



# **Ireland Reaching Out: The Parish Administrator's Handbook**

**Ireland Reaching Out**

Michael Cusack House  
25, Dunkellin Street  
Loughrea  
Co. Galway  
Tel: (091) 842013  
Email: [info@irelandxo.com](mailto:info@irelandxo.com)

[www.IrelandXO.com](http://www.IrelandXO.com)

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## Welcome

We are delighted to welcome you to the programme. Together, we can develop and harness the extraordinary potential of your community's Diaspora around the world for the betterment of your area today, and for Irish people everywhere.

The documents and forms included in this Handbook have been developed for the purpose of assisting Parishes through the first phase of the Ireland Reaching Out Programme. The contents of the Handbook are initial drafts by the project team. As such, we are extremely keen that the suitability and usefulness of the Handbook is tested in a thorough way as we begin this exciting programme together.

Sincerely

Michael Feerick

Chairperson

Ireland Reaching Out

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### **Background to Ireland Reaching Out**

There are an estimated 60-70 million people worldwide who are of Irish heritage. The Irish Diaspora has often been recognized as a very significant asset, who place a huge value on this country and their connections to it, but their relationship with Ireland can be an unrequited one. Often when they visit, we Irish don't reach out to them. ***Ireland Reaching Out*** wants to meet this challenge head on and change this, connecting people in a way that will enrich all of our lives for the economic, social, and cultural benefit of the Irish people. Instead of waiting for people of Irish descent to return to Ireland to "trace their roots" as is popularly done today, ***Ireland Reaching Out*** proposes to enable local communities, through a largely volunteer effort, to seek out their Diaspora.

This *reverse genealogy* entails the tracing and recording of those who left the parish and the connecting with their living descendants worldwide. Those descendants are then invited to become part of a new global Irish society. We want Ireland to start thinking of itself as a people and not just a physical island - to expand the physical boundaries and build "virtual" communities, made possible by the power of the Internet.

### **Aims and Objectives**

- To expand our parish communities beyond their physical boundaries and to identify and engage with the Diaspora.
- To attract those identified of being of Irish extraction to **visit the locality** over the following years.

### **Community Benefits –**

#### *Economic, Cultural and Social*

- Parishes are enabled to develop the prospects of their own area through their own community & Diaspora while building a global social network.
- The process of finding and establishing your area's heritage reinforces ties and re-energises the community.
- Increased local and regional tourism through the development of a global online network that can stimulate the local and national economy of Ireland.
- The development of local training programmes in genealogy, history, folklore and heritage (planned in tourism and IT skills) that benefit the community.

### **Joining the Team & Getting Involved**

As you know, Ireland Reaching Out is about reaching out to the global Diaspora, sharing a common connection and creating new ties with people in your local community. It is also about finding out what it is that makes your parish special. Now that you've joined your parish, you are ready to begin contributing to your global community.

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### **Parish Administration: What you need to know in 5 easy steps.**

- A. *Parish Profiles:* As a Parish Administrator you will want to add to the information contained on your Parish Profile webpage. This allows other members and visitors to see that the parish is active and encourages them to post information/messages on the site. Your parish website should attract messages from those associated with or interested in your area.

(For website assistance see: <http://www.irelandxo.com/help> )

The objective of the Parish Profile is that someone seeking genealogical information online and tracing themselves loosely to a particular parish will be able to introduce themselves via the website, gain some information about the locality, and if they chose to visit the parish, be warmly greeted by the corresponding local Parish Welcome Team i.e. you, the Parish Administrator, as well as any volunteers who are assisting you. (What we refer to as the Meet & Greet team).

Information you may wish to include on your Parish Profile webpage includes:

- a. A brief introduction/history of the area. (The more detailed the better!)
- b. Photos of notable places in the locality, i.e. churches, holy wells, memorials, schools etc... with a brief description of each. (Please ensure that any photos, text, documents used on the website are your originals or you have written permission to use them.)
- c. Information regarding local clubs & societies associated with the history & heritage of the area. You could also include links to information pages for the area.
- d. A section with the names and photos of the volunteers in your parish (including yourself), as well as the contact email for the parish.

Additional information can be added as needed.

#### **Examples of parish profiles:**

<http://www.irelandxo.com/group/fohenagh-killure-and-kilgerril-galway>

<http://www.irelandxo.com/group/portumna-galway>

- B. *Community Involvement & Messages:* Identify those in your parish who might be interested in getting involved and assisting with the project. These may be friends, relatives or anyone with an interest in local history, genealogy etc. One of the most challenging aspects at the beginning will be to get enough people interested in the project. Therefore, we would

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encourage parish administrators to approach local community and development groups as a source for volunteers. Include those groups with Genealogy, Heritage & History Societies as well as Active Retirement Groups, Camera or Photo Clubs. Once you have identified a group of interested people, we at Ireland Reaching Out are available to meet with you and get you started on the first steps.

As a Parish Administrator you are now able to post/edit items of interest for your parish and interact with others in the community you may not otherwise know. This can create a close parish bond, whether you are living in the centre of the parish or are living 5,000 miles away from the parish! By responding to queries made on your parish message board you are making connections between the parish and those living outside of it, the Diaspora themselves.

### *C. Parish/Genealogy Research & Reaching Out:*

As a Parish Administrator you and your volunteers can begin researching your area and those people who may have left it. This will help you to answer some of the queries you may get on the message boards and begin actively tracing your parish Diaspora. There are several things that you and your volunteers can do to accomplish this.

Conduct a Parish survey. Some of your 'team' can act as researchers to interview people/families in the area who had relatives who left the parish. Start slowly with people you may already know and build up your contacts from there. You may also advertise your intentions in your local parish newsletter and invite the community to support your efforts through volunteering or providing information. (A press release template is included in Appendix B.) Volunteers can begin researching the available records to find out where those who left the parish may have traveled. The information gathered by volunteers is used to create your parish database.

Once those descendants have been identified, contact can be made by email / telephone / post. Email and Skype phone calls are the easiest, quickest and cheapest way to make contact. However, it is sometimes only possible to contact people by posting.

Organize your information and recruit additional volunteers in preparation of events. The information you have collected about your local area can be formatted and added to the parish website. In some instances it is possible to 'employ' a person or student through TUS/FAS/Job Bridge or your local school's Transition Year programme to assist with the office administration portion of your 'Reaching Out'.

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Form a core group or committee to help spread the word about Ireland Reaching Out in your community. Advertise and promote your projects via the local media – parish newsletters, local websites, blogs and radio. Contact local business and look for local sponsors to assist with costs – advertising, printing, postage etc. Remember to include local service providers – B&B's, pubs etc- on the parish webpages. Contact local community groups including Town & County Councils for support for initiatives and events you may be planning.

**\*For more information see the Ireland Reaching Out 1<sup>st</sup> Steps to Reaching Out guide.**

*D. Reuniting your Parish Diaspora and the Week of Welcomes:*

Begin planning your Meet & Greet events/Emigrant Weekend/ Week of Welcomes/Local Festival with your unique diaspora in mind. Approach local committees or organizers of existing festivals/events for your parish and discuss with them ideas regarding the addition of an emigrant/diaspora theme. This can be as simple as adding an additional element to the event – i.e. guided tour of a local area, big house, graveyard etc – or as extravagant as putting on a dedicated 'Emigrant Weekend' - designed specifically for those whose ancestors left the community – before or after the local event.

Likewise, plan your own events. Some events – like club/society/school reunions – can be successfully scheduled independently of other local festivals. For small groups – families or individuals who arrive sporadically throughout the year - Meet & Greet experiences can be individually organized based on their itinerary and volunteer availability.

Send out your invitations. Now that you have identified, contacted, corresponded with and created events for members of your parish's diaspora, it is time to invite them to visit the area.

**\*Invitation templates are available in PDF format from Ireland Reaching Out.**

Once your group has identified/contacted members of your unique Diaspora and they, in turn, have planned to visit your parish, it is time to organize a Welcome event for your visitors. This is a great opportunity to get the rest of your parish/community involved. You can advertise for local volunteers and tie your Welcome event in with local festivals. Decide on the activities your parish or parishes can offer. This can take the form of fieldtrips to see places of interest, genealogy, music and craic in the local pub, or turf cutting in the locality. Use your imagination!

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**Some tips for organizing your Welcome event are:**

- Form a committee & plan an itinerary
- Decide a budget for the event, organize a bank account & set up a method of payment for bookings (i.e. PayPal etc..)

Once you have organized your event you will want to advertise it. Suggested advertising includes:

- Local Radio / Community Diary
- Your Regional Newspaper/Parish Newsletter/ Flyers/Posters
- Word of mouth - this is often the simplest and most effective way to promote events in your area. Mention it to everyone you know: friends, family, neighbours and work colleagues. Ask them to tell as many people as they can.
- Any local Websites/Facebook /Twitter – (We can assist with this!)

**Remember!** We at Ireland Reaching Out are available to advise you in your endeavors and further literature – flyers/posters templates etc can be made available to you.

**Useful Links**

Ireland XO on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/irelandreachingouthomepage](http://www.facebook.com/irelandreachingouthomepage)

Twitter:

<http://twitter.com/#!/Irelandxo>

Ireland XO YouTube Channel:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/IRO2011WOW>

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## **Appendix A**

### **Ireland Reaching Out Backgrounder**

Ireland Reaching Out is registered as a company limited by guarantee, with charitable status, under the Companies Acts and is managed by a voluntary Board of Directors. The project is based in Loughrea, Co. Galway.

#### **Statutory Board of Directors**

Mike Feerick, David McWilliams and Michael Fahy

#### **Central Office Team**

Paula Kennedy

Mary Shaughnessy

Cynthia O'Connor

Laura Phelan

Henry Healy

Rory O'Shaughnessy

#### **Advisory Panel**

Marie Mannion, Heritage Office, Galway County Council

Gerard McInerney, businessman and local historian

John Joe Conwell, retired teacher and local historian

Willie Golden, NUIG Dean of Studies

Michael Fahy, retired teacher and local historian

Bill Liao, founder and co-owner of Xing

Paul Michels, US businessman

Company Number 493058

Charity Ref CHY19382

### **Behind the Team**

The IrelandXO is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Heritage Council, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Ireland Funds, Galway County Council, and other Irish-American sources. Sponsors include Google, Guinness, An Post, and the National Library, with the support of the GAA.

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## **Appendix B**



### **Press Release Template**

#### ***About Ireland Reaching Out***

The Ireland Reaching Out (Ireland XO) programme is based on a simple idea; instead of waiting for Irish-Americans and their global counterparts to come to Ireland to trace their roots, we go the other way. Working through voluntary effort at a townland, village and parish level, we identify who left, and trace them and their descendants worldwide, proactively engaging with them and inviting them to become part of an extended “virtual” community with their place of origin.

The national pilot project of Ireland XO was developed in South-East Galway from October 2010 through to July 2011 culminating with a hugely successful “Week of Welcomes” event held in the area in late June. Long lost members of the local Irish diaspora returned from the USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand for the event which was covered by local, national and international media, including the New York Times and the BBC. Key to the success of the Ireland Reaching Out programme has been communities working to develop contact with their own local Diaspora, not just that of the nation at large.

To learn more about getting involved, please contact:

Ireland Reaching Out

Tel: +353 (0)91 842013

Email: [info@irelandxo.com](mailto:info@irelandxo.com)

#### **Useful Links**

Ireland XO Press Section: <http://www.irelandxo.org/?q=content/press-and-media>

Ireland XO on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/irelandreachingouthomepage](http://www.facebook.com/irelandreachingouthomepage)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/Irelandxo1>

Ireland XO YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/IRO2011WOW>