



COIMISIÚN
FORBARTHA
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WESTERN
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION

Connected Communities, Global Relationships

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research on Diaspora Engagement in the West and Northwest of Ireland.

Emigration has been one of the defining forces in the history of the West and Northwest of Ireland. Across generations, people from this region have left to build lives elsewhere, often in difficult circumstances, while maintaining enduring ties to home, family and community. That experience has shaped our society, our economy and our sense of identity, and its effects continue to be felt across the region today.

Through its work as a regional development agency, the Western Development Commission has always had a strong sense of the scale and value of the enduring relationships that continue to link people and communities in the West and Northwest with people in other parts of Ireland and across Britain, North America, Australia and many other parts of the world.

But we wanted to know more about these relationships...

- Who was doing the connecting?
- What did it look like?
- What were the outcomes and success stories?
- What were the challenges?
- Were there supports or initiatives which could enable that work to become more effective, more coordinated, more sustainable?

METHODOLOGY
Mixed-methods
approach



Regional survey

240 responses representing
178 organisations and groups



Interviews



9 Case studies

Five Key Findings

1

Diaspora engagement is primarily relationship-led. For most respondents, diaspora engagement is rooted in staying connected, achieving mutual benefit and sustaining relationships over time. Other outcomes, including fundraising and investment, are important, but they are more likely to be built on top of those relationships than to replace them.

2

There is a strong base of existing activity, with nearly half of respondents already engaged and a significant proportion seeking to expand their efforts further. So there is already strong commitment, a wide range of interesting work, and a clear willingness to build on that foundation. With the right support in place, that work could become more effective, coordinated and sustainable.

3

Groups usually know what to do. Many have lengthy and varied experience of diaspora engagement, have a clear idea of what works and what doesn't and are ambitious in terms of the further possibilities. But there are often difficulties identifying and reaching the right people, sustaining engagement over time, and having the people and resources needed to meet the potential which exists.

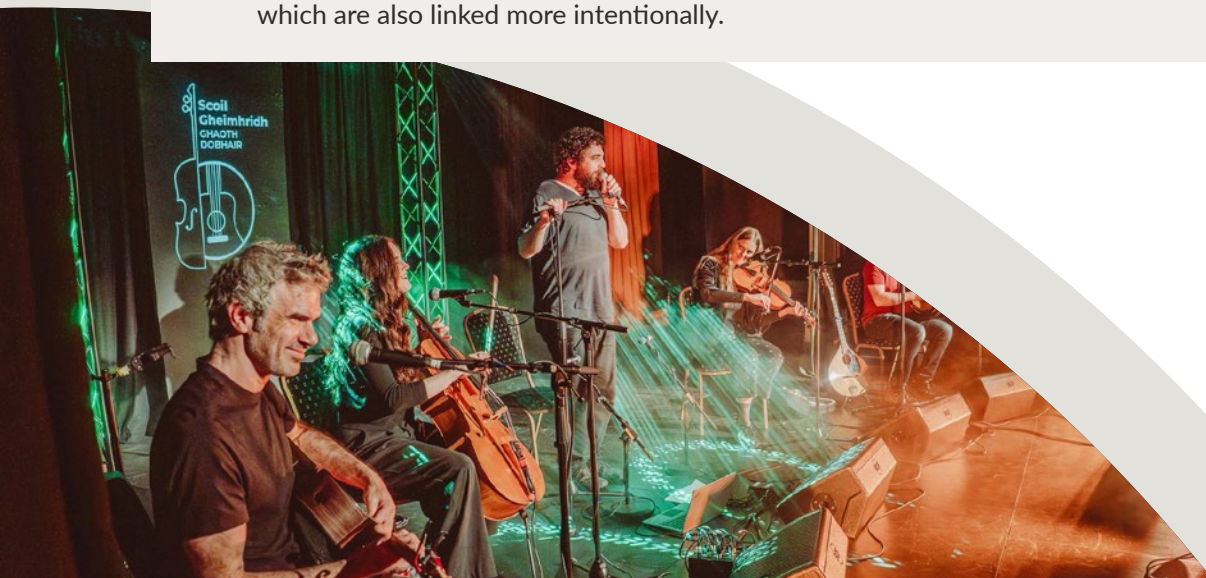
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There is a high level of interest among groups and individuals in additional supports to build and improve diaspora engagement. The stronger demand is for collaboration, networking and shared infrastructure rather than for standalone supports. People largely want opportunities to work with others, to learn from others and to reduce duplication.

5

Some types of organisations, and especially those in the public sector or where there are long-standing professional roles are better placed to build long-term continuity. They usually have more capacity to engage in ongoing relationship building, to attending important diaspora events and to following up on promising linkages and opportunities over time. Other group and individuals, especially those involved in local community development, family reunions, sport, culture and local heritage may lack some of this capacity but are typically strong at local reach and responsiveness, at drawing on personal connections and at providing a sense of welcome.

These are complementary rather than competing models. Diaspora engagement is likely to be strongest where these different roles are supported in ways which are suited to their needs but which are also linked more intentionally.



What does engagement look like?

- Diaspora engagement is widely distributed across sectors, with strong representation from community development, economic development, heritage, culture and tourism. This highlights the cross-cutting nature of the activity and its relevance across many policy areas.
- In line with this, the activities are also hugely varied. Case studies highlight business and philanthropic investments sought and achieved but also community festivals as sites of homecoming and reconnection, the development of academic connections and studies, diaspora members bringing their expertise and passion to community planning, ongoing linkages between GAA clubs and their players and supporters globally and a growing number of exciting initiatives in heritage and genealogy.
- Geographically, engagement is concentrated in the United States, England, Scotland and other parts of Ireland, reflecting historic migration patterns. This is also reflected in the fact that long-term emigrants and people of Irish descent are the core audiences.
- Delivery is shared between volunteers, staff and individuals engaging for personal reasons, creating a hybrid system that is both resilient and fragile. While volunteer-led efforts provide reach, authenticity and goodwill, they often lack sustained support and infrastructure.
- Current engagement is often intermittent and heavily reliant on social media, events and newsletters. Although these channels are effective for maintaining contact, they can be resource-intensive and difficult to sustain without additional support.
- While there are good relationships with the 'known' diaspora, there are real difficulties in reaching the 'unknown diaspora', limiting the potential for growth and broader engagement.



Recommendations

Each recommendation responds directly to the challenges and opportunities identified in the research, with a focus on practical supports that can enable more coordinated, effective and resilient diaspora engagement across the region.



Strategic Leadership and Coordination

Recommendation 1: Establish a dedicated diaspora engagement post at regional level

Recommendation 2: Develop a regional diaspora framework and implementation plan for the West and Northwest

Recommendation 3: Build in ongoing consultation and light-touch metrics from the start



Shared Infrastructure and Capacity

Recommendation 4: Build shared infrastructure that reduces pressure and strengthens continuity

Recommendation 5: Invest in shared communications capacity, not just communications training

Recommendation 6: Design supports for intermittent capacity and mixed delivery models



Collaboration, Networks and Learning

Recommendation 7: Create regular structures for collaboration, peer learning and exchange



Targeting, Audiences and Reach

Recommendation 8: Prioritise key geographies while keeping flexibility

Recommendation 9: Develop a more differentiated approach to engaging with the diaspora

Recommendation 10: Make it easier to reach the “unknown diaspora”



From Connection to Impact

Recommendation 11: Support organisations to move from first contact to meaningful involvement

Recommendation 12: Ensure support for vulnerable diaspora is recognised within the wider model

