



Chambers  
Ireland  
Advancing business together

# CSR for SMEs





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CSR involves companies ★  
taking responsibility for  
their impacts on society  
and the environment..  
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# What is Corporate Social Responsibility?



Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involves conducting business ethically and keeping in mind society and the community in which the business operates. CSR involves companies taking responsibility for their impacts on society and the environment. This can involve good practices that relate to a business' community, workforce, marketplace or environment.

Corporate Social Responsibility is often thought of as only being of relevance to 'big business' and companies that have a vast budget, but this is not the case.

SMEs in Ireland make up over 99% of businesses in the economy and account for almost 70% of people employed and it is therefore vitally important that Irish businesses are aware of what CSR is, the positive impacts it can have on a business, and how to get started on CSR.

Small and medium size enterprises are just as capable of engaging in socially responsible business practices as a large corporate. SMEs stand to benefit greatly from developing a CSR plan and communicating it to stakeholders.

The nature of SMEs as belonging to a particular locality and their importance in local economies means that they are often better placed than a larger company to engage in local issues and CSR work within their community. It can also be easier to engage staff in an SME where there are fewer people and all employees can get involved if they so wish.

Customer and business expectations around CSR are increasing and now is a great time to get your business involved.

# What can CSR do for your business?



We are now seeing increased demands from employees, customers and government bodies for businesses to behave responsibly and transparently about their activities and to reach, and maintain, acceptable standards in their business practice. Engaging in CSR activities can have many positive impacts for a business of any size.

Many SMEs are already engaged in CSR practices unknowingly through their efforts to make a positive impact on their communities and support local causes. In a lot of cases, SMEs that are engaging in socially responsible business practices are not necessarily communicating these activities or aligning them with their core business model.

CSR is a great way for a business to increase their attractiveness to both employees and consumers, and is a great way to enhance competitive advantage while having a positive impact on society.

Customers and employees are increasingly interested in the impact that businesses they engage with have on the environment and their role in contributing to a fairer society. Similarly, CSR is becoming increasingly considered in commercial partnerships, B2B tendering and supplier relations. Demonstrably responsible business practices can enhance relationships with suppliers and stakeholders, and increase business opportunities.

Adopting policies that are environmentally friendly is important for many reasons, but can also help a business to save money on energy and operating costs too.

Having a clear and focussed plan on making your business socially responsible, or even the act of communicating what you are already doing in this space, is an excellent way to win business, enhance your brand reputation, increase consumer retention and also contribute to employees' work satisfaction. In an increasingly competitive employment market, the attraction and retention of talented staff is hugely important. Adopting a CSR programme which engages staff is an effective way to attract, retain and maintain a happy workforce and become an employer of choice in your field.

# What does a ★ CSR programme look like? ★



CSR covers four key pillars: Community, Workplace, Marketplace and Environment. But you don't have to tackle them all!

Beginning to work in just one pillar is a great way to begin to engage your business in CSR.

A CSR initiative might be a project in the local community, or the adoption of environmentally friendly workplace policies, or even engaging further afield in an international project.

For example, volunteering with a local charity which has needs that align well with the skills of your company and staff is a simple way to begin. You might be an IT company that is able to assist a charity or community group in their website design, or you might be a food retailer that can donate produce to a local homeless shelter. Something as simple as offering staff healthy food options in your office and breaks to exercise away from their desks are great workplace practices that will contribute to wellbeing and may even boost productivity.

There are many small socially responsible practices that an SME can adopt that will have a positive impact on their community, staff and the environment.

# How can Chambers Ireland help?



Chambers Ireland is involved in promoting CSR across Irish business in a number of ways. We sit on the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation's National CSR Stakeholder Forum which drives national policy in this area; we run the National Chambers Ireland CSR Awards which commends and publicises best practice initiatives in CSR; and we facilitate a CSR Policy Council, made up of senior professionals working in this area, to drive our policy and assist us in getting the Chamber Network and our members engaged in socially responsible business practices.

In collaboration with our CSR Policy Council, Chambers Ireland is delighted to offer SMEs the opportunity to engage with some of Ireland's leading CSR practitioners.

Members of Chambers Ireland's CSR Policy Council have offered their time to meet with SMEs for a one-on-one CSR consultation and guidance session, offering information on how to get started in CSR, or give advice on building upon existing CSR initiatives.

This is a great opportunity for small and medium sized businesses to meet one-on-one with a CSR specialist for advice and guidance on getting engaged in CSR or the promotion and development of existing CSR strategies. The Council comprises of a number of high profile businesses' CSR practitioners.

If you are interested in meeting with an expert to discuss CSR implementation or the development of your SME's CSR strategy, we would love to hear from you.

Chambers Ireland can organise a meeting with one of our expert Policy Council members who can provide guidance on all things CSR. This is an excellent chance for a business to access a free consultation with proven experts in their field on a wide range of CSR topics. Our advisors will take the time to understand your business needs and guide you on implementing a CSR strategy that works for your business and staff.

Please contact Elisha in Chambers Ireland for further details: [elisha.collierobrien@chambers.ie](mailto:elisha.collierobrien@chambers.ie)





**Brief bios on some of our CSR Policy Council experts participating in this initiative.**



**Anne Cooney,**  
**Corporate Social Responsibility**  
**Lead in ESB Group**

Anne has over 10 years' experience in planning and implementing CSR and fundraising strategies, incorporating areas such as strategic partnership development, sponsorship, employee engagement, PR and event management. Anne's career to date involves a number of years working in the charity sector and she has a keen interest in the Community and Workplace areas of CSR.

ESB won the Outstanding Achievement in CSR Award at the 2016 Chambers Ireland CSR Awards for having their CSR practices embedded at the company's core and for their ongoing dedication to community engagement and responsible business practice.



**Michelle Toner,**  
**Head of Corporate Social**  
**Responsibility at eir**

With a background in Public Relations Michelle has more than 10 years' experience in creating and delivering successful, impactful CSR campaigns. In 2013 Michelle established eir's dedicated Corporate Social Responsibility department, delivering a robust CSR strategy which has secured multiple awards for the company. Through Michelle's leadership eir has achieved the Business Working Responsibly Mark and were the first Irish business to be placed on the Workplace Equality Index for their Diversity and Inclusion programme.



**Colm Bergin**  
**Corporate Social Responsibility & Reporting**  
**Associate at Bank of Ireland**



Colm has been a key member of the Corporate Social Responsibility and Reporting team at Bank of Ireland since 2015. Colm is focussed on how the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda can support all businesses' priorities. Colm has experience in developing long-term corporate and community partnerships, activation of charity initiatives and Corporate Social Responsibility reporting. Colm holds an undergraduate degree in Government & Public Policy and an LLM in Business and Human Rights Law.



**Deirdre Kennedy,**  
**Corporate Citizenship and**  
**Corporate Affairs**

Deirdre has worked at IBM Ireland for most of her professional career, initially in Communications, both employee and external communications. In 2005 she took on the role of Corporate Citizenship Manager and is responsible for the deployment and development of IBM's Corporate Citizenship strategy and activities in Ireland. Her role includes forming strategic partnerships with non-profit organisations and education providers. Deirdre is passionate about promoting STEM (Science Engineering Tech Maths), particularly with girls, and also in taking a 'user centric' approach to helping non-profits achieve their goals with the assistance of IBM philanthropic offerings.



**Sinead Hickey,**  
**Corporate Social Responsibility**  
**Manager at Abbott**

Sinéad has been the Corporate Social Responsibility Manager for Abbott in Ireland since September 2013. Closely working with the Global Sustainability team in Chicago, she oversees the CSR strategic direction for Abbott in Ireland and works with all 9 sites in Ireland to ensure on the ground implementation of their wider CSR programme. STEM and Education are a key focus areas for Abbott, and she manages the key partnerships with NGO's and education providers. Sinéad's career spans the healthcare, banking, education and governmental sectors, focusing on CSR, education and community development. Sinéad is a member of the National CSR Stakeholder Forum and a member of the Chambers Ireland CSR Policy Committee.



**Karina Howley,**  
**Head of Corporate Citizenship**  
**& Diversity at KPMG Ireland**

Karina is the Head of Corporate Citizenship & Diversity for KPMG Ireland. KPMG was the first professional services firm in Ireland to achieve carbon neutral status in January 2007. Through Karina's tenure KPMG Ireland has developed a robust CSR programme and has won a variety of CSR Awards over the last number of years: in 2013 and again in 2017, KPMG won the overall Outstanding Award for best company at the Chambers Ireland CSR Awards. Karina is the Chairperson of the Chambers Ireland CSR Policy Council and actively works with Business in the Community Ireland. She is also a member of the government led CSR Stakeholder Forum and is a member of Chambers International CSR Council.



**Jill Johnston,**  
**Corporate Social Responsibility Manager**  
**Three Ireland**

Jill is responsible for CSR strategy and related activity including the management the company's charity partnership programme, the external promotion of CSR and for creating employee fundraising and volunteering events. Under her leadership Three recently won an CSR Award for Charity Partnership at the Chambers Ireland CSR Awards and the Project Management Award for Social Good at the National Projects Awards. She is a member of the Chambers Ireland Policy Council and an active participant in Business In The Community. She is also on the advisory council of An Cosán Virtual Community Council and is a board member of Irish Service Providers Association of Ireland.





