

Finding your Way around the Budget

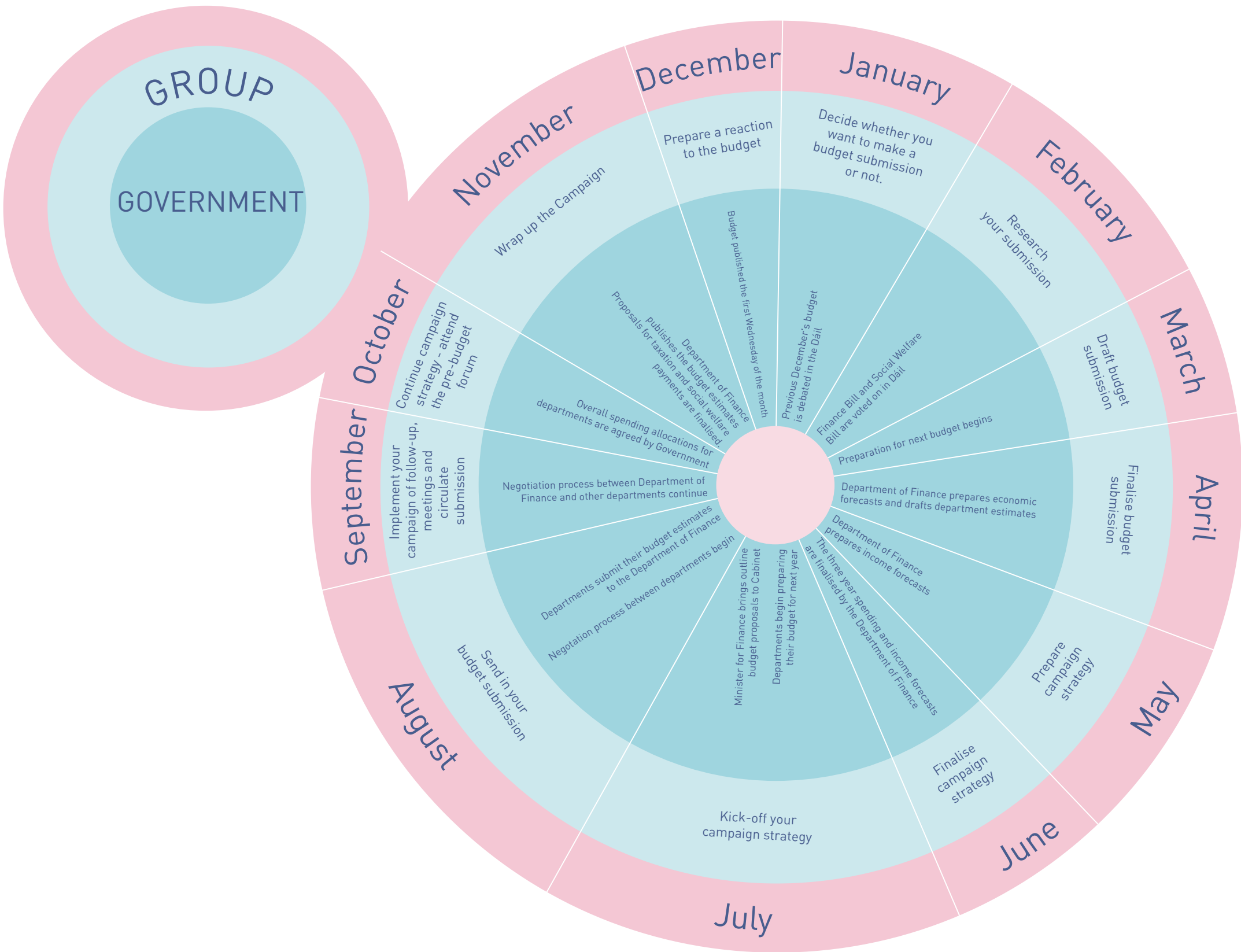
Hilary Curley

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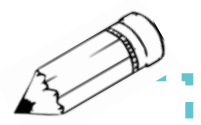


The Budget process in Ireland

Finding your way around



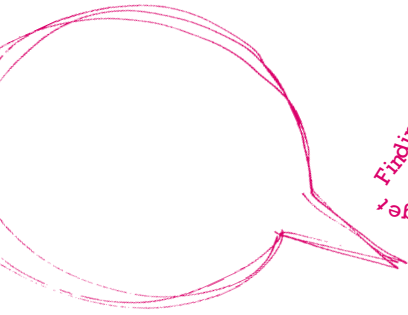
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Finding your Way around the Budget

Hilary Curley



Finding your Way around the Budget
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anti-poverty groups
framework
budget
process
Social Welfare Bill
Government
priorities
City and County
Development
Boards
taxation rate
influence
annual rates
Department
of Finance



information for all



Combat Poverty
Agency *working for a
poverty-free Ireland*



promoting the voluntary sector



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Foreword

The Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986 specifies Combat Poverty as a state advisory agency whose functions include: policy advice; research; project support, innovation and evaluation and public awareness of poverty. This work is undertaken through the current Strategic Plan 2005-2007, *Working for a Poverty-Free Ireland*.

In November 2005 Combat Poverty launched a three-year programme *Having Your Say* (see www.combatpoverty.ie/havingyoursay). The aim of the programme is to strengthen the voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty in the development and implementation of anti-poverty policies and programmes.

Objective 2 of the *Having Your Say* Programme is designed to support the skills and capacity of the community and voluntary sector to understand the policy system.

This Guide: *Finding your Way around the Budget* is one of four companion titles published under this objective. The four guides are designed as practical tools to enable the community and voluntary sector with a focus on poverty to understand, navigate, analyse and influence the policy environment more effectively. These include Local Government, the Budget process in Ireland, and social welfare and family policy. Three of the Guides are published in partnership with Comhairle and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). A fourth Guide on health is produced in collaboration with the Combat Poverty *Building Healthy Communities* Programme.

Combat Poverty acknowledges Hilary Curley's work in producing three of the Guides. It is hoped that they will make a valuable contribution to a greater understanding of the policy system in Ireland, leading to better outcomes for people experiencing poverty.

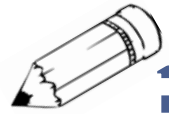
November 2006
Combat Poverty Agency



Glossary of Terms

RAPID Programme	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
CLÁR	Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais
TD	Teachta Dala
IPA	Institute of Public Administration

Keep Notes:





Overview

The budget process is an annual event setting out how the Government will use public money over the coming year. It includes overall spending targets, tax changes and social welfare payments.

The budget process influences the work of anti-poverty groups at both policy and practice levels. It affects:

- the annual rates of social welfare payments
- the taxation rate which affects people's take-home pay
- the budgets for capital projects such as housing and schools
- the budgets for programmes which influence how much money is available for anti-poverty groups on a year-to-year basis.

Anti-poverty groups have opportunities to influence the budget process. Their effectiveness depends very much on what they are looking for, their contacts, the political climate, the health of the Government finances and the strength of public opinion. Groups often have unrealistic expectations of what a budget submission can actually achieve, so it is important to be aware of the budget preparation process, the timing and what influences it.

There are two strands to the budget process. The first of these is called the 'Estimates'. These outline the cost of providing existing services by Government departments and agencies plus inflation.

The money given to Departments remains virtually the same every year as it deals with rolling costs covering the work of the public service (hospitals, schools, civil service, defence, etc.). What can change is the budgetary allocation to Departments. This can either increase or decrease, depending on Government priorities and




monies available. When all the core costs are covered, the actual amount of money left over each year is a very small part of the overall total and therefore not very open to influence.

The second part of the budget process is the 'budget' itself. This covers new Government initiatives or programmes and any tax or welfare changes. This is a far more political process and is open to influence by all players including community and voluntary groups.

The Department of Finance begins preparing for the budget in April every year. It prepares a three-year economic forecast. This looks at the health of the economy and also draws up spending estimates of each Department and state agency. Alongside looking at what the Government will spend over these three years, it estimates what the Government will receive in income, and prepares a revenue forecast for three years.

Together these forecasts form the basis of the budget strategy which is brought to the Government for agreement in July. Spending guidelines are then sent to all Departments, setting out the framework within which they should develop their budget estimates for the following year and the maximum amount they can spend.

The Department of Finance is assisted in making its decisions by the Tax Strategy Group. This is an inter-departmental committee chaired by the Department of Finance. Its role is to examine and develop proposals for tax, social welfare and PRSI, and look at how the various proposals interact with each other and how they will affect the economy.



Once each Department completes this process, the estimates are submitted to the Department of Finance by the end of the summer. This marks the start of negotiations between the Department of Finance and each Department, working through the detail of the estimates, budgetary allocations and any new proposals included.

This negotiation process finishes in October when the Government agrees overall Department budgets for the next three years and detailed spending figures for the coming year.

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs holds a pre-budget forum for community and voluntary groups, usually in October of every year. At this forum, groups are given the chance to air their concerns and present their proposals directly to the Minister and his/her officials.

In November, the Government publishes the Department Estimates and summary information on capital projects for the following year. No detailed break-down on Government expenditure is given but simply the headings (called Department 'votes') under which spending will take place, alongside a general allocation figure.

The detail is produced in the budget published a number of weeks later. This is usually on the first Wednesday in December. This is the time when any new Government initiatives or programmes, proposed tax changes and social welfare rates are unveiled.

The Finance Bill and the Social Welfare Bill are debated in the Dáil in January and voted on in February. This brings the budget changes into law.

Section 1



Government Departments

Individual sections in each Department will all try to make sure they get what they ask for during the budget process.

If you are planning to make a budget submission, therefore, it is important that you link in with the section in the Department that handles your particular issue or activity. The Departments and sections dealing directly with poverty policy are highlighted below.

There is a finance section in each Department responsible for pulling all the facts and figures together and linking with the Department of Finance, who has ultimate responsibility for preparing the budget.

Department	Areas of Responsibility
Agriculture and Food	Animals and animal products; crops and plant products; food safety; trade and exports; animal health and welfare; agriculture and food development
Arts, Sport and Tourism	Arts, film, music; sport; tourism; culture; sport.
Communications, Marine and Natural Resources	Broadcasting: radio, TV and licencing; energy supply; energy conservation; postal services; broadband; Marine: public safety, environmental protection; Natural resources: mining, exploration

Department	Areas of Responsibility
Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	<p>Community and local development programmes; Community and voluntary supports: older people, programme of grants for local groups; Rural Development: LEADER; Irish Language; Gaeltacht; Offshore islands; charities regulation; dormant accounts; RAPID; CLÁR; National Drugs Strategy</p>
Education and Science	<p>Primary education; secondary education; higher education; school inspectorate; special needs education; youth affairs; education disadvantage; school buildings, school transport; curriculum assessment</p>
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	<p>Employment: rights, relations and redundancy; enterprise science and technology; work permits; consumer issues; competition policy</p>
Environment	<p>Building standards; elections; Environment: waste management; air and water quality, climate change; fire and emergency planning; heritage service; housing; local government; city and county development boards; motor tax; Met Éireann; non-national roads; water services; planning and development</p>



Department	Areas of Responsibility
Finance	Budget; taxation policy; economic forecasting; public expenditure monitoring; monetary policy; banking and credit
Foreign Affairs	Foreign policy; embassies; visa services; citizenship; development aid
Health and Children	Health Service Executive: hospitals, primary care, health promotion; child welfare and protection; mental health; nursing; social services
Justice, Equality and Law Reform	Prisons; probation and welfare; An Garda Síochána; immigration; crime; courts; law reform; equality; Childcare: grants to childcare providers, county childcare committees
Social and Family Affairs	Social welfare payments; pensions; Families and children: Family Support Agency and family resource centres; anti-poverty strategy; social inclusion; money advice budgeting service; employment supports
Transport	Public transport: rail, buses; aviation; national roads; road safety; ports shipping; coastguard service
Defence	Defence forces: army, navy and air corps; civil defence; international security; emergency planning





A Budget Submission

There are a number of questions a group should consider before starting on the budget submission process:

- What does the group want to achieve by making a budget submission?
- Is going down the budget submission route the best way to achieve this
- Are there other more effective ways of achieving these objectives?
- Are the resources (time, staff, money) in place to undertake the budget submission and lobbying process?
- Are there other groups who will be communicating the same message?
- How can you work with these groups?
- Are there national, better resourced, more well known organisations which you can link in with to communicate your message more effectively?

These questions should be debated and discussed by a group before any decisions are made. Keep in mind too that the more effective policy-influencing strategies are the ones that are conducted over a number of years rather than a once-off action. Keeping the effort up however, can be draining on both resources and energy.

Groups should actively consider conducting joint campaigns or linking in with national pressure groups, for two reasons: (a) to strengthen the message – the more people involved in lobbying, the greater the weight it carries, and (b) to spread the workload.


If, after these discussions, a group decides to go ahead and prepare a pre-budget submission they should consider the following in their planning.





- Keep the submission short and simple, with an executive summary of one page summarising the main points.
- Think about what you want from the budget, e.g. an increase in the child benefit rate; changes to the eligibility criteria for the medical card; a reduction in tax for low-income earners.
- Set out in plain language what the issues are, how they are affecting people and how they could be addressed.
- Try to deal with the issue of costing – how much your proposal would cost and where you think the resources could come from (either increasing taxes, cutting expenditure elsewhere, economic growth). Government Departments will often help you with this information and support is also available from national organisations such as Combat Poverty.
- The issues or problems set out in the submission should be well argued and accurate. They should be backed up by evidence of the problem in the form of human interest case studies and should be supported by relevant figures and statistics.
- A group should be realistic in what it is looking for and details should be given as to how its suggestions or proposals could be implemented.
- Make a list of the obvious arguments officials might make against your proposals and respond with counter arguments.
- Show how your proposal will benefit the wider public. A submission that has narrow self-interest at heart, and that will benefit only a small minority, will not attract the interest of the decision makers.
- Keep an eye on the wider policy context and make sure the proposal fits with existing Government priorities and commitments as set out in policy documents such as the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Spatial Strategy, the Social Partnership agreement, etc. A group should demonstrate that its proposal can assist the Government in reaching its aims and fulfilling its promises.



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- Be aware of what other groups in your field are seeking from the budget process and from the Government. If groups working in the same area have conflicting messages and proposals, the Government is more likely to ignore both submissions, not wanting to invite controversy in what is already a fraught process.

The work does not end when a submission has been prepared and sent in. For it to be effective, a strategy of informing and lobbying decision makers and decision influencers needs to be well planned and carried out. It should target key civil servants, ministers' advisors, local politicians (including independents) and the media.

Try to contact these people well before the budget submission date so that time has been devoted to building a relationship with them. The budget submission process could take up the best part of a year if done correctly.

The bottom line is that Government Ministers are looking for ideas that are:

- new and different
- will address problems identified
- will help them realise their policies and commitments
- will not cost the earth
- will not damage them politically
- will be popular with the public.

If a submission can hit all these buttons, there is every chance that it can have a significant influence on the budget process.

Section 3




The First Quarter: Researching the Submission

January–March

The early months in the year should be used for discussing and planning the budget submission and the accompanying campaign.

- Be clear about what you want to achieve from a budget submission as this will decide the focus of your proposal and your strategy, e.g. A change in tax or welfare policy? Increased resources? Increased group profile? Looking for legislative changes?
- What kind of policy influencing will be conducted at local and national level? Who do you need to contact? Who are the decision makers? Do you want to involve the media and, if so, in what way?
- Does your group have the necessary resources (time, staff and funding) to undertake an ongoing campaign on your budget submission? Is this a once-off action or one that you will follow through on over a period of years?
- Are there any other policy or influencing spaces outside of the budget process where the group can also present its proposals so that you maximise the work and effort put into the submission by bringing it to a wider audience? Groups should consider the social partnership process,¹ a key policy-making forum. This process informs not only the budget decisions but many other central Government strategies such as those concerning education and health.

¹ The social partnership process involves government, unions, employers, the community and voluntary sector, and farming organisations and is a key policy-making forum in the country. The social partners come together to produce multi-annual economic and social policy agreements and these agreements frame government policy and decision making.



Once these discussions have taken place and the group is clear about the purpose and scope of the budget submission, it should move into the research phase. This phase can be broken down into a number of separate and different elements:

- Begin building your case through collecting the necessary information. This information needs to be relevant and accurate and include local socio-economic statistics along with direct feedback from people and groups affected by the policy or policies in question. It should also include personal case histories or stories to add depth to the submission.
- Conduct research into existing Government policies and commitments pertinent to the issue and the proposals detailed in the submission. A submission is likely to be more effective if it can dovetail with Government priorities and you can show it can help realise these.
- Start networking and making links with other groups who have similar objectives or interests. Decision makers are more likely to listen to proposals that are representative of a number of groups and where there is strength in numbers. Working with other organisations will also help spread the workload.
- Build links with the larger national organisations who are well-known campaigners and/or organisations that are linked into the social partnership process. Your message or issue could be included or integrated with their own campaign.
- Start making contact with key civil servants in Departments (usually civil service staff at the level of Principal Officer and above). This is important at this stage because civil servants and Government advisors are more likely to pay more attention to groups they already know. Leaving it until the late autumn is just too late make a real difference.
- If you have decided to use the media as part of the campaign, identify journalists and reporters who cover social policy type



stories and the budget process and make contact.

- Make sure you keep regular contact with your own local TDs. While they are not directly involved in the decision on the budget, they can have significant influencing power on their parties, on the Ministers and on debates that take place in the Dáil.

During this three months, there is a lot of information and analysis available to groups on the December budget. This can provide a useful starting point for groups seeking to engage in the budget process.

- The Combat Poverty Agency produces an analysis of the budget, particularly from an anti-poverty perspective and holds a half-day seminar on this during the month of February.
- CORI, the Conference of Religious in Ireland, produces an analysis a number of days after the budget, again highlighting the impact on poverty.
- The Minister for Social and Family Affairs usually prepares a speech on the budget a few days after it is presented to the Dáil.

Month by month

January: The December budget is debated in the Dáil.

February: The Finance Bill and the Social Welfare Bill are brought before the Dáil and voted on. The Budget process is then complete.

Helpful hints

Some of the larger, well-resourced organisations have detailed research and analysis of particular issues, e.g. child poverty. It may be possible for you to link in with this organisation and use some of its facts and figures to support your argument at a local level.

The Second Quarter: Finalising the Submission

April–June

By the end of this time, a group should have a draft of its budget submission prepared, along with a list of key people to whom it should be circulated. A timetable for the campaign should also be drawn up at this point. This should include:

- when the proposal will be submitted
- the media arrangements (if any) that will take place
- a list of campaign or lobbying meetings to be held and with whom.

The budget submission draft should be circulated for comment among the group members and other interested bodies. Bear in mind that this is particularly important if a group is conducting a joint budget submission with other groups or is linking in with a campaign being run by a national organisation.

A good idea for a group in terms both of making contacts and of tightening a submission, is to contact the relevant civil servants over this period. This should help you to discuss your ideas informally and get some feedback and further suggestions.

Once these various consultations have taken place, the submission should be finalised by July and the campaign ready to kick-off.



Month by month

April: The Department of Finance prepares a three-year economic forecast and budget estimates for each Department (called Existing Level of Service Estimates), outlining what it will cost to cover the Department functions for each year.

May: The Department of Finance completes a three-year revenue forecast, estimating what the Government income will be from taxes, spending, exports over each of the three years.

June: The two forecasts (economic and revenue) are finalised, along with the proposed estimates, and form the basis for the overall Budget Strategy. The estimates are generally brought to the different Oireachtas Select Committees in the month of June (sometimes July) for consideration (e.g. The Department of Social and Family Affairs Estimates are brought to the Select Committee on Social and Family Affairs).

Helpful hints

Back up what you are asking for with evidence and costings if you can. Arguments should be balanced and convincing, and it helps if your organisation has built up some credibility before make your request. Prepare a one-page summary of your proposal, listing the key points and your recommendations.



The Third Quarter: Implementing the Strategy

July–September

This is the most important time for groups seeking to influence the budget process. A group should submit its budget submission in this quarter. The Department of Finance encourages groups to send them in by the end of September in order to give the Department time to circulate submissions internally and consider them.

There are numerous sections within the Department of Finance and other Departments involved with drawing up the budget, with each of them responsible for different aspects of it.

Finding the right audience for the submission can be confusing. A list setting out who should receive the submission should already have been prepared as part of the campaign planning process. This information should be easily sourced by ringing the Department responsible for the activity in question, through the Department's website or through the *IPA Administration Yearbook and Diary*.

It is recommended that groups send their submission to:

- the Office of the Minister for Finance. Your submission will be acknowledged by the Minister and it will be directed to the appropriate section in the Department of Finance.
- the Office of the Minister in charge of the Department who has responsibility for the issues you are raising. For example, a submission on rural development should go to the Minister's Office at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.






- The Minister's policy advisors.
- The civil servant in the Department who works in the section responsible for the issue in question. For example, if your submission concerns Carers then you should be linking in with the Principal Officer in the Carers Policy section in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. You should already have found out who this is and contacted him or her informally at this stage.

Each Minister and each department has its own way of handling submissions. Generally they are read first by the civil servant(s) involved in the budget process or the Minister's advisors. The key points of the submission are highlighted and then passed on to the Minister.

It is recommended that you follow up the submission with a phone call to make sure it has been received. Opinion is divided on whether meetings with Ministers and his/her advisors or civil servants are useful. Research has shown that meetings with relevant civil servants or advisors are more useful than meetings with Ministers as these are the people who act as filters for ideas or proposals going forward.

If it is a quality submission that is clear and well argued, and is followed up with a phone call to clarify any issues, this should be enough. Groups can seek a meeting with the Minister in question if they believe it will have any effect, particularly if a group has an already established relationship with the person in question.

The submission should also be circulated to your local TDs; members of the Oireachtas Committee responsible for the issue in question; opposition party spokespersons on the particular issue and social partner organisations. Some groups take it upon themselves to circulate their submission to all members of the Oireachtas.



A group may have decided to use the media as part of its campaign, so the press release can be sent out on the day you send in your submission. Engaging the media involves a whole new set of rules, but generally bear in mind the following:

- It helps if you have a relationship already established with a journalist.
- Be conscious of your launch date. Are there other planned launches or events that will overshadow your event?
- Ask yourself what is interesting or new about what you have to say. The media won't cover it unless it is newsworthy.
- Avoid being too aggressive. While it might make the news, it could aggravate the decision makers and have the opposite effect to what you intended.

Comhairle

Comhairle makes its budget submission usually at the end of September. It is informed by what it hears from the Citizen Information Centres (CICs) around the country. For the first time in 2006, it held a pre-budget forum with the CIC's which was useful in hearing first-hand the main issues people were dealing with on a daily basis.

Once the budget is published, it produces an information pack at the end of December or early January detailing the main points of the budget, particularly those that concern welfare and tax changes.



Month by month

July: The Minister for Finance brings proposals for the overall three-year Budget Strategy and framework to the Government for agreement. The Department of Finance then issues an Estimates Circular to all Departments, asking them to prepare a budget for their Department within the agreed spending guidelines.

August/September: The estimates are submitted by each Department to the Department of Finance by the end of August. Through September, each Department negotiates with the Department of Finance over its estimates. This is usually done by civil servants, but if there are disagreements or problems these are referred to the Ministers.

Helpful hints

Don't leave it until the end of September to send in your submission. Bear in mind the timeframe set out above. Make your submission early so that there is time for the Department to consider it.



The Final Quarter: October–December

Wrapping up the Strategy

Even though the process is close to being finalised, groups should keep in touch with key decision makers to ensure that their proposals get maximum exposure. The pre-budget forum hosted by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs is held in October of every year. At this forum, community and voluntary groups are given the chance to air their concerns and present proposals directly to the Minister and his/her officials.

You need an invitation to attend the pre-budget forum. Invitations are usually sent to the larger, national community and voluntary organisations, e.g. Age Action Ireland, St. Vincent de Paul, Threshold. You can choose to either link in with their budget submissions or you can contact the Department of Social and Family Affairs directly to see if you can be placed on the invitation list.

During the month of October, the Government agrees the three-year spending allocations for each Department. The detailed expenditure allocation for the following year in each Department (known as sub-heads) is then prepared.

Although the overall spending estimates for each Department are agreed by October taxation changes or changes to social welfare payments are not finalised until the month of November. This gives you time to conduct a follow-up to your campaign.





If you are working with the media in your campaign, it would also be a good idea to link in once more with journalists to see if there is any additional coverage available. This is relevant because the media tend to feature the budget process only at the time of the estimates in November and at the budget publication time itself in December.

Even though it may be too late to influence the approaching budget, if you have planned a long-term campaign aiming to achieve changes over a period of years, it is worth your while engaging with the media at this point to build the group's profile so that some ground work is done for the following year(s).

Combat Poverty Agency sends in its budget submission in early October. It begins pulling it together at the end of August and it is informed by its own research and analysis, and from the various action research projects conducted around the country.

The submission is sent to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and then circulated to a wider audience including the Minister for Finance. Meetings are held with civil servants and the Agency is usually invited to meet with the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs. Combat Poverty also organise a media event to coincide with their budget submission.

A detailed analysis of the budget and its impact on people living in poverty is produced in February and presented at a half day seminar.





Month by month

October: The Government agrees Department/Offices spending allocations for the next three years, resulting in detailed expenditure allocations for the following year.

November: The Department of Finance publishes the Estimates for Public Services which outlines the general spending plans of the Government for the following year. Taxation decisions and social welfare payments are finalised.

December: Four days before the budget is made public, the Department of Finance publishes the White Paper on Receipts and Expenditure, showing the health of the exchequer for the next two years including estimated revenue, expenditure and borrowing. On the first Wednesday in December, the Minister for Finance presents the budget to the Dáil, setting out the overall budgetary targets and taxation policy.

Helpful hints

Once the budget has been published, make sure you contact all the people you have been engaging with on the process (whether you have been successful or not), thanking them for their time and assistance. Not only is it a nice thing to do. It also helps in the relationship-building process, which is important for the future.



Appendix

Case Study: Doras Buí – a parents alone resource centre


Doras Buí, a parents alone resource centre, offers information, advice, training and support for lone parents. They also have a crèche. The centre is in the heart of Coolock and is the oldest lone parent group in Dublin, formed over twenty years ago.

Every year the group becomes involved in the budget process through the pre-budget forum run by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in October. 'We get an invite every year and once it arrives, usually in September, we start putting together our budget submission,' said Noreen Byrne, Director of the Centre.

The submission is normally a few pages long and highlights the practical impact of lone parents living in poverty. It focuses on two to three key issues and these are informed by what staff in the centre are hearing from people who come to them looking for information or support. 'We record every issue that comes to our attention and these are entered onto a database which is updated monthly,' said Noreen. 'We use this information for our monthly board meetings but we also use it to inform any policy submissions we are putting together, including the budget submission.'

The one issue that is usually central to their submission is income. Other issues may change from year to year, depending on the practical concerns of lone parents, e.g. housing, the Back-to-School Allowance.

Doras Buí members bring their submission to the pre-budget forum and present their case to the Minister. They also give their submission



to OPEN – the national network for lone parent groups – and circulate it to their local area-based partnership. ‘We don’t really send it to anyone else,’ said Noreen. ‘We used to but didn’t find it that much use ... it was a lot of work for very little return.’

Some positive changes have taken place over the years but Noreen is not so sure whether it was because of their campaigning or because of the needs of the economy. ‘Influencing policy is important but can be very technical with the kind of language used and the way you have to present your information,’ she says. ‘It is really the larger organisations like St Vincent de Paul who have an impact, and of course the media – if you can get your message in the media you can be sure the politicians will listen.’

Noreen offers a number of tips to groups who are interested in influencing the policy process and particularly the budget:


- Use the national networks and organisations to get your message out. But don’t sit back and wait for them to do all the work. You have to feed your message through to them, build a relationship and play your part.
- Whenever you meet a politician, always mention policy and your policy concerns.
- Be creative about how you get your message across. Community groups are traditionally not very comfortable with dense policy reports, technical language and statistics. Work in the medium you are most comfortable with. Some groups use art and drama to communicate their concerns. Doras Buí have done this in the past and it has been very effective.
- When attending any policy forum, including the pre-budget forum, make sure you bring someone with you who has actual experience of the issue in question, e.g. someone who is a lone parent or a member of the Traveller Community. Even if they only say a few words, their input is usually invaluable.



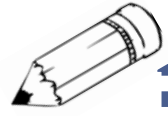
National Organisations

The range of national organisations who prepare and submit budget proposals are too numerous to list in this publication. Below is a selection of names and contact details of organisations you may choose to engage with during the budget process, depending on your field of activity and interest:

Age Action Ireland	www.ageaction.ie	01-4756989
Barnardos	www.barnardos.ie	01-4530355
Carers Association	www.carersireland.com	056-7721424
Children's Rights Alliance	www.childrensrights.ie	01-6629400
CROSSCARE (Catholic Social Service Agency)	www.crosscare.ie	01-8360011
Disability Federation of Ireland	www.disability-federation.ie	01-4547978
Focus Ireland	www.focusireland.ie	01-8815900
Forum of People with Disabilities	www.fpd.ie	01-8786077
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	www.inou.ie	01-8560088
Irish Rural Link	www.irishrurallink.ie	090-6482744
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament	www.seniors.ie	01-8561243
National Youth Federation	www.youthworkireland.ie	01-8729933




Disability (NAMHI)	www.namhi.ie	01-6766035
National Association of Widows in Ireland	www.nawi.ie	01-8728814
National Federation of Pensioners' Associations		01-8313731
National Women's Council of Ireland	www.nwci.ie	01-8787248
One Family	www.onefamily.ie	01-6629212
One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN)	www.oneparent.ie	01-8320264
Pavee Point	www.paveepoint.ie	01-8780255
People with Disabilities in Ireland Ltd (PWDI)	www.pwdi.ie	01-8721744
Retired Workers Committee		01-6680641
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul	www.svp.ie	01-8386990
Tallaght Welfare Society	www.tallaghtwelfaresociety.com	01-4515911
Threshold	www.threshold.ie	01-6786310
TREOIR (Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children)	www.treoir.ie	01-6700120



Keep Notes:

A large rectangular area defined by a dark blue dashed border, intended for taking notes.



A number of changes have been made to the budget process by the Department of Finance since the publication of this Guide. The main difference between the current process and what went before is the removal of the 'Budget Estimates' element usually published four weeks before the Budget itself.

The changes do not substantially alter the information given in this Guide which aims to assist community and voluntary groups in the planning and executing of a campaign to influence the budget process. But it is important that groups are aware of these changes in order to fully appreciate and understand the budget cycle.

In previous years, the 'Budget Estimates' were published in November outlining the funding allocation for Government departments and agencies for the following year. The actual Budget in December provided further details on these allocations, along with proposed tax and welfare changes and any new Government initiatives or Programmes.

In the current scenario, the Budget Estimates is dispensed with and a 'Pre-Budget Outlook' is published in mid-October. This provides information on the economic and fiscal outlook for the forthcoming three years. It also sets out how much it will cost to provide the existing levels of public service for the following year.

The actual December Budget is now the platform from which changes to public service financial allocations for the following year are presented, along with new spending measures, tax and welfare changes and any new policy or programmes.



Through this mechanism, it is possible to see what each Department requires for the following year to maintain existing levels of service through the Pre-Budget Outlook and then see from the Budget how much of an increase (or decrease) is earmarked for each Department. The Department of Finance maintains this makes the budget cycle and subsequent funding changes more transparent.


In the Guide, the budget cycle as undertaken by the Department of Finance is broken down on a month-by-month basis. With the new changes, the monthly timetable is as follows:

January/February/March: In previous years, the budget debate was held in the Dáil in January. It now takes place in the days following the publication of the Budget in December.

The Finance Bill and the Social Welfare Bill are brought before the Dáil and voted on in the new year. This brings the budget changes into law and the cycle for the year is officially complete.

April/ May/June: Preparation for the next budget begins when the Department of Finance prepares a three-year economic forecast and budget estimates for each Department outlining what it should cost to cover their functions for each year.

It also completes a three-year revenue forecast, estimating what the Government income will be from taxes, spending, and exports over each of the three years.



The two forecasts (economic and revenue) are finalised and they form the basis for the overall Budget Strategy. This is called the Budgetary Strategy Memorandum (BSM).

July: The Minister for Finance brings proposals for the overall three-year budget strategy and framework (the BSM) to the Government for agreement. The Department of Finance then asks each Department to prepare an expenditure forecast for the following year based on the cost of providing the level of public services as they exist at present i.e. existing levels of service.

August/September: These Existing Levels of Service Estimates are submitted by each Department to the Department of Finance by the end of August and into early September. Following negotiations between officials, they form the basis for the Estimates contained in the Pre-Budget Outlook.

October/November: The Pre-Budget Outlook is published in Mid-October showing the economic and fiscal outlook for the forthcoming three years and the finance (or Estimates) required to maintain public services at existing levels. Details on individual departmental expenditure, broken down by section (called sub-heads) is also provided.

Departments are then asked to submit their proposals for new policy developments, which may or may not, involve additional resources (capital or otherwise). Negotiations then take place between officials and Ministers to agree spending priorities for the forthcoming budget. Taxation decisions and social welfare payments are also finalised in this period.



December: Four days before the budget is made public, the Department of Finance publishes the White Paper on Receipts and Expenditure showing the exchequer position for the current year and the Pre-Budget forecast for the following two years including estimated revenue, expenditure and borrowing.

On the first Wednesday in December, the Minister for Finance presents the budget to the Dáil which sets out taxation policy, welfare policy, funding allocations for departments and agencies and any other new policy or programme initiatives for the following year.

The *Finding Your Way* is a series of four guides which are being published as part of the *Having your Say* Programme.

A central tenet of the Programme is the view that policies intended to tackle poverty are more likely to be successful if the people and communities they are designed for are involved in their planning and implementation.

The guides are designed as practical tools to support the community and voluntary sector to understand, analyse and influence the policy environment in a number of key areas. These include: Local Government, the Budget process in Ireland (North and South), Social Welfare and Family Policy and Health.

These guides are being published in partnership with Comhairle, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and the Building Healthy Communities Programme in Combat Poverty.

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