



FINAL REPORT

December 2013

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FOREWORD

The Gathering Ireland 2013 has been described as “the largest ever tourism initiative” in Ireland. But, as the project gained momentum throughout the year, it became much more than that. With over 5,000 events organised by families, communities and other groups in every part of the country, this truly was a ‘People’s Project’ that captured the imagination and provided the platform to welcome and host our visitors from across the globe.

This report provides an analysis of the project and outlines the results and achievements under the relevant project headings. The report includes research results and impact measurements on visitor numbers as well as the social and community benefits arising from the project. Key conclusions and recommendations are included at the end of each chapter with an Executive Summary outlining the principal recommendations at the front of the report. While full end year data on visitor numbers is not yet available at the time of writing this report, this data will not affect the conclusions or the recommendations.

An independent Economic Impact Study of The Gathering is underway with a final report due in April 2014. Preliminary findings from this study are included in Chapter 7 and in the Executive Summary. A Social and Community Impact study is also underway with a report also due in spring 2014.

I wish to thank all who contributed to making The Gathering a success. We had a fantastic core team working full-time on the project with great support from staff in Fáilte Ireland and in Tourism Ireland. The staff in local authorities around the country also played a key role in rolling out the project at local level. Many others in various arms of government and state agencies also lent their support for which we are very grateful. We also want to acknowledge the great support from the many private sector partners that got behind the project.

Finally, I want to thank the many thousands of people in every part of Ireland that enthusiastically responded to The Gathering call and organised the huge variety of events that provided the heart and soul of The Gathering. It is to them and to those who travelled from overseas to celebrate The Gathering year that we owe our most special thanks.

Jim Miley
Project Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the main conclusions and recommendations arising from The Gathering Ireland 2013. More detailed conclusions and recommendations are included at the end of each Chapter.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall Impact

1. The Gathering succeeded in achieving its ambitious goal of engaging the people of Ireland to invite diaspora and friends to attend over 5,000 special Gathering events right across the country. The power of personal invitations was one of the great successes of The Gathering.
2. Preliminary estimates by independent consultants show that the project delivered at least 250,000 to 275,000 incremental tourists in 2013 that would not have visited Ireland but for The Gathering. The additional revenue generated by these tourists is estimated conservatively to be €170 million. The final independent Economic Impact Report will be published in April 2014.
3. In addition to the economic value, The Gathering has delivered a social dividend with a very positive impact on communities in every part of Ireland and has helped to bring about a renewed sense of community spirit. An independent Social & Community Impact Report will be published when finalised in March/April 2014.
4. The Gathering was delivered within its approved budget of €13m from the Department for Transport, Tourism & Sport. It also succeeded in leveraging substantial third-party cash and in-kind supports estimated to be worth in the region of €8m.

Structure & Governance

5. The lead-in time to plan The Gathering and set up the necessary structure was not adequate for a project such as this which, as a brand new concept, required specific resourcing and a purpose-built organisational structure. While the short lead-in time did not ultimately impact significantly on overall project delivery, crucial project planning was impeded while governance structures were still being finalised.
6. The Gathering was set up as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fáilte Ireland with the operational project rolled out by the two state tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. This structure added a degree of complexity that would not exist with a single dedicated team and management with full executive powers.

Citizen and Community Engagement

7. The model used by The Gathering for Citizen and Community Activation worked extremely well. The active support of the Local Authorities in setting up a collaborative framework for The Gathering that would enable effective local roll-out was a critical success factor. The Gathering Coordinators played a pivotal role at a county / city level.
8. The eager adoption of The Gathering by citizens and local communities, especially in rural Ireland, vastly exceeded expectations. The enormous voluntary effort in making The Gathering a success is evidence of the on-going power of community and had a significant

impact on generating 5,000 national events, many in counties that would not typically be regarded as tourist destinations.

9. The online open access website for registering of Gathering events was a very successful innovation. However, the time constraints during project set-up demanded quick decisions on technology solutions and contractors that could have been done more cost effectively had a longer lead-in time been available.

Partners & Strategic Alliances

10. The range of supports received from partners, public and private, made a substantial contribution to the success of The Gathering. The support of lead partners, the DAA and IPB, was especially helpful in the crucial areas of marketing and visitor welcome and in cash support for flagship events across the country.
11. The cross-governmental support for The Gathering, championed by the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, helped directly in addressing key project needs and also contributed to building a national support base on a collaborative model.
12. The Volunteer Gathering Ambassador Programme run in cooperation with Volunteer Ireland had a successful outcome and provided some useful operational lessons which can be considered in future projects. Likewise, the Ireland Reaching Out partnership succeeded in its dual goals of broadening the support base for The Gathering and building a national reverse genealogy network.

Events Funding & Supports

13. The overall events funding strategy of providing support for a broad range of large, medium and small-scale events worked well. Many of the larger existing festivals delivered incremental visitors for the Gathering. However, the lessons learnt from the poorer performance of some of the events should be noted especially in relation to the capacity and the timeframe to have a saleable events programme in place to target overseas audiences.
14. The funding support for a small number of larger Gathering-specific events was worthwhile. But, the relatively high cost and the heavy resource requirements to stage and manage new events such as these should be carefully considered for any future projects.
15. The provision of the €1 million IPB Insurance Fund was a welcome boost and addressed an important gap in The Gathering events programme and funding needs at county level. Similarly, the Gathering Community Events Fund, financed from the Gathering budget and administered by local authorities, provided an innovative and flexible solution to the micro-funding requirements of local and community events.
16. The provision of non-cash supports to local events including training on PR, communications and social media was effective especially where the supports were carefully targeted.

Marketing & Communications

17. The Gathering succeeded in its core objectives of raising awareness (87%) among Irish people and encouraged them to engage or 'Be Part of It' with 1 in 3 adults saying they personally invited someone to visit Ireland in 2013. This 'personal invite' was a key factor in delivering on the additional overseas visitor targets.
18. While all media channels contributed to the success of the marketing and communications campaign, the use of well-chosen TV sponsorships and the digital and social media platforms

played a crucial role and delivered best results. Event-specific promotions worked best and were most cost-effective compared with more generic campaigns.

19. PR and media engagement was a vital part of the communications effort and delivered strongly at home and abroad with a total of 8,000+ media placements delivering an estimated Equivalent Advertising Value of €115m. Regional PR proved particularly effective in engaging domestic audiences and accounted for nearly 60% of total coverage. A total of close to 1,500 media trips to Ireland during the year delivered strongly for The Gathering and will, combined with other Gathering promotional efforts, also yield substantial future dividends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Impact

1. The Gathering should not be staged more frequently than on a five-year cycle as it would not be feasible to mobilise the national and international effort to run it successfully on a more frequent basis. A decision on when/if to stage another Gathering should only be taken following consideration of the final Economic Impact and Social and Community Impact Reports due for publication in April 2014.
2. A longer lead-in time is necessary for any such future initiatives. A fully functional project team should be in place at least twelve months prior to the project commencement date.
3. Consideration should also be given to not repeating The Gathering at all and to focus instead on the sustained and on-going development of the legacies of the 2013 Gathering based on the recommendations in this report in the areas of sustained support for events with overseas visitor potential, continued development of the engagement with diaspora networks abroad and the development of local and community-based tourism under the leadership of local authorities.

Structure & Governance

4. The timescale provided to set up a project of the scale of The Gathering was too short. A minimum lead-in of two years is recommended. This is especially critical in ensuring the capacity to promote and market to potential visitors in long-haul markets where the travel decision timeframes are usually 12 months and more in advance.
5. Early definitive decisions on project set-up will also avoid pitfalls and delays in relation to governance and organisational structure which need to be in place well in advance of initiating project operations.
6. Alternative governance structures such as outsourcing project implementation to an independent non-State entity should be considered for future projects like this in order to increase flexibility and cost effectiveness. However, if such an 'arms-length' structure is used, it is essential that linkages to State agency support functions and strong connections with other State institutions are built into the project design.

Citizen and Community Engagement

7. The community activation process for The Gathering with its strong reliance on local partners worked well. The approach used could be applied to other large national or regional projects in tourism or indeed in other sectors.

8. The Gathering has shown that local authorities are best placed to lead out on locally-based community tourism initiatives. It is recommended that community tourism be prioritised as a key strand of economic development by local authorities with appropriate funding allocated by them along with support from LEADER funds and others. This is consistent with the Putting People First local government reform measures which enhances local authorities' role in economic development.
9. The collaborative approach involving national tourism agencies, local authorities, local communities and commercial tourism interests worked very well and should be continued in the future for relevant events and projects.

Partners and Strategic Alliances

10. Active, cross-governmental support is a critical success factor for major national projects such as The Gathering and it requires strong engagement at both the political and executive levels of government.
11. The Ireland Reaching Out national reverse genealogy programme should be supported in order to further develop this important national resource. Ideally, county-by-county support and partnerships with local authorities and LEADER / local development groups may provide the most appropriate linkages as the essence of the IRO initiative is local and parish-based. This has the potential to be an important legacy from The Gathering.

Events Funding and Support

12. The requirement to deliver a specified target number of overseas visitors should be a core condition of State funding for all major events and festivals with provision made for independently verified results.
13. The event grant-funding cycle by Fáilte Ireland should be changed with grant decisions made and funding contracts in place no later than mid-year for events scheduled to take place in the following year. This will enable event organisers, in partnership with the tourism agencies, to implement a timely overseas promotional programme for key events.
14. Tourism Ireland, working in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, should develop a bespoke overseas marketing and promotions model for all key events receiving funding.
15. Micro-funding of smaller scale local community events should be continued with Local Authorities best placed to implement such a funding support scheme. This should be supported, where possible, by LEADER funds.

Marketing and Communications

16. The success of The Gathering in engaging with key diaspora groups abroad should be developed further as a priority part of on-going tourism promotion overseas. Tourism Ireland should include diaspora engagement as an intrinsic part of their marketing strategy with specific budgets allocated annually based on defined targets and objectives. Such initiatives should form part of the wider government strategy on diaspora engagement.
17. Budgets should be prioritised for event-specific promotions that have the capacity to yield the highest return of overseas visitors. Close collaboration is required between Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland in selecting events to be funded and supported for marketing overseas to ensure maximum return on investment for State funds.

18. Social media and digital communications offer a cost-effective opportunity to micro-target key diaspora groups. It is important that event organisers are given appropriate supports by the tourism agencies to harness the potential of social media.
19. The power of the 'personal invitation' from people in Ireland to friends, relatives and affinity groups abroad should continue to be harnessed and developed. To achieve this, an integrated approach to events funding and related marketing and communications supports by the tourism agencies is essential.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

The Gathering Ireland 2013 was initiated by Fáilte Ireland in response to the declining fortunes of the tourism industry in the Republic of Ireland since 2007. The concept of The Gathering received the support of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar TD, and was presented to the Global Irish Forum in October 2011. The initiative was broadly based on The Homecoming 2009 in Scotland which aimed to encourage those with ancestral links to return home for a series of special events and festivals. An Tóstal, a similar event run in Ireland in 1953, also provided some elements of the blueprint for the project.

The global diaspora population is estimated to be in excess of 70 million people. The Gathering was designed to motivate members of that diaspora, as well as those with an affinity for Ireland, to come to Ireland to celebrate the best of Irish culture, arts, sports, music and heritage. The project would provide a platform for Irish citizens and communities to organise events and to connect with their ancestral relatives or special interest groups around the world.

With nearly 40 million ancestral Irish, the US accounts for more than half of the global Irish diaspora population and so was a prime focus for The Gathering. Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand were also important Gathering markets. European markets were also included in the Gathering outreach with the emphasis there on those with an affinity as well as an ancestral link with Ireland.

This report sets out a comprehensive summary of the key components of The Gathering Ireland 2013 project. It provides an insight into each key component of the project. It outlines the achievements and identifies areas where there were gaps in delivery or where changes might be made in future projects. It provides relevant recommendations for a future Gathering or for Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to implement as part of their on-going activities on behalf of tourism.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The Gathering has been described as “the largest ever tourism project” in Ireland. Its ultimate aim was to contribute meaningfully to tourism by increasing overseas visitors and tourism revenue. The Gathering was charged with providing an important boost to economic re-growth in this key industry. However, the project aims extended beyond tourism to include social and community objectives and to build lasting relationships with the diaspora. The main aims and objectives of The Gathering were:

- To mobilise citizens, communities and businesses to work collectively and to connect with diaspora groups around the world;
- To attract 325,000 additional overseas visitors to Ireland generating €168m extra tourism revenue and thereby provide additional employment in the tourism industry;

- To promote pride in Ireland and to raise the profile and standing of the country internationally by advertising and publicity (specifically, 200 additional press trips to Ireland);
- To create a platform for on-going and lasting engagement with Ireland's diaspora through the development of contacts and networks in key markets.

1.3 Funding

A designated budget of €12 million was provided for the project by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, €5 million in 2012 and a further €7 million in 2013. This was supplemented by a further €1 million provided by Fáilte Ireland from an allocation originally earmarked for the Irish Open in 2012 which was ultimately held in Northern Ireland.

The €13 million core funding was supplemented by a range of cash and non-cash supports leveraged by The Gathering from key partners. The provision of a substantial range of supports by the Dublin Airport Authority and a €1 million Gathering event fund provided by IPB Insurance Ltd were chief among the partner supports secured.

An outline of these supports is provided in [Chapter 4](#) while an analysis of the budget spend is provided in [Chapter 7](#).

1.4 Staff & Supports

A core team of staff to implement The Gathering was provided by Fáilte Ireland. The number of staff varied from ten to twenty-five at different phases of the project. This was supplemented by three full-time staff provided by Tourism Ireland. In addition to this core team, the combined staff teams of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland provided substantial support for delivery of key components of The Gathering project. This included the active support of Fáilte Ireland regional staff in Ireland and the staff throughout the overseas office network of Tourism Ireland.

The Project Director was engaged through a competitive tender process under a services contract. Additional services in the crucial marketing and digital communications areas were contracted from existing suppliers of Fáilte Ireland.

Further supports were provided by the 34 Local Authorities through the appointment of designated Gathering Coordinators in each city / county. Their role was to lead and drive the local Gathering effort in their area. This was a crucially important element that contributed to the success of the Gathering project at a local level.

1.5 Project Evaluation

The performance of the project against key targets and indicators is provided in Chapter 7. A range of measurement tools have been deployed to critically assess the project, to identify key successes as well as gaps in delivery or lessons for the future. The principal research and measurement initiatives provided are:

- Overseas visitor data as supplied by the Central Statistics Office;
- Gathering-specific visitor data including results of an 1,850 strong survey of Organisers of Gathering events across the country;

- Independent Economic Impact Study by Fitzpatrick & Associates consultants with supporting research from Behaviour & Attitudes. Preliminary findings from this Study are included in this report with the final report to be completed by April 2014;
- Public awareness and sentiment surveys as provided by Ipsos MRBI Omnibus research;
- Tourism industry analysis of the Gathering as measured by independent research consultants;
- Assessment of Social & Community impact of The Gathering from an independent study by DIT Tourism to be published in March/April 2014.

PROJECT ORGANISATION & STRUCTURE

2.1 Legal Structure and Corporate Governance

The Gathering Ireland 2013 was established as a Special Purpose Vehicle under the auspices of Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority for the Republic of Ireland. The project was operated by a separate company, The Gathering Project 2013 Limited (Company No. 21207) the directors of which were Shaun Quinn, CEO, and Deborah Nolan, Finance Director of Fáilte Ireland. The Gathering Project 2013 Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Fáilte Ireland.

The Gathering Project Director and management team reported weekly to the Failte Ireland Management Advisory Committee who in turn report to The Authority / Board of Directors of Fáilte Ireland who hold ultimate responsibility for funds management and project accountability in line with normal governance procedures of Fáilte Ireland. The back office supports and administrative functions for the project were provided by Fáilte Ireland which also supplied the majority of staffing for the project with some additional staff supplied by Tourism Ireland.

The Gathering was very much a non-standard project requiring a different structure and operational framework to that normally used by State agencies. The time pressures on the project and some delays in clearly establishing the governance framework meant that the project planning phase was curtailed which could have undermined the ultimate success of the project. The establishment of the project as a subsidiary of Fáilte Ireland offered the advantages of accessing a ready-made business support structure in Fáilte Ireland including the capacity to access a suite of existing service suppliers. It also ensured that the project had the required status and leverage to garner support from other state organisations and institutions.

However, there were some disadvantages under this structure. The project was subject to the public sector recruitment embargo in line with all semi-state organisations. This raised significant challenges in securing some key skills required to run a major national project such as this. The lack of capacity, given the tight timeframes involved, to directly hire service providers more specific to the project needs also led to a lack of flexibility. The rigid and sometimes slow-moving public procurement procedures which the project was subject to also raised unhelpful challenges in what was a very time sensitive project.

2.2 Key Sponsors & Operational Stakeholders

The Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, Leo Varadkar, TD, was the main project sponsor on behalf of the Irish Government. He was responsible for budget allocation to the project and for securing cross-governmental support for The Gathering. As a priority project, the Minister maintained an active role in ensuring the project was meeting its objectives with monthly review meetings with the Project Director and the senior management team which were also attended by the Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring, TD, and key departmental officials.

Fáilte Ireland was charged with project delivery with its Board / Authority retaining overall governance responsibility for The Gathering. The wider Fáilte Ireland team provided operational support for key components of the project with the regional staff units playing a key role in the interaction with local communities and Gathering groups.

Tourism Ireland had responsibility for promoting the Gathering in key overseas markets through its network of offices. It made The Gathering a strategic priority from early 2012 through to The Gathering year in 2013.

The City and County Managers Association were instrumental at the outset in securing the support of local authorities for the project. They provided designated resources at city/county level to support the project and assist the national rollout and implementation.

Fig 2.1: The Gathering Ireland 2013 Stakeholder Map



2.3 Operational Management and Reporting

The Gathering was overseen by the Project Director with a Senior Management Team covering the key functions including project management, finance & operations, marketing & communications, overseas promotion and community engagement. This included a representative of Tourism Ireland who was charged with responsibility for marketing and promoting The Gathering in overseas markets. The reporting and governance of the project was managed through a series of regular meetings with key stakeholders and project groups.

- The Project Sponsor and primary stakeholder was the Minister for Tourism, Transport and Sport who, together with the Minister of State for Sport and key departmental officials worked closely with the Project Team to deliver on its goals.
- Project oversight, governance and budget responsibility was vested in the Fáilte Ireland Authority / Board of Directors with line responsibility through the CEO and senior management of Fáilte Ireland.

- The national and regional staff in Fáilte Ireland were engaged as part of the national roll-out of the project. They played an important role in supporting the project at a regional and local level by engaging their established networks and securing support across the regions.
- Tourism Ireland was responsible for promoting and marketing The Gathering overseas. One full-time manager and two other staff were assigned for most of the duration of the project. A proportion of The Gathering budget was assigned for overseas promotion and passed through to Tourism Ireland for spending on agreed plans. A type of devolved management approach operated for this component of the project with Tourism Ireland maintaining direct line management control of their staff and the roll-out of The Gathering programme of activities abroad. This demanded a high degree of inter-agency collaboration which was sometimes challenging to achieve.
- A Project Advisory Board (see [Appendix A](#)) provided support and guidance to the Project Team. This comprised of nominees from the tourism agencies, the City and County Managers Association, the Irish Local Development Network, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, commercial tourism interests and the festivals / cultural sector.
- A Trade Advisory Group (see [Appendix B](#)) including representatives of the key tourism trade bodies ITOA, IHF, Good Food Ireland, ITIC, RAI, B&B Ireland, VFI and Heritage Island provided a liaison structure with commercial tourism interests across the sector.

2.4 Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

- a) The semi-state structure provided challenges in the initial stages for a project that required a large degree of operational flexibility.
- b) Project planning bottlenecks in the early phase of the project could have been avoided if the decision to go ahead with the project had been taken earlier with the appropriate governance and organisational structures put in place.
- c) Overall, however, these initial obstacles were overcome and did not ultimately inhibit the success of the project.
- d) The involvement of two State agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, in the direct implementation of The Gathering rather than a single dedicated project team with full through-the-line control for all aspects of the project was sub-optimal. The dual structure added a degree of complexity and that would not exist with a single dedicated entity with full executive powers.

Recommendations

- a) The timescale provided to set up a project of the scale of The Gathering was too short. A minimum lead-in of two years is recommended. This is especially critical in terms of providing the capacity to promote and market to potential visitors in long-haul markets where the travel decision timeframes are usually 12 months and more in advance.
- b) Early decisions on project set-up will also avoid pitfalls and delays in relation to governance and organisational structure which need to be in place well in advance of initiating project operations.

- c) Alternative governance structures such as outsourcing project implementation to an independent non-State entity should be considered for future projects like this in order to increase flexibility and cost effectiveness. However, if such an 'arms-length' structure is used, it is essential that linkages to State agency support functions and strong connections with other State institutions are built into the project design.

3. CITIZEN AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – THE CREATION OF ‘A PEOPLE’S PROJECT’

3.1 Strategic goal

At the outset, The Gathering was a State agency inspired and government-led project. It required and received the active support of key political leaders including An Taoiseach, An Tánaiste as well as the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport. It was positioned as a key national project that would contribute to Ireland’s economic recovery. However, in order to succeed, The Gathering required the active support and participation of citizens and communities across Ireland.

The strategic goal was to transform the project from being perceived solely as a government-run, state-backed initiative to one that would actively engage people and communities. A programme of citizen and community engagement was built into the Project Plan with a dedicated team assigned to implement this key project component. This chapter sets out some of the key elements of that programme that contributed to The Gathering becoming a true ‘People’s Project’.

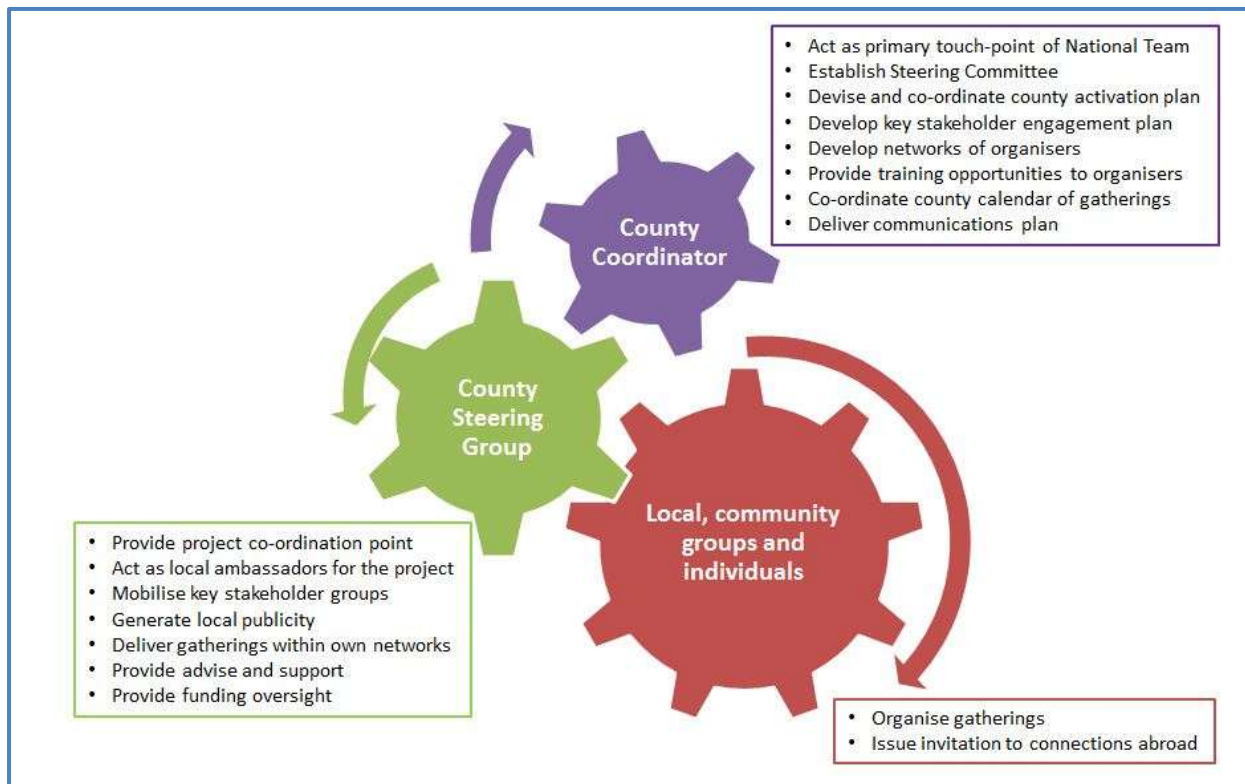
The engagement of citizens and communities was, without doubt, the single most critical success factor in the entire project. It provided the framework around which many thousands of local Gathering events would be created with tens of thousands of volunteers working to make those events successful and to issue personalised invitations to people to travel to Ireland. An analysis of the scale and diversity of Gathering events is provided later in this chapter.

3.2 Establishing a National Framework

The central coordination office for The Gathering did not have the capacity or the reach to roll out a national community engagement programme. Therefore, it was critically important that a local partner network was formed. The Gathering sought the support of the local authorities under the leadership of the County & City Managers Association. They appointed a designated Gathering Coordinator in each of the 34 Local Authority areas in the country in May/June 2012. This provided the basis for a national cell structure to support The Gathering at a local level.

The Gathering Coordinators acted as a dedicated resource in each city / county to activate The Gathering locally. They were supported by The Gathering team and by the regional staff of Fáilte Ireland. A Steering Group was established in each county to help coordinate Gathering efforts. While the make-up of these groups varied somewhat, in general they were comprised of local authority staff and elected members and representatives of local networks and organisations in the sports, cultural, artistic, business or community sectors.

The collaborative model between the national project team, the local authority personnel, Steering Groups and local tourism interests provided a solid framework for implementing The Gathering and enabled it to have nationwide reach. In practice, the model was often adjusted to cater for county-specific needs but the primary pillars of the partnership were constant throughout the country.

Fig 3.1: Summary of The Gathering Ireland 2013 collaborative model.

3.3 Engaging Community & Voluntary Networks

It was recognised that the support of a wide coalition of community and voluntary sector partners was required and that the goodwill and effort of individuals and communities were essential ingredients of success. The Gathering needed to become a project ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’. In order to achieve this, a determined effort was made to canvas the support of as many community-based organisations as possible.

All key national organisations or networks with a local reach were invited to participate and support. This included the main sporting organisations, farming and rural organisations, elderly and youth groups, voluntary and community networks, cultural, education and music groups and many more. The strategy involved securing high level support at national level through one-to-one meetings with executive and elected leaders in all of the main organisations. Once national buy-in was secured, follow-up at local level ensued through the local structures that were being established.

Organisations such as the GAA had a particularly strong role to play. They provided three-way support by granting access to Croke Park for a major launch event to coincide with the All Ireland Hurling Final 2012, encouraging their local units around the country to support The Gathering and spreading the message internationally through their 500 strong international clubs network. This partnership ultimately resulted in a number of specific GAA Gathering events around the country with overseas teams hosted for special tournaments.

The Irish Local Development Network and LEADER companies in Ireland also played a key role in supporting and funding at a local level from their member companies. Their efforts, combined

with those of the many other groups around the country, helped to provide a strong foundation for Gathering activities. A number of LEADER companies provided funding support to local Gathering initiatives.

3.4 Community Activation: Town Hall meetings

In order to directly link with citizens and community activists, a series of public ‘Town Hall’ style meetings were organised across the country in summer / autumn 2012. A total of 70 such meetings were run using the World Café¹ meeting model. The goals from this national series of meetings were:

- To provide first-hand information about The Gathering and what it hoped to achieve;
- To motivate individuals and groups to get involved in the project by mobilising local organisations and networks;
- To deliver a draft menu of viable ideas for Gathering events and activities in each area.

Five pilot meetings were run in late June / early July 2012 with the main bulk of the meetings taking place in September / October. Where possible, well-known local public figures were invited to lead and chair the meetings. The meetings were run using local volunteer facilitators, 900 in total, who were trained and mentored in the meeting process. A combined attendance of close to 7,000 people across all 26 counties participated in the meetings with over 2,000 viable ideas for Gathering events generated.

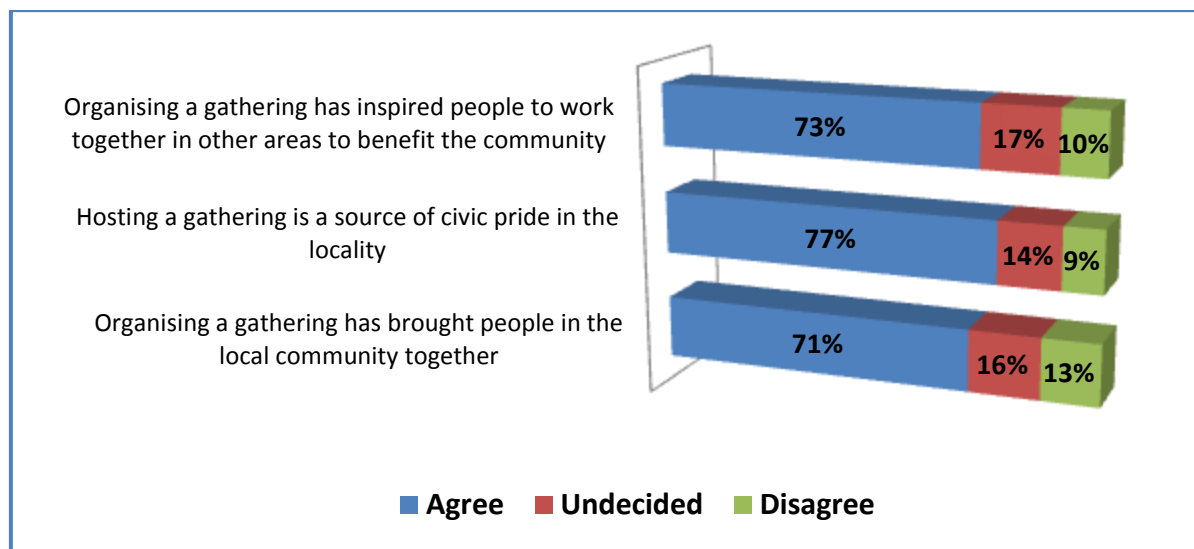
The meeting-led process worked extremely well. It was a key instrument in securing the buy-in from communities and citizens and provided a solid foundation for generating Gathering events. The format of the meetings via a well-managed facilitation process was ideal and ensured that the objectives of the project were adhered to during the meetings.

The success of the Town Hall / community meetings in the main cities, especially Dublin, was more limited. This is not surprising and is consistent with experiences for such public meetings in other sectors. In Dublin, the local authorities supplemented the community meeting process by encouraging groups and communities to engage with The Gathering using the Community and Voluntary Fora.

Evidence of the positive contribution of The Gathering to community spirit and a sense of pride is provided by independent national research undertaken by Ipsos MRBI in October 2013. The research shows that 77% of respondents believe that hosting a gathering is a source of civic pride in their locality and 73% believe that organising a gathering has inspired people to work together in other areas to benefit the community.

¹ The World Café is a globally recognized structured conversational process in which groups of people discuss a topic at several tables. A cafe ambience is created in order to facilitate conversation.

Fig 3.2: Results from Ipsos MRBI National Omnipoll Survey, October 2013, showing public opinion regarding the impact of The Gathering on community spirit and civic pride.



3.5 Gathering Event Profile & Analysis

The original Project Plan for The Gathering set down a target of creating an additional 500 new events during the year, approximately 20 per county. This target was quickly revised during the Town Hall meeting process to 2,950 with specific targets set for each county. The final result greatly exceeded this target with a total of 4942 'Gatherings' registered on the www.thegatheringireland.com website. There is evidence that a significant number of other Gathering events were held that were not registered on the website so the ultimate total may, in fact, be substantially greater than this.

Figure 3.3: Screen-grab of online registration form for registration of Gatherings

Get started creating a Gathering

1 Create your Gathering 2 3

Create your Gathering

* mandatory fields

NAME YOUR GATHERING*

VENUE*

COUNTY*
Select a county

TOWN*

STREET ADDRESS*

MAP ADDRESS

The use of an open access online platform on The Gathering website for individuals and groups to register their Gatherings proved to be a key success factor in generating events. This 'open source' approach had not previously been used in Irish tourism or events profiling. Gathering organisers were enabled to register their Gathering events online and, following a short validation process, the Gatherings, if eligible for inclusion, were published online. The requirement for the event to attract overseas visitors was the key qualifying factor for inclusion of Gathering events. The online registration process worked reasonably well in spite of some early technical challenges.

There were, however, some valuable lessons learnt in relation to the type of technology platform used and the ease of use of the online application process.

There are a number of key features apparent:

- Gatherings are spread right throughout the country. This was one of the great successes of The Gathering in that it resulted in an economic dividend in every part of Ireland as shown in Fig 3.4 below.

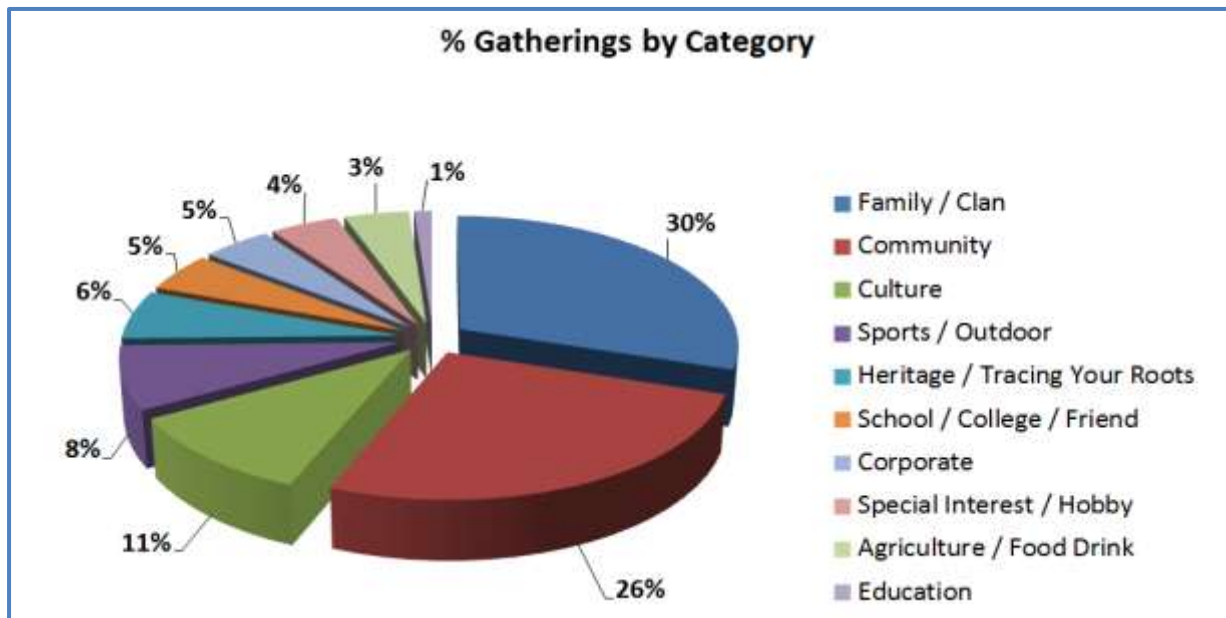
Fig 3.4: National spread of Gathering events as registered on www.thegatheringireland.com



- Not surprisingly, the counties with the largest numbers of Gatherings are those regarded as having the greatest ancestral diaspora links as shown in Fig 3.6 on the next page.
- Although The Gathering was a Republic of Ireland based project, the online platform provided access to individuals and groups in Northern Ireland to register their Gatherings. A total 116 events in Northern Ireland were registered.
- Of the 5,000 or so registered Gatherings, about 30% were existing events or festivals. These events created additional Gathering elements to their programme and/or extended their promotional reach overseas, usually to diaspora groups or networks with a strong local link.

- Family and Clan were the largest category with 30% of events while Community events accounted for a further 26% giving a combined total for these two of 56%. These two categories were the mainstay of The Gathering project and demonstrate the power of the personal and local connection in terms of making direct diaspora links.

Fig 3.5: Breakdown of Gathering events by category.



- Business gatherings made an important contribution with 223 events or 5% of Gatherings. It is estimated that a total of 14,700 business delegates were delivered directly by these Gathering events. The most prominent included a series of Alltech Gatherings with a total of 3,000 delegates and the Ernst & Young Senior Managers Gathering with 1,500 delegates from 71 countries.

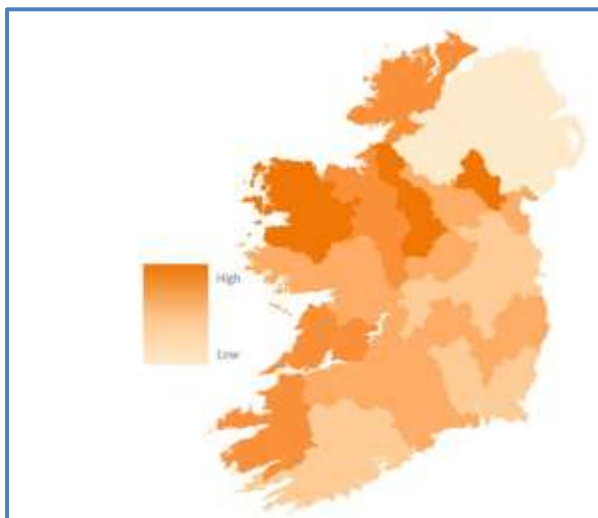


Fig 3.6: Density of Gatherings by county ranked per head of population.

This provides an interesting profile with the top 10 ranking counties by and large drawn from the western region and those with a strong tradition of emigration and diaspora connections.

Fig 3.7: County ranking showing number of Gatherings weighted by population density.

County Ranking - gatherings by head of population -			
1	Longford	14	Westmeath
2	Leitrim	15	Laois
3	Mayo	16	Tipperary
4	Monaghan	17	Louth
5	Sligo	18	Limerick
6	Kerry	19	Wicklow
7	Clare	20	Offaly
8	Roscommon	21	Cork
9	Donegal	22	Wexford
10	Galway	23	Dublin
11	Cavan	24	Kilkenny
12	Carlow	25	Meath
13	Waterford	26	Kildare

In general, counties with higher levels of past emigration organised the most Gatherings per head of population.

3.6 Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

- The active support of the Local Authorities in setting up a framework for The Gathering that would enable effective local roll-out was a critical success factor. The Gathering Coordinators played a pivotal role at a county / city level.
- The model used by The Gathering for Citizen and Community Activation worked extremely well. The Community / Town Hall meeting model was particularly noteworthy in canvassing support for the project at a local level and in motivating community activists to take the lead locally. A comprehensive Toolkit on Community Activation has been developed with more information available in [Appendix C](#).
- Notwithstanding the success of the community activation model, there were serious pressures to deliver results within the available timeframe. The Local Authority support was only sought and secured in Quarter 2 2012 so that the on-the-ground implementation had to be greatly accelerated. This was a consequence of the earlier delays in project set-up and governance arrangements.
- The eager adoption of The Gathering by local communities, especially in rural Ireland, vastly exceeded expectations. The enormous voluntary effort in making The Gathering a success is evidence of the on-going power of community and special interest groups in Ireland. The Gathering had a significant impact on generating events in many counties that would not typically be regarded as tourist destinations.
- The innovation of using an online open access registration tool for Gathering events was a great success. However, important operational lessons were learnt about the level of on-going resources required to manage this process. The choice of technology platform

and contracting arrangements resulted in an overly costly and complicated solution. This was partly due to the tight time limitations for project implementation.

Recommendations

- a) The Gathering has shown that Local Authorities are best placed to lead out on locally based community tourism initiatives. It is recommended that community tourism would be formally recognised as a key strand of economic development by local authorities with appropriate funding allocated by them with support from LEADER funds and others. This is consistent with the enhanced role of Local Authorities in economic development under the Putting People First local government reform measures.
- b) The collaborative approach involving national tourism agencies, local authorities, local communities and commercial tourism interests worked very well and should be continued in the future for relevant events and projects.
- c) The Community Activation process worked well, in particular, the Town Hall meetings. The approach used by The Gathering could be applied to other large national or regional projects in tourism or indeed in other sectors. A comprehensive Community Activation Toolkit has been developed in this regard with more information available in [Appendix C](#).

4. PARTNERS & STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

4.1 Introduction

It was recognised at an early stage that The Gathering could not meet its potential without leveraging the support of a wide range of organisations. The key contribution of communities has been outlined in Chapter 3. The critically important project partnership with local authorities has also been outlined in that chapter. In this section, the support of some other key partners is summarised, in particular those that made a unique and telling contribution to the success of The Gathering.

The partnerships and strategic alliances straddle the public, private and voluntary sectors. The supports provided included both cash and non-cash supports. In total, an estimated value-in-kind of circa €8m was provided to The Gathering through various partnerships. An analysis of this value-in-kind is outlined further in [Chapter 7](#).

4.2 Headline Partners: DAA and IPB

Two partners, in particular, provided very substantial support to The Gathering that made a definitive contribution to its overall success.

The Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) provided substantial promotional support at their airports at Dublin and Cork. The partnership commenced in August 2012 in advance of the high profile Navy V Notre Dame American Football game at the Aviva Stadium. The DAA re-branded the arrivals and departures lounges of the airport to give a special welcome to the 35,000 or so football fans. This was an important early contribution to promoting awareness to key audiences at home and overseas.

The airport ‘Gathering Welcome’ was further enhanced in advance of the commencement of The Gathering year in January 2013. In addition to the visible presence / branding, special Irish-themed live entertainment was provided at peak passenger periods such as Christmas and St. Patrick’s Festival. This ubiquitous presence for The Gathering at key national gateways over a 16 month period was a valuable asset in raising awareness and in enhancing the Céad Míle Fáilte for those arriving in Ireland. DAA also provided grant support for some key events in Dublin and Cork.

Shannon Airport which became independent of the DAA from January 2013, also provided a special Gathering Welcome as did the Ireland West Airport at Knock. The combined efforts of the airports ensured that visitors throughout the year, including those who had not previously heard of The Gathering, were alerted to it and directed to Gathering-related events.

IPB Insurance is an Irish owned mutual insurer catering for some of the largest organisations in the state in the public and private sectors. In 2012, IPB adopted a Corporate Social Engagement policy and allocated a multi-million Euro fund to support community and voluntary activities in key sectors. One of its chosen sectors to support was the diaspora and in autumn 2012, IPB agreed to allocate €1 million to a special Gathering initiative around the diaspora theme.

It was agreed to use the fund to support Flagship Gathering events in each of the thirty-four local authority areas. The scheme was administered via the local authorities with funding

provided for a total of 81 Gathering events nationwide. More detail on the IPB Gathering programme is included in [Chapter 5](#) on Events Funding.

The €1 million IPB Fund also enabled The Gathering to leverage a further €1 million in events funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport. This additional fund was used to support smaller local events, the details of which are outlined in the next Chapter.

4.3 Airline Partners

The requirement to ensure that there was sufficient air access from key markets was a critical strategic requirement of The Gathering. This was especially so in the case of North America from where seat capacity had fallen by more than a quarter in the previous four years. In 2011 and the earlier part of 2012, a concerted effort was made to convince key airlines to increase capacity from North America. Tourism Ireland, supported directly by the Minister for Transport & Tourism and the DAA worked to secure additional seat capacity and routes from the main trans-Atlantic airlines. The Gathering was a critical factor in helping to make the case for this extra capacity.

A total of 26% additional trans-Atlantic seat capacity amounting to 4,000 additional seats in peak season was added for The Gathering year. This included:

- **Aer Lingus:** 1,925 additional seats per week during the Summer Season. Additional frequency on routes from Boston and Chicago to Dublin – 7 additional departures per week;
- **United Airlines:** 845 additional seats per week during the Summer Season on a new a seasonal Chicago-Shannon service. 5 new departures per week;
- **Delta Airlines:** 708 additional seats per week during the Summer Season with increased frequency and larger aircraft on its JFK-Dublin service – 3 additional departures per week;
- **US Airways:** 1,470 additional seats per week during the Summer Season on the re-launched seasonal service from Philadelphia to Shannon – 7 new departures per week;
- **American Airlines:** 1,575 additional seats per week during the Summer Season on a new service from JFK and Dublin – 7 new departures per week.

The success in securing this additional air access capacity from the US was a key enabling factor for The Gathering to achieve its goals. All of this increased seat capacity has been retained for 2014 with a further 6% extra capacity also to be provided.

4.4 Government and Semi-State Partners

In addition to the sponsoring Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, a significant number of other government departments and State agencies provided practical supports to The Gathering initiative. An Taoiseach and An Tánaiste were both active advocates and supporters of The Gathering throughout the term of the project. All government departments and quite a number of State agencies placed the Gathering message, 'Be Part of It', at the footer of all emails with a link to The Gathering website. This simple, cost-free action helped increase awareness in the months leading up to and during the Gathering year and helped build a

national coalition of support. Other specific initiatives by Ministers and government departments included:

- Engagement of embassy network abroad by the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade to promote The Gathering by hosting promotional events and activating their networks;
- The facilitation by the Department of Justice of a visa fast-track scheme for some designated Gathering groups by the Visa and Immigration Service;
- The support of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and An Post for the design and publication of a commemorative Gathering stamp as well as assistance with the distribution of special Gathering postcards to every home in Ireland;
- Practical support by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in securing the valuable collaboration with local authorities;
- Canvassing support from the arts and cultural sector as well as providing direct supports for key Gathering initiatives by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht;
- Direct support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Bord Bia through hosting a special food trade event in September 2013;



- Support for a 'Write and Invite' campaign for primary schools and a transition year Gathering video project at second level by The Department of Education & Skills.

Fig 4.1: Copy of a leaflet to promote the Department of Education & Skills supported 'Write and Invite' campaign.

4.5 Volunteer Ambassador Programme with Volunteer Ireland

The aim of the Volunteer Gathering Ambassador Programme was to provide a warm Irish welcome to visitors during the peak tourist season, create an awareness of The Gathering and give first-hand information about Gathering events in high visitor footfall areas. The on-street

Programme ran in five locations, Cork, Killarney, Limerick, Galway and Sligo during the busy summer months of 2013. A similar scheme already existed in Dublin.

In order to develop and deliver the programme, The Gathering needed to partner with an agency that would have the reach and ability to manage a programme in each location. Volunteer Ireland was chosen as the national volunteer development agency with a support body for all Volunteer Offices (20) in Ireland. The Programme was also fully supported by the Tourist Information Office network and was designed to complement the service they provide.

The Programme delivered a number of benefits including:

- 136 trained volunteers with 70% indicating they would volunteer again;
- Approximately 17,000 visitors greeted by Gathering Ambassadors with 2,000 hours of volunteering delivered across 5 locations;
- 5 Tourist Information Office staff trained in Volunteer Management;
- A sustainable legacy in the form of a network of experienced volunteers that could be called upon to support future projects.

The Gathering Volunteer Programme was successful overall although the level of resources required to manage and support it was greater than that originally envisaged. A comprehensive Volunteer Ambassador Toolkit has been developed and is available for future projects in the tourism and other sectors that may have a requirement for volunteers. More information on the Volunteer Programme Toolkit is available in [Appendix C](#).

4.6 Ireland Reaching Out Partnership

Ireland Reaching Out (www.irelandxo.com) is a national reverse genealogy programme working to reconnect the Irish diaspora back to their place of origin. The programme seeks to recruit a network of volunteers in every parish in Ireland and to get each parish to invite its own living diaspora back to their place of origin. The Gathering partnered with IRO to help spread its reach following a successful pilot programme in east Galway in 2010 / 2011. The Gathering provided funding of €150,000 to IRO to help fund the expansion programme.

The IRO network has spread to 32 counties and currently has 918 active parish volunteers nationwide. As the network develops, parishes can create a virtual presence on the IRO website which acts as a resource for those seeking to find their Irish roots and an opportunity to directly link with local history experts across the country. The interactive service is an important asset in the Irish genealogical landscape and enables those with local knowledge and an active interest in local history and genealogy to provide valuable, free information to those seeking out their ancestral roots.

As the national and diaspora network of Ireland Reaching Out grows, it has the potential to become a key source of accessible online local history and genealogy information. In addition to establishing online linkages and virtual information exchange, Ireland Reaching Out also supports parishes in setting up local 'Weeks of Welcome' for returned diaspora. A total of 76 Weeks of Welcome were held to date in 2013. The IRO network has the potential to grow much larger. Local partnerships with local authorities may provide the best opportunity for long-term

sustainable growth. The Gathering partnership with IRO helped broaden its scope of engagement and also yielded practical support for local Gathering events.

4.7 Other Key Partners

A number of other partners provided supports for The Gathering through promotional activity, event support or otherwise. A sample of those supporting partners includes:

- **Aer Lingus:** Provided substantial promotional support including a building-wrap banner on their HQ and in-flight promotion on their entertainment network and in-flight magazines; also provided lead sponsorship for Aer Lingus Hurling Tournament in Galway in September 2013 with 950 overseas attendees;
- **Irish Aviation Authority:** Hosted and funded FlightFest – The Aviation Gathering; 130,000 people lined the streets of Dublin to view the spectacular 3 hour long fly past in September;
- **Bank of Ireland:** Sponsored Transition-year Gathering video competition with over 100 participating schools as well providing access to House of Lords building on College Green for key events. The bank also issued a communication to all 9,000 staff members with all branches receiving Gathering packs and each region appointing a Gathering Ambassador. ATM advertising was also provided;
- **Dublin Port:** Erected prominent Gathering welcome billboards at the passenger point of entry to the port as well as a building wrap on Dublin Port HQ; also co-sponsored FlightFest and supported Riverdance – The Gathering;
- **Irish Sports Council:** Provided designated funding for selected Gathering sporting events including cricket, sailing, athletics and others with a total investment of €181,000;

Irish Rail, Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Irish Ferries each provided marketing and promotional support through the provision of media space to help drive The Gathering message. Irish Ferries also provided 100 free coach spaces on their Britain/Ireland route. Other partners included Mastercard, Diageo and Glenisk who supported the Gathering in a number of ways from running competitions to co-branding.

4.8 Conclusions & Recommendation

Conclusions

- a) The range of supports received from partners, public and private, made a substantial contribution to the success of The Gathering.
- b) The support of lead partners, the DAA and IPB, was especially helpful in the crucial areas of promotion/ visitor welcome and cash support for flagship events across the country.
- c) The cross-governmental support for The Gathering helped directly in addressing key project needs and also contributed to building a national support base on a collaborative model. Such support could not have been accessed without strong and active political leadership from An Taoiseach and key Ministers.
- d) The Volunteer Gathering Ambassador Programme run in cooperation with Volunteer Ireland had a successful outcome with some useful operational lessons learnt on running such a programme in future. Likewise, the IRO partnership succeeded in the dual goals of

broadening the support base for The Gathering and building a national reverse genealogy network.

Recommendations

- a) Active, cross-governmental support is a critical success factor for major national projects such as The Gathering. Delivering such support requires deliberate and sustained engagement at both the political and executive levels of government.
- b) Partnerships and strategic alliances with non-State organisations can play an important role in projects like The Gathering. It is crucial, however, to clearly identify and agree the mutual benefits of particular partnerships before formally engaging in such alliances.
- c) The establishment of a Volunteer Ambassador programme such as that run by The Gathering is recommended provided the location(s) has high levels of visitor footfall. It is recommended that the day to day supervision and scheduling be managed at local level. This service may be provided by the Tourist Information Office or outsourced.
- d) The Ireland Reaching Out national reverse genealogy programme should be supported in order to further develop this important national resource. Ideally, county-by-county support and partnerships with local authorities and LEADER / local development groups may provide the most appropriate linkages as the essence of the IRO initiative is local and parish based.

5. EVENTS FUNDING & SUPPORT

5.1 Events Strategy

The Gathering set out to establish a layered events strategy covering a number of key strands with dual objectives. The primary goal was to create the maximum possible number of events and attractions to draw additional overseas visitors to Ireland in 2013. A second important objective was to ensure that a Gathering-themed series of events would be in place across Ireland throughout the year so that visitors, including those who had not specially travelled for The Gathering, would enjoy a unique 2013 experience.

It was decided not to place too great an emphasis on creating a suite of new large-scale events specifically for The Gathering although some such iconic events were required. The experience of The Homecoming Scotland 2009 with such events was that they are very expensive to stage from scratch with often variable results. The events strategy, therefore, was based on three primary pillars as follows:

- Leveraging existing festivals and events, where possible, to create additional Gathering-themed elements that would directly attract overseas visitors and enrich the visitor experience;
- Creating or supporting a small number of medium to large-scale bespoke Gathering events that would act as iconic Gathering events and provide a focal point at certain times of the year or in particular regions;
- Supporting local or community-generated events in accordance with the community activation strategy outlined in Chapter 3.

Separate funding strands were put in place for these event categories with a total allocated fund of €2.9 million. In addition, a further boost was received for the local and community events programme through the granting of a €1 million support fund by IPB Insurance. An outline of the results deriving from this and the other three funding strands is provided in the sections below. A summary of the non-cash supports provided for event organisers is also included below in section 5.6.

5.2 Existing Festivals and Large-Scale Events

In June 2012, a call-out was issued to the larger festivals and events around the country to make proposals for funding to add special Gathering elements to their programme in 2013. This fund was additional to core funding provided to festivals by Fáilte Ireland. The qualifying criteria included a capacity to target and deliver additional overseas visitors and to provide a unique Gathering experience as part of their festival or event. A total of 46 applications were received with 26 festivals granted funding.

A total of €1.23m was committed to these events with funding amounts varied from €250,000 at the top of the scale for the St. Patrick Festival in Dublin to just €5,000 for Listowel Writers Week. All of the events were supported in their efforts to generate additional overseas visitors

through The Gathering-Tourism Ireland overseas marketing and promotional programme and through key account mentoring.

These events, as a group, succeeded in the objective of providing a unique Gathering experience for visitors and greatly helped to animate towns and cities around the country right throughout the year. The Gathering programme for each of the events was clearly defined and, in many cases, was focused on attracting specific visitor or diaspora groups. A summary of the events profile is given in [Appendix D](#) attached.

Overall, the 26 events in this category are estimated to have delivered approximately 50,000 additional overseas visitors indicating an average cost (of Gathering funding) per additional overseas visitor of just under €25. This is an estimate only as post-event evaluations have not yet been finalised on some of the funded events and one, NYE 2013, has yet to take place.

The performance of the events in terms of their delivery of overseas visitors varied. While no one critical success factor can be identified for the best performing events, they have in general the common features of creating high quality and relevant Gathering programmes, successfully identifying niche target markets overseas and having event programmes in place in sufficient time to enable effective marketing and sales campaigns to be implemented. A capacity to partner with tour operators at least 6 months prior to the event, or 12 months and more for long-haul markets, was a critical success factor for some.

Among the successes was the Gathering NYE Dublin 2012 event which succeeded in its overseas visitor targets and also substantially raised the profile of Dublin as a New Year's Eve destination with Lonely Planet Guide placing Dublin in its Top 5 Cities for New Year's Eve which is a positive legacy to build on. The Gathering People's Parade for St. Patrick's Festival was also a big success in broadening the international attendance base at the country's largest festival.

Other key successes included the Rose of Tralee Gathering which attracted in excess of 3,000 additional overseas visitors and the Cork Choral Festival which featured 5,000 singers from 122 groups and attracted 694 additional overseas visitors. The results for a number of the other events were less favourable. One of the key features of those that under-performed on delivering overseas visitor targets was their lack of a timely events programme to promote overseas. Recommendations on changes to the funding approach for large-scale events which are included at the end of this Chapter addresses this core issue.

5.3 Larger Gathering-specific Events

A designated fund was provided to support a small number of new key events at national and regional level for The Gathering year. While a substantial number of event opportunities and applications were considered, six events of varying scale were ultimately funded with a total allocation of €0.51m in direct funding.

The selected events covered a broad range of music, cultural and sporting activities with a balanced regional spread. They included the multi-event Gathering Dublin - Meet to Compete

organised by South County Dublin Tourism, Rebel Week in Cork, Tailteann Nua in Limerick, The Gathering Cruise, a maritime gathering and the iconic Riverdance Gathering on the banks of the Liffey in Dublin. A summary of the events is included in [Appendix D](#).

These new Gathering-specific national/regional events contributed significantly to the overall Gathering programme and served to animate the country with their unique offerings. Riverdance-The Gathering got widespread international media coverage before, during and after the event and thereby yielded promotional benefits for Irish cultural tourism for the future. The event did, however, demand substantial additional resources in logistics and marketing in addition to the €200,000 direct cost.

The series of sporting and leisure events under the umbrella of The Gathering Dublin worked well and delivered on the overseas visitor targets. The events successfully filled the large supply of bed-night capacity across South Dublin, especially those events in the off-peak months. The overseas visitor return for An Tailteann Nua and The Gathering Cruise were less successful and highlights how challenging it is to successfully launch and create a new event and to market it overseas.

Cork Rebel Week was a major new initiative with a total of over 65 events built into a week-long programme. The event overall was a success but the audience of 150,000 visitors over the course of the week was predominantly local and domestic rather than international. In all, the event attracted 9 international marching bands, 6 visiting naval vessels and created substantial domestic spend in the third week of October.

Overall, this series of events did contribute positively to The Gathering year of activities and delivered an estimated 39,000 additional overseas visitors. However, the level of funds investment and logistical resources required to stage them would suggest that caution should be exercised before committing to new large-scale events in future. In some cases, funds might be better deployed on well-chosen existing events rather than on 'greenfield' events were The Gathering to be run again. Our recommendations in this regard reflect this experience.

5.4 Local and Community Gathering Events

A total of circa 1,150 local and community events were funded under a special Gathering Community Fund. The fund was allocated across the 34 Local Authority areas with €30,000 per county / city area bringing the total Fund cost to €1.02m. A set of criteria was drawn up for fund applicants based mainly around the capacity to attract overseas visitors. This Fund was administered in tandem with the IPB Fund outlined in section 5.5 below.

A simplified application and qualifying criteria process was drawn up for this Fund with each Local Authority overseeing the application vetting process in accordance with the standardised criteria. The funds were distributed by the Local Authorities with 50% of eligible funds paid on approval and the remaining 50% paid post-event on production of the required event report and validation process.

The maximum amount of funds per event was €2,500 and the average funds disbursed across the 1,150 events was €885. This Community Events Fund was an important part of the Gathering programme with very positive results.

- A sample survey of this category of funded events shows that they had an average overseas Gathering-specific attendance level of 41. This indicates a cost per visitor of €21 which is a very strong return on investment.
- While the individual amounts provided were quite small, it made an important contribution to many of the events to supplement the very substantial voluntary and community efforts.
- Some event organisers secured matching funding from other local sources so that the original seed funding was leveraged even further.

A detailed Toolkit has been prepared setting out the approach and operating guidelines for a Community Events micro-funding programme such as that implemented for The Gathering. This Toolkit could be applied to future funding scenarios in either the tourism or other sectors and more information is available in [Appendix C](#).

5.5 IPB Fund

The €1 million Fund supplied by IPB Insurance was also distributed via the Local Authority structure. The purpose of this Fund was to support up to three 'Flagship' events in each county or main city. These were typically medium-scale events although there were a small number of larger events also included. The funds were allocated directly by IPB to each of the councils and allocated in accordance with funding criteria agreed with The Gathering.

These county or city-based Flagship events were also focused on the dual objectives of attracting overseas visitors while also acting as significant focal points for celebrating The Gathering in a locally-relevant context. Some of the events were extensions of existing festivals while others were specially created for The Gathering.

While The Gathering was not accountable for these funds, the post-event analysis was shared with The Gathering team. The following key results are noted:

- A total of 81 projects were funded with an average allocation of circa €12,000 per event.
- The average number of overseas visitors estimated to have travelled to Ireland specifically to attend each of these events is estimated at 177. It should be noted that only a very small number of these events had independently verified research so the visitor numbers are estimates provided by event organisers.
- Across the board, these local Flagship events were very well attended and did succeed in their aim of providing local animation of The Gathering and generating additional domestic economic activity.

5.6 Non-cash event support

In addition to the funds supplied for events, a number of other supports were also put in place by The Gathering. These included:

- **Training:** A total of 80 training workshops were provided across the country with a total combined attendance in excess of 1,600 people. The workshops were offered free of charge to gathering organisers to help up-skill them in a number of areas critical to the successful delivery of their events but focused primarily on the delivery of overseas visitors. The workshops covered areas including marketing and promotion, online and social media marketing and event management.
- **Mentoring and Gathering Clinics:** The Gathering offered one-to-one mentoring to key events in each county providing advice, guidance and a range of practical supports such as access to social media marketing and overseas marketing opportunities. A primary focus of all engagements with organisers was to identify the overseas audience and how best to target them.
- **Promotion on social media:** With over 27,000 Twitter followers and 110,000 'Likes' on Facebook, The Gathering offered significant exposure to key Gatherings throughout 2013. This proved very effective for many Gatherings.
- **Overseas Marketing:** Tourism Ireland offered a range of free and paid-for promotional opportunities for priority Gatherings via their Industry Opportunities website. These opportunities ranged from coverage on Tourism Ireland Facebook pages such as Ireland Family History to features in market newsletters both offering significant reach abroad to organisers.
- **Branding and marketing collateral:** The Gathering produced substantial quantities of bunting, flags and banners and distributed them to gathering organisers via the Local Authority-led structures in each county. Organisers also had access to an online Gathering branding website from where they could download designs and images for local printing.

5.7 Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

The overall events-funding model with separate funding strands targeting large, medium and small-scale events worked well. Specifically:

- a) The support provided to existing larger-scale festivals and events yielded good results with an overall estimate of 50,000 additional overseas visitors delivered. However, the lessons learnt from the poorer performance of some of the events should be noted especially in relation to the capacity and the timeframe to have a saleable events programme in place to target overseas audiences.
- b) The funding support for a smaller number of Gathering-specific large and medium-scale events yielded an estimated 39,000 additional overseas visitors. The majority of the events had positive outcomes and enhanced The Gathering programme. Nonetheless, the relatively high cost and the heavy resource requirements to stage and manage new events such as these should be carefully considered for any future projects.
- c) The provision of the €1 million IPB Fund was a welcome boost and addressed an important gap in The Gathering events programme and funding needs.
- d) The Gathering Community Events Fund provided an innovative and flexible solution to the micro-funding requirements of local and community events with 1,150 events receiving support. The decision to devolve responsibility for managing and administering

the Fund through Local Authorities worked well and provides a useful model for future collaboration.

- e) The provision of non-cash supports to local events including training on PR, communications and social media was well received. Best results were achieved where funding, mentoring and designated marketing support was provided for specific events.

Recommendations

- a) The requirement to deliver a specified target number of overseas visitors should be a core condition of funding for all major events and festivals. Budgetary provision should be made for independent, verifiable research for all events receiving funding above a specified minimum threshold.
- b) The event grant-funding cycle by Fáilte Ireland should be brought forward with grant decisions made and funding contracts in place no later than mid-year for events scheduled to take place in the following year. This will enable event organisers, in partnership with the tourism agencies, to implement a timely overseas promotional programme for key events.
- c) Micro-funding of smaller scale community events should be continued, albeit that the number of such events in a non-Gathering year is likely to be substantially lower. The experience with The Gathering shows that Local Authorities are best placed to implement such a funding support scheme in line with their enhanced role in local economic development. This should be supported, where possible, by LEADER funds.
- d) Tourism Ireland, working in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, should develop a bespoke overseas marketing and promotions model for all key events receiving funding.
- e) The provision of a well-managed support and mentoring structure for event organisers, many of whom operate on limited budgets or in a voluntary capacity, is a critical requirement if the best value for money is to be achieved from providing funding support to those events.

6. MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

6.1 Objectives and Strategic Approach

The Gathering, conceived in 2010, was backed by the government and announced in late 2011 with the project structure established in the earlier part of 2012. By mid-2012, just six months before the first event, there was still a very low level of awareness of The Gathering either in Ireland or abroad and an even lesser understanding of what it was about. The project, therefore, faced a formidable communications challenge in creating awareness and understanding and in engaging key domestic and overseas audiences.

A brand proposition was developed around three key strategic communications pillars:

- **Create:** To create awareness of The Gathering among the Irish public and in key diaspora-centric markets. This pillar also extended to engaging citizens and communities in Ireland to create or develop their own 'Gatherings' or to build in a Gathering component to existing local events.
- **Invite:** To encourage the citizens of Ireland to issue direct and personal invitations to their friends, relatives or affinity contacts abroad to come home for The Gathering or to attend a specific event.
- **Attend:** To drive overseas attendance at and participation in Gathering events as well as maximising support from local and domestic audiences.

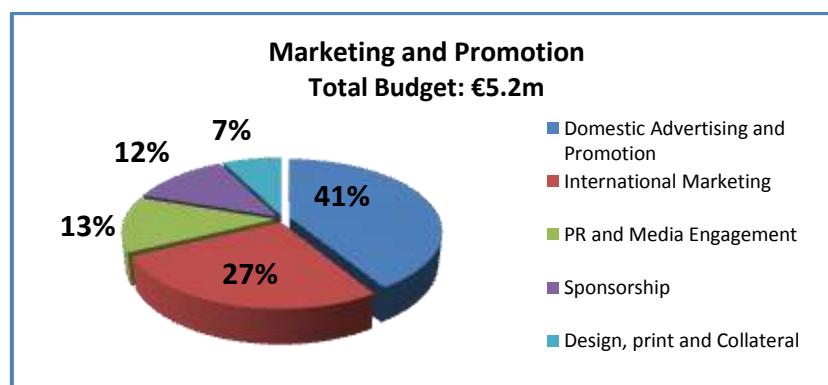
The brand proposition was expressed through the tagline '*Be Part of It*' which reflected the participative and inclusive principles of The Gathering as a national People's Project.

The marketing and communications plan was framed around these core pillars and was implemented in a number of distinct but overlapping phases.

6.2 Marketing and Communications Plan

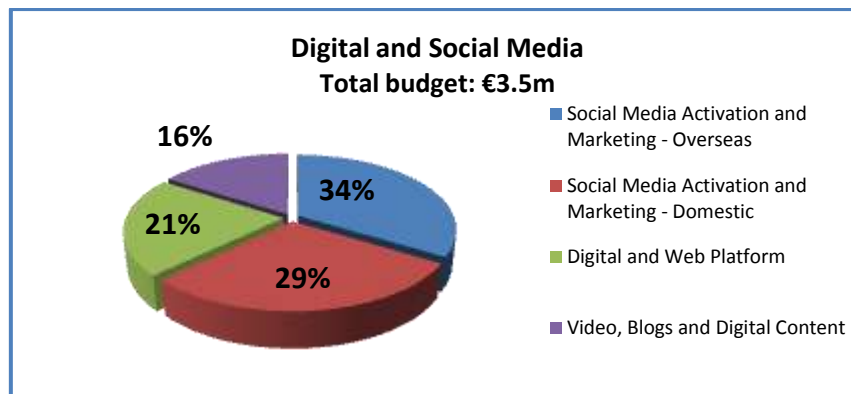
An integrated marketing, promotion and communications plan was drawn up. This covered the full range of channels from raising awareness and driving engagement in the domestic market, promotion in key international markets, direct marketing, design and brand collateral, sponsorship and PR and media engagement. The breakdown of the marketing & communications spend by category is shown below in Fig 6.1.

Fig 6.1: Breakdown of The Gathering marketing and communications budget.



In addition, the digital and social media activity contributed directly to promoting The Gathering both at home and abroad. This spend is accounted for separately in the budget analysis with a breakdown shown in Fig 6.2.

Fig 6.2: Breakdown of The Gathering digital and social media budget.



The project also benefited from the general promotion and marketing activities by Tourism Ireland in overseas markets and Fáilte Ireland in the domestic market with The Gathering strongly referenced throughout the majority of campaigns and media engagements. In the sections below, an outline is provided of the key strands of activity across each of the sectors that contributed to the marketing and promotional activity.

6.3 Domestic Awareness and Engagement

Creating Awareness

The over-riding requirement of the domestic communications plan in the early stages of the project (from summer 2012) was to create awareness and understanding of what The Gathering was about. The communications campaign ran in tandem with and supported the community engagement programme that has been outlined earlier in Chapter 3. The marketing and communications activity straddled a range of media platforms including PR, media engagement, TV, radio, print, direct-marketing, outdoor and digital. The major mass communications awareness activity commenced from late August 2012 and ran throughout the remainder of the year.

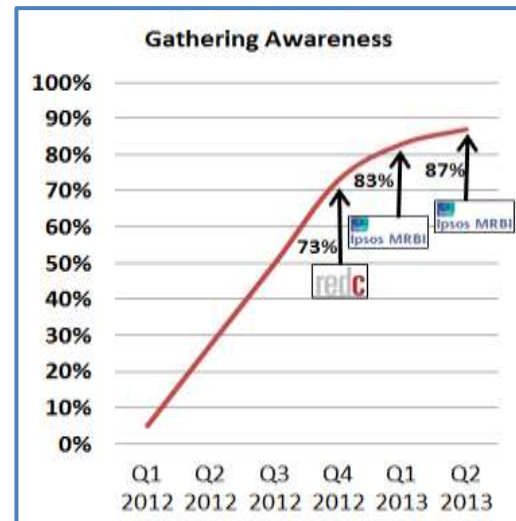
The sponsorship of a 6-part TV series broadcast on RTE, The Gathering - Homeward Bound, was one of the key contributors to building awareness and understanding. The series, which featured well-known celebrity sportspeople, actors and music and dance artists returning to their places of origin, provided an opportunity to showcase real-life examples of how The Gathering might work in a local context. A strong cross-media domestic marketing campaign to coincide with the major Navy V Notre Dame American football game in Dublin also helped build awareness. This was further supplemented by an on-field pageant with attendant media interest at the GAA All Ireland Hurling final in early September 2012.

As a result of these and the many other elements of the marketing and communications activity, awareness of The Gathering, which had been almost non-existent in early 2012, climbed to 73% by

November 2012 as reported by research conducted by RedC and presented in *Fig 6.3* below. Awareness grew further to 83% by April 2013 and 87% by June according to Ipsos MRBI's Omnipoll.

In summary, the awareness and understanding of The Gathering among the general Irish population was taken from zero to close to saturation through a well-orchestrated communications and marketing campaign over a six to nine month period. This was pivotal to the success of the project and ultimately contributed greatly to the creation of 5,000 events across the country.

Fig 6.3: Growth pattern in awareness of The Gathering in Ireland



Engaging the Nation

A core objective was to encourage as many people as possible to get involved with The Gathering. While some tens of thousands of key activists got involved at community level to organise special local Gathering events, it was important to reach out for support to the wider population. The message to all citizens was that they had an opportunity to engage by inviting at least one person they knew to come to Ireland in 2013. This message was carried through a range of media platforms from late 2012 and much of 2013. Among the broad range of activities were:

- Broadcast of the 6-part TV series, *The Gathering Homeward Bound* on RTÉ;
- Special 'Invite them Home' radio advertisements with 78% reach of all adults nationwide;
- Features on key shows on radio and television both national and regional
- A strong digital and social media campaign with interactive elements such as competitions and encouraging the sharing of content via the Invite and Attend Facebook App;

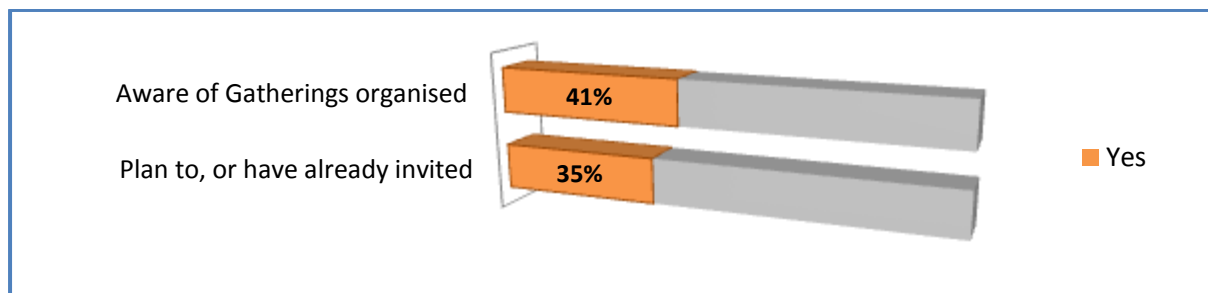
Fig 6.4: Example of outdoor Gathering advertisement.



- Direct marketing with a mini-pack of Gathering Invitation postcards delivered to every house in Ireland asking citizens to 'write and invite' their friends and relatives;
- Email marketing to a database of consumers and organisers;
- Outdoor advertising including a national billboard campaign;
- Branding of key locations such as Dublin Airport and other entry points.

Evidence of the strong level of engagement by the Irish people is provided by the Ipsos MRBI research. Their July 2013 National Omnipoll Survey found that 41% of respondents were aware of actual gatherings taking place while 35% of those surveyed either planned to invite, or had already invited, someone home from overseas to be part of The Gathering. The fact that more than one in three people in Ireland had engaged with The Gathering by inviting someone home is a powerful indicator of citizen engagement.

Fig 6.5: Results from Ipsos MRBI National Omnipoll Survey, July 2013 which demonstrates the strong level of engagement by citizens.



The promotional activity to sustain engagement and to generate strong domestic attendance at key Gathering events continued throughout 2013. This included a number of event-specific as well as general promotions on radio, print and online. Fáilte Ireland also adapted their Home Holidays campaign to include frequent Gathering messages in order to further boost domestic tourism activity.

6.4 International Promotion

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland in overseas markets. They were tasked with delivering an integrated promotional campaign for the Gathering as part of that remit. They developed a suite of activities that can be summarised under three main headings:

- Eliciting the support of key diaspora ‘Enablers’ or ‘Influencers’;
- Targeting key diaspora audiences;
- General promotion to non-diaspora audiences.

Enablers

Starting in the period around St. Patrick's Day 2012, a concerted campaign was undertaken to canvass the support of key members of the Irish diaspora with a particular focus on the US and Canada which accounts for over 50% of the global Irish diaspora. The UK as well as Australia and New Zealand were also strongly targeted and there was also a push in certain key European markets.

With the support of Irish embassies abroad, a total of 40 Gathering launch events were staged in 27 cities with an estimated attendance of 17,000 people of Irish ancestry or Irish affinity. Many of these ‘road-shows’ were led by the Minister for Transport & Tourism or the Minister of State for Tourism & Sport. The Ministerial-led promotions provided significant media opportunities abroad with a resultant increase in awareness about The Gathering and about Ireland as a tourism destination in general. The events provided an opportunity to directly brief key influencers and leaders in Irish communities abroad and to seek their active support to spread the word about The Gathering or to engage directly by bringing a group back to Ireland in 2013.

Some responded directly to the call. Some 500 or so, or 10% of the total number of Gatherings organised in 2013, were organised or assisted by overseas ‘enablers’. These ranged from family and friends Gatherings to business-type events with some business leaders of Irish origin or ancestry diverting key meetings and conferences to Ireland in support of The Gathering.

While some of those ‘enablers’ who responded positively to the invitation to support The Gathering had previous active links with Ireland, others were activated for the first time. Tourism Ireland will continue to develop those relationships as part of their diaspora programme in the future and in line with the wider government strategy on diaspora engagement.

Messaging the Diaspora

A targeted approach was adopted by Tourism Ireland to promote The Gathering to diaspora audiences in priority markets. A range of promotional and communications tools were used including:

- Campaigns placed on Irish diaspora media, both print and online;
- Mass media campaigns such as the sponsorship of the Navy v Notre Dame football game on the CBS sports network in the US;
- Bespoke social media campaigns such as ‘How Irish are You?’ See [Appendix E](#) for more detail;
- PR activity across all media and markets throughout the lifetime of the project. This included the high profile story on Hollywood actor, Tom Cruise, discovering the full story of his Irish ancestral roots which received massive international media coverage;
- Special promotions at the top Irish festivals in the US, some with attendances in excess of 100,000 people.

One of the campaigns used to communicate with the diaspora was that of the ***Ireland Family History*** Facebook page which was developed as a dedicated platform to encourage and facilitate engagement around the interest areas of ancestry and family heritage. It enabled focused communication with the Irish Diaspora worldwide without alienating the wider tourism audience for the Gathering Ireland project.



The page communicated details of Clan Gatherings and Gatherings with a heritage theme throughout the year and also delivered 6 fan forums in association with leading genealogical research groups and associations. The page attracted over 168,000 ‘Likes’ with approximately 45% acquired via 3 paid-for campaigns.

An ancestral competition was also run which received over 36,000 entries. Considering its significant following, the Ireland Family History page has substantial legacy potential and will remain as a primary communication platform to Ireland’s diaspora.

Promotion to non-Diaspora audiences

Care was taken to ensure that The Gathering was not presented as an exclusive diaspora celebration or year. There was a danger that an over-emphasis on the diaspora theme would result in the general tourist audience with no diaspora connections being turned off Ireland as a destination in 2013. As part of its general marketing and promotional activity, Tourism Ireland continued to promote Ireland to the general market using The Gathering as an additional 'hook' for 2013.

The promotional strategy was around the proposition of 'There'll never be a better year to visit Ireland'! The Gathering was referenced in its general advertising and promotion in relevant markets. A range of campaigns and tactics were used including:

- Gathering messaging on the main overseas tourism promotion website Ireland.com;
- Inclusion of Gathering messages on key media campaigns, especially in the priority diaspora markets;
- Bespoke social media campaigns on YouTube and Facebook;
- PR and media engagement across all target markets;
- Competitions and special promotions.

6.5 Digital and Social Media

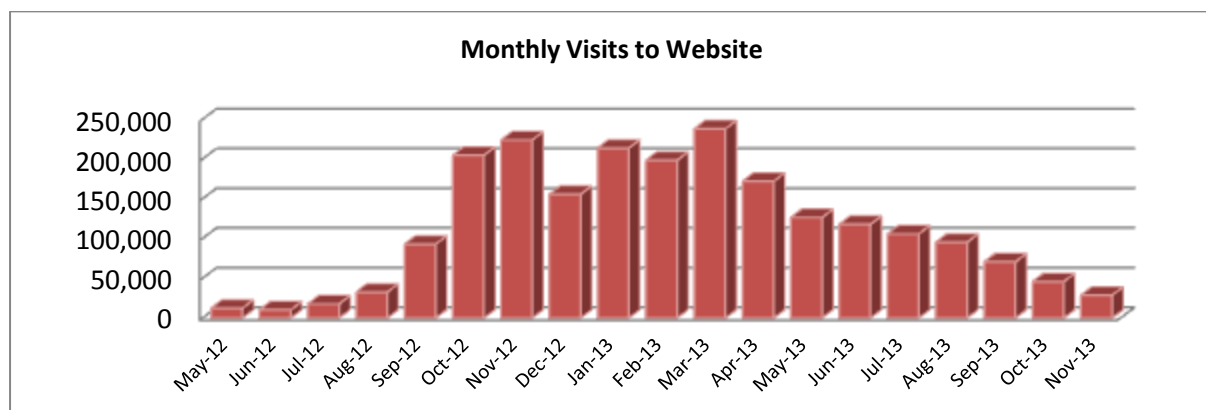
The use of the web and other digital platforms was a critical component of the Gathering project and proved to be a game-changer in terms of its overall impact.

Website

In addition to providing an online platform for registration of Gathering events (see Section 3.5 above), the www.thegatheringireland.com website also acted as the primary online communications hub for the project. The website included a continually growing series of articles and stories about The Gathering, the people involved with it and, as the year progressed, stories and images of actual Gatherings.

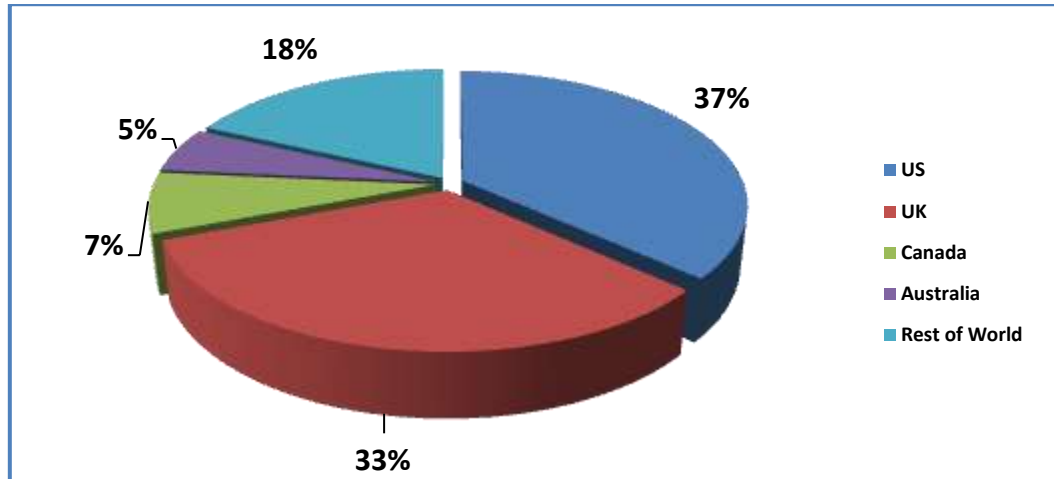
Activity on the website grew from its launch in May 2012 with an average monthly visitor count of 110,000. The cumulative number of visitors to the site was over 2.1 million by the end of November 2013.

Fig 6.6: Summary of monthly visits to www.thegatheringireland.com



57% of website visits were from outside Ireland. Among the international audience, the US and the UK combined accounted for 70% of overseas visits over the lifetime of the project. This is not surprising given the global profile of the Irish diaspora.

Fig 6.7: Breakdown of country of origin of international visitors to website.



Creating Content

A key element of the digital strategy was to create a constant stream of interesting and relevant content to engage online audiences to extend an invitation to connections overseas and, for those overseas, to provide compelling reasons for them to visit Ireland in 2013. A significant investment was made to create quality content and to constantly update and refresh it. This digital content included professionally produced material as well as stories and images submitted by Gathering organisers and participants.

- A large number of videos were created and were an important means of engaging the audience and telling The Gathering story. Go to www.youtube.com/gathering2013.
- Web articles and blogs on individual events and personal accounts of Gatherings;
- User-generated photos of gatherings on a special Facebook App.



Fig 6.8: Example of image submitted to The Gathering Facebook Gallery App.

Social media channels

The full suite of social media channels were used to promote the rich and varied content and to provide a platform for the audience to engage with the project and with each other:

Facebook

- The Gathering Facebook page acted as the main social media hub. It attracted 112,000 'Likes', the vast majority of which were secured through content marketing. See [Appendix F](#) for examples of best performing promoted content on the Gathering Facebook page.
- Competitions were used as a key tool to engage interest and build a consumer database for email marketing. An e-database of 80,000 was created which is a valuable asset for future marketing activity.
- In addition to the main Gathering Facebook page, a number of event-specific community or individually run Facebook pages were supported directly. A total of 96 Gathering events were supported in this way generating over 287,000 'Likes' for those events.
- An 'Invite and Attend' app was also developed to encourage people in Ireland to extend an invitation to friends by sharing information about gatherings to their networks. 32 individual Gatherings were supported by dedicated Facebook advertising which helped drive in excess of 100,000 unique visitors to the App.
- Special campaigns were run such as the Ireland Family History Facebook page described earlier in this chapter.
- In total, circa €0.75m was spent by The Gathering on Facebook activity and promotions.

YouTube and Web TV

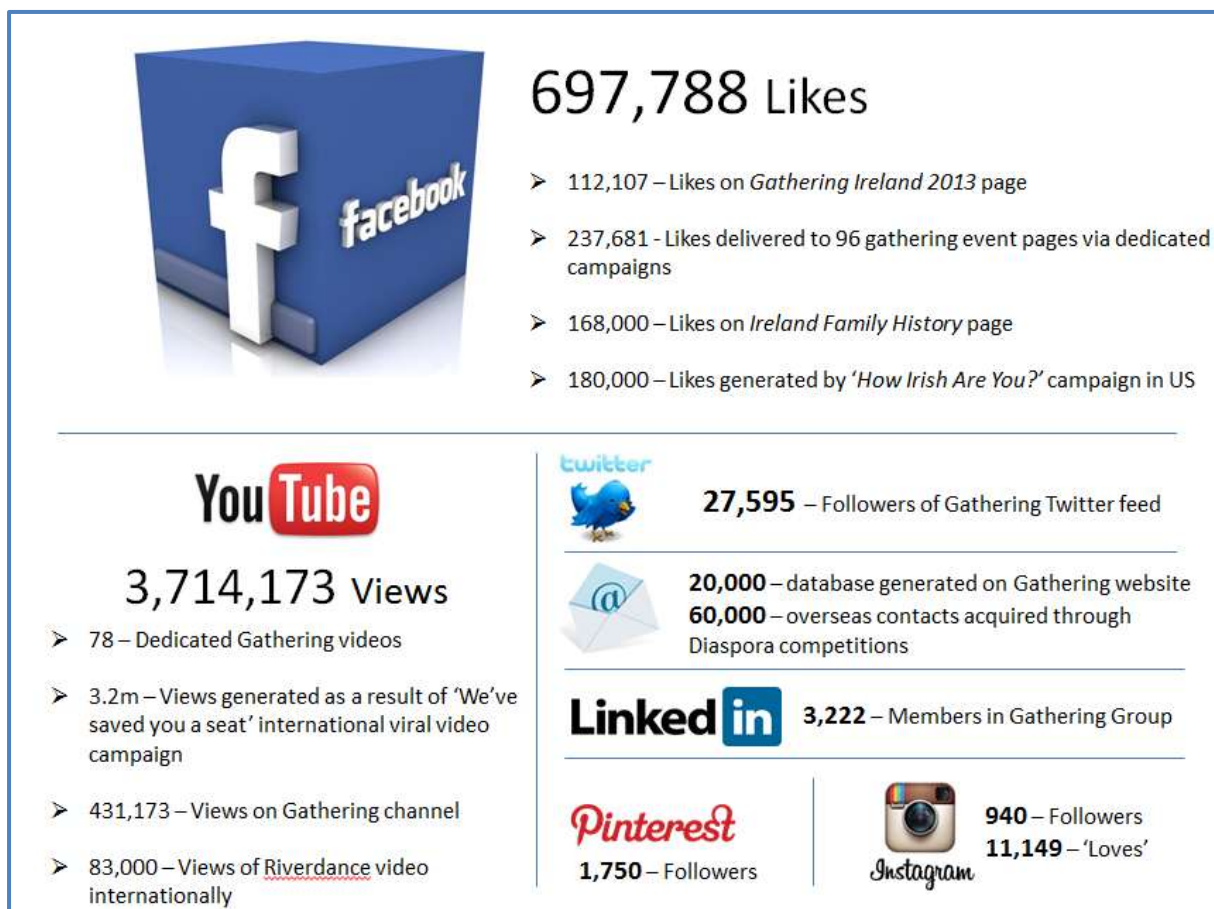
- A total of 78 Gathering videos were produced both for domestic and international audiences generating in excess of 3.7m views.
- A YouTube Channel was established to host Gathering videos including a selection submitted by the public. See [Appendix G](#) for most popular videos on Gathering YouTube Channel.
- The YouTube content included some special feature campaigns including the, "We've Saved you a Seat" special featuring comedian Andrew Maxwell in a suite of 4 videos which were heavily promoted in all key markets. Details are provided in [Appendix E](#).
- The Gathering Web TV Channel delivered a looped broadcast of Gathering video content from a link on The Gathering website. It also hosted 9 live broadcasts throughout 2013, totalling almost 30 hours of viewing and generating 132,200 live streams. 65% of people who watched The Gathering Channel on The Gathering website were from overseas.

Twitter

- Twitter was used primarily to help drive awareness of up-coming gatherings but also shared news relevant to the project. It delivered over 27,500 Followers. Key-word targeting internationally allowed a low-cost method of advertising to an already engaged audience. More details are provided in [Appendix G](#).

Other

- The Gathering also had an active presence on other social media channels including LinkedIn, Pinterest and Instagram with summary results included in Fig 6.9 below.

Fig 6.9: Summary of Gathering social media achievements

**All statistics are to end November 2013*

A Toolkit has been prepared by The Gathering which focuses on developing and implementing a high impact social media strategy based on project experience. More information on this Social Media Toolkit can be found in [Appendix C](#).

6.7 Media Engagement and PR

Domestic Media Engagement

PR has shaped the national story of The Gathering, continually driving positive messaging and supporting key strategic objectives. Domestic PR began in earnest in mid-2012 with the appointment of an internal PR Manager and an external PR agency to support.

A series of 2012 campaigns anchored in key events drove awareness of the Gathering. They included the formal launch of the Gathering at Dublin Castle (May 2012), a regional campaign to support Community Meetings phase (Summer- Autumn 2012), The Emerald Isle Classic ‘Kick Off’ of the Gathering Ireland 2013 & GAA All Ireland Hurling Final events (September 2012) and NYE Dublin 2012 – the first Gathering of a year of Gatherings

Successful events-based PR activities continued throughout 2013 with St Patrick’s Festival, Riverdance-The Gathering, Cork Rebel Week and others serving as milestones and opportunities for

media engagement. However, it was the personal testimonies of long-lost ancestral connections or newly-discovered friendships that really captured the imagination and provided a wealth of engaging and often emotional stories for the media. These stories captured the true essence of The Gathering and what it meant for individuals, families and communities.

The Gathering Ireland's domestic media engagement programme produced a huge range of media content and had a major impact:

- Over 6,227 articles and reports on the Gathering were recorded. The tone of Gathering coverage throughout 2013 has been overwhelmingly positive. See [Appendix H](#) for examples of Gathering coverage in the domestic media.
- Regional media accounted for approximately two-thirds of all coverage, reflecting the local, community-based nature of the project.
- In total, this coverage is estimated to have had an Equivalent Advertising Value of over €40 million.

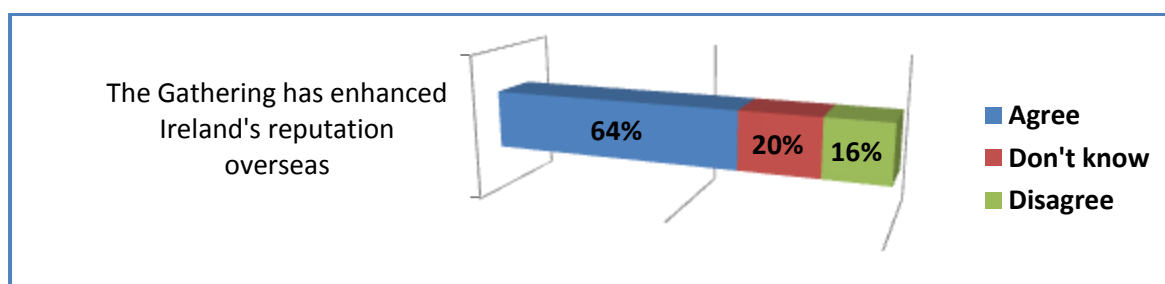
International Media Engagement

The Gathering Ireland message was rooted in Tourism Ireland's international media outreach programme throughout 2012 and 2013. This included extensive coverage across the international suite of online media rooms with The Gathering Ireland message included in story ideas, press releases and suggested media itineraries. Key activities included:

- The Gathering Ireland programme was incorporated into itineraries for the vast majority of international media visits that took place in Q4 2012 and throughout 2013;
- 1,418 journalists came to Ireland during 2013 to specifically cover The Gathering;
- A further 15 group Press Trips were arranged hosting over 130 media with each individual itinerary featuring a Gathering event;
- Promotion of the Gathering at key international trade and media events;
- Production and international dissemination of Video News Releases (VNRs) around key priority events throughout 2013 e.g. St. Patrick's Day, Tom Cruise Irish Heritage and NYE Dublin;
- The Gathering Ireland message was also included in media e-zines and media outreach activities to a database of over 22,000 international media and news agencies.

The international publicity effort for the Gathering Ireland has generated a total of 1,870 publicity items (across press, online, TV and radio) with an estimated Equivalent Advertising Value of €75m.

Fig 6.10: Results from Ipsos MRBI Omnipoll National Survey, October 2013 showing that 3 in 5 people in Ireland believe The Gathering has raised the profile of Ireland overseas.



Please see [Appendix H](#) for examples of positive media coverage abroad.

The substantial media coverage achieved internationally by the Gathering has helped raise Ireland's profile as a holiday destination globally. In 2013 Ireland received a number of significant destination ratings including being featured in the highly influential Fodor's Top 25 Go List and The New York Times Top 40 Must See destination in 2013. The Lonely Planet Guide also named Dublin in the Top 5 Cities to visit for New Year's Eve.

6.8 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- a) The Gathering succeeded in its core objectives of raising awareness (87%) among Irish people and encouraged them to engage with the project with 1 in 3 adults saying they personally invited someone to visit Ireland in 2013. This 'personal invite' was a key factor in delivering on the additional overseas visitor targets.
- b) All media channels contributed to the success of the marketing and communications campaign in Ireland and overseas with TV, radio and digital /social media playing key roles at different phases of the project. In addition, the use of key influencers or enablers abroad was effective in driving awareness and contributed directly to the organisation of Gathering events.
- c) The digital and social media platforms played a central role and acted as the communications hub for the project. In general, the event-specific promotions worked best and were most cost-effective compared with more generic campaigns.
- d) PR and media engagement was a vital part of the communications effort and delivered strongly at home and abroad with a total of 8,000+ media placements with an estimated Equivalent Advertising Value of €115m. A total of close to 1,500 media trips to Ireland during the year delivered strongly for The Gathering and will also yield substantial future dividends.
- e) The marketing and communications activity associated with The Gathering is likely to continue to yield benefits in the years ahead as a result of the much enhanced profile of the country as a tourism destination and the extended reach with diaspora groups around the globe.

Recommendations

- a) The success of The Gathering in engaging with key diaspora groups abroad should be developed further as a priority part of the on-going tourism promotion activities overseas. Tourism Ireland should include diaspora engagement as an intrinsic part of their marketing strategy with specific budgets allocated annually based on defined targets and objectives.
- b) Budgets should be prioritised for event-specific promotions that have the capacity to yield the highest return of overseas visitors. Close collaboration is required between Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland in selecting events to be funded and supported for marketing overseas to ensure maximum return on investment for State funds.
- c) Social media and digital communications offer a cost-effective opportunity to micro-target key diaspora groups. It is important that event organisers are given appropriate supports by the tourism agencies to harness the potential of social media.

- d) The power of the 'personal invitation' from people in Ireland to friends, relatives and affinity groups abroad should continue to be harnessed and developed. To achieve this, an integrated approach to event funding and related marketing and communications supports by the tourism agencies is essential.

7. PROJECT PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

7.1 Budget Performance

The budget for The Gathering, allocated by the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport totalled €13 million. This was made up of €5m in 2012 and €7m in 2013 with a further €1m re-directed from Fáilte Ireland funds from monies previously allocated for The Irish Open Golf tournament.

The project was delivered on budget. A breakdown of funds across the four primary budget headings is shown below in Fig 7.1.

Fig 7.1: The Gathering Ireland 2013 Budget Summary



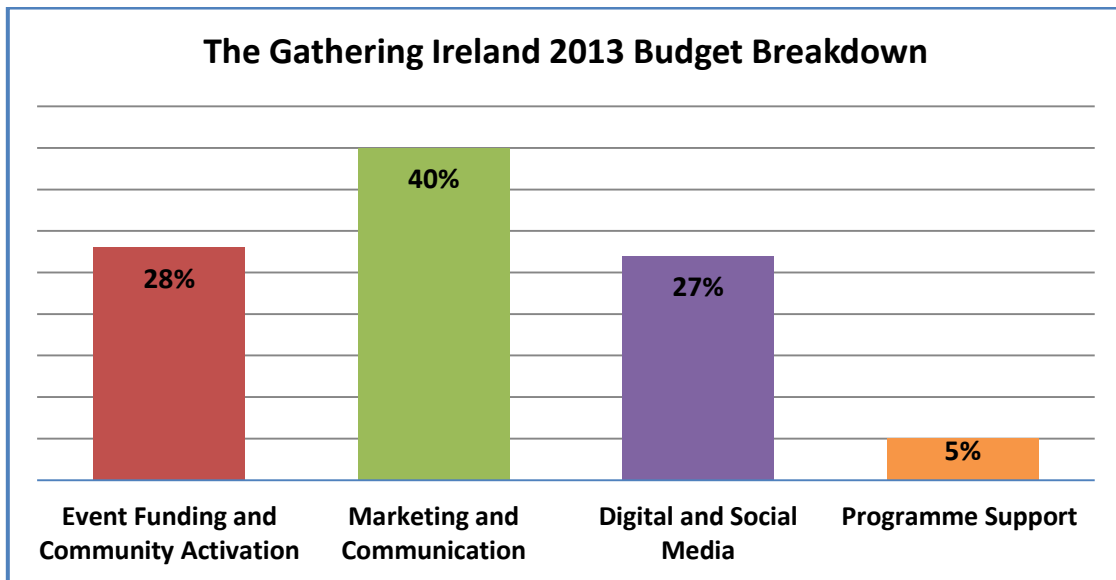
*Note: Figures based on provisional final year estimates as at November 2013

It should be noted that the above refers only to the budget directly allocated to and accounted for by The Gathering. The tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, also contributed substantial staff resources to the project and integrated The Gathering with their on-going programme activities where appropriate. Likewise, staff resources provided by all local authorities and cash supports provided by some are not accounted for. Some estimates of the value of these and other third party supports are provided in section 7.3 below.

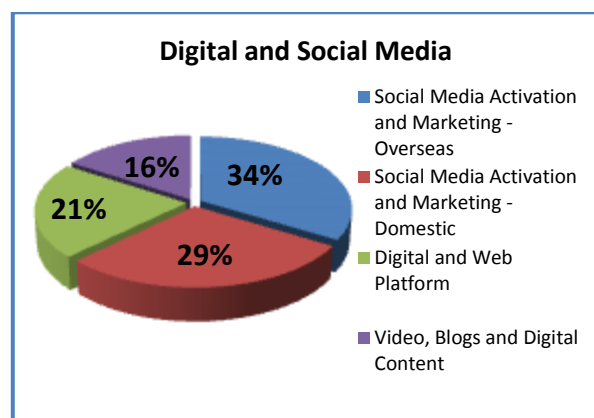
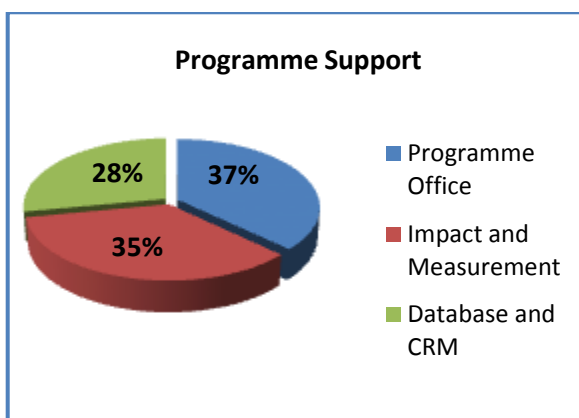
7.2 Budget Analysis

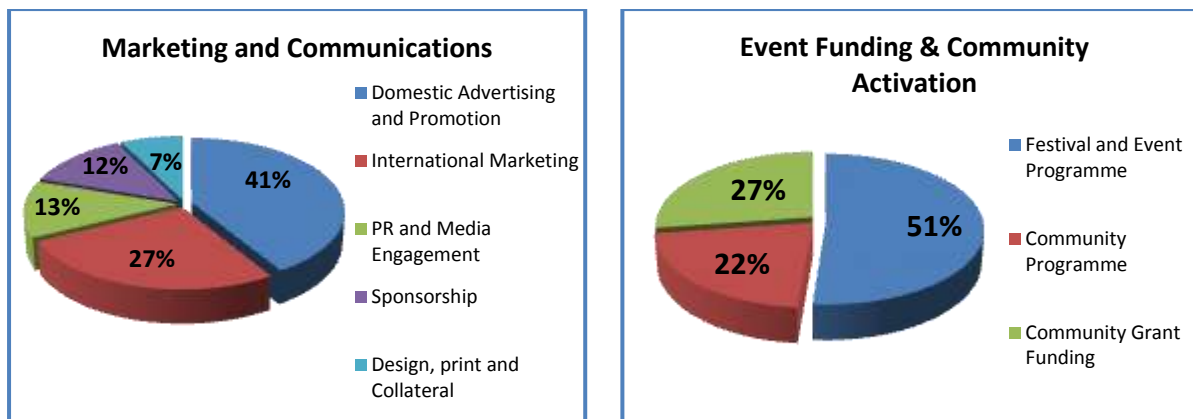
The detailed breakdown by % of the Budget across each of the key project areas is provided in the charts below. The following key points should be noted when analysing the budget:

- This budget analysis, while providing an accurate accounting record of the project, does not always provide the complete picture on particular areas due to cross-functional spending.
- For example, the Events Funding and Community Activation budget played a substantial role in directly attracting overseas visitors through the personal and group invitations that arose from community events. A portion of this budget could, therefore, be reasonably regarded as international promotion and marketing but it is not possible to accurately isolate the relevant proportion attributable to this.



- Within the Marketing and Promotion budget itself, the Domestic Advertising & Promotion element refers to money spent in the Irish market or on domestic media. However, the ultimate aim of much of this spending was to activate Irish people to organise events and/or invite people to Ireland and thus had a strong international focus.
- Likewise, a significant proportion of the Digital and Social Media budget was focused, directly or indirectly, on communicating to overseas visitors and could also be included in the marketing and international promotion category.





7.3 Third-party Support & Value in-kind

The Gathering benefitted from a broad range of supports from both public and private sector organisations. These supports came in the form of events funding, the provision of staff and other organisational resources, project sponsorship and a variety of marketing and co-branding supports.

It is not possible to assign a precise value on these supports as some partners were unable to provide a detailed valuation and commercial sensitivities apply in other cases. An approximate valuation of the supports suggests a total value of circa €8 million made up of approximately €3.7m in cash supports for events and a further €4.3m in-kind supports.

The IPB Insurance €1m contribution for the special Gathering events fund outlined earlier is by far the largest third-party cash supporter. Events grants from local authorities are estimated to have a combined value in excess of €0.75m with LEADER and Local development companies estimated to have provided in excess of €1m in events supports. Other significant events funding provided by the Irish Aviation Authority for Flightfest, the Irish Sports Council for certain sporting events and the ports of Dublin and Cork.

The comprehensive co-branding and marketing supports by the DAA leads the list of the publicly-owned in-kind sponsor category. Other key partners providing in-kind supports include Shannon and Ireland West Airports, An Post, Irish Rail and Bus Eireann. The provision of staff by local Authorities is conservatively estimated to be worth in excess of €1m. Commercial sponsors in the transport area providing mainly marketing and co-branding support include Aer Lingus, Etihad, Emirates, Irish Ferries and Celtic Link Ferries. Other notable commercial sponsors include Bank of Ireland, Mastercard, Diageo, Glenisk and Applegreen.

7.4 Research and Impact Measurements

A number of research and measurement tools were deployed to assess the impact of The Gathering and to evaluate the value for money for the investment by the State. There were four primary pillars to the research and impact analysis:

1. The awareness of and attitudes to the Gathering by people at home in Ireland was measured through a series of Omnipoll National surveys carried out by Ipsos MRBI. The surveys provided useful guidance for the project as well as an overall analysis of

sentiment and buy-in by citizens. The key results from those surveys have been included throughout the earlier part of this report.

2. Overseas visitor numbers are measured monthly and published by the CSO. The 2013 data shows an overall growth in overseas visitors of 7.3% (based on first 10 months data) with especially strong growth in the key diaspora markets targeted by The Gathering. The Gathering also commissioned research to attempt to establish what proportion of these additional visited was influenced by The Gathering. This included a combination of surveys of Gathering Organisers, detailed research of some larger festivals and events, data from Gathering-specific corporate or business Gatherings and some data from port of exit surveys. The visitor data was analysed by independent consultants and used by them in their assessment of economic impact. A summary of some of the data from the Gathering Organisers survey is included in [Appendix I](#).
3. The independent consultants, Fitzpatrick & Associates, were appointed to carry out a detailed Economic Impact Study of the Gathering following a request for proposals through a public tender process by Fáilte Ireland in February 2013. The consultants agreed a methodology with the Fáilte Ireland research department and commissioned additional research undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes. This, as well as all relevant publicly available data and the results of The Gathering Organisers Survey has been compiled and analysed by the consultants. They will issue their final Economic Impact report in April 2014 following publication of the final 2013 overseas visitor days by the CSO. In the meantime, they have issued an interim statement of preliminary findings which is included in section 7.5 below.
4. Given the importance of the community engagement with the project, The Gathering also commissioned research to analyse the social and community benefits arising from the project. DIT Tourism School have been engaged to carry out this work. They have selected two counties to do an in-depth analysis of the social and community impact. Kerry, a strong tourism county, was chosen along with Westmeath which has a lesser tourism legacy. The researchers will provide a final report in March 2014 but have now produced an interim report as outlined in Section 7.6 below.

7.5 Economic Impact Analysis – Preliminary Findings

In order to assess the initiative's performance using a strong evidence base, a number of research instruments were put in place covering:

- Individual Gatherings: This covers over 4,700 family, clan and community/local Gatherings. Organizers of such Gatherings were surveyed after the event to determine the volume of additional overseas tourists arising, i.e. overseas visitors that came to Ireland specifically to attend Gatherings, with over 1,800 events responding to the survey to date. See [Appendix I](#) for more detail.
- Festivals Research: The Gathering team commissioned consumer research at about one third of the 34 national level Gathering festivals, with all others required to report post event data on festival/event attendances to Fáilte Ireland.
- Corporate Gatherings: The Gathering team kept regularly updated logs of attendance at all Gathering-specific corporate events and also surveyed event organizers.

- Port of Exit Survey: A representative sample of departing tourists was interviewed, with a set of Gathering specific questions asked of all respondents.

Independent consultants, Fitzpatrick & Associates, were commissioned to carry out an Economic Impact Study. Their preliminary assessment based on the analysis of available data as of December 2013 is as follows:

“Based on the indicative results available to date, which are based on partial, preliminary data for the January-September period, it is conservatively estimated that the initiative will have delivered between 250,000 and 275,000 incremental tourists to Ireland in 2013². These additional tourists would not have visited Ireland this year but for The Gathering.

In terms of the incremental economic impact arising, it is estimated that Gathering specific overseas tourists will also have spent up to €170mn in the country. This is above original projections, as the actual profile of Gathering visitors differed from our original assumptions.

In particular, the actual profile of Gathering visitors:

- *contained a higher share of North American tourists, who tend to holiday longer in Ireland, thereby spending more money here;*
- *contained a higher share of business tourists, who tend spend more than any other category of tourists;*
- *was more likely to use paid accommodation than anticipated.”*

Fitzpatrick & Associates will provide a final Economic Impact Report on The Gathering Ireland 2013 in April 2014.

7.6 Social and Community Impact – Independent Study

Another important strand of research was also commission by The Gathering to identify, analyse and measure the social and community impacts of the project in Ireland. The School of Hospitality, Management and Tourism in DIT has undertaken the study which seeks to ascertain the type and nature of social and community impacts generated by The Gathering and to examine the nature of the legacy benefits that will extend beyond 2013.

Two counties were selected in which to conduct the study namely Kerry, a county with a long established reputation as a leading tourism area and Westmeath, a county which is less strongly associated with tourism. In addition, the researchers will review national data including the results of a detailed survey of The Gathering Co-ordinators in each county. More information on this survey is provided in [Appendix J](#).

This research project is rolling out on a phased basis. Phase one involves collecting background information on The Gathering in Kerry and Westmeath while phase two involves interviewing key informants in the counties. Phase three comprises surveying all events organizers in the two

² While an estimated 275,000 tourists attended various gatherings, a range is quoted as it is possible that some tourists attended more than one gathering. This reflects our conservative approach to the impact assessment.

counties while in phase four focus groups and short surveys with communities in Kerry and Westmeath will be conducted to ascertain their views.

Phases one and two are now complete with phases three and four scheduled for early 2014. While the final report is not due until March/ April 2014, an interim report synopsizing the feedback emerging from the key informant interviews has been prepared. The findings suggest there is a general consensus that The Gathering has had a positive social and community impact. It has brought people and communities together and brought about a renewed sense of community spirit.

The DIT Social and Community Impact report will be published when finalized in spring 2014.

7.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- a) The Gathering was delivered within its approved budget of €13m from the Department for Transport, Tourism & Sport.
- b) The project succeeded in leveraging substantial third-party cash and in-kind supports from both the public and private sectors. While a precise value of these supports is not available, it is estimated that they were worth in the region of €8m.
- c) Preliminary estimates by independent consultants show that the project delivered at least 250,000 to 275,000 incremental tourists in 2013 that would not have visited Ireland but for The Gathering. The additional revenue generated by these tourists is estimated conservatively to be €170 million. The final Economic Impact Report will be published in April 2014.
- d) In addition to the economic value, The Gathering has delivered a social dividend with a very positive impact on communities in every part of Ireland and has helped to bring about a renewed sense of community spirit. An independent Social & Community Impact Report will be published when finalised in March/April 2014.

Recommendations

- a) The Gathering should not be staged more frequently than on a five-year cycle as it would not be feasible to mobilise the national and international effort to stage it on a more frequent basis. A decision on when/if to stage another Gathering should only be taken following consideration of the final Economic Impact and Social and Community Impact Reports due for publication in April 2014.
- b) Consideration should also be given to not repeating The Gathering at all and to focus instead on the sustained and on-going development of the legacies of the 2013 Gathering based on some of the earlier recommendations in this report including:
 - Support for sustainable events with good potential for attracting more overseas visitors;
 - Development of the engagement with diaspora networks as an intrinsic part of the promotion of tourism in key target markets;
 - Sustaining the collaborative approach to the development of local and community-based tourism under the leadership of local authorities.

APPENDIX A – PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

The Gathering Ireland 2013	
Project Advisory Board	
Tim O'Connor	Chairperson
Jim Miley	Project Director
David Geraghty	Google
Ray O'Leary/ Maurice Quinn/ Paul Bates*	Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport
Marian Vickers/ Brian Carty*	Irish Local Development Network
Ruth Andrews	Irish Tour Operators Association
John Crumlish	Galway Arts Festival
John Concannon	Fáilte Ireland
Frank Dawson	County & City Managers Association
Simon Gregory / Mark Henry*	Tourism Ireland
Mark Boyle	NUI, Maynooth

*One nominee – membership varied at different stages of project

APPENDIX B – TOURISM ADVISORY GROUP

The Gathering Ireland 2013	
Ruth Andrews	Chairperson
Catherine Reilly	Brendan Vacations
Helena Healy	B&B Ireland
Michael Vaughan	Irish Hotels Federation
Margaret Jeffares	Good Food Ireland
Jane Magnier	Abbey Tours
Adrian Cummins	Restaurants Association of Ireland
Padraig Cribbon	Vintners Federation of Ireland
Eoghan O'Mara Walsh	Heritage Island
Tim Fenn	Irish Hotels Federation

APPENDIX C – GATHERING TOOLKITS

Toolkits have been developed in four strategically important areas. These Toolkits are a valuable resource for other tourism projects and may also be applicable to other sectors. Each Toolkit is based on the experience of The Gathering and focus on areas critical to the success of the project. The toolkits examine in detail the approach taken, critical success factors, indicative timelines, budgets and resources as well as KPIs and key achievements.

1. Community Activation

This Toolkit is deals with mobilising communities across Ireland to support a major national project. The toolkit can be applied to other similar national projects that require strong community engagement. It can equally be applied at a regional or county level to enlist support for local initiatives where community activation is essential.

You can download this toolkit from the Fáilte Ireland website here → [insert link](#)

2. Community Event Micro-Funding

This Toolkit is based on the experience of The Gathering in allocating and distributing event funding for a major national project to multiple community based events. The Toolkit can be applied to other similar projects that require allocation of funding in a short timeframe, using a devolved fund administration process, in collaboration with Local Authorities.

You can download this toolkit from the Fáilte Ireland website here → [insert link](#)

3. Delivering an Impact on Social Media

This Toolkit focuses on developing and implementing a high impact social media strategy. The Gathering's strategy aimed to maximise awareness and engagement with the project both nationally and internationally. Social media activation was underpinned robust content marketing, micro-targeting on Facebook and Twitter and fundamental 'always-on' activity.

You can download this toolkit from the Fáilte Ireland website here → [insert link](#)

4. Rolling out a Volunteer Ambassador Programme

This Toolkit focuses on developing and implementing a Volunteer Ambassador Programme in five locations around Ireland. The toolkit can be applied to other similar national projects that require brand visibility on the ground and/or to enhance the visitor experience. It can be equally applied at a regional or county level to support initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin and Culture & Heritage.

You can download this toolkit from the Fáilte Ireland website here → [insert link](#)

APPENDIX D – SUMMARY OF EXISTING FESTIVAL AND LARGE-SCALE EVENT PROFILES

EXISTING LARGE SCALE FESTIVAL AND EVENTS IN RECEIPT OF GATHERING FUNDING	
Event	Description of Gathering-specific activity/programme
Bloom 2013	"Gathering of Gardeners" - inviting people to have their Gathering at Bloom for free.
Cat Laughs Comedy Festival	Expanded festival to include high profile US / UK based Irish act to increase overseas audience.
Cork International Choral Festival	Developed non-competitive strand of the Cork International Choral Festival to increase numbers from overseas.
Cork Midsummer Festival	Seeking to target and attract new overseas target audience to the event.
Dublin Fringe Festival	Invitation to Irish artists living abroad and international artists with connections to the festival to return to Dublin and present as part of the 2013 Fringe
Dublin Theatre Festival	One-day seminar, "Voyage and Return", with the theme of theatre and the Irish diaspora
Earagail Arts Festival	The Homecoming Abhaile - star-studded music festival by internationally recognised Donegal and Irish artists
European Athletics Team Championships	Largest athletics team event ever staged in Ireland with 12 nations competing (men and women) and a total of 650 athletes participating.
Galway Arts Festival	Extended festival including an additional weekend incorporating "Gathering of Minds"
Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival	Oyster opening heats held overseas for competitors with any of the surnames of the 14 Tribes of Galway thereby targeting a new audience and increasing the number of overseas participants.
Great Limerick Run	Increased overseas promotion of the event to increase overseas participants.
Guinness Cork Jazz Festival	Boston Music College students invited to Cork for the International Jazz Gathering including special jazz master classes.
John Ford Ireland	World Class seven day international film school. Invitees include top international young film makers, film studio executives, international and trade press.
Kilkenny Arts Festival	Increased overseas promotion of event and bigger and better programme
Kinsale Arts Festival	'Come Home for Your Tea' Day - A Friends and Family Day, incorporating street performances, free live music, a street party and Bake Off Competition.
Listowel Writers Week	Extended festival designed to appeal to an overseas audience with diaspora literary theme.
NYE 2012 & 2013	Major overseas promotion of enhanced event with a programme designed to target and attract incremental overseas visitors.
Rory Gallagher Tribute Festival	Fáilte Isteach Rock - concert offering Irish musicians working overseas and musicians with an affinity to Ireland who have been inspired by Rory Gallagher to participate and feature in a unique diaspora concert.
Rose of Tralee Festival	Gathering of the Roses with all previous Rose finalists invited back.
Sea Sessions	Targeting of four key 'Gathering' markets (US, UK, Australia & NZ) and four secondary markets (France, Germany, Spain & Nordics) to deliver incremental overseas visitors.
Sligo Live	Targeting new audiences to increase incremental overseas visitors to the festival
St. Patrick's Festival	People's Parade: Unique opportunity to attract overseas visitors to march in the parade ahead of the main floats – hugely successful.
Temple Bar Tradfest	Enhanced programme to attract incremental overseas visitors.
Waterford Harvest Festival	Expanded event to target and attract incremental overseas visitors.
Wexford Festival Opera	Focusing on overseas promotion and a programme designed to target and attract incremental overseas visitors.

LARGER FUNDED GATHERING-SPECIFIC EVENTS	
Event	Description of Gathering-specific activity/programme
An Tailteann Nua	New event with contemporary take on the ancient Irish sports and artistic festival, the Tailteann Games. 5-day multi-activity cultural experience, to include writers, musicians, tournaments, workshops, presentations, debates, storytelling and gigs.
Cork Rebel Week	A week-long celebration of “all things Cork” with a specific focus on bringing International visitors and family home to Cork County and City – incorporating Naval Ships Gathering and Cork Global Economic Conference.
Riverdance - The Gathering	Riverdance Longest Line World Record and outdoor concert / show at Merrion Square targeting overseas participants and visitors – dancers from over 40 countries took part.
The Gathering Cruise	Flotilla of boats from UK locations with Irish connections – visiting ports along the east coast and travelling to Kinsale for a Gathering of participants.
The Gathering Dublin	Series of 25 sporting / leisure events from February to November with combined target of 18,750 overseas visitors.
The Dublin Decider	A special pre-season friendly between Liverpool FC and Celtic FC in Aviva Stadium in August, organised by the FAI specifically for The Gathering to attract overseas visitors to Dublin for the game.

APPENDIX E – INTERNATIONAL ONLINE CAMPAIGNS

‘HOW IRISH ARE YOU?’ CAMPAIGN

The ‘How Irish are You?’ social media campaign was run in the US market and sought to trigger the interest of those with Irish links, however distant. It also supported the Diaspora Gathering Advertising that was running both offline and across Tourism Ireland digital channels.



Fig E (i): Screen-grab of ‘How Irish Are You?’ Facebook App

The campaign included 3 strands – social vibe, sponsored posts and marketplace ads that targeted the +35 age group. Facebook posts over the course of the campaign were themed with ‘How Irish Are You?’. Fans were directed to a Facebook App where they were invited to answer 10 questions to discover how Irish they were, and they had the chance to share their result on Facebook.

The campaign delivered 180,000 new fans for Tourism Ireland’s US Facebook page and the competition received 35,685 entries.

‘WE’VE SAVED YOU A SEAT’ VIRAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN



This was an integrated YouTube / Facebook viral campaign designed to get users to share the video and invite friends to particular events. The overall cost of the campaign including production and promotion amounted to €300,000. While the campaign attracted over 3.2 million views on YouTube and helped to raise awareness, it under-delivered on Facebook activation.

APPENDIX F – EXAMPLES OF BEST PERFORMING PROMOTED CONTENT ON GATHERING FACEBOOK PAGE

Cork Rebel Week Photo Album



Flightfest Photo Album



Touch Rugby Video

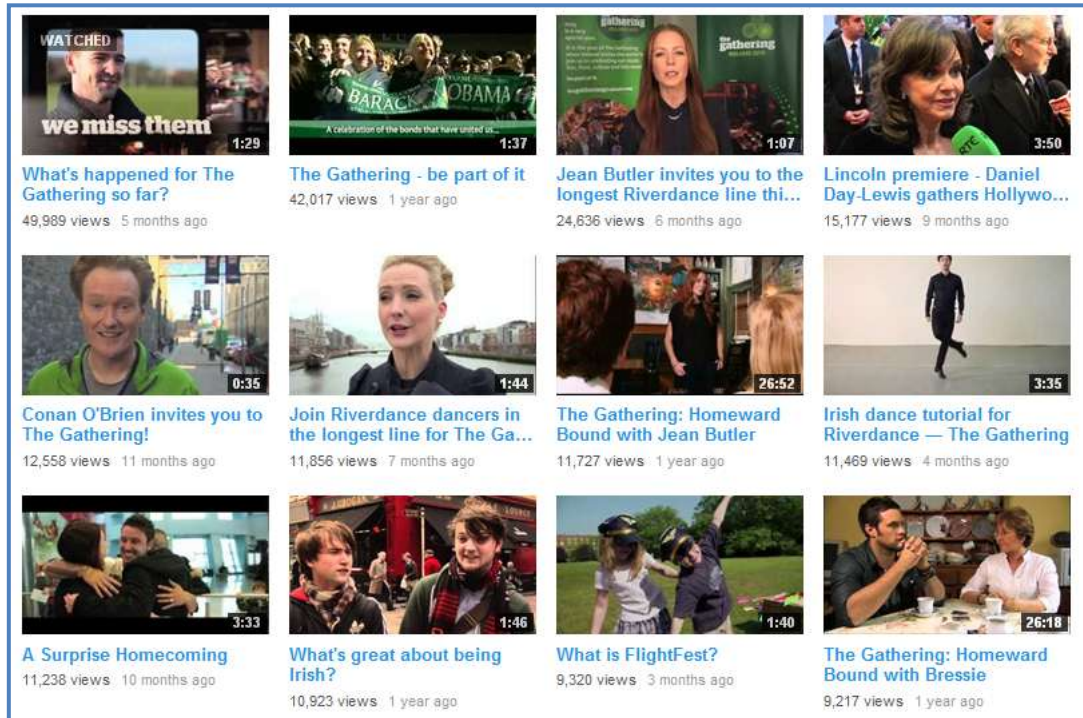


Ukulele Video



APPENDIX G – YOUTUBE AND TWITTER

MOST POPULAR VIDEOS ON GATHERING YOUTUBE CHANNEL



Go to www.youtube.com/gathering2013.

EXAMPLE OF PROMOTED TWEET USING KEY-WORD TARGETING

'Riverdance – The Gathering' ads were served to Twitter users in 11 countries mentioning the keywords 'Jean Butler', 'Michael Flatley' and 'Irish Dance'.

Fig G (i): Riverdance targeted promoted tweet in Japan.



Fig G (ii): Riverdance targeted promoted tweet in Italy.



APPENDIX H – SAMPLE OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Domestic

- The Gathering Supplement - The Irish Independent 24.11.12 → <http://tiny.cc/3an67w>
- New Year's Eve and the start of the Gathering - RTÉ Six One News 31.12.12 → <http://tiny.cc/fr1t7w>
- 'Forget the Shakedown, Here's the Breakdown', Ciara Kenny. The Irish Times 11.01.13 → <http://tiny.cc/8bn67w>
- St. Patrick's Day Special - RTÉ The Late Late Show 15.03.13 → <http://tiny.cc/bk2t7w>
- 'Gather Ye', Yvonne Gordon. Irish Times Magazine 22.06.13 → <http://tiny.cc/bdn67w>
- Summer Gathering Series, Samantha Libreri. RTÉ 1 Morning Ireland, July 15-18:
 - July 15th → <http://tiny.cc/x32t7w>
 - July 16th → <http://tiny.cc/m62t7w>
 - July 17th → <http://tiny.cc/562t7w>
 - July 18th → <http://tiny.cc/o72t7w>

International

Various

- "Gathering for dinner" - Elite Traveller 14.03.13 → <http://tiny.cc/mzc17w>
- "Irish Gathering Defies Actor's Shakedown Tag Amid Gloom: Economy" - Washington Post 16.08.13 → <http://tiny.cc/i1c17w>
- "Ireland Calls the Diaspora Home" - Helen O'Neill (AP) 04.06.13 → <http://tiny.cc/q2c17w>
- Fodors Top 25 → <http://tiny.cc/x3c17w>
- "Gathering 2013, a celebration with a kiss of the Irish" - Washington Post 15.03.13 → <http://tiny.cc/u4c17w>
- "Ireland's Diaspora Return" - Financial Times 08.03.13 → <http://tiny.cc/w5c17w>

Riverdance

- CBS News (USA) → <http://tiny.cc/w7c17w>
- CTV News (Canada) → <http://tiny.cc/afd17w>
- The Guardian (Great Britain) → <http://tiny.cc/7bd17w>
- Euronews (Europe) → <http://tiny.cc/ycd17w>
- Travel Weekly (Australia) → <http://tiny.cc/2fd17w>

Tom Cruise

- Daily Telegraph (Great Britain) → <http://tiny.cc/uhd17w>
- Sky News (Great Britain) → <http://tiny.cc/ajd17w>
- Travel Pulse (USA) → <http://tiny.cc/4jd17w>
- Irish Central (USA) → <http://tiny.cc/rkd17w>

APPENDIX I – GATHERING ORGANISERS SURVEY

The Gathering Feedback Survey was commissioned by The Gathering Team to take feedback directly from the organisers of all registered Gatherings except existing large scale festivals and larger Gathering-specific events which are subject to a separate strand of analysis. Key questions being asked of gathering organisers in this survey relate to attendance estimates and as to whether or not the event will be organised again and, if so, within what timeframe.



Fig. 1 (i): Screen-grab of online survey for gathering organisers.

Approach

- Personalised emails are issued to organisers of Gatherings within 4 weeks of their registered event having taken place. They are invited to provide feedback on their event via www.TheGatheringFeedback.com.
- One week after the initial email, a reminder email is sent to non-respondents.
- A 2nd follow-up email is sent to non-respondents the following week.
- Telephone and further email communications are undertaken each month with organisers of key funded events (identified by Gathering Local Engagement Managers) who have not responded.
- Lists of non-respondents are also supplied to Local Engagement Managers and Gathering County Co-ordinators so that they can follow up and encourage the organisers to respond.

Verification

- Telephone contact is made with events deemed to have possibly returned overstated estimates. These events are identified by Local Engagement Managers and Gathering County Co-ordinators.
- During the last quarter of 2013, a review of all returns has been undertaken by Local Engagement Managers to verify data and ensure accuracy of estimates of overseas visitors.

Results

- The response has been extremely strong at 37% with a total of 1,817 responses received.
- Asked whether or not they intend hosting their gathering again 51% responded YES. Of those who responded YES, 71% said they will host their event again in 2014.
- The survey showed that the average attendance of people who travelled to Ireland from overseas specifically to attend a gathering event is 36.

APPENDIX J – GATHERING CO-ORDINATORS SURVEY

This Survey was completed by Gathering Co-ordinators in October / November 2013.

Overall it was felt that the Local Authority-led structure at a county level was a success. Steering Committees were effective in activating communities and networks in most cases. A number of responses indicated that new, potentially long-lasting relationships, between local authorities, community interests, commercial tourism interests and other partners have now been established in many counties.

While 3 out of 4 co-ordinators report they successfully developed working coalitions of local organisations who supported The Gathering locally, tourism businesses were less engaged than would have been expected with only 56% of respondents reporting support from them.

The community activation process was also deemed highly successful overall with 72% of respondents agreeing that the moderated community meetings, which formed a core strand of this activation process, helped deliver worthwhile outcomes. It should however be noted that the community activation process in Dublin yielded lower than expected engagement when compared to other areas of the country.

Gathering Co-ordinators have also indicated that the capacity of the Local Authorities to reach out to relevant diaspora networks, which was an important objective of the project, has greatly increased over the past 18 months. Similarly it is felt that Local Authorities have also significantly improved their capacity to develop and expand community tourism.

Fig J (i): Summary of top-line feedback from Gathering Co-ordinators.

