

TOURISM IN THE COMMUNITY

A Business Toolkit For
Community Tourism Projects



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

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Foreword

Community tourism reaches into every part of Ireland and projects like yours – driven by local pride and vision – produce powerful and far-reaching economic and social benefits.

Local tourism projects support pride and wellbeing within their communities. Many projects enhance the environment through their focus on regeneration and renewal, and all offer visitors unique opportunities for connection, learning and enjoyment.

Research conducted into the community tourism sector confirms the importance of grassroots projects in the development of Ireland's offering to visitors. Community-based tourism enterprises are also making outstanding contributions to their local economies, as well as creating vital employment opportunities. There is real scope to increase these benefits and bring them to more communities if existing projects can be expanded and new and emerging ideas are encouraged.

We know there can be challenges in turning your vision into reality, attracting visitors and maintaining momentum over time. The COVID-19 crisis has magnified many of these challenges. Harnessing the power, reach and potential of community tourism in Ireland is now more important than ever. Projects like yours have a vital role to play in local, regional and national efforts to recover from the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Whether you are working with a well-established project or exploring the potential of a fresh idea that will attract visitors to your area, this toolkit is here to help you plan and deliver the benefits that community tourism can produce. This document contains information, practical tips and planning tools that will help you overcome common challenges and make progress towards creating a sustainable tourism enterprise that can support recovery in your locality and beyond.



How to Use the Toolkit

LOCAL COMMUNITIES ARE AT THE HEART OF SO MANY GREAT VISITOR EXPERIENCES IN IRELAND.

This toolkit can help your community tourism group if you are looking for a step-by-step process to the business of setting up a new initiative. It will also be a great resource if you want to consolidate, grow and deliver greater economic benefits from an existing project to revitalise your community post-COVID.

If you are starting a new project, like a festival or a community café, you can draw on all sections of this document to help you establish a practical and useful business plan and set up appropriate governance structures.

If you need tools to help revitalise your project post-COVID, use Section 2 to refresh your vision and improve your efficiency.

If your project needs help attracting new visitors, focus on Section 3 to gain a better understanding of visitors' needs and review Section 5 to gather useful marketing tips.

If you want to build on success and grow your revenue, use Section 4 for help with creating packages and special offers that will appeal to domestic and international visitors as they begin to enjoy visiting Ireland's communities again.



1

What is Community Tourism?



Community tourism projects – which can range from one-day festivals to year-round heritage centres – are owned and/or managed by local communities and rely on visitors for their success.

IF YOU SEE YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP HERE, THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU!



Trails and outdoor recreation



Festivals of arts, music,
food and culture



Culture-based attractions
(storytelling, music,
art and dancing)



Heritage-based attractions
(local and themed museums,
as well as heritage centres)



Services (tourism information
centres, tourism ambassador
programmes, genealogy
services and community cafés)



Discovery parks
(nature, heritage)



Tourism networks and clusters / destination marketing groups



VISITORS APPRECIATE PROJECTS DESIGNED FOR LOCAL PEOPLE TOO!

- TidyTowns groups demonstrate local pride and enhance the appearance of our towns and villages.
- Parkruns – from Roscommon's Lough Key Forest Park and Dublin's Malahide to West Cork's Bere Island – give people the chance to take in new scenery and mingle with the locals.
- Local groups working to create autism-friendly towns improve our welcome for all.

**TOP
TIP**



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that, pre-COVID, two-thirds of visitors to community tourism projects were from within Ireland?

That domestic appeal gives us a great base to build on as our communities recover!

1.1. The people who play a part



1.2. Economic impact

A SNAPSHOT OF THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY TOURISM PROJECTS IN IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST (2018)

58

Number of Projects Surveyed

1.03
MILLION

Number of Visitors

GENERATING

67

Full-time Jobs
(management, admin)

246

Part-time Jobs
(admin, finance, marketing)

190

FTE Equivalent Jobs¹

SUPPORTED BY

987
VOLUNTEERS

Full-time Jobs
(management, admin)

€16.5
MILLION

Direct Value Added

€14.7
MILLION

Indirect Value Added

€31.2
MILLION

Total Value Added

¹ If we add up the hours in part-time contracts, we can convert those figures into the equivalent number of full-time positions.

² This is a figure produced when a conservative estimate of visitor spend in other local businesses is taken into account.

1.3. Impact on communities

Community-based tourism is a major driver of regeneration in both rural and urban areas, and its social effects are powerful. Projects like yours are:

- Providing jobs and creating pathways back to employment.
- Giving people skills and confidence that help them to re-join the workforce.
- Combatting isolation and building friendships across communities.
- Fostering local pride and keeping skills and traditions alive.
- Producing visitors for ancillary tourism services (e.g. cafés, restaurants, overnight accommodation).

When we collaborate and work in partnership with each other to boost the success and profile of community tourism, we can increase the benefits our projects produce at local, regional and national levels. Collaboration can help individual projects to gain greater visibility. Meanwhile, fresh ideas can improve projects' sustainability, as well as the appeal that they have for visitors.



REVIEW YOUR PROJECT TO GAIN NEW PERSPECTIVES

Community tourism projects tend to be 'grassroots' enterprises. They get their strength from being rooted in place. While this sense of place is rightly a source of pride, it also makes sense to take a bird's-eye view of your project so that you can learn lessons from elsewhere and benefit from fresh insights, collaboration and practical supports.

Use the information, ideas, tips and templates in the rest of this toolkit to gain a 360° view of your project and support your efforts to fulfil its full potential.

**TOP
TIP**



2

Set Up for Success

Many projects begin as a local conversation. Neighbours share concerns about sites that need to be saved and areas that need to be regenerated. People want to celebrate skills and traditions that are part of the fabric of their place and their communities, or they decide to share stories about people and events that are in danger of being forgotten.

Whether you are setting up a new community project or looking to reinvigorate an established project post-COVID, you need efficient and resilient structures in place.

Proper project planning will help you to:

- Establish that there is market demand for your project.
- Save time and resources.
- Draw on insights from other similar projects and prospective partners, including outside agencies.

These can help you to evaluate your ideas, identify new opportunities and increase your chances of success, as well as your opportunities for improvement.

Whether your project is starting out now or getting back on track, whatever its scale and stage, it is important that it works well and is able to manage change.

Now more than ever, community tourism needs to be functioning at full capacity so we can help our communities recover from the devastating and ongoing social and economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

CONVERSATIONS, PASSION AND PRIDE CAN GET A PROJECT STARTED, BUT A STRONG STRUCTURE AND A STRATEGIC APPROACH CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR IT TO SUCCEED OVER THE LONG TERM.

See Section 8 for details of planning tools and templates.



**TOP
TIP**

2.1. Structure

Most groups begin as voluntary committees but adopt official legal structures as they develop. A legal framework will help to ensure that your group is governed well. It will also reassure funders and other stakeholders that the resources and supports they provide are going to be used and managed responsibly.

POPULAR STRUCTURES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM GROUPS



Voluntary groups (32%)



Charities



Council-run



Cooperatives



Companies limited by guarantee (42%)

THE BENEFITS OF A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE

The most common framework for community tourism groups is a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG). It offers a simple administrative structure and gives legal protection to your Board of Directors.

The CLG model is generally the best option for community tourism projects because it:

- Provides a transparent structure.
- Offers protection for group members.
- Gives confidence to funders and other stakeholders.

What is a Company Limited by Guarantee?

- A non-profit company which must have a minimum of 2 directors and one member (the member can also be a director).
- The money generated is used to sustain and develop the community tourism project.
- There are no shareholders or share capital. Instead, CLGS appoint member(s) who guarantee to contribute €1 to the company at the point when it is wound up.
- A CLG has a constitution and its accounts are audited.



DID YOU KNOW?

Rathcroghan Visitor Centre uses a CLG structure to support its social enterprise project, which conserves and showcases historic sites as well as working to create local employment.

See Case Studies, Section 7

2.2. Plan

It can be difficult to allocate time to proper business planning when your attention is focused on operational demands, running repairs and funding applications. Most successful projects have a 3-5year plan in place which sets out goals, operations and budgets. Behind welcoming buildings, packed event programmes and miles of winding trails are voluntary committees, overstretched staff, rotas and accounts.

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO THINK LONG-TERM WHEN:



Constant juggling is needed to meet operating costs



Funding opportunities and deadlines crop up unexpectedly

Some of the best community projects in Ireland start life as a conversation and a plan on the back of an envelope, but things get more complex quickly!



Changes in circumstances, like the need for repairs, demand urgent action



You are relying on volunteers who can only contribute for a limited amount of time



It is difficult to recruit and retain skilled staff and volunteers

To break the pattern of short-term thinking, it is worth making time to create a new plan that covers your short-term needs and your priorities for the next 3-5 years.

You can begin your planning process by reviewing your vision with your core team. Once your plan is completed, share it with a wider group of people, beyond your committee, who may be able to offer additional perspectives. Try to include:



Other visitor-facing groups in your community
(e.g. accommodation providers, attraction owners, guides, retailers, pub/café/restaurant owners)



Local groups with expertise in heritage, sustainability, the environment and accessibility



Relevant local authorities and agencies
(See Section 8, Potential Funders and Key Contacts)



Your wider community and past visitors
(invite people to take part in person or through local or online surveys)



Young people whose involvement will help to future-proof your ideas



EXERCISE

Brainstorm for the Future

To refresh enthusiasm as well as clarify your vision, why not dedicate your next meeting to brainstorming ideas instead of dealing with detail?

Set yourself a different kind of agenda:

- Where would you like to be in 5 years' time if there were no obstacles in place?
- What are the logical steps towards your goal?
- What partnerships can you use to achieve your aims and overcome obstacles?
- Who do you need to help you (staff, volunteers, the community and/or other partners)?
- How can you make your project viable?
- And how can you improve your appeal to visitors?

Then think about the planning team you will need in place to deliver on your goals.

PRINT
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Planning Team Strength Test

Does your planning committee have ...	Strengths	Gaps
Skills relevant to your ideas (e.g. event management, construction)		
Strong local knowledge		
Expert knowledge and useful perspectives (gained either from other locations or their work experience)		
An understanding of visitors and their needs		
Skills that will help you to communicate with visitors (marketing and promotion)		
Experience of networking and/or willingness to network with local and regional partners		
A willingness to commit a defined amount of time to the project for a set period		
Other skills relevant to your project		

Make sure everyone feels welcomed and listened to, so that you benefit from the broadest possible number of perspectives. Remember, people who are involved in this planning and review process can become long-term allies and ambassadors for your project.

It is a good idea to commit to repeating this process every 2 or 3 years so that you can continue to benefit from your community's input.

LOOK UP AND OUT!

Do research online and draw on your experience of strong tourism experiences in other places, as well as your local knowledge.

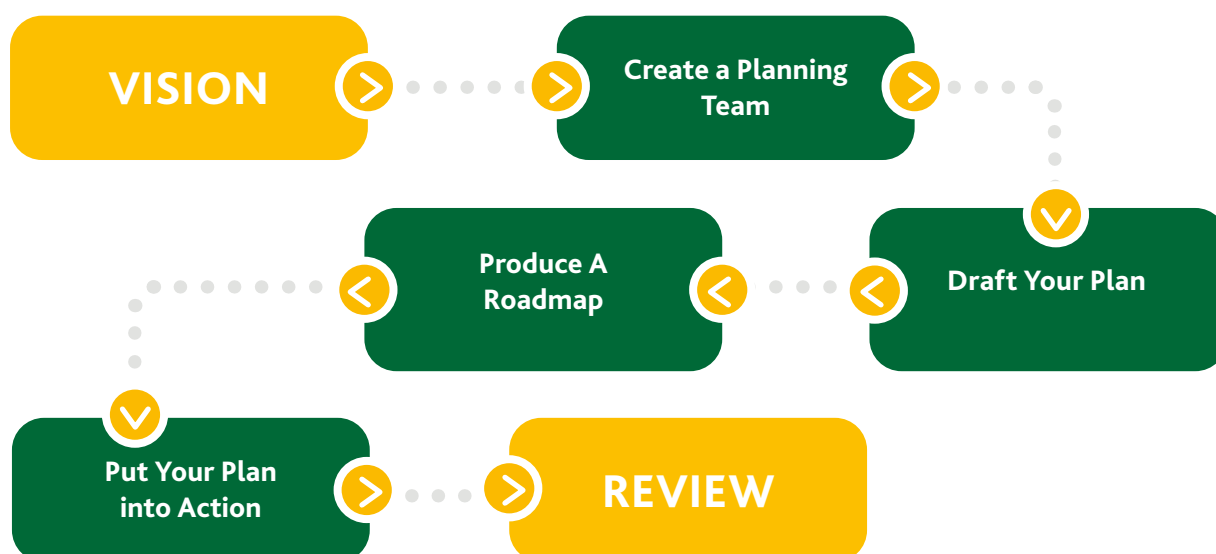
- What are the best examples of projects like yours in Ireland and further afield?
- What insights can you gain from looking at projects like yours online?
- What sets you apart from other similar projects?

**TOP
TIP**



How to Create a Plan

Your plan should set out the **shared vision** that gives your project direction and purpose. The big idea that inspires and motivates your team is often the key to motivating your visitors.



Your plan might fit into a simple one-page document or it might take the form of a detailed report or spreadsheet. Whatever its size, it needs to be realistic, practical, easy to understand and fit for purpose ([Click here for a template you can use](#)). Everyone involved needs to understand it and have ownership of it so that they can help bring it to life.

Make sure your plan identifies:

- **Clear goals** (short, medium and long-term).
- **Consumer sentiment** and information on the types of visitors you plan to attract.
- **Skills** you need to make your project happen, including those you already have access to and those you can acquire through recruitment and training.
- **Resources** you will need, from money and staff to premises and equipment.
- **Partners** who can help you to secure staff and resources (from local employment schemes to Councils and other agencies).

When you have a plan, you can move on to create a roadmap:

- **Create a timeline which matches your goals** – set out your plan's actions in an order that makes sense. Identify quick wins and the steps needed to achieve larger goals.
- **Establish budgets** – Decide how to use existing resources and generate new ones.
- **Define roles and responsibilities** – Be realistic about how much time people can give.



A CLEAR PLAN IS A VALUABLE ASSET

Your plan is vital to your everyday operations and to people inside your organisation. Without it, progress is difficult, and efforts can be squandered.

A clear plan should also show potential partners that:

- You are capable of managing resources well.
- You will produce long-term benefits for your community and your region, as well as for visitors.
- Support and funding provided to you will achieve substantial impact.

TOP
TIP



Put Your Plan to Use

A good plan will be a tool you refer to regularly for guidance as you pursue your short-term goals. Review and refresh it once a year with your team to strike a great balance between short-term and long-term thinking.

2.3. People

To put a plan into action, you need people who are willing to help. So much of what has been achieved by community tourism is owed to strong leaders who worked to implement a vision with the assistance of hard-working staff and volunteers over many years.

Community tourism in Ireland relies to a huge extent on volunteers working in roles up to and including those at leadership level. Fewer than a third of the projects surveyed in the Ireland's Ancient East region have a paid manager supported by part-time staff.

The involvement of committed volunteers is something to celebrate, but it is important that their generosity is not over-stretched and that new people have the chance to bring in fresh insights and ideas.

Did you know the James Joyce Martello Tower is one of Ireland's volunteer-run attractions?

See Case Studies, Section 7

Community-based projects need to have strategies in place to:

- **Recruit new volunteers**, especially for important tasks that carry responsibility.
- **Fill skills gaps**, particularly in areas like promotion and marketing where technology and best practice are evolving quickly.
- **Tackle operational issues and generate resources** to reduce pressure on staff.
- **Avoid burnout and frustration** – key reasons why community projects lose momentum and fail.

2.3.1. How to encourage involvement

It can be hard to persuade new volunteers to get involved in community tourism projects, but there are a number of ways you can encourage participation and make life easier on existing staff and volunteers.

Create your plan and a stable structure

A big vision, shared and achievable, can attract new interest, especially when it is publicised well and you involve a wide range of people in your planning and development phase. Clear structures can reassure people about the responsibilities they are taking on, and involvement won't seem too stressful if your group is moving sensibly towards agreed goals at an achievable pace.

Get the people you need in place

Bring together people with the right skills to deliver on your aims. For example, if you are looking to attract more European visitors, it may be helpful to involve people with language skills. If you want to develop more paid-for experiences for visitors, think about inviting an experienced sales and marketing manager from a local hotel to join your group.

Recruit from improved social employment schemes

Social employment schemes provide an incredible amount of day-to-day support to community projects. Contact your local Council, whose teams can help you to determine if your project qualifies for any of a number of employment schemes that are available.

Retain knowledge and skills

Remember to make the most of the local and practical knowledge and experience that exists within your project and community.

- Use handover periods to make sure knowledge is passed on to new volunteers.
- Encourage team members to visit other attractions and discuss their experiences with each other.
- Encourage staff to share and record the unscripted stories they tell visitors, so snippets of information are not lost over time.
- Keep records of contacts with partner organisations so that conversations keep their continuity and progress is maintained.
- Build relationships with other groups and regional partners so that knowledge and experience can be shared.



BUILD ON WHAT'S GONE BEFORE

Revive or reform an existing group rather than starting from scratch to avoid losing progress and creating information clutter for visitors.

TOP TIP

Communicate with your team

Make time for your team of staff and volunteers to reflect and share ideas on a regular basis so that you can keep communication flowing and build a sense of shared purpose.

- Bring your team together at the beginning of each season to plan, create a strong bond, energise the staff and prepare for the year ahead. Take the opportunity to update everyone on last year's progress and review short-term and long-term goals.
- Hold team meetings regularly during the season or before your event to keep the focus clear and gather useful insights you can act on quickly.
- Organise debriefing sessions after your event or season is over, so that you can gather and act on feedback from everyone in your team.

Keep good records

Good record-keeping can go a long way towards reducing the time and effort you ask of your team and volunteers.

- Keep records of simple things like brochure orders, ticket book requirements and catering plans so that you can use them to guide choices in future.
- Capture data and insights from your debriefing meeting so that you can check the impact of any changes they prompt.
- Keep track of visitor numbers and ticket sales figures that will help you to make informed decisions about marketing spend the following year.
- Store your group's data carefully so that you are compliant with GDPR and keep important information like website access details or minutes safe.
- Re-use and recycle documents to reduce workload. Many of the posters, reports, accounts, spreadsheets and application forms you create can be refreshed rather than started again.

KEEP TALKING!

Good communication with your team can help you to:

- Eliminate waste.
- Capitalise on emerging trends.
- Remove small glitches from your visitor experience.
- Uncover some of the minor frustrations that affect visitors or lead committed staff and volunteers to walk away.

**TOP
TIP**



Be clear about roles and responsibilities

New people are more likely to become involved if they understand exactly what you are asking them to do. When you invite someone to join your team, you will often be asking a busy person to get busier! Your plan should set out roles and responsibilities clearly so that people can assess how much time and work is involved.

MAKE GOOD GOVERNANCE A PRIORITY

It is important to make sure that your group is efficiently run and that each person involved understands their role and remit fully. Everyone in your team must be fully aware of their legal and ethical obligations, as well as their practical responsibilities.

The legal obligations you take on when you get involved in community tourism can seem daunting at first, but the successful projects you see all around you have all taken on board these responsibilities successfully and prove that they are manageable.

To make sure your work will stand up to scrutiny and meet the highest standards:

- Refresh your understanding of what good governance for community-based projects looks like (See www.governancecode.ie/).
- Undertake training in good governance. Ask your local LEADER company or Local Enterprise Office (LEO) for advice about training opportunities in your area.

When you combine good governance with transparency, you inspire trust and confidence in your project and make it easier for new people to decide to join your team. You also share responsibility and knowledge more widely, which can help to make your project fairer and more sustainable.

**TOP
TIP**

Invite new people to join

Publicise new projects and call for volunteers with the help of your local newspapers and radio stations, community bulletins and social media. Let people know that you are looking for specific expertise and insights and build up excitement around the goals you are working to achieve.

An inclusive project that draws on ideas and experience from across your community will stand the best possible chance of appealing to the diverse visitors you want to enjoy the fruits of your work.



2.4. Expertise

The right people for your tourism project are the ones who can help deliver your organisation's overall goals. New people who have relevant experience of finance or marketing skills can be a great help. You should also make sure that your existing board, staff and volunteers are ready for the unprecedented challenges generated by the COVID-19 crisis.

Training programmes can help you with:

Tasks	Develop skills in areas such as event planning, facilities management and risk analysis.
Strategies	Improve your tactics for attracting visitors and packaging experiences.
Insights	Learn from projects elsewhere, other stakeholders in the tourism industry and sectors such as culture and heritage.

Training providers

LEADER, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Fáilte Ireland. For further information see their websites.

By taking advantage of training opportunities you will be helping to strengthen the community tourism sector, supporting life-long learning in your community and making it easier for your project to survive and thrive.

CREATE YOUR OWN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Set aside time for an annual training session** when you are laying out your board meeting dates to ensure that training and upskilling become part of the culture of your community-based tourism project. Share knowledge and expertise that already exists in your team, or call on other local tourism providers and experts to share their insights as guest speakers.
- **Engage with other local projects by taking on a mentoring role or organising a local tourism forum.** If you are involved in a successful project and a new group asks you to provide advice and support, take it as a compliment! A new community-based tourism project in your area can boost your community's appeal to visitors and create new opportunities for collaboration and development. An encounter with fresh thinking can help to refresh your own enthusiasm too.

**TOP
TIP**

2.5. Monitoring

When you have a robust structure for your project and clear goals in place, you can start to put your plans into action with the help of people who have the right skills to make them work. Success won't necessarily be instant, so it's important to keep track of your progress and measure it against your overall aims.

Monitor your activities so that you can reflect on how things are going:

- **Decide on meaningful ways to measure your project.** Data points might include visitor numbers, ticket sales, average visitor spend, seasonal patterns and breakdowns of those kinds of figures (for example, you might track sales of different ticket types). It will also be vital to measure social impact. Even if you track some of this data already, check to see if you need to use additional measurement mechanisms to help you understand how well you are progressing towards your goals.
- **Establish a baseline.** Use the data you already have in your organisation to assess where you are now. It will allow you to monitor the effects of any changes you make.
- **Measure your progress on a regular basis.** Feed insights you gain into your planning review.
- **Use insights to make adjustments.** When you have clear information available, your board will be able to make well-founded decisions about how to move forward. You can also share findings about your progress with partners and funders to promote your case.

Effective monitoring supports long-term, evidence-based, strategic thinking. It will also help to make your project more efficient and durable.

MOVE TOWARDS BETTER MEASUREMENT

In 2019, 63% of community tourism projects reported that they already record visitor numbers. Others said that they did not have the resources and/or mechanisms in place to capture that information (e.g. ticketing systems or counters on walking trails).

Training courses targeted towards community tourism projects will share practical and affordable strategies you can use to track your progress and your impact on your community. You may also be able to make use of expertise from local college students who are looking to take on projects that focus on IT, data capture, social media or marketing. Schools and colleges can sometimes help you with collecting stories and local history too!

**TOP
TIP**

2.6. Aim to self-sustain

It is important to plan for the long term and equip your team to work efficiently and effectively, but financial resources are also crucial if your project is going to be sustainable. It can be difficult to put your project on a secure footing when it is dependent on grants and short-term funding to top up income from visitors or reduce subscription costs for local stakeholders. It makes sense to work towards becoming as financially independent as possible.

You can move towards economic sustainability by developing an annual operational plan and budgets. Use your planning process to identify strategies that will reduce costs and generate more income from visitors. If you can produce a better financial return from your team's efforts, you can improve the stability of your project and make a bigger contribution to your community's economic and social wellbeing.

The National Maritime Museum in Dún Laoghaire sustains itself by making use of a membership scheme and ticket sales, as well as a community employment scheme, to keep its doors open to visitors.

See Case Studies, Section 7

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

To produce a strong financial return on your project, you need to be able to promote and market your project well. The rest of the toolkit provides you with resources you can use to answer some key questions:

- Who are we selling to?
- What is our offer to them?
- How can we get our message out and amplify it?

TOP TIP

3

Understand Your Visitors



3.1. Who are they?

The COVID-19 crisis has had a drastic impact on the tourism industry across the board in 2020. If your tourism project was able to open at all last year, it catered almost entirely to the domestic market. In fact, our research shows that, even before 2020, 66% of visitors to community tourism projects were already from Ireland.

When you are making plans for 2021 and beyond, it will make sense to focus on this domestic market again, given the ongoing uncertainty that affects us all at the moment. Your familiarity with what visitors within Ireland want and how to engage with them will be a great help in this work.

If we look beyond our immediate circumstances, it is clear that international visitors represent a real opportunity for community tourism projects because many projects have struggled to win their attention in the past. You can find opportunities to grow both your domestic market and your international visitor numbers by making use of your own experience and insights into visitor trends identified through Fáilte Ireland's market research.

3.1.1. Review your visitor base

What kinds of visitors does your business attract already?

Put together a profile of the type of visitors your project generally attracts, and make sure you have mechanisms in place to capture insights into your core visitor segments. If you were able to operate your business or event under COVID-19 restrictions (even if it was in a new format), make separate notes of any different visitor types and visit patterns that you noticed during this period.

Short 'pen portrait' profiles of your key visitor types can help you to make good decisions about marketing and promotion. When you are clear about your current visitor segments, you can work on attracting more people with this profile. You can also use this information to identify gaps in your visitor base and opportunities to grow new audiences..

What do your visitors like best about what you offer?

Listen to what your visitors say about the experiences they have of your community tourism projects offering. You can collect their views in person, via a visitor book or through surveys. If you don't already collect their opinions, this is the time to start - there is probably data you can also draw on already close to hand.

You can collect information from comments on your social media pages and from reviews on sites like Google and TripAdvisor. If you are struggling to find data that tells you what visitors think of your project, you can:

- Use an online questionnaire to canvass views and ideas. Tools like Google Forms allow you to put together simple, free visitor surveys which you can publicise on your social media pages or via your online newsletter if you have a list of email contacts.
- Ask local accommodation providers to share feedback visitors give them about your offer and how it fits into their experience of your area.

INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR WORK

TOP TIP

If you need help with electronic research, why not turn your requirements into a Gaisce project for local Transition Year students?

You can benefit from their technical skills and foster their pride in their local community at the same time.

3.1.2. Value for money

Holidaymakers appreciate:

- Value for money. Price matters, but you can also add value by offering a range of ticketing options (e.g. family tickets or discounts for visits to multiple attractions in your area).
- Convenience. Make it as easy as possible for visitors to find out what you offer and how to contact you.
- Efficiency. Make sure that details about your opening hours or dates are clear and regularly reviewed. Reply to any enquiries in a prompt and positive way. Saving time for your visitor is one of the ways you can deliver value.

3.1.3. A meaningful experience

Visitors are looking to your project to give them a brilliant experience and great memories. If you inspire them, provide a real chance to relax or offer a moment of pure exhilaration, you are giving them what they value most of all.

- Give people the chance to immerse themselves in culture, nature, heritage and your community.
- Share hospitality, friendly conversations and intriguing stories. Investigate the [Dúchas](https://www.duchas.ie) archive for local stories collected by schoolchildren in the 1940's – a treasure trove for any visitor attraction. [Dúchas.ie](https://www.duchas.ie)
- Ensure that everyone, from the person who is selling tickets to your tour guide, is offering a warm and inclusive welcome.

The volunteer in a community café who offers a great tip about where a visitor should stop next is a wonderful ambassador for your area, adding value and a personal touch to the visitor's experience, as well as supporting local businesses. Everyone can play their part in creating a meaningful emotional connection between the visitor and your community.

3.1.4. Environmental sustainability

Be sure to tell visitors about the positive work you are doing to reduce your carbon footprint and increase local impact. This work can raise your project in their estimation, at the same time as it lowers your costs.

- Tell visitors about your community-centred vision – share the story about how your project was born and explain how it has progressed through local efforts. If all of your volunteers or employees live within a 10km radius of the area, share that information too.
- Talk about sustainability – tell visitors you are recycling, reducing energy and waste and working to eliminate single-use plastics.
- Source local foods – let visitors know you are supporting local farmers and suppliers.
- Showcase local arts and crafts – add quality and originality to your shop, market or stalls.
- Involve local craftspeople and artists – attract visitors with demonstrations and workshops and think about hiring local artists to create high-quality visual interpretation and design work to set your project apart.

3.1.5. Ways to improve value

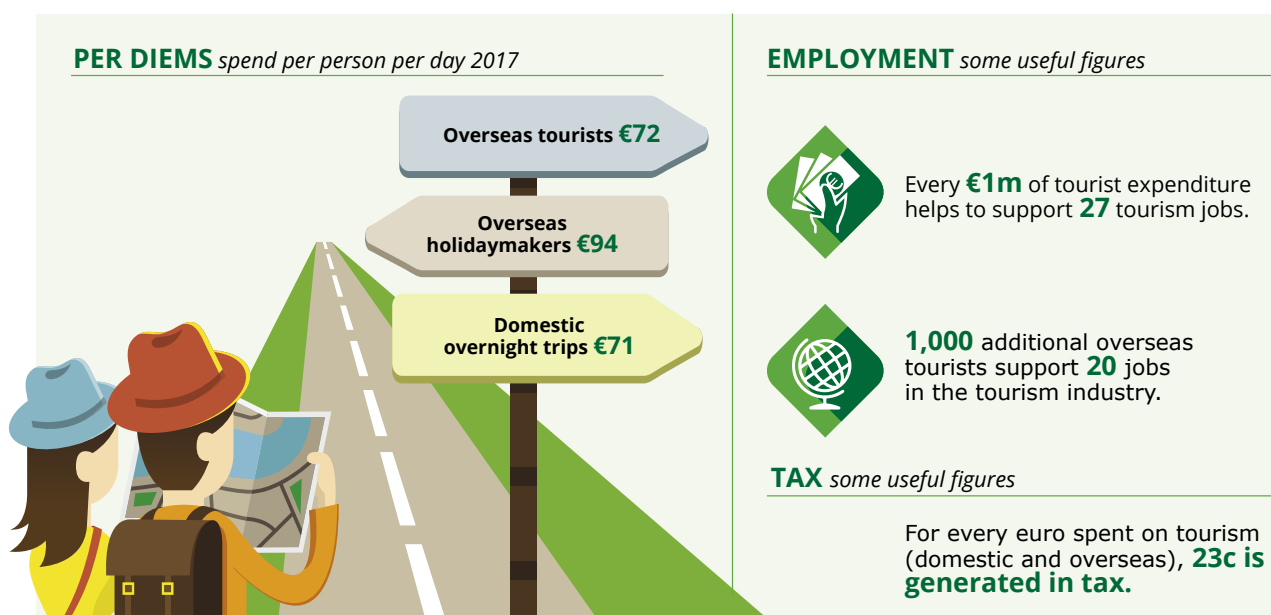
You can add value to your visitors experience if you:

- Provide timely, accurate information and support to create a stress-free experience.
- Ensure you are reliable and easy to understand. This will inspire your visitor's confidence in the quality of your product or service.
- Help visitors to have exhilarating, moving and authentic experiences.
- Share knowledge or news about what is on offer locally. Include information on paid and free options, and make sure every customer-facing person in your team has up-to-date information to share.
- Tailor experiences for different market segments. For example, you might target private groups with an out-of-hours guided evening walk and drinks or tempt families with activity sheets that encourage children to interact with and appreciate the environment.

3.1.6. Value for your community

When you give visitors what they value, they repay your community by engaging with and enjoying what you offer. They also spend time and money in and around your project, and this creates knock-on benefits – more valuable now than ever – for the other local businesses they encounter.

To put your tourism project in the best possible position to attract visitors you will need to package your offer to make it inviting and easy for them to understand.



4

Package Your Offer

People want to get 'under the skin' of a destination and connect with the real Ireland. This is where local community-based tourism projects excel, but, to give yourself the best chance of winning visitors, you need to make sure they understand the benefits of connecting with you. Remember, lots of tourism operators, commercial and local community-based tourism projects, are vying for their limited attention in Ireland and beyond. The best way to communicate with the visitors you want to attract is to package your offer in a clear and interesting way that connects with their hopes for their holiday in Ireland and in your area.



Make your offer easier to understand

Packaging is all about helping your targeted visitors to realise that your project is a great match for them. A packaged offer is easy to understand and easy to sell, and it can hold its own in the marketplace where tourists pick things to do and places to go.

Decide on your set of offers

Begin by mapping out the different experiences you already offer to visitors and matching them up with the different target markets you have identified. Then explore these ideas for new or improved experiences that will appeal to the visitors you want to attract.

Added extras and hands-on elements can go a long way towards making your offers more attractive. Do make sure you are making the best possible use of your team's expertise, local infrastructure and partnerships with the wider community, as well as natural resources. Amenities and heritage sites, from castles to peatlands, as well as local infrastructure, can all help to build out the offer you present to tourists.

**Hook Lighthouse
successfully developed
its appeal for visitors by
creating experiences shaped
by local stories.**

*See Case Studies,
Section 7*

There are lots of ways to boost your project's offer

Sample Project Types	Current Offers	New / Improved Offers
Heritage Centre with café	- A self-guided Heritage Centre Tour (Tuesday to Sunday, March to October). 1-hour guided tours on Wednesdays at 11 from March to October.	- Explorer pack produced for children and details added to the website. - Guided Tour & Tea package added on Mondays (a trial run in September and October that could become more permanent). - Better promotion for the weekly guided tour which is now bookable online.
Community-run walking route	- A 3-day, self-guided looped walk (free). 20 short looped and linear walking routes (1 > 6 hours; easy > difficult).	- One-day annual walking festival to showcase loops and the route's biodiversity. - A bookable guided walk package added to your website in partnership with a local guide and accommodation providers.
Food Festival	An annual 2-day programme including a street market and demonstrations (free and charging events).	- Specialist hands-on workshops (bookable online) added to the main programme. - One seasonal spin-off workshop planned in your area. - One seasonal online demonstration added, using tech skills acquired in lockdown (a good way to maintain links with potential repeat visitors). - A new festival event about food traditions scheduled for the heritage centre. - A foraging walk event added to your event programme that uses a walking route loop.

Spell out the details

When you have decided on the offers you are ready to promote, create an attractive set of offer descriptions you can share easily. It's important to take the time to write up descriptions of what the visitor can expect in each of the experiences that you are offering.

Make sure that your package descriptions provide answers to key questions and make it easy for your potential visitor to commit to you. Then share your offer on your website, with local tourism businesses and with other partners who can help to drive visitors your way.

Packaged offer checklist

What is this experience?

Where is it?

When is it?

How do I book it?

How safe is it?

How accessible is it?

Do I need to bring anything with me?

For webinars and advice on how to package your offer, see covid19.failteireland.ie/business-supports/

MAKE YOUR EXPERIENCES EASY TO SHARE

- Create a set of 50- and 100-word offer descriptions you can share easily so that you can communicate about your experiences without lots of additional effort.
- Link those offers to Ireland's regional experience brands Ireland's Ancient East, Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Dublin to benefit from the visitor attention they capture in Ireland and overseas through promotional campaigns directed towards the market segments you cater for.
- Include and connect with local partners so that you contribute to creating a rich offer at your destination level.

**TOP
TIP**

Link your offer to Ireland's regional brands

When overseas visitors start planning their visit to Ireland, they will tend to connect with regional experience brands first.



When you align your offers with your regional experience brand, you make it easier for visitors to make sense of your location and the kinds of experience you will be able to offer. The attention the brand receives can begin to funnel visitors towards your project.



DID YOU KNOW?

From the visitor's point of view, your regional brand gives your offer:

- A link to the 'big picture' of the island of Ireland.
- Recognisability, credibility and visibility.
- 'Stickiness', tempting new and repeat visitors to explore stories in your area, stay longer, dig deeper or do something new.

You can connect your offer to the regional brand by:

- Telling stories that link to your destination's themes.
- Creating meaningful, hands-on and/or immersive experiences that bring those themes to life.
- Using images and language that match your brand's tone.
- Adding brand logos to your website and publicity materials.
- Getting involved with the brand on social media by sharing material and using things like destination hashtags.

WORK WITH Fáilte Ireland AND TOURISM IRELAND

Make sure your tourism project can be found on Fáilte Ireland's websites. Get listed at www.failteireland.ie/get-listed.aspx and check out this toolkit's suggestions for aligning yourself with your regional experience brand (See Section 5.1).

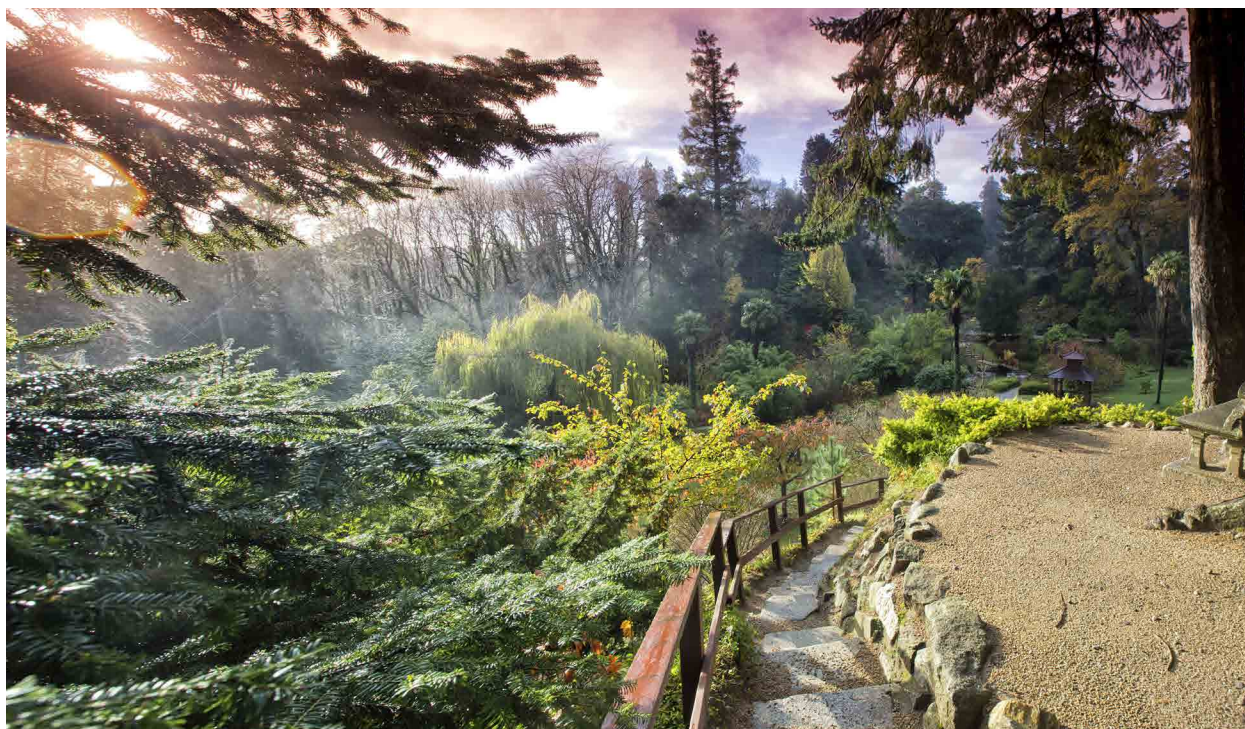
You can also participate in Tourism Ireland's campaigns to gain the attention of international audiences. Whatever your project's size, it is worth looking at opportunities to get involved.

See tourismirelandindustryopportunities.com for details.

**TOP
TIP**

The Beara-Breifne Way
and Suck Valley Way
have benefitted
from linking to the Ireland's
Hidden Heartlands Brand.

*See Case Studies,
Section 7*



Deliver on your promise

To win a 5-star review, the experience you offer has to deliver on the promise you make in your package description and on the visitor's expectations of your region and Ireland. Community-based tourism projects like yours are already helping domestic and international visitors to have the holiday they hoped for.

To maintain the highest standards, it is a good idea to:

- Regularly review the experience you offer and the feedback it produces.
- Refresh the range of experiences you provide.
- Review and implement your plans for continual improvement.

You can strengthen your project's ability to cater for visitors by accessing training supports, and there are some excellent resources available in the form of toolkits that cover topics like interpretation and signage (See Section 8). Networking and partnerships can also highlight opportunities to enrich the experience you offer to your visitors (See Section 5.4).

Strengthen your community's offer

Make sure that you are drawing visitors' attention not just to your project but to the community around it and all it has to offer. Areas that do this increase visitors' dwell time and drive up local spend. Don't forget that every extra lunch order or bed night makes a difference to the businesses in your locality.

You can:

- Get involved in local destination management groups (which are often community tourism projects like yours).
- Build packages that make use of the strengths of other community projects and local tourism businesses.
- Encourage visitors to write online reviews and share pictures on social media. Their content can help to build an attractive picture of their experience with you and give other visitors insights into your area's appeal.

Building Packages That Showcase Your Area: An Example

Collaborating to make a garden bloom

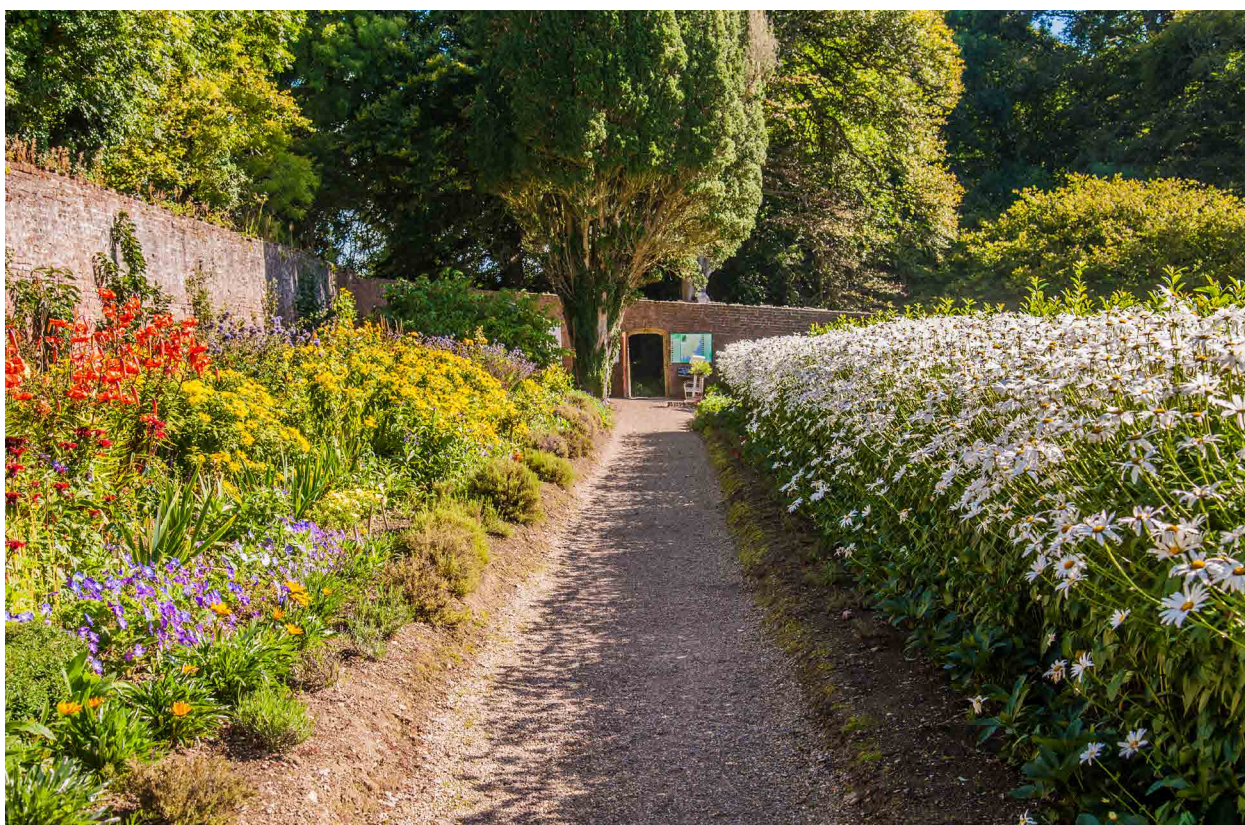
A community garden with a great heritage story is close to a newly opened Greenway. The cycle route will encourage people to explore slowly rather than drive through the area, so it represents a great opportunity for the garden team.

The garden's committee works with a local bike hire company to develop a simple itinerary. The Greenway itinerary includes cycling to the garden. It suggests a local café where people can enjoy lunch too (the garden's salads are on the menu). It also includes a stop at a nearby OPW attraction that the garden's visitors will love. The attraction is normally quiet in September, so its staff are delighted to be involved.

The garden team, the bike hire company and local accommodation providers include the itinerary on their websites. It also features on the local destination group's site. Everyone suggests the trip to their followers on social media. The person who manages social media for the garden committee shares posts that cyclists publish about their visits, and they produce a lot of interest.

After a local newspaper launch, local people try the route and return when they have guests who want to see the area. Domestic visitors are starting to try the itinerary out and are giving great reviews. More international visitors are sending enquiries too because they are starting to recognise what the whole area offers.

Next year, the garden team plans to work with local hotels and B&Bs to see if the itinerary can be turned into an overnight package, but first they want to get on with planning guided tours to coincide with the local heritage festival!



5

Connect with Potential Visitors



You and your team care passionately about your project, but your job is to persuade people who don't feel that way about it (yet!). It is easier for visitors to connect with and understand you when you have clear offers to share with them, but we know that – even when you have clear offers in place – marketing can pose one of the biggest challenges to community tourism projects.

Marketing is a fast-changing field and it requires a set of skills and up-to-date knowledge that small teams can find hard to access, especially when they are already struggling to ensure they have enough staff and volunteers in place. Even when you have resources available to help with marketing, visitors' attention spans are limited and their expectations about the quality of marketing materials are rising all the time.

This section of the toolkit:

- Shares some of the best ways for you to connect with potential visitors.
- Outlines different ways to market and sell your offers, which you can incorporate into your project plan.
- Explains the value of aligning your community tourism project with local, county and regional efforts to amplify your message.
- The supports and linkages provided by county tourism officers and bodies such as Fáilte Ireland are already producing results for many projects, but a structured approach to marketing built into your own plan is vital to your success.

5.1. How marketing works today



A lot of community tourism projects rely on brochures to interest visitors who are already in their destination and looking to find something to do almost immediately. Brochures influence many tourists' decisions, and community-run tourist offices, community cafés and ambassador programmes also do great work to cultivate interest on the ground and deliver visitors to you.



Most projects now have websites and/or social media profiles too, and they support visitors who are increasingly researching their breaks online before they arrive. Some holidaymakers will spend a lot of time searching online and making detailed plans using Discover Ireland resources as well as your website.



For many potential visitors, the route to your business will be via Fáilte Ireland's regional tourism brands. These brands encourage domestic visitors to explore more and they persuade international visitors to commit to Ireland. Other potential visitors will see an interesting experience crop up on Facebook or an Instagram story and base their entire plans around the interest that generates. Most of them will be looking at your digital material on mobile phones.



A lot has been achieved in recent years, online and offline, by umbrella-style community tourism groups that represent local destinations and the businesses within them. Groups like this encourage collaboration, and their members promote each other, cross-selling all kinds of community tourism projects and private businesses, as well as helping visitors to understand what an area has to offer.

Representation across a range of promotional platforms and strategic partnerships that widen your audience and appeal can help you to sell your experience to visitors, but before you start marketing you need to decide on how your offers will be sold.

5.2. How to sell directly

Direct sales channels involve you selling your experience directly to your visitor.

Ways to sell direct

Traditional	Online
Phone and email enquiries	Website
Walk-in customers	Social media
Collaborative marketing (e.g. local area, county or region-based promotions)	Other forms of digital marketing (e.g. adverts and ezines)

Brochures

Lots of visitors get ideas for what to see and do from printed materials they pick up after they have arrived in your region. You need to make sure your brochure is positive, practical and realistic, as well as good to look at. You should also ensure that it is downloadable, so make sure it is available online. Your local printer will be able to give you advice about what works best in print format, but you will be likely to win a good response if you use:

- Simple language – Make sure it is in a readable font and size. Proofread it carefully.
- Strong imagery – A good picture speaks a thousand words. A thousand words printed in a small brochure will be unreadable!
- Good structure – Headings, bullet points and bold statements make your meaning easy to grasp. Make your materials skim-proof.
- Clear instructions – Tell the visitor what to do next (ring to book, book online, save the date or visit your website). Icons can make your message more accessible to people who have English as a second language or have accessibility needs. For example, you can use icons to indicate that you have hearing loops and baby-changing facilities available.
- Social media links – Create an ongoing connection with people who might not be ready to book or visit yet.
- Local and regional branding – Help people to get a sense of the wider destination and stories your project represents.

Brochures are a great tool for community tourism projects, but they are not the 'be all and end all' of marketing. Unless someone picks up a brochure at a holiday fair or a regional tourist office, printed material is not helping you to pull in people who have not considered your locality yet. To attract visitors who might not have your project or your area on their radar, you will need to make use of opportunities to get your message across online.

Website

Your website is a key place for visitors to find out more about your community tourism project and its offer. If your project is not ready to create and maintain a website yet, social media profiles are a good place to start. You should also consider taking out a website listing with your local community tourism network or county-level tourism organisation. It will be important to make sure you are represented on Fáilte Ireland's websites too.

Your own website does not need to be complicated, but it does need to be welcoming and get its message across to visitors quickly and accurately.

Website health check:

- Is it easy to use on mobile phones?
- Does it have clear navigation? Can the browser find your location, contact details and other practical information?
- Is the imagery attractive and compelling? Photos and videos help to give people a preview of your offer and they are worth getting right.
- Is the tone appropriate? Use the language of the destination brand as a guide. Avoid complicated language that will be difficult for many visitors to understand.
- Is your offer explained well? Good descriptions of your offer are crucial.
- Are you open? Opening hours, seasonal information and next year's dates are important details to share. Tell people how to book or engage with your experience.
- Is local context provided? Let the visitor know about the area around you and what it has to offer.
- Is it accessible? Your website designer can run accessibility checks for you. You should also make sure you clearly explain any obstacles or supports that may affect access during a visit.
- Is it up to date? Review your site regularly to make sure your project looks alive and well. If you run an annual music event, why not flag next year's event now and add a newsletter sign-up to capture interest for next year?
- Does it link to your social media profiles? These links can prompt a longer-term connection that will bring you visitors at a later date.

If your project does have its own website, you will need to update it regularly and refresh its appearance every few years because technology changes regularly and user expectations shift over time.



Social media

Even if you don't use social media yourself, the days when you could skip using it as a marketing tool for your project are long gone. The opportunities it represents are too great for you to cut yourself off from them.

It is usually free to set up social media accounts and, though they take time to manage, they take your message to your audience before people arrive in your destination and keep it at the front of their minds.

You can use social media to:

- Build anticipation for an event and remind people to book.
- Show people which kinds of visitors already enjoy your experience.
- Share good reviews so that potential visitors can see what you offer.
- Put your offers in context and showcase your local area.
- Keep connections with visitors alive between events and seasons.
- Target low-cost advertising at specific geographical areas and market segments.

You need to make sure the platforms you are using are suited to your target markets. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok and Pinterest have quite different audiences, for example.

There are a few tips you should keep in mind wherever you decide to post:

- Keep your posts short and simple.
- Choose the right tone of voice (conversational/upbeat/fun).
- Remember your posts reflect your project's standards and character.
- Post when your audience is highest (the best slots are typically 7-8 am or 7-11pm).
- Use hashtags to help the visitor understand your offer, your location, stories and connections – #purecork, #irishhistory and #makeabreakforit are examples of the types of hashtags already being used by community tourism projects. Research the ones that are relevant to your project and make the most of the slipstreams they create.
- Only ask one question or make one point at a time.
- Change the post to suit the platform and the audience.
- Consider allocating responsibility for posting to a volunteer or staff member who is familiar with social media.
- Plan ahead and link your plan to market segments.
- Respond to comments and messages to show you appreciate interaction.
- Use images and video but avoid text-heavy images which are difficult to read on mobile devices. Keep a store of images to hand for social media use.
- Ask your visitors to follow you on social media, tag your business or leave reviews to spread the word and help you build up a following.

Be realistic about the time that you can commit to social media. If you are involved in a larger community tourism project or collaborative marketing in your local community, make sure you invest enough resources to produce a vibrant and compelling campaign.

Collaborative marketing

Some of the most vibrant marketing in recent years has been driven by destination marketing groups which bring community tourism projects together with private tourism operators and other stakeholders to form a larger, umbrella-style, community tourism group. Some of these groups are organised around towns or villages, while others are structured around clusters created by food networks, walking routes and other areas or topics of interest.

Collaborative marketing is important because it:

- Gives visitors a sense of the whole area and what it has to offer.
- Helps people in different market segments to find what works for them.
- Makes it easier and more affordable for your project to be represented at promotional events such as county fairs and trade events.
- Ensures good local awareness of your offer, which drives recommendations.
- Amplifies your message for domestic and international visitors.

Remember, visitors are unlikely to travel a long way for a single, hour-long experience. To win them over, you will need to help them understand that your destination has a strong claim on their attention.

Collaborative marketing projects help visitors to understand the full range of things to see and do in your area, and they often share information on places to stay and eat too. They explain the character of your location, and they can put your messaging in context, as well as sharing it with people who are already warm to the idea of visiting your area. These kinds of projects take two forms.

The West Waterford Festival of Food has used collaborative marketing to boost the visibility of local food and showcase local producers, increasing visitor numbers along the way!

*See Case Studies,
Section 7*



Offline

Tourist offices, community cafés and ambassador programmes provide face-to-face support and recommendations to visitors. It is important to make sure that you share your information with them and update it regularly so that you continue to benefit from their help. A personal recommendation will carry much more weight with a passing visitor than a brochure will on its own.

Online

Many projects operate almost entirely online. These types of collaborative marketing projects can do a lot to amplify your message by featuring your experiences on their websites, sharing your posts and creating marketing campaigns that help you to access overseas markets.

Community tourism projects with an online focus target visitors outside your community, and so their efforts are generally less visible to locals than more traditional forms of marketing, but in recent years this kind of project has been important in helping to drive up the numbers of international visitors who make use of community-based tourism experiences.

When your message works well as part of a local or regional story, the chances of it being shared and getting attention will rise.

Online or offline, collaboration at local level can help you to add depth to your offer, putting it in context for the visitor and helping them to realise that your area and your project match their interests. Local collaboration can give you access to local knowledge and expertise and it can encourage longer stays and greater spend. Over time, it can drive season extension too as rising visitor numbers give businesses and community tourism initiatives the confidence to extend their operating periods or increase the range of programmes they deliver.

5.3. How to sell through other channels

Indirect sales channels make your experience available through an intermediary. That intermediary might be a tour operator or an online selling platform like Airbnb Experiences, for example. Your offer is then sold or re-sold to the end user. Traditionally, indirect channels have been best suited to large-scale tourism enterprises, but over time they have become widely used by all sorts of other tourism projects.

- Don't assume that your project is too small to interest tour operators. There is a trend towards smaller, specialist or themed trips for individuals who share similar interests. This type of group travel often involves an average of 12 to 16 passengers rather than coach-style groups.
- Consider listing with online travel agencies. They can put your offer in front of lots of potential visitors who may not find you otherwise.

Working with tour operators and online travel agencies will not be right for everyone. They have a lot of power in the international travel market, but their influence is matched by high commission rates.

If you are interested in exploring this route to market, talk to your local Fáilte Ireland team and take advantage of training that will help you to make the most of the opportunities indirect channels offer.



CREATE A SALES ACTION PLAN

Whichever routes to market you choose you need to have a Sales Action Plan in place as part of your overall plan. It can be a simple, one-page document or something more detailed if you are managing a larger project. The most important thing is to take the selling of your experiences seriously and plan effectively to win the kinds of visitors you want to attract.

Remember that all sales – direct and indirect – involve a cost per acquisition. You need to factor the costs of winning visitors into your overall plans.

**TOP
TIP**

5.4. Network effectively

'Ní neart go cur le chéile' is a seanfhocal often used as a tagline by community tourism businesses in Ireland, and the idea that there is 'no strength without unity' is a powerful one. A collaborative spirit lies behind individual projects as well as community-wide efforts, and it will continue to inform our combined work to ensure that the community tourism sector in Ireland fulfils its potential.

Connections with partners outside your core team can provide you with the information, practical support, funding and technical advice you need to create your plans and deliver on them. To help your tourism project thrive and become sustainable, you need a shared sense of purpose within your team and your community, but you also need to source advice and supports from a wider circle of people and organisations.

On a national level, collaboration and partnership can help to connect community tourism projects with each other and with partners who can support their ambitions.

If community tourism projects combine their local strengths with insights and supports from outside, then they can become truly dynamic contributors to the regeneration of their communities and the Irish visitor experience. It is a good idea to make sure you are not missing opportunities to build connections that can help you move forward with your ideas.

The Burren Ecotourism Network was named as one of Lonely Planet's 30 'Best in Travel' destinations for 2021 for the way it uses a community network to encourage 'slow tourism, local engagement and greater responsibility for all in the area.'

*See Case Studies,
Section 7*

5.4.1. Local networks

In developing your plan and building your experiences, you will already have improved your connections at a local level. Make sure that your project is doing everything it can to show its connections with your local area and its community:

- **Bring stories to life through connected experiences** – make connections through interpretation, storytelling and guiding, as well as recommendations and self-guided itineraries among other strategies. For example, you might create a self-guided tour or event series that encourages visitors to explore Viking connections or industrial heritage in your area.
- **Connect stories and offers using local infrastructure** (e.g. Blueways, Greenways and walking and cycling routes) and commercial services (e.g. bike or boat hire).
- **Collaborate with local events** – add a community element to a local event programme or host a festival event to increase local footfall, dwell time and spend.
- **Partner with attractions** – commercial attractions and OPW sites which have strong visitor recognition can help to drive visitors to your own project. Make sure their teams know about what you are doing and explore any potential connections or collaborations that can improve footfall and extend the tourist season.
- **Contribute to local improvements** – align your plans with town and village enhancement schemes and collaborate with local groups to make sure that enhancements are improving rather than complicating the visitor experience. Measuring social impact is very important because it allows you to share evidence of your contribution to the local community. This evidence can also help you to access support via grants and work schemes.
- **Share what you love about your place** – in your packages and on your website and social media pages, share what you love about your natural environment and heritage, as well as your enjoyment of local tourism experiences and services.

If there is a local tourism network, make sure your project is part of it – if there isn't one in place, set it up. Partners such as Coillte, the National Monuments Service, the Office of Public Works, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Irish Lights and Bord Iascaigh Mhara can all work with you to improve the visitor experience.

SELL YOUR DESTINATION WELL

For tips on creating or optimising a destination-focused group, see Fáilte Ireland's Destination marketing resources at

<https://covid19.failteireland.ie/business-supports/sales-and-marketing/>

**TOP
TIP**

Local Media

Establish good relationships with the teams in your local newspapers and community radio stations to win coverage of launches, planned events, activities and project news. When you feature in local news and advertising, you remind people that your attraction, amenity or festival is there for them to enjoy. A lively community helps to sustain genuinely local media and so these relationships are good for your community in lots of ways.



5.4.2. Regional networks

Lots of great collaboration is already going on between projects and regional organisations of all kinds. Local Authorities and their tourism and enterprise officers (and other teams focused on arts, heritage and the environment in particular) have been actively supporting projects like yours for many years. Fáilte Ireland's regional teams work closely with a wide range of community-based tourism projects too, and the regional experience brands are a key part of efforts to encourage visitors to explore right across Ireland.

Most of the people involved in community-based tourism already understand the importance of working to support their county's and their region's efforts to attract visitors and bring them to their own area. You can use your plan to make sure everyone in your team sees the benefits of helping to promote rich and rewarding visits to your region.

Many areas have Destination / Visitor Experience Development Plans in place or in progress. These plans involve a wide range of agencies and community groups which work in partnership to implement actions designed to improve the visitor experience and the clarity of what each region offers. It will be important to engage with these plans which help to:

- **Build up local and regional awareness about available visitor experiences.**
- **Improve mechanisms for referring on visitors and cross-selling.**
- **Promote themes and connections that support existing and emerging projects.**
- **Enable collaboration and knowledge-sharing.**

Positive partnerships with local authorities, national development agencies and statutory agencies, as well as your local partners, can all bring visitors and benefits to your local community.

The Blackwater Eco Tours team has developed relationships with neighbours along the River Blackwater to build visitor appeal and support local employment.

See Case Studies, Section 7

Click here for more information



5.4.3. National networks

Whether you are in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands or Ireland's Ancient East, in Dublin or on the Wild Atlantic Way, your regional experience brand is what connects you to the bigger picture of what Ireland has to offer. Visitors who are looking at Ireland from the outside are funnelled towards communities when they take an interest in those brands.

When you support national tourism marketing campaigns on social media, you give your offer much greater visibility than you can achieve alone on a small marketing budget. Occasional mentions in national newspapers or features on TV programmes such as 'Nationwide' can also help to promote your project on the national stage. Send in press releases about new developments or unique events to gain attention for your work and keep your local Council and Fáilte Ireland teams informed about your news too.

The training programmes and other supports mentioned in this toolkit will help to create an environment that helps community-based tourism groups to flourish. You should also look for opportunities to connect with projects like yours across Ireland, so that you can share ideas and insights and identify any opportunities for collaborative marketing. A network of projects that focus on Ireland's industrial heritage might be able to gain more attention than any one site, for example. Ireland's Pilgrim Trails have worked together very successfully to gain cut-through at national and international levels.

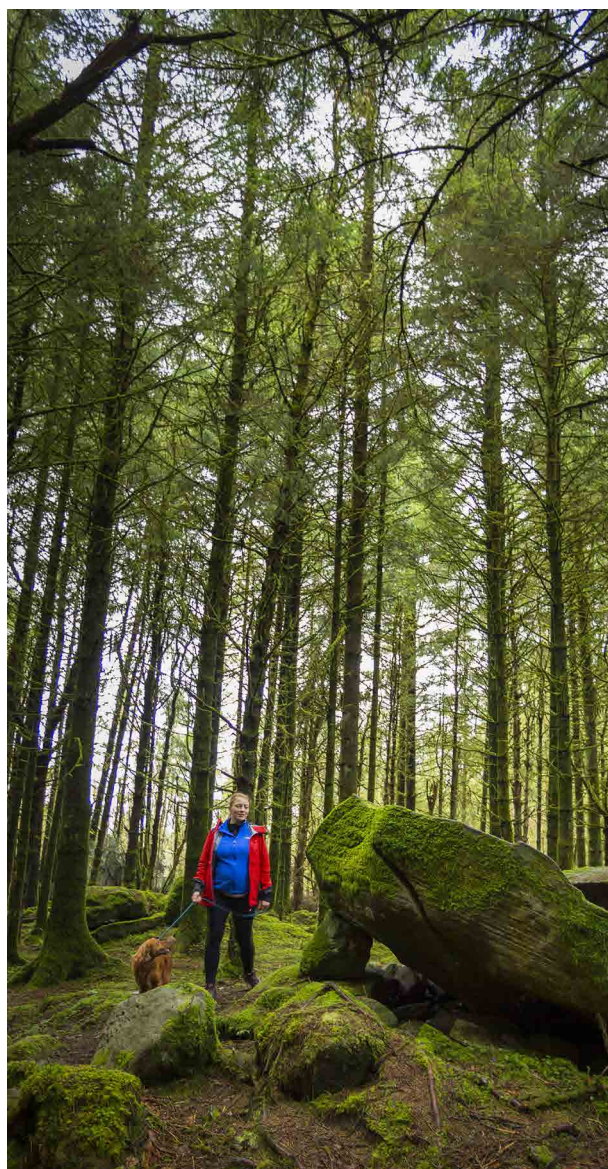
5.4.4. International networks

Some projects can make use of international funding and support, thanks to the availability of European Union (EU) funding opportunities that can be won over and above those offered through the LEADER programme (an EU fund administered within the state). For example, projects in border counties can avail of inter-community and cross-border resources delivered through programmes including InterReg and PEACE.

Elsewhere, areas that feature in EuroVelo routes can investigate related projects, which often include community projects of various kinds, and there are other thematic opportunities available that represent opportunities for community groups.

Post-Brexit supports may also present opportunities to create or improve relationships with European partners.

Local Authorities and other agencies with experience of participating in European projects will be useful partners if you decide to pursue funding and development through international channels.



6

Recover Together



Tourism projects and partnerships – in communities, counties and regions across Ireland – provide a vibrant and rich set of things to see and do, offering unique experiences of place, heritage, culture and community that are enriching for all.

The COVID-19 crisis has presented our communities and our industry with an unprecedented set of challenges. The road to recovery is going to feature a new set of problems. A strategic approach to project development and the community sector can help us all to navigate our way forward.



This toolkit will support your organisation's efforts to rebuild the capacity of your community-based tourism project. The recommendations in section 3 will help you find ways to re-establish the appeal of your project to both domestic (short-term) and international (medium to long-term) visitors. Use them to inspire your team, as well as to reinvigorate your project and maximise its contribution to economic growth in your community.

Stay tuned to emerging trends in tourism so that you can continue to adapt and flourish as circumstances change by plugging into Fáilte Ireland's consumer research on the types of experiences and destinations that are appealing to visitors and searching out other sources of information too. Use the recommendations, tips and ideas you find in the toolkit and your research to help you focus on delivering high-quality, memorable experiences that make the most of what you have to offer. Understand which market you should be targeting and the best ways for you to promote to and connect with the audience you are aiming to attract. Equip your project with best-in-class operational and marketing plans, good budgeting, and a defined set of objectives too, and you will be setting your tourism project firmly on the road to recovery.



Greater collaboration is key to the recovery and growth of sustainable community tourism. By sharing insights and raising standards across the sector, we can add richness, quality, depth and variety to the visitor experience in every part of Ireland and contribute to the social and economic recovery of our communities at the same time. Be sure to get involved in networks and partnerships, because they can help you to stay in touch with trends and opportunities as you navigate the uncertain times ahead.



Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities and a wide range of agencies are committed to helping community tourism fulfil its potential in the months and years ahead. Their insights, experience and practical supports will all play their part in the recovery of communities hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences. Make sure you take advantage of the research, networking, training and practical assistance they provide. A collaborative approach, combined with the passion for place and the welcome at the heart of every community-based tourism project, can revitalise Irish tourism and the local communities it helps to sustain.

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Case Studies

A National Project: Beara-Breifne Way [IHH, WAW, IAE]

Jim O'Sullivan wanted to commemorate O'Sullivan Bere's 1603 march from West Cork's Beara peninsula to Leitrim, and he understood the impact that could be produced if tourists followed a 14-day walking route in O'Sullivan Bere's footsteps through small communities or dipped in to complete the route over several trips. Jim worked with the local tourism organisation he leads (Beara Tourism) and a further 60 community groups along the walking route to bring his vision to life. The Heritage Council has supported the project since 2001 and the route incorporates 12 local walking trails in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Offaly, Galway, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan.



The Beara-Breifne Way has gained a national profile, and in the process it has brought visitors to route sections, like the Suck Valley Way, which were also established through community-level collaboration. A cycleway is being developed, and one section already features a bridleway. Jim is working with a range of agencies to realise the new vision of creating a walking route that stretches across the whole island of Ireland.

Cross-County Collaboration: The Suck Valley Way [IHH]

The Suck Valley Way was developed by the River Suck Valley Development Cooperative, which was formed in 1991 to develop tourism across counties Roscommon and Galway. With the help of Fáilte Ireland, the walking route was opened in 1997. The Roscommon LEADER Partnership now manages the trail and it works in partnership with the Roscommon and Galway Rural Social Schemes and County Councils, as well as Coillte and 82 Walks Scheme participants. Involvement in the Beara-Breifne Way has helped to give the Suck Valley Way greater visibility, and the trail also benefits from its involvement in promoting Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.



Supporting and Improving Local Tourism: Burren Eco-Tourism Network [WAW]

This network of tourism enterprises was set up with the objective of establishing the Burren as a premier, internationally-recognised sustainable tourism region to ensure the future economic and social growth and sustainable development of its communities, environment and heritage. BEN supports training, mentoring and accreditation in sustainable tourism for its members and for businesses interested in joining the network, and it works to make the Burren a place where best practice can be found. Its members support each other in a number of ways, including cross-promotion, and they work with 'one voice' to get their message across.

The Burren Ecotourism Network and the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark have enjoyed a special relationship since 2008 when the network was founded by the Burren Connect Project. The two organisations now work in partnership to promote responsible tourism that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.



Volunteer-led Free Attraction: James Joyce Martello Tower [DUBLIN]

The famous tower in Sandycove, Co. Dublin, opened as a museum on Bloomsday in 1962 thanks to the efforts of Dublin artist John Ryan. Ryan organised the first Bloomsday celebration in 1954 with the writer Brian O'Nolan, famously known as Flann O'Brien (Flann O'Brien is surely one of the most illustrious names involved in Irish community-based tourism).

Though there have been difficulties along the way, the museum has been managed successfully by the Friends of Joyce Tower Society since 2012, and its trained volunteers keep this free attraction open every day of the year. The tower's operations are supported by visitor donations.



Non-Profit Social Enterprise: Rathcroghan Visitor Centre [IHH]

Rathcroghan Visitor Centre is a non-profit community social enterprise located in the medieval village of Tulsk, Co. Roscommon. Visitors find a constantly evolving interpretive experience, a community café that focuses on local produce and a gift shop which features local crafts. Most importantly, they are introduced to the internationally significant archaeological landscape of Rathcroghan, referred to in medieval literature as CruachanAí.

The centre was established as a company limited by guarantee. Its team promote, protect and conserve Rathcroghan's sites and use heritage tourism to produce social and economic benefits, including jobs, for the communities in Tulsk and Rathcroghan.

The original centre, which opened on 31st October 1999 – in time to mark the festival of Samhain – was funded in partnership with Fáilte Ireland as part of a flagship project to promote tourism in an area where little development had occurred. In 2013, the centre and its interpretation were refreshed as part of a project supported by Roscommon LEADER funding. The project team's members describe themselves as 'heritage custodians' as they, and the centre, share the landscape and its stories with visitors.



Productive Partnerships: Hook Lighthouse [IAE]

When the Hook Lighthouse was converted to automatic operation in 1996, work began to convert Ireland's oldest operational lighthouse into a visitor centre, and the centre welcomed its first visitors in 2001. The lighthouse is still operated remotely by Irish Lights but the site has also become a beacon for Wexford tourism and for family days out in Ireland. Hook Lighthouse has 220,000 visitors a year, and its team collaborate with other local businesses on the peninsula to maximise the benefits of these visits for everyone from accommodation owners to local food producers.



A focus on honing insights and developing an understanding of how to drive visitor demand have been essential to the success of Hook Heritage. The team has targeted the international market and taken steps such as adding online booking and adding saleable visitor experiences, including an Ireland's Ancient East tour. Innovation and practical work to achieve year-round growth has seen the attraction quickly climb national visitor rankings – quite an achievement for an 800-year-old structure that has a maximum capacity of 30 people.

After a strategic review, Hook Lighthouse redeveloped its tour experience and maximised its tour slots by adding evening and early morning tours, as well as food experiences and seasonal events. Hook Heritage has also been working with Fáilte Ireland and Wexford County Council to further develop its visitor experience, and it has ambitious plans to explore the shipwreck stories around the peninsula's coastline, deepening its story as well as its appeal to visitors.

Targeted Product Development: Blackwater Eco Tours [IAE]

Blackwater Eco Tours is a not-for-profit ecotourism company developed by the Villierstown Education & Culture Project Ltd (a company limited by guarantee). It expanded into tourism for the first time and focused on attracting adventurous visitors in key market segments who would enjoy ecologically focused experiences, pod accommodation, river activities and walking trails in the Blackwater River Valley.

The team has developed relationships with neighbours along the River Blackwater. Visitors stay in the village's community 'pods' and travel by kayak or boat to access heritage gardens and explore food outlets in neighbouring villages upriver. There are plans to link to the Waterford Greenway too. The project has been supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and by Pobal through the Community Services Programme.



Specialist Interest: National Maritime Museum [DUBLIN]

Drawing on a personal collection amassed in the early 1940s by Col. Tony Lawlor, who founded the Maritime Institute of Ireland to preserve and present all aspects of marine life, the National Maritime Museum found a home in Dún Laoghaire's Mariners' Church in 1974.

It showcases a wide range of objects, instruments, pictures, paintings and documents relating to Ireland's colourful maritime heritage, and it is operated by volunteers. The museum makes use of a community employment scheme provided by the Department of Social Protection to run its operations throughout the year, and it also uses ticket sales, a membership scheme and donations to fund its ongoing development.



Growing a Reputation for Great Food: West Waterford Festival of Food [IAE]

The festival tells the food story of the West Waterford region and showcases local food and producers. Its popular programme includes demonstrations and markets, but also incorporates trails and tours which make use of infrastructure like the Waterford Greenway and trails in the Comeraghs to encourage dwell time and spend and widen the range of communities it benefits. The festival partners with local Irish companies. Local businesses also provide the festival with support by signing up to its Friends Circle, which helps to support its ongoing development and sustainability. The voluntary board behind the festival has made use of Fáilte Ireland's Taste the Island (TTI) initiative to extend its impact and the tourist season in their area. The festival team promoted a set of Bus Bia tours through the Taste the Island programme in 2019, using TTI's profile to bring in visitors who went out to visit Waterford's local producers as part of an event series that ran from September through to the end of November.



Art Makes an Impact: Pittenween Arts Festival

[FIFE, SCOTLAND]

The small Fife village of Pittenween is taken over for nine days each August with exhibitions that reach beyond galleries into people's homes, gardens and garages. The festival was established by artists with education in mind back in 1982, and the programme now encompasses everything from poetry and film to a torch-lit procession and fireworks. A part-time coordinator and many volunteers have grown the festival, which now attracts over 25,000 visitors per year and adds around £1.2m to the Fife economy. Its success has allowed organisers to build a small base which serves as a cultural hub for local residents. The festival has received funding supports from Fife Council, LEADER, the European Regional Development Fund and schemes run by the UK's National Lottery.

Increasing Dwell Time: McKenzie River Valley Mountain Biking Network

[OREGON, US]

With too many tourists driving through their area of Oregon or clustering on heavily used trails in the centre of the state, the residents of the McKenzie River Valley wanted to give visitors a reason to stop in their region with the added benefit that this would take pressure off over-used areas.

A group of small communities built a strong partnership with the Forest Service to improve the accessibility and attractiveness of an under-utilised network of backcountry trails in the Willamette National Forest for mountain bikers. They mapped a workable bike trail, developed a long-term plan that would allow them to connect to a nearby cycling hub and devised maps and information to help persuade mountain bikers to stop in their area.

The project benefitted from a training programme and matched funds offered by Travel Oregon. An early award from a mountain-biking organisation boosted the project's profile, and it also made the most of substantial Local Authority funding drawn from a trails programme and practical ongoing support from the local Forest Service, whose staff helped with things like application-writing as well as trail-based support.

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Resources & Templates



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Templates

Use our online templates as you plan to take your community-based tourism project to the next level.

Business Plan and Financial Templates

A template to help you with the preparation of a business plan and associated finances.

**PLEASE CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD
TEMPLATES FOR BUSINESS PLAN**

**PLEASE CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD
TEMPLATES FOR CASHFLOW**

Reshaping the Experience (domestic)

Includes Saleable Experience templates, videos, PPTs and best practice case studies

<https://covid19.failteireland.ie/business-supports/sales-and-marketing/driving-domestic-sales/reshaping-experience-offer/>

Reshaping the Experience (B2B International)

Includes Saleable Experience templates, videos, PPTs and best practice case studies

<https://covid19.failteireland.ie/business-supports/sales-and-marketing/>

Useful resources, guides & toolkits

A Toolkit for Storytelling Interpretation

<https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Irelands%20Ancient%20East/Storytelling-Interpretation-How-to-Help-Visitors-Experience-Your-Story.pdf>

This helpful toolkit explores the different ways you can tell stories to visitors and it includes practical advice on matters such as signage and interpretation. While it focuses on Ireland's Ancient East stories in its examples, the ideas it presents can be used wherever your project is based.

COVID-19 Support Hub

<https://covid19.failteireland.ie/>

In consultation with industry experts, Fáilte Ireland has created an extensive range of business supports to guide tourism enterprises through these unprecedented times. It includes information and advice on a wide range of issues that will be relevant to community-based tourism projects.

Ireland's Content Pool

irelandscontentpool.com

Ireland's Content Pool is an online library of free promotional images, video copy and other marketing assets. You can add and download images through the site, which is widely used by tourism agencies, industry and media in the marketing and promotion of Ireland.

Potential funders

Local Funding Sources

- **Local Authorities** – financial and technical, particularly tourism, supports from various departments.
- **Local Enterprise Offices** – enterprise development supports on an ongoing basis for different programmes.
- **Rural Development Programme/ RDP Leader Partnerships** – projects can avail of financial support (capital grants), training and support with capacity building. Also available are supports that encourage network development, trails development, youth job activation and work experience placements.

Regional

- **EU InterReg** – funding available for pan-European collaborative projects.
- **SEUPB/ Cross-Border** – funding available to border counties such as Louth, Cavan and Monaghan (although it is unclear how/whether this will be administered post-BREXIT).
- **Bord Iascaigh Mhara** – project funding available for maritime counties. e.g. FLAG

National

- **Tús scheme** – provides 'hands on' supports for maintenance of grounds, trails and other infrastructure, but requires supervision.
- **Rural Social Service (RSS) scheme** – help with maintenance and upkeep of facilities, trails, grounds etc, supporting farmers or fishermen whose income is categorised as inadequate.
- **POBAL Community Services Programme** – employment supports in particular.

Other

- **Irish Social Enterprise Network** – offering leadership and management training to members.
- **Philanthropic donations** – potential for philanthropists or members of the Irish diaspora to support local projects, using 'Friends Of' or similar initiatives.