

**BASEBALL
IRELAND**



THE 10 x 10 STRATEGIC PLAN

A Blueprint for Participation Growth, Skill
Development and Increased Awareness



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1. Introduction

The 10 x 10 Strategy

Baseball Ireland’s overarching strategy for development over the next decade is to grow our youth membership participation numbers tenfold from the current 150 players to over 1,500 players. This “10 x 10 Strategy” serves as the foundational goal of a long-term plan to develop a robust, skilled and passionate baseball experience in Ireland, ultimately culminating with Baseball Ireland competing on the global baseball stage.

This strategic plan is our best estimation currently of how to enable Baseball Ireland to reach its goals. Advancing the Baseball Ireland organisation to the level of health and strength described above, will likely be a two to three generation effort. During the next ten years, we must grow the participation aggressively, because a thriving, growing program is the very best way for Baseball Ireland to demonstrate that it’s worthy of investment. Once growth is underway, facilities, coaching and funding are the top priorities and prerequisites for the elevation of baseball in Ireland.

This strategic plan includes preliminary budget figures and sequencing of goals and activities. However, the plan is a working document that will evolve and be updated as the Baseball Ireland organisation makes progress on the individual priorities and goals. We anticipate that some of the goals being treated sequentially may be achieved concurrently.

2. Vision for Irish Baseball

Baseball Ireland envisions a future where organised clubs, supported by communities throughout the island of Ireland, offer youth and adults of all ability levels the opportunity to play the sport of baseball in regional, national and international competition, and experience all that baseball offers in the way of personal development.

3. Mission of Baseball Ireland

The Mission of Baseball Ireland is to grow and develop the sport of baseball on the island of Ireland. This means developing new programs and strengthening existing programs of Baseball Ireland that will improve the quality of the baseball experience for all, by growing participation, improving playing standards, developing facilities, and providing top rate coaching.

4. Core Values

The values of the Baseball Ireland organisation that guide its activity are:

- Enjoyable, safe baseball experience
- High standards of play and behavior
- Respect for the game and its traditions
- Non-discrimination and equality of access
- Sportsmanship and fair play
- Community orientation
- Improvement through competition
- Drug-free competition
- Excellent organisation
- Non-profit

The leadership of Baseball Ireland and the organisation has benefitted from the ideals learned and taught by playing baseball. The organisation has a goal to instill these ideals in all who participate:

- Teamwork
- Goal setting
- Dependability
- Responsibility
- Trust in others
- Sportsmanship
- Winning with grace

5. Situation Assessment

Baseball Ireland was established in 1995 and spent the first 10 years in a startup growth mode, building up basic infrastructure or clubs, teams and leagues at adult and youth levels. For the past decade or so, while many aspects of baseball in Ireland have improved and solidified, participation numbers at both adult and youth levels have remained quite flat – about 250 adult participants and 150 youth participants.

The small number of players limits Baseball Ireland's ability to develop the game on many crucial levels. For example, it's difficult to have national representative teams at various age groups, e.g. 12u, 15u, without

sufficient numbers of players from which to select. Stability of clubs and teams is a constant concern when many have barely sufficient numbers of players and coaches to maintain their existing teams. For example, since there are insufficient player numbers in the 13-15 age group to have a Cadet league, we have had to lower the minimum age for playing in the B division of the adult league to 13 to allow this age group an opportunity to play.

Despite these inherent challenges, the adult league in Ireland is vibrant and teams in the main have been quite stable, with some of them being established for more than 20 years.

To better understand our situation and where we could go, it's instructive to look at a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis (SWOT) of Baseball Ireland as of today:

Baseball Ireland Strengths

- Highly dedicated leadership
- Established player base
- Unique baseball culture
- Irish sporting tradition
- Willing support from the Irish diaspora and enthusiasts of Irish culture
- Modern Ireland's globalised society
- Culture of inclusion—open to players of all backgrounds and abilities
- Distinctive, marketable brand
- Opportunity to play the game internationally

Baseball Ireland Weaknesses

- Flat growth in participation
- Lack of organised and planned fundraising
- Lack of high quality baseball playing and training facilities
- Poor structures and support for youth participation and retention
- Leadership, while dedicated, is wholly voluntary and less than part-time
- Limited baseball tradition
- Location of Ireland
- Over reliance on a few key leaders

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- Apathy in membership
- National road and rail infrastructure makes traveling city-to-city difficult
- Sporadic and inconsistent government support

Baseball Ireland Opportunities

- Engagement with the Irish Diaspora
- Merchandise sales / marketing
- League expansion outside of Dublin and Belfast
- Securing an indoor training facility
- Coaching internship program
- Massive latent number of potential players to fuel growth
- National emphasis on increased involvement in sport due to childhood and adult health concerns
- Global marketing alongside Major League Baseball

Baseball Ireland Threats

- Recession in Ireland and/or the USA
- Brexit could lead to a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – making baseball operations between the two challenging.
- Stringent and changing Child Protection laws in Ireland will require policies agile enough to evolve and comply with the changes.
- Risk of not satisfying South Dublin County Council in our partnership to maintain Corkagh Park grounds properly and to the Council's satisfaction.
- Competition from youth sports programs that require year-round participation.
- GAA overwhelming dominance in youth sport.
- Irish weather and geographic location
- Rise in Irish cost of living
- Loss of key leadership and institutional knowledge
- Tension with Softball Ireland, inability to effectively merge
- Rise in apathy in the membership and not addressing apathy
- Deteriorating or non-improvement in pitching standards

The conclusion of this SWOT analysis is that, despite many structural and situational challenges, there are tremendous opportunities for growth and forward progress for Baseball Ireland. There are substantial numbers of potential youth players in Ireland with demonstrated aptitude for baseball, and the Irish diaspora can be a great resource in support of the development of baseball in Ireland in many ways.

6. Priorities

Facilities, coaching and funding are essential prerequisites to Baseball Ireland's long-term growth and success. Below are the top development priorities for Baseball Ireland. They are listed roughly in sequential order, although some will advance concurrently.

1. Growth in youth participation (starting with primary school age group)
2. Establishment of Academy structure for:
 - Player development
 - Coaching development with emphasis on improved pitching standard.
3. Improvement in facilities – fields, indoor facility
4. Paid professional staffing for Baseball Ireland
5. Increasing awareness of baseball in Ireland via marketing.

The growth of the youth participation is seen as the over-riding priority to build the base of the pyramid that will lead to improvements at all levels over the long term.

Note: While most of the paid professional staffing will be added in the latter half of the 10x10 plan, a fundraising position is included and will have to be prioritised early in the plan to raise funds to execute the other priorities.

Strategic Initiatives

Schools Program

In 2017, Baseball Ireland conducted a Pilot Program with some local primary schools around the Ashbourne area to grow youth membership numbers in the Ashbourne club.

Starting in April 2017, Baseball Ireland brought in coaches from Holland to visit three local primary schools over the course of a week. They exposed more than 800 children to baseball. Over the next eight weeks, school classes visited the International Baseball Centre Field in Ashbourne where Baseball Ireland coaches



assisted the children to play games. Twice a week, sessions were held for three hours. Two school classes would visit the field each time. Finally, Baseball Ireland brought a coach from the USA to conduct a three-day camp in July.

From the 800 children initially visited in the schools, 40 children attended the camp, and 16 children joined the club as new members for a small fee. So, this represented a five percent conversion rate to camp attendees and a two percent conversion rate to actual members.

We consider this Pilot Program to have been a success and a demonstration that this technique can be used to fuel growth in youth participation numbers. This program is the core instrument by which we plan to support the growth of youth participation in the 10 x10 strategy. We plan to roll out this schools program more widely starting in spring 2019 to fuel more aggressive growth.

Our 10 x10 strategy requires 10x growth in youth participation numbers over the course of the next 10 years. To achieve this, we need a compound annual growth rate of about 26 percent. The schools program will contribute significantly to this growth. Assuming we maintain the two percent conversion rate from school visits to actual members of clubs, and assuming we achieve modest numbers of additional members coming from sources other than the schools, the 10-year plan would look as shown below.

Year Number	Year	Members	Growth Rate	New Members	Number of youth reached in school visits
0	2017	150	26%	16	800
1	2018	189	26%	39	1950
2	2019	238	26%	49	2457
3	2020	300	26%	62	3096
4	2021	378	26%	78	3901
5	2022	476	26%	98	4915
6	2023	600	26%	124	6193
7	2024	756	26%	156	7803
8	2025	953	26%	197	9832
9	2026	1201	26%	248	12388
10	2027	1500	26%	299	14966

So, for 2018, we need to increase our school activity by about 2.5 times from the levels of the Pilot Program in 2017. This is very achievable. What it requires is to have a presence on the ground of qualified, screened coaches who excel at working with children and who are available to work with the school children during the working day.

Baseball Ireland will search for visiting coaches using a description devised by its National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC will form a subcommittee which will review applications and select coaches, as well as consult with youth clubs to determine which schools will be selected for visits and follow-ups.

We estimate needing one senior coach and one intern level coach in Ireland from June to August. This would almost double the length of the previous year's program. The goals during this period would be to accomplish the school visits, field visits, and summer camp. Costs for this program would run between €25,000 to €35,000 to support coaches visiting Ireland from abroad who would require accommodation, rental car, food allowance and compensation.

Organising and planning the schools program is the very top priority once initial seed funding is raised. We recognise that the staffing arrangements and budget will need to scale as the numbers of students reached increase.

As we plan the logistical details, we will also consider ways that the coaches can advance Baseball Ireland beyond the schools program. For example, as time allows, coaches might assist in any of the following areas of need:

- Helping to coach the club teams and National Teams.
- Helping to train Irish resident coaches.
- Helping Baseball Ireland focus on improvement of the standard of pitching in Ireland.
- Intern coaches could also play in the Irish league.

Academy

After the schools' program is underway and growing, the second priority is the development of the Baseball Ireland Academy, which will be a key tool for the growth of baseball in Ireland. While the plan for such an Academy is still in its infancy, we have initiated both player and coach development programs that could ultimately become the cornerstone of a larger Academy program.

The vision for the academy is to target the players developed through the schools program and the clubs, and to bring them to a facility in Dublin for off-season coaching and instruction. The Academy will offer programs for players of all levels, and we see it as key to elevating the best players at each level to the next level of play.

The Academy is also key to the development of coaches, and we anticipate a significant focus on coach training in addition to the development of the players.

With the country being so small and Dublin accessible from most points, we anticipate that the Academy can be very effective as a day program with all-day clinics on Saturdays.

There are several objectives for the Academy. These are listed roughly in the order in which we believe they can be achieved.

- To raise the standard of baseball in Ireland through the training of coaches and players.
- To run a coach development program enlisting the support of visiting coaches from the US and elsewhere.
- To initiate a program of coach certification whereby coaches can develop professionally through a structured curriculum.
- To provide players in Ireland with the opportunity to maximise their potential through the provision of expert coaching.
- To develop Ireland based players from Little League level to a position where they can compete at International level.
- To develop a High-Performance Training Program for the Elite level player. It is envisaged that this will eventually result in players enlisting in US college programs and ultimately playing professional baseball.

We have identified some specific needs associated with the Academy:

- A dedicated facility to allow for year-round training
- The presence of full-time development coach(es)
- The opportunity to host other visiting coaches
- Equipment, consumables and training aids including nets, pitching machines, etc.

Details of the Academy's operations will be worked out after we have the schools program underway. We do anticipate organising and starting the Academy prior to having full time, year-round staff on board. A visiting/short term coach may be an initial solution. We anticipate that securing a year-round facility may happen concurrent with developing the Academy.

Estimated costs to operate the Academy for next three years are as follows:

2018

Item	€
Facilities Hire	2500
Equipment	3000
Transport	1000
Visiting Coaches	1500
Total	8,000

2019

Item	€
Facilities Hire	4500
Equipment	4500
Overseas Tournament	7500
Visiting Coaches	4500
Total	21,000

2020

Item	€
Facilities Hire	4500
Equipment	3,000
Overseas Tournament	7500
Visiting Coaches	1500
Total	16,500

Indoor Facility

To grow the game of baseball in Ireland, it is imperative to get people playing more often. One of the elements that we believe will help us to facilitate this goal is the ability to take a medium/long-term lease on an indoor facility. We have developed a subcommittee focused on this issue. The committee is currently scouting locations and assessing costs. Although the indoor facility is listed as the third priority after

growing the schools program and the Academy, the facilities development will likely occur concurrently with the growth of the program. The reason this is listed as a third priority is that we believe demonstrating growth and health in the baseball program is a prerequisite to raising funds for structural expenses like facilities and staff.

Having an indoor facility will allow us to:

- Facilitate training at all levels throughout the year
- Provide a focal point for Baseball Ireland available to all registered members existing as a team neutral facility
- Provide a base for visiting coaches and ‘on-island’ coaches to train all age groups and levels
- Provide an environment to proactively improve baseball skills for the Baseball Ireland membership through access to batting cages and field drill facilities.
- Further enhance the stature of baseball in Ireland as the possession of an indoor facility will serve to represent professionalism, scale and intent
- Galvanise the membership who will be excited by this investment

For Baseball Ireland to obtain and maintain a facility, three things will need to happen:

- The working group will need to find a location and determine how best to develop the space
- Identify a group of individuals who are custodians of the facility and therefore are responsible for its safety and maintenance
- Secure a guaranteed source of revenue for a minimum of 5 years to sign a lease

The financials broken down:

- While we have not yet gone to market, initial assessment and commercial property experience suggests that we will need to sign at least a 5-year lease. We may even need to sign a longer lease, but we almost certainly will get a break clause of 5 years. This could possibly be negotiated to 3 years.
- We could get a shorter-term lease, but this would not be advisable for two reasons:
 - 1) The rent will likely be higher on a square footage basis.
 - 2) We will have limited rights and therefore it would be risky to put any cost into the development of the facility as we could be told to leave more quickly than we would like.

Anticipating that we would want a facility in the Dublin area but near to certain transport links, we anticipate a rent per year of about:

- €35,000 - €40,000 per year for a 5,000 – 6,000 square foot facility
- Prices vary based on location and specification

- We could possibly get something a bit less expensive, but would be reticent to go any smaller than 5,000 square feet

Based on a rent at this level, it could be possible to operate the facility at a break-even level if the facility was to be made available for rental to other sports (for example, 5-a-side soccer).

Initial costs to kit out the facility are estimated to range from €10,000 - €20,000. This includes netting, pitching machines, pitching mounds, mats, gym area.

Marketing, Branding & Merchandising

The Irish people and the Irish Diaspora have a strong cultural connection to sport and they also enjoy a delightful story. Baseball Ireland is such a story with a potentially strong brand. A media plan is needed to grow the sport in Ireland, engage with the wider baseball community and grow the Baseball Ireland brand. This plan will achieve marketing objectives including but not limited to:

- Growing excitement and engagement in Ireland among players and their families
- Improving the image of the Baseball Ireland brand
- Pushing the Irish baseball story to a global audience.

Because the first and most pressing priority for Baseball Ireland is to grow program participation among Irish youth, marketing activities related to this goal will be early priorities of this plan. Social media is a relatively inexpensive means of engaging audiences and generating enthusiasm and is a natural fit for Baseball Ireland's initial growth goals.

An initial social media audit will accomplish the following:

- Analyse Baseball Ireland's current social media channels.
- Examine the potential for user generated content from players (at all levels), parents of youth players, coaches, and fans.
- Examine role of coaches and volunteers in current social media activity.
- Examine potential for educational content on social media (pitching tips, videos instruction, etc.)
- Put forth an engagement and growth plan including:
 - Recommendations on most appropriate platforms/accounts
 - Conversion goals and measurable performance indicators related to goals of growing the program.
 - Strategy for growing user generated content.

- Recommendations on roles, expectations and training for coaches around social media.
- Recommendations on a paid reach and advertising budget.
- Pricing information related to outsourcing social media content development and management. (We anticipate that a solid content and management contract with a creative agency in Ireland would be around €1,000 - €2,000/month for one to two platforms.)

A separate market analysis will come later and will be focused on the North American market. This market analysis will identify what the Irish Baseball fan or supporter in North America looks like, what he or she wants, and how Baseball Ireland might reach him or her. This analysis will culminate in a 12-month marketing plan that will support the more ambitious goals of creating brand awareness, developing revenue through merchandising opportunities, and increasing fundraising.

The marketing plan will deploy a mix of media channels to engage the target market. After a 12-month cycle, the effectiveness of the plan will be assessed, and the next phase or follow-up will be determined.

Ideas and areas of focus for this broader, “second phase” market analysis is included as an appendix at the end of this document.

7. Staffing

As we embark on this 10 x 10 Strategic Plan, Baseball Ireland is still a completely amateur organisation staffed by volunteers. The steps we outline in this Strategic Plan are modest steps towards our goals in the short term, though our vision is more ambitious in the longer term. As we develop our base of support, to strengthen our ability to drive forward across all the initiative areas we have set out here, we will professionalise the organisation by adding paid staff. We anticipate the staffing plan as follows:

- Director of Baseball Ireland – charged with fundraising and advancing Baseball Ireland
- Head Resident Coach of national team
- Assistant Resident Coach of national team
- Administrator

Note: The positions of director, head coach, and assistant coach may full-time, temporary-to-permanent, or contract employees as determined by the Board of Directors. The administrator will be a full-time position located in Ireland.

We plan to accomplish marketing and merchandising primarily through partnerships with vendors, and with some support from the coaches.

The staff positions are listed in the order in which we anticipate being able to bring them on.

8. Funding

Baseball Ireland is ready to embark on its next stage of growth. There are tremendous opportunities to fuel this growth by engaging youth players in Ireland through the schools and with the Irish diaspora to support our initiatives. Baseball Ireland has committed to its “10 x 10” Strategy – to grow youth participation numbers by a factor of 10 over the next 10 years. Funding for all the priorities in this plan will occur progressively.

As of this writing we are actively fundraising for our immediate priority, which is to get visiting coaches to Ireland who have time during the working day to conduct our schools program and to help develop domestic coaches and raise the standard of pitching in Ireland at all levels. We anticipate by mid-summer 2018 we will have funds needed to move forward. The success that Baseball Ireland can achieve with that seed funding in 2018 and early 2019 will be essential for further fundraising efforts.

As a second priority, we anticipate developing our Academy roughly concurrently with the schools program and anticipate visiting coaches will also be deployed to staff the Academy. (In the long term as we develop the funding, we see the Academy developing youth players to elite levels).

Development of facilities is also a high priority, primarily an indoor facility that can be used year-round.

Raising awareness of baseball in Ireland through the media is also important. Marketing efforts will occur in phases and will be ongoing. We anticipate that initial marketing efforts will be relatively inexpensive and will be focused within Ireland, and a major international marketing effort will come in the second half of the 10 x 10 plan.

Staffing is a final priority. While a fundraising position must come early in the plan, much of the staffing will not be added until that first position has had time to become effective. So, we anticipate staffing to increase most significantly deeper into the 10 x 10 plan.

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Guideline costs are summarised below:

Visiting Coaches for Schools Programs:	€25,000 - €35,000
Travel, Room & Board	
Insurance	
Academy Program:	€10,000 - €20,000 per year
Indoor Facility establishment:	€30,000
Initial Social Media marketing	€15K - €30K/year
Second Phase Market Analysis and 1 Year of Costs	€30K

Staffing:

- Director of Irish Baseball
- Travel for Director
- Head Coach
- Assistant Coach
- Administrator

The fundraising needs for this Strategic Plan are significant, but also realistic and achievable. However, advancing the vision of Baseball Ireland will require a professional approach to fundraising, including capital fundraising, operating funds, and eventually, endowed funds.

9. Contacts

Baseball Ireland is incorporated as a non-profit limited liability company whose sole purpose is the promotion and development of the sport of baseball in Ireland, north and south.

The Board of Directors of Baseball Ireland are as follows:

Chairman:	Mike Kindle (mike@baseballireland.com)
President:	Tom Kelley (tomkelley@baseballireland.com)
Secretary:	Sean Mitchell (sean.mitchell02@gmail.com)
Treasurer:	Jason Nebenzahl (jasonnebenzahl@gmail.com)
Academy Director:	Will Beglane (wbeblane@gmail.com)
US Director:	Jon Houston (jhouston@justiceassistance.org)

Appendix

Suggested areas of focus for the broader, “second phase” market analysis

- Identifying key geographic locations and business communities where the Baseball Ireland brand resonates, which might include Catholic universities, urban towns and cities that experienced high levels of Irish immigration during the 20th Century, states that hold large annual festivals of Irish culture, and regions with new patterns of Irish-American settlement in the southern and southwestern United States.
- Identify opportunities when levels of interest in Ireland peak, such as St. Patrick’s Day, Irish nights at professional baseball venues including minor league parks and MLB, and Irish-American fairs. How can Baseball Ireland capitalise on these opportunities?
- Identify the opportunities presented by various Irish-American print publications, including but not limited to the Irish Echo, The Irish Voice and the Irish Herald. What can be accomplished for Baseball Ireland through print media?
- What type of content resonates with North American fans/supporters of Baseball Ireland, and where/how do they want to consume it? Does this audience simply want storytelling about Irish baseball? What type of brand personality will they respond to?
- Does this audience want to watch games and feel connected to the players and events on the ground in Ireland? What opportunities can be capitalised on through coverage of the main events and activities of the Baseball Ireland calendar, which include the start of the adult and youth leagues in Ireland, possible club participation in CEB sanctioned competitions, national team play at multiple age groups, Irish Baseball Academy events and the various Irish league championships?
- What are appropriate conversion goals and measurable performance indicators related to brand awareness and revenue goals? (For example, conversion goals might include North American audiences generating higher traffic to the Baseball Ireland website, increased merchandise sales and increased donations to Baseball Ireland).

