

## Best Practice: Citywide Reading Program

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**CITY: DUBLIN**

**POLICY AREAS: EDUCATION; CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

### BEST PRACTICE

The **One City, One Book** project in Dublin encourages everyone in the city to read the same book during the month of April each year to promote literacy and a sense of community. The highlighted book is available to borrow, free of charge, from one of the many library branches in the city and is also heavily promoted in city bookshops.

### ISSUE

The City of Dublin is regarded as having one of the world's greatest literary heritages. It has been home to four Nobel Laureates – W.B. Yeats, G.B. Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Séamus Heaney as well as writers such as Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker. Modern writers such as Colum McCann, Maeve Binchy, Sebastian Barry and Joseph O'Connor were raised in Dublin and many continue to live there. The One City One Book project capitalizes on Dublin's unique regard as "a city of writers" and encourages people to read and attend the many events associated with the particular book, including films, discussions, debates, exhibitions, and recitals.

In recognition of Dublin's strong literary heritage the City Council applied for and was awarded the title of UNESCO World City of Literature in 2010. The City Council has now established an office specifically to deal with this permanent designation. The office is headed by Jane Alger, the Director of Dublin UNESCO City of Literature.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this project is to encourage reading and help improve literacy in the city. The project also promotes civic participation in Dublin with free access to cultural events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The first "Dublin: One City, One Book" event was held in 2006 as a pilot project by Dublin City Council and its public library service with the assistance of Ogilvy public relations company. Since then, the number of partners has grown and now includes the Irish Film Institute, the National Library, Dublin Business Improvement Districts Company, National Gallery, Marsh's Library and Saint Ann's Church. Each partner hosts events during the month of April, at no cost to the public. The Dublin public libraries are a part of the Culture, Recreation and Amenity Department of Dublin City Council.

The project is run by a steering group comprised of the Communications Manager of the Council, a senior member of the Dublin public libraries and the Director of Dublin UNESCO City of Literature. Generally, this group involves no more than three people. Each year, this trio has been joined by representatives from the publisher of the book. If a living author is chosen he or she also joins the organizing group.

The project's team chooses the book each June, almost one year before events begin. By September, the publisher is contacted and by the end of November, the majority of the program is planned. From November to April 1, there are regular meetings and discussions via e-mail or telephone to finalize the project for that year.

To date, the books chosen for the month of April have had a direct connection to Dublin, either through the setting of the story or through the author.



Mícheál Ó Nualláin, brother of the late Flann O'Brien and Lord Mayor Catherine Byrne with Tommy Smith, co-owner of Grogan's Castle Lounge, Dublin City, 2006

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Following the success of the pilot event in 2006 and based on the City's evaluation of the project, it was determined that the event should be held every year. The City Council was given an award by the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) and won a World Ogilvy Award for the project's social inclusivity. In 2009, the initiative won the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Award, under the category of Arts and Culture.



Actors participate in a re-enactment of the Bram Stoker wedding in St Ann's Church, as part of the One City, One Book program in 2009.

### COST

The initial budget for this project was approximately €100,000 (\$123,386 USD). The majority of this figure was spent on services provided by the public relations company. The remaining balance was spent on the costs of hiring actors for the events. This budget has been considerably reduced in recent years, however this reduction has not impacted on the success of the project. A public relations company has not been used since 2008.

Each year, the Council partners with a media entity and a publisher. Both of these affiliates provide contributions such as free advertisements for the project. The publishing partner also designs and prints nearly 100,000 copies of the programme leaflet. Media support is crucial and has been one of the key factors in the project's success. The cost to the Council, excluding salary costs, is approximately €15,000 (\$19,000 USD) each year.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Following the program each year a formal evaluation is carried out by the steering committee. The evaluation is based on the number of people attending events, the number of books borrowed and sold, and the amount of media coverage and feedback from over 150 readers' groups. Since 2006, the year's chosen book has been in the top five on the best seller list, as well as being the most borrowed book

in Irish libraries. It is estimated that over 80,000 people have attended related events, indicating that the project is successful. This citywide reading program is now regarded as a tourist attraction. Organizers of the project are often approached by organizations and groups wishing to take part.

Dublin City Council receives requests from around the world for information about the project.

Another indication of the success of the project has been its ability to attract visitors to the event from overseas. The grandson of Bram Stoker opened the 2009 project which was based around his novel, *Dracula*. The following year, the grandson of Oscar Wilde opened the 2010 event for that year's chosen book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As for 2012, cities in the United States, Russia and China will participate in the project.

### TIMELINE

The books chosen for Dublin: One City, One Book project are as follows:

April 2006	<i>At Swim-Two-Birds</i> by Flann O'Brien
April 2007	<i>A Long Long Way</i> by Sebastian Barry
April 2008	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i> by Dean Jonathon Swift
April 2009	<i>Dracula</i> by Bram Stoker
April 2010	<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> by Oscar Wilde
April 2011	<i>Ghost Light</i> by Joseph O'Connor



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In April 2012 Dublin: One City, One Book will focus on *Dubliners* by James Joyce.

### LEGISLATION

The Equal Status Legislation 2000 and 2004 are relevant in relation to free and open access to the services provided by the Council. One of the key features of Dublin: One City, One Book is that the majority of events are open to all participants at no charge.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Since 2006, Dublin City Council has learned to aim high and have a distinct program each year. The choice of book dictates the activities. People enjoy being encouraged to read a book that they might not normally consider. In fact many people did not realize that *Dracula* films were actually based on a book. The people of Dublin and visitors to the city enjoy a full range of events from discussions to debates, films to exhibitions and sometimes even themed guided walks and cycles in the city.

### TRANSFERABILITY

Dublin's experience of running this project is now being brought to Eurocities, a network of 140 large European cities in over 30 European countries, as an example of a best practice. St. Johns in Newfoundland, Canada and Belfast in Northern Ireland are just two of the cities which have sought advice from Dublin.

This project is transferable to any city, large town or region that is served by a public library network and, in fact, has been replicated in counties across Ireland as well as in other cities internationally.

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