



PDF 1

PDF 2

PDF 3

PDF 4

PDF 5

» **HOW TO...** build relations with policy-makers

» Why build relations with policy-makers?

One of the most important and effective ways in which you can influence policy, programmes and legislation is to build a good relationship with policy-makers. This includes the legislature, executive, and administration. It is a key way to be effective in influencing policy.

The Government White Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector see page 8: Resources gives you a secure basis for building good relations. It says:

The State acknowledges the role of [the community and voluntary sector including anti-poverty groups] in inputting to policy-making and the pursuit of common objectives. This includes proposed legislation, development of relevant policies (i.e. policy areas of immediate interest and having an impact on the work of both), monitoring of existing policies and consultations with end-users of public services. The State will ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to give effect to this.

As an anti-poverty group, you need to develop ongoing relations with policy-makers and influencers. You can do this by keeping up regular communication with them. Be pro-active in your dealings and offer to serve as an expert resource.

» Networking

If you build long-lasting relationships you will be better able to influence policy. Good relationships are based on mutual trust and shared benefits. Put time and energy into getting to know key contacts very well. However, there is more to a good relationship than a contact just knowing who you are. They should also have confidence in your credibility. Credibility is about being reliable, and worthy of confidence. Credibility grows when appointments are kept, promises are acted upon, facts are verified and services are rendered. Once you begin to meet each other's expectations and each of you is satisfied with what you are getting from the relationship, it will continue to strengthen.

You can make contacts and build relationships in lots of ways:

- **Attend conferences and events where you are likely to meet policy actors you would like to contact**
- **Invite key policy-makers to your own events**
- **Seek one-to-one meetings.**

You can communicate also through established ways such as institutional mechanisms, formal meetings and by writing regularly.

» Institutional Mechanisms

Social Inclusion Forum

If you and your group are not directly engaged in the social partnership process, the Social Inclusion Forum can give you a means of informing the monitoring and review of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion). Any anti-poverty group can participate in the Forum. It is an ideal opportunity to build and reinforce relationships with public representatives, national and local public servants, representatives of various statutory agencies, as well as other anti-poverty groups. Experience has shown that groups that have been given the resources to prepare in advance are more confident in presenting their viewpoint.

Social Partnership

National agreements between the social partners decide national economic policy in Ireland in many important ways. National agreements are not only about pay. They also include sections on social inclusion policy. The social partners are the Government, employers, farmers, trade unions and, more recently, community and voluntary organisations. See *Towards 2016*, www.taoiseach.gov.ie, the current agreement.

You should keep in touch regularly with all social partners especially the community and voluntary groups. Build relations with key policy staff. Highlight issues or agendas you have in common. Before new agreements are negotiated, make sure the social partners know what your major concerns are. Do this by preparing and promoting a submission. See [How to Write a Policy Submission](#)

During the negotiations, which can last for six months to a year, keep the social partners and their key staff updated with new information that adds weight to your point of view, but keep it concise. Monitor developments once an agreement is in place. You can check the following websites.

www.wheel.ie www.taoiseach.ie www.ibec.ie www.ictu.ie

www.ifa.ie www.pobal.ie www.pobail.ie

Social partnership is also a central part of local social development. Social partners are represented on County Development Boards, and on local Rapid and Clár programmes. Once you are clear about your policy or programme messages, get to know the members and the local plans. Consider joining the Community Forum in your locality. For more information contact Pobal at www.pobal.ie, and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs at www.pobail.ie

Joint Oireachtas Committee Meetings

The Joint Oireachtas Committees (JOCs) discuss and draft proposals for changing laws as well as monitor policy developments. You can present your findings or highlight your concerns to these committees. [How to Work with Joint Oireachtas Committees](#)

» Formal Meetings

Through regular meetings you can get to know decision-makers over time. Such meetings allow you to make your case in person. It is important to go in with an open mind. While you have a message to get across, you need to listen and understand their perspective.

Make sure that your message is not only a description of the problem, but offers recommendations and solutions based on your evidence and experience. Most public servants or elected representatives know the general issues. Your strength as an organisation is that you have direct experience of how policy is implemented on the ground and the gaps that exist.

Document your evidence. You don't have to give a research report. It might simply be a record of the experiences of your members on a particular issue. Give a concise written version of your briefing where possible.

» Written Communication

To build relations and network effectively, you need to keep an up-to-date database. It can be a mailing list or an email contact list. Through such a database you can keep information flowing regularly to your contacts. You don't have to send them everything. Know which policy people are very busy and only have time to read concise briefings and tailor what you send to match this.

Checklist for being effective

- **Meet regularly, especially when new research or policy material is produced.**
- **Ensure records are kept of meetings to build 'institutional memory'.**
- **Make one person the key contact.**
- **Include all key contacts on postal and emailing lists. Update regularly.**
- **Use relevant conferences and seminars as opportunities to network.**
- **Send regular briefing documents. Keep them short – maximum length two A4 pages.**
- **Send other relevant materials.**

» Resources

Publications

Government of Ireland (2000) *Supporting Voluntary Activity - A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Towards 2016 (2006) Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Websites

www.wheel.ie

www.taoiseach.ie

www.ibec.ie; www.ictu.ie

www.ifa.ie

www.pobal.ie (Pobal)

www.pobail.ie (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)