media” which is all about persuading journalists to cover your story and “owned media” which is your own website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and other platforms for which you control the content.

Having reached out to external media through means such as press release it can be extremely effective to support this with social media.

### **Social media can:**

- Drive traffic to your own platforms
- Build a loyal community of relevant followers
- Engage and influence service-users and stakeholders directly
- Amplify and extend the impact of traditional media activity
- Provide a more human and engaging voice for the organization

Social media should work hand-in-hand with classic media to add to context and expand on it.

### **Impact of social media**

- News travels faster and proliferates
- Stories spread more quickly – at any time of day (there are more channels, more users, international accounts etc.)
- Communities develop more rapidly
- Issues-based communities can develop quickly and coordinate activity easily.
- Comment feeds comment
- Easier for people to compare comments and feed the story
- NGOs can quickly inform influential audiences
- Organisations can swiftly reach and mobilise their supporters
- The media have case studies on tap
- Real stories are far easier to come by than previously.

### **5.1 Using links and other feature to join up social media**

- Incorporate social icons/links on the organisation website/blog
- Offer the ability to share/like via share button
- Use Hashtags to get more hits on search engines. #Hashtags mark topics of social media messages making them discoverable to people with shared interests.
- Create video content/infographic and link to it
- Like, comment and share social media from other organisations so they will support you. Getting involved in an ongoing topic or news story connects you with the audience following

## **5.2 The main social media platforms**

### **Twitter**

- Post short, maximum 280-character messages (This can include links to longer content)
- Useful for regular updates
- Can also direct message individuals
- Retweets form an important part of any Twitter strategy.

### **LinkedIn**

- The world's largest professional network allowing users to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally
- Great for Business to Business and Peer to Peer communication though thought-leadership, opinion blogs and insights

### **Facebook**

- Social networking site that enables users to live a “digital social life” staying connected with friends, posting content, sharing links and exchanging information

Businesses use Facebook as a more informal platform where tone can be more familiar

### **Instagram**

- A mobile app based mainly on sharing pictures and videos with other users
- A useful platform if you have strong images to share

## **5.3 How to use social media**

### **Content posting**

- Content is king on social media, but in order for content to have maximum impact, it is important to have established a ‘tone of voice’ that reflects the values of your organization.
- The type of content you choose to will be the content that performs best with your audience.
- Original content can be uploaded on to your website (if you have one) then linked to via social media

- If you have issued a press release – capture a 280-character summary for Twitter or slightly longer for Facebook and LinkedIn and link to the press release. If you have published a report do the same and link to a PDF of the report.
- Link images and videos to written content
- Pictures combined with text help audiences gain a quick grasp of your message and can be very persuasive.

### Responding to social media comment about your organization

When an organisation ‘sticks its head above the parapet’ on social media it is not uncommon for individuals to make comments about you which may be negative or misinformed.

The question of whether you should respond to these comments depends on a variety of factors so the table below should help you.

Comment	Analysis	Action
Rant	<b>Low</b> – little impact, most people will recognise them for what they are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and log but do not respond</li> <li>• Responding to rants and getting sucked into arguments online is one-way organisations can fall foul in terms of engagement</li> </ul>
Misguided or incorrect comment	<b>Medium to high</b> – depending on the influence of the forum. These can spread and become perceived reality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond - prioritising sites with most influence</li> <li>• Correct misconception/ refute incorrect allegation</li> <li>• Direct to full and accurate information</li> </ul>
Complaint	<b>Medium to high-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond – attempt to take the comment offline by asking them to contact organisation directly</li> <li>• Do not deal with complaint in an open forum</li> </ul>

### Listening

Social media is also a very useful way to listen to your audiences by monitoring digital conversations to understand what customers/end-users and saying about you.

This information can then inform content strategy as content can be tailored according to what the audience likes and dislikes.

Social listening is a key way to identify influencers, to track hashtags and phrases, and make sure you are part of conversations.

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## **6.0 Measurement**

Measuring the effectiveness of your communications can be a very useful thing to do.

Measurement helps identify what worked well and what did not so you can do it better next time.

And strategically an evaluation report can demonstrate to your funders, partners and members that the achievements of your organization are being recognized, understood and appreciated.

There are three key areas of measurement.

### **1. Inputs.**

This may be the number and quality of press releases or briefings, attendance at events, content produced, and messages developed. This principally a demonstration level of activity.

### **2. Uptakes.**

This is a measure of uptake to the campaign or activity. This could be hits to a web page, searches or likes on Facebook, articles in the media (appearance in target publications, size and messaging -positive, negative, neutral) and overall campaign return on investment.

This can demonstrate the reach of your communication, the share of voice and whether your messages are achieving cut-through.

### **3. Outcomes.**

This is the ultimate measure of a campaign's success. Does the campaign cut through and change minds and behaviours so that not only have people received the message but have acted upon it?

A simple report covering these areas is something that can reassure stakeholders and partners and help shape future communication.

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## **7.0 Issues and crisis management**

No two crises are ever the same but there are core principles which hold true for almost every occasion.

If the answer to one or more of the follow questions is “Yes” then you are probably dealing with a potential crisis.

1. Is the scope of the problem larger or likely to become larger than a local problem?
2. Are the media in UK or Ireland involved or likely to be involved?
3. Does the problem have consequences for the health or safety of colleagues or the public?
4. Does the issue have consequences for your office site or surroundings?
5. Will the problem involve a regulatory or statutory body **in the UK or Ireland?**

**Issues and crisis management breaks down to three key areas: *Prepare, Respond and Recover***

## **7.1 Prepare**

Every organisation should put together a Crisis Management Team (CMT), even if in the case of a small body it is just two or three people.

This team should share all out of office contact details including home number, mobile phone and preferably will have set up a WhatsApp group.

If a potentially serious issues arises, they can set up a conference call to assess all aspects of situation.

They can identify know facts and track the situation as it develops.

Sometimes the right decision is to escalate the process and contact a wider group within your organization and third parties such as regulators, stakeholders or even emergency services. In other cases, it might be the right decision to go on to standby, continue to verify information and track developments.

If it is necessary to communicate externally then there should be one identified spokesperson who is well prepared.

The crisis takes priority; the CMT focuses on the issue and delegates daily duties.

## **7.2 Respond**

The vacuum caused by a failure to communicate can be filled by rumour and misrepresentation. But on the other hand, any response should be carefully considered rather than ‘knee-jerk.’ It is a question of balance.

- Be proactive – gather information
- Be positive both internally and externally
- Coordinate messages between all sites
- Address concerns of the stakeholders (including staff) – not just the media
- Monitor local media or media activity

**Critical first steps**

- As far as possible, centralise the management of the issue to the core team – trigger the process which brings together the crisis management team
- Properly identify the source of the information about the crisis
- Verify the source, check the detail – if necessary, brief someone to do this and report back to the team
- Only act on the information available
- Assess the requirement to inform the board, higher management and stakeholders

### **Ongoing issues management**

- Meet at regular intervals to share information related to the crisis
- Keep a record of events
- Update status log as necessary
- Monitor response to any information you release
- Ensure stakeholders are board

### **Response to Third-Party Allegation - Checklist**

- ✓ Identify scale of issue

*is this a minor complaint or something that can harm the organization in the long term?*

- ✓ Is a response/acknowledgement needed?

*Is the individual an influencer and/or do they have a large following?*

- ✓ Are the facts correct?

*is gentle correcting all that is required?*

- ✓ Do Inform Irish in Britain HQ

*IIB will have resources to help you.*

- ✓ Do notify employees

*Provide an overview of the issue and implement an organization-wide response plan*

- ✓ Know when to take it offline

*If the situation is not being resolved on the platform, then it is wise to take it offline to minimise escalation*

- ✓ Do make copies of messages, document actions taken for later analysis

## **7.3 Recover**

Once the issue has been managed and is no longer live it can be useful to:

- Review what caused the issue and assess could it have been prevented.
- In terms of how the issue was handled review what worked well and what could have worked better.
- Assess if there is any future come-back from media or stakeholders

- Consider a positive pro-active campaign or outreach in the medium term to enhance reputation

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## 8.0 Conclusion

This toolkit has been prepared for Irish in Britain by Malcolm Munro a former Head of Home News for the UK's biggest commercial news broadcaster ITN who has since advised many organisations and companies on effective communication and issues management around the world.

It is based on more than 30 years of experience on 'both sides of the fence' – news and communications consultancy.

It is intended as guide and does not replace sound judgement and common sense, but the core principles will hold you in good stead.

Trust your instincts and remember that you a great organisation doing great work with a positive story to tell.

Good luck.

The logo for 'Irish in Britain' is a green speech bubble with the text 'Irish in Britain' in white. It is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page.

**Irish  
in Britain**

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