

Irish Football Association: Developing outcomes for Community Relations

The *Measuring Change* approach was used to help define 'community relations' within the context of the Irish Football Association's 'Football for All' programme and support a sample of Irish League clubs to baseline their current position with respect to community relations.

'Football for All' has been running as an Irish Football Association (IFA) campaign since 2000, funded under EU Peace III and managed with support from SEUPB, Community Relations Council and Pobal. One of its specific objectives is to empower local football clubs to be beacons in their community with regard to promoting community relations.

During early 2012, CENI worked with the Community Relations department of the IFA to develop a framework of community relations outcomes and test an approach to enable Irish League clubs to baseline their position against these outcomes.

How was *Measuring Change* used?

1 Defining change

The IFA Community Relations programme had a series of high level objectives which connected with multiple and diverse community relations activities undertaken at a club level. The task was to incorporate these into a single overarching framework of community relations outcomes.

An initial desk exercise trawled the community relations audits produced by the clubs to identify a preliminary list of outcome statements. Facilitated sessions were held, bringing together representatives from different branches within the IFA including league and competitions, licensing, marketing and community relations. This helped to explore community relations issues from these perspectives and shape up an outcomes framework around three key themes:

- **Community Relations within Clubs:** how well prepared is the club to engage in community relations activity?
- **Club's Community Relations with Supporters and Local Community:** how is the club actively engaging in community relations practice with its supporters and the local community?
- **Overall Quality of Community Relationships:** what is the level and quality of relations between the club and its supporters and the local community, as well as other clubs, cultures and organisations?

Theme	Outcome
Community Relations within Clubs	Enhanced community relations capacity within the club
	Improved communication with fans, local community
	More partnership working with community, clubs and agencies
Community Relations with Supporters, Community	Enhanced sustainability match attendance, corporate sponsorship and public funding
	Widened support base more women, families and others
	Increased community involvement community groups, youth groups, schools etc
	Increased opportunity to develop awareness and skills within local community and youth groups
Overall Quality of Relationships	Enhanced quality of life within the local community
	Better bonding with fans, supporters and local community
	Better bridging with other clubs, sports and cultures
	Better linking with public sector, politicians and corporate sector

2 Capturing change

Three clubs were selected to engage in a pilot 'baselining' exercise - two premier league clubs and one amateur league club. Stakeholder panels were set up representing different aspects of each club's operation - management/board, staff, coaches, players and representatives from their supporters and the local community. The panels were asked three specific questions in relation to each of the outcomes:

- How important this outcome was to their club
- Where their club currently stood against this outcome (their baseline)
- How difficult it would be for them to achieve this outcome in the next 5 years.

The panels rated the importance, baseline and difficulty of each outcome for their club's position using a 0-10 scale. The debate and discussion that went on within the panels to inform the estimates was also recorded.

3 Showing Change

The analyses illustrate how the data can be used - in this case to show the baseline and difficulty estimates for one of the clubs sampled against all of the outcomes. **Diagram 1** shows the club's baseline position on each outcome, with '0' indicating no community relations development; '5' they are in the middle range i.e. 'have done some work but a lot more to do'; and '10' they have fully achieved this community relations outcome. These have been listed in order of highest (most developed) to lowest (least developed).

Diagram 1: Baseline: Club's Estimated Current Position on each Outcome (0 – 10 scale)

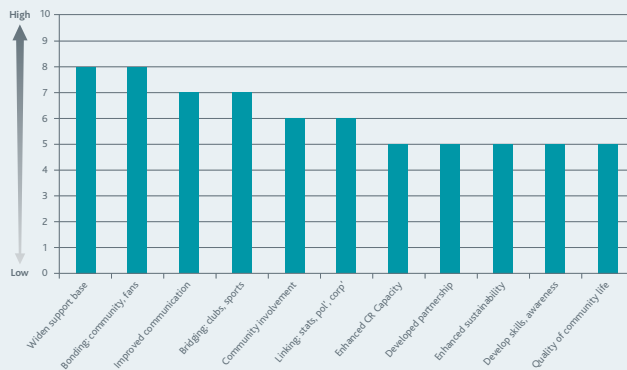


Diagram 2 shows how difficult they estimate it will be to actually achieve these outcomes, again on a 0-10 scale, where a lower score indicates it will be relatively easy, a middle score indicates moderate difficulty and a higher score indicating it will be more difficult. Again these have been listed in order of highest (most difficult) to lowest (least difficult).

Diagram 2: Difficulty: Club's Estimated Difficulty in Achieving each Outcome



In this example, those outcomes which they rated with the lowest baseline - 'enhancing the sustainability' of their club and 'developing skills and awareness' with supporters and the community - were also the ones they rated as being most difficult to achieve.

How did *Measuring Change* help?

- Facilitated separate departments within the IFA to define and agree a common set of community relations outcomes
- Supported clubs to debate the priorities and challenges of community relations for them and to agree a starting position for their club against these outcomes
- Provided clubs with data to help plan their future community relations activities and monitor progress over time
- Provided the IFA with a common framework to assess the position of individual clubs, identify the challenges they face and inform future support strategies.

"Our work with CENI helped to inform the IFA's new Club Community Development plans which are currently being delivered across Northern Ireland, building the capacity of clubs and volunteers throughout all levels of the game."

Michael Boyd, Head of Community Relations, Irish Football Association