

2026 IR Readiness: **Do You Have a Bench, Or Just a Business Card?**

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Why IR capability planning belongs on the 2026 board agenda

Across markets, Investor Relations has shifted from a disclosure function to a strategic driver of corporate value, influencing valuation, liquidity and access to capital. Boards and CFOs now rely on IR not only to communicate

results, but to interpret market sentiment, explain strategy, and support decisions on capital allocation and risk. EY notes that an effective IR team serves as the organisation's interface with investors and analysts, giving leadership a clearer understanding of trends in the wider investment landscape.



At the same time, the remit of the Investor Relations Officer has expanded considerably. A 2024 guide by Lumi reports that more than two thirds of IROs have seen their responsibilities increase, with many becoming strategic advisers and internal counsellors on governance, ESG and stakeholder communication.

Against this backdrop, treating IR capability as a narrow “training” topic misses the point. For 2026, the more searching question for any board is: Do we have a resilient IR bench that can support our strategy under stress, or only a single name on a business card?

The anatomy of a modern IR bench

Today's high-performing IR function is a team sport. Even when the organisation has a single named IRO, that individual depends on a small ecosystem of internal and external collaborators. The core capabilities usually span four domains:

1. Financial and capital-markets fluency

IR analysts and officers are expected to understand financial statements, valuation drivers and market dynamics to a depth that allows them to discuss performance, guidance and risk in a credible way with institutional investors and research analysts.

2. Regulatory and ESG literacy

Regulatory expectations around disclosure, insider information, ESG reporting and stewardship codes are expanding. IR teams increasingly need working knowledge of global ESG frameworks and reporting standards to integrate non-financial metrics into the equity story.

3. Storytelling and stakeholder management

The IR function must shape a coherent narrative that connects strategy, capital allocation, risk, and sustainability in language that institutional investors, proxy advisers, rating agencies and employees can understand. Relationship management and communication skills are repeatedly cited as critical success factors for IR careers.

4. Data, technology and AI comfort

From ownership analytics and perception studies to AI-assisted drafting and monitoring, IR teams now work with data platforms and digital channels as standard tools. This requires analytical judgement and comfort with new technologies, not just basic spreadsheet skills.

A genuine IR “bench” is one where these capabilities are distributed across a cohort of IROs and analysts at different levels of seniority, instead of being concentrated in a single over-stretched individual.

In 2026, Investor Relations capability will be judged not by a single eloquent IRO, but by the strength of the internal bench that can explain strategy, ESG and capital allocation with the same discipline as financial reporting.

The growing IR talent gap

Demand for sophisticated IR talent is rising across public companies, private equity, infrastructure and alternatives. Recruiters report that IR professionals are in strong demand because they are central to fundraising and investor confidence, especially in more volatile markets.

At the same time, the skills profile is becoming more demanding. The integration of ESG into mainstream investor dialogue, the complexity of cross-border listings, and the rise of AI-driven investor workflows mean that IROs need broader capability than traditional financial communication alone.

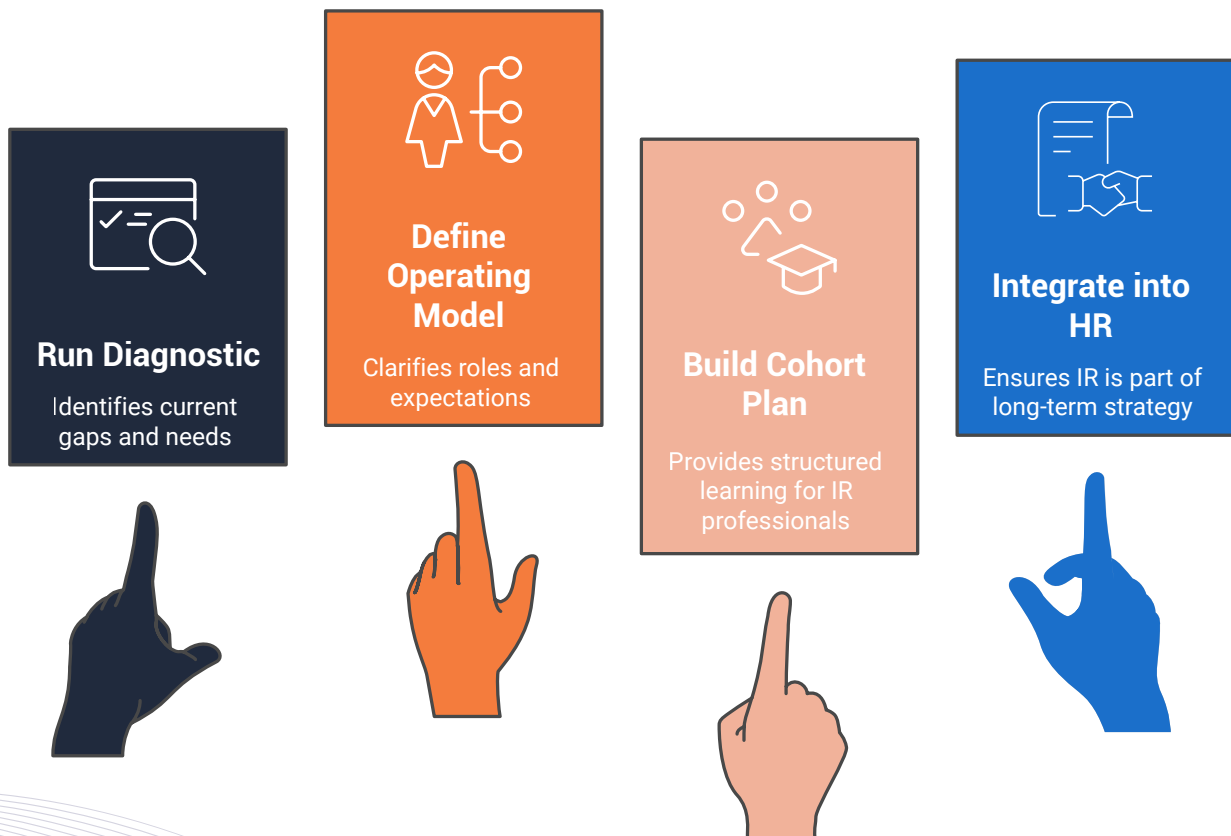
Yet many issuers continue to operate with:

- A single key-person IRO, with limited succession planning
- Minimal structured development for junior IR analysts
- Ad hoc exposure to capital-markets events rather than a deliberate capability programme

The result is a quiet but material risk: in a year where guidance is challenged, a rating review is under way or a strategic transaction is announced, the organisation discovers that its IR “function” is essentially one person and a presentation deck.

often outside your control. Aligning corporate messaging with external realities is no longer optional—it is an existential requirement.

How to develop IR capabilities for 2026?

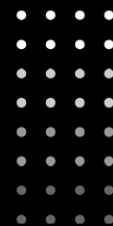
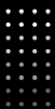




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Investor Relations today is not just compliance – it's capital strategy. As boards and investors expect sharper engagement, CFOs who embed IR discipline internally gain control over messaging, perception and access to capital. **CapEdge Academy** helps finance and communications teams acquire professional-grade IR skills through structured learning, practical toolkits, and role-ready training.

- **Fragmented disclosures:** we teach cohesive investor communication.
- **Weak narratives:** we train teams to connect story with strategy.
- **Reactive queries:** we build proactive investor engagement calendars.
- **Ad hoc updates:** we establish repeatable results and disclosure rhythms.
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From “training course” to IR capability roadmap

For 2026, CFOs, HR leaders and IROs can reframe the conversation from “sending people for training” to designing an IR capability roadmap that the board can recognise as part of its human-capital oversight. A practical roadmap can follow four steps.

1. Run a short IR capability diagnostic

Start with a structured assessment of the current IR set-up: roles, skills, succession, coverage of ESG and sustainability topics, exposure to investors and analysts, and use of data and technology. This can be done through a focused questionnaire and a set of interviews with the CFO, IRO, Company Secretary and HR.

2. Define the 2026 IR operating model

Translate strategy and risk into a clear picture of the IR function you need by end-2026. For example: a lead IRO, an IR or ESG analyst, and one designated “internal bench” colleague from finance or strategy who regularly shadows investor interactions and board-facing communication.

3. Design a cohort-based development plan

Rather than isolated workshops, plan a 9 to

12 month learning and exposure journey for a defined cohort of IROs and analysts. This can combine:

- Targeted classroom or virtual modules on capital markets, valuation, ESG and regulation
- Practical assignments on earnings materials, investor decks and MD&A drafting
- Simulated investor meetings or results calls with structured feedback

Specialist academies and partners can provide structured curricula and placement-style support, which helps HR and CFOs demonstrate to the board that IR capability development is being managed with rigour, not informality.

4. Integrate IR into human-capital and succession discussions

Finally, make IR benches visible in talent and succession reviews. Boards expect transparency on critical roles linked to market confidence. Positioning IR cohorts as part of leadership development, rather than a peripheral communication function, strengthens both governance and market perception.



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ELEVATE MARKET DIALOGUE.**

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Why start this conversation now

Several macro trends will converge in 2026: more demanding ESG and sustainability expectations, greater scrutiny of capital allocation choices, and accelerating adoption of AI in both investor workflows and corporate reporting. (PwC)

Issuers that arrive in that environment with a deliberate IR capability roadmap and a visible

internal bench will be better placed to:

- Engage confidently with long-term investors and rating agencies
- Support the board on strategy, risk and sustainability dialogue
- Navigate capital-raising opportunities when conditions are favourable

Those who continue to treat IR as a single job title with occasional training may find that when markets start asking harder questions, their most important “asset” can also be their most fragile single point of disappointment.

Designing a 2026 IR capability roadmap is therefore not a training decision. It is a board-supportive human-capital decision that directly influences valuation, resilience and access to capital.

Shankhini Saha, the Associate Director of Investor Relations at Dickenson, holds an MPhil with distinction from the University of Cambridge, UK, and a BA magna cum laude from The New School, USA. Specialising in stakeholder engagement across diverse sectors, Shankhini is dedicated to transparent communication, providing strategic insights into our clients' financial performance and growth initiatives. As a key player in Dickenson, she focuses on creating lasting value for issuers in the global capital market.

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