



Consultation on the Development of a National Volunteering Strategy
Response by the Citizens Information Board to the Department of Rural and Community Development's Call for Input.

Question 1:

Should we adopt the White Paper definition or the European Union definition of volunteering? Is there a more appropriate definition which could be considered for the purpose of the strategy?

Either definition is acceptable. However, the EU definition may be a better fit in that it encompasses more strongly the concept of social solidarity and the related role of volunteering in addressing 'human, social or environmental needs and concerns'.

Question 2:

Do you agree with the outline of the Department's role in volunteering? What additions or amendments would you suggest?

The role of the Department as stated may not adequately address the need for an overarching national framework for volunteering. Neither does it capture the wide diversity of voluntary contribution at all levels of society ranging from the very informal to the structured.

There are two factors which impinge on effective volunteering which need to be more fully taken on board by the Department,

- The significant challenges faced by voluntary Boards of Management relating to, for example, regulatory frameworks, good governance, risk management, child protection, health and safety, data protection and public transparency;
- The additional and specific problems faced by organisations with a heavy reliance on volunteers to deliver essential services and the consequent need to recruit volunteers with specific skill sets to address service requirements.

Question 3:

Do you agree with this vision for the purposes of this strategy? If not, what should our vision be?

The following is a suggested alternative Vision:

A society based on strong, inclusive, and resilient communities which facilitate active citizenship and social inclusion through volunteering.

Question 4:

What objectives for Irish volunteering should be set for the purposes of this strategy?

- 1) Creating a transparent community infrastructure at local level within which volunteers can give of their time and skills in a meaningful way and contribute accordingly;
- 2) Extending the capacity of voluntary organisations to deliver on their aims and goals by increasing the participation of volunteers in their activities;
- 3) Promoting a sense of belonging and social connectedness and contributing to the common good
- 4) Providing potential pathways through volunteering to employment, active retirement or community integration;

Question 5:

What is the role of the public in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?

The role of the public is primarily one of engaging in active citizenship through:

- a) Volunteering in accordance with their time availability and skills
- b) Acknowledging, respecting and affirming the contribution of volunteers
- c) Understanding the necessary and crucial role played by volunteers in a wide range of areas – service delivery, sport and recreation, the arts, active retirement and, very importantly, community development

Question 6:

What is the role of Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) in developing volunteering?

Volunteer Involving Organisations can make a significant contribution to volunteering by:

- (a) Providing appropriate training, support and supervision for volunteers

- (b) Providing clear role descriptions and appropriate boundaries for all volunteers
- (c) Where relevant, encouraging and facilitating effective teamwork between volunteers and paid staff

VIOs need to have a balanced voluntary Board of Management membership which includes appropriate skill sets to run and manage an organisation in accordance with best practice – governance, financial, legal, health and safety, data protection and risk management.

Question 7:

Should the role of volunteer supporting infrastructure be expanded for the purposes of this strategy?

The volunteer supporting infrastructure is vitally important and should as a minimum be able to provide support to a wide range of VIOs and their volunteers in the following areas:

- (i) Ensuring meaningful roles for volunteers
- (ii) Supporting VIOs to ensure that there is a sufficient complement of volunteers to carry out the required range of tasks, thus minimising burn-out
- (iii) Providing mechanisms at local level for matching, recruitment, training, and supervision
- (iv) Ensuring clarity about the roles and responsibilities of volunteers in any give organisation and their relationship with paid staff
- (v) Supporting voluntary Boards of Management in carrying out their responsibilities

Question 8:

Is the current model adequate? If not, what volunteering infrastructure and funding model would best support the development of volunteering?

More structures are required as follows:

- The provision of adequate support structures for volunteers as management committee members;
- Supporting voluntary and community groups to engage in medium and long-term planning and the provision of funding accordingly;
- Meeting the essential training and skill development needs of all staff (paid and voluntary) and management committees;
- Enabling evaluation and impact assessment on an ongoing basis;

- Capacity-building among voluntary and community organisations to engage in a partnership approach to planning and policy-making;

Question 9:

How can Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and PPNs work together to develop volunteering, active citizenship and participation in the community?

The benefits of volunteering as well as the need for local organisations to have an adequate number of volunteers with various skill sets should be more in the public domain. There is, therefore a need for much more publicity at local level about the role of Volunteer Centres through the use of local and social media.

Question 10:

How can the Department facilitate co-operation between Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and the PPNs?

Co-operation and collaboration could be improved by:

- A funding policy which minimises dysfunctional competition between voluntary bodies and eliminates the practice of re-focusing services to draw down funding;
- Enabling voluntary and community organisations to achieve an appropriate and acceptable balance between service provision/development activities and fundraising requirements.

Question 11:

Are there other areas of research that could be included?

Additional research is required in the following areas:

- 1) Developing a clear nationwide picture of the nature and extent of volunteering and quantifying, as far as possible, the full extent of voluntary activity, including informal/'good neighbour' volunteering;
- 2) Quantifying, as far as possible, both the *social* value (practical benefits to society, to those provided with help and support, and to volunteers themselves) and the *economic* value
- 3) Effective management of the relationships between paid and volunteer staff in VIOs;
- 4) Identifying and overcoming challenges faced by voluntary Boards of Management

Question 12:

What is the role of local authorities in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?

Local authorities are inextricably linked to communities through both the representative and participative democratic processes. They can play a central role in supporting volunteering, given their particular responsibilities and expertise in delivering national strategies at a local level through, for example, social inclusion measures, age-friendly strategies and inter-cultural strategies.

As facilitators of the Local Community Development Committees, Local Authorities can ensure that resources are in place to support involvement of vulnerable groups in local social, economic and cultural activities. A community development approach can contribute to enhancing volunteering in local communities by:

- Promoting collective action to solve problems
- Building on strengths and potential within local communities and mobilising resources
- Enhancing participation of minority and excluded groups, e.g. Travellers and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities
- Promoting networking and communication within communities.

Question 13:

What is the role of central Government (outside the Department of Rural and Community Development) in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?

While funding, partnership and legal structures are central to the development and integration of the voluntary and community sector, there is a need to ensure that volunteering as the essential underlying rationale and starting point for the sector is pro-actively promoted and supported by Government and its various agents.

The system of supporting the development of the voluntary and community sector in general and the way volunteering operates continues to be diverse, fragmented and under resourced. The question of volunteering can only be adequately addressed in a context which ensures that the development and functioning of the sector is adequately and systematically supported by Government, including, in particular:

- (i) Promoting the concept of volunteering;
- (ii) Research – the absence of information on the sector itself needs to be addressed;
- (iii) Information and advice on matters relevant to its functioning and development;
- (iv) Development of structures for the effective representation of the voluntary and community sector in planning and policy-making;
- (v) Monitoring of the legal and institutional framework within which the sector operates;

- (vi) Developing good practice (including conditions of employment, terms of engagement for volunteers and meaningful user involvement) in voluntary and community organisations;
- (vii) Developing the concept of social mentoring as a support to volunteers and voluntary organisations;

Volunteering is a key component of active citizenship and should be promoted by Government across a range of areas, including, in particular,

- Formal recognition by the State of the essential contribution of volunteers;
- Engaging the private commercial sector in creating opportunities for purposeful volunteering by workers;
- A database of dynamic and varied case studies involving volunteers;
- More 'mainstreaming' of volunteering, including active promotion of the concept throughout the educational system;
- More public discussion and debate on the role and contribution of active volunteering in the 21st century;
- Seminars/workshops providing more opportunities for 'grassroots' volunteers to tell their stories;

Question 14:

How could the Department further facilitate engagement between the business sector and volunteering?

There is an important role for employers and business in promoting volunteering through corporate social responsibility, where organisations and businesses work with communities. Business supported volunteering initiatives, such as those promoted by Business in the Community (an Association of Major Companies) have much to contribute in the area of volunteering. Corporate volunteering, or employer-supported volunteering, through their Corporate Social Responsibility practices provides a valuable platform to engage staff with the not-for-profit sector which can benefit the employee, employer, the volunteer-involving organisation, and of course, society. The Department could consider the promotion of recognition schemes for businesses that meet a set level of volunteering within their staff.

Question 15:

What steps can the Department and other stakeholders take to enhance engagement with European and international partners in volunteering?

There is potential for greater liaison with international programmes. For example, the European Voluntary Service Programme (EVS) is an EU funded programme for 18-30 year olds which funds travel, accommodation, food and pocket money as well as preparation, on-arrival training and personal support during the project. Volunteering opportunities are

available from 2 to 12 months (shorter periods and extra financial support are available for those with extra support needs e.g. those who have a disability and unemployed people). The programme works by helping volunteers to make contact with accredited hosting organisations. Organisations select the volunteers that they would like to host on the basis of the interest that the volunteer brings to the project. This programme has further potential for Ireland and should be promoted.

Question 16:

What other relevant stakeholders, if any, should be considered in developing a volunteering strategy to support volunteering in Ireland?

There are many organisations at both national and local levels that have a long track record in involving volunteers and which would clearly have very relevant insights and views relevant to the Strategy. These include, for example, sports organisations, social service councils, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Hospice movement, Citizens Information Services, Active Retirement Associations and Community Arts Centres. Targeted consultation should be carried out with such organisations. Organisations that represent low participation groups such as the National Youth Council, Pavee Point, and migrant support organisations would also be relevant stakeholders.

Question 17:

Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons

Since, as stated, volunteering is a cross sectoral matter, there is no 'one size fits all' approach. The proposed National Advisory Group on Volunteering is an appropriate forum to engage all relevant stakeholders – government departments and agencies, and volunteer centres – as well as inter-sectoral entities such as educational institutions (the latter to calibrate appropriate courses and qualifications for volunteers). Issues could be addressed through the Advisory Group having mechanisms to feed into the existing infrastructure with specific recommendations on these issues.

The Advisory Group could complement the role of the Department in the following areas *inter alia*:

- Provide a context within which the practice, skills, development and coordination of volunteering can be effectively realised across the country
- Enabling access by all to volunteering opportunities
- Integrating the various funding strands for volunteering
- Providing for uniform approach to developing volunteering opportunities
- Overseeing funding requirements
- Developing education, train and qualification systems
- Developing standards and related Codes of Practice for volunteering
- Research, monitoring and evaluation

- Data information systems

Question 18:

Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons.

Yes, multi-annual funding is crucial for most organisations. This was recommended in the 2000 White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*

- Multi-annual funding to become the norm for agreed priority services and community development activities. This will mean a major move away from the present unsatisfactory and *ad hoc* funding schemes experienced by many community and voluntary groups.
- Applying for funding has become increasingly complex and bureaucratic and is often of a short-term or once-off nature;
- Community and voluntary organisations clearly need adequate funding to resource their core work and meet the different types of challenges which present themselves at different stages of the organisation's development, including the recruitment and training of volunteers;
- Statutory bodies need to ensure that funding is provided for essential services delivered by voluntary bodies at a level which eliminates the necessity for volunteers to have to engage in extensive fundraising when the latter is clearly not their motive for volunteering and which can sometimes discourage people interested in volunteering.

Question 19:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering?

The formal education system has a major role to play in shaping values and in the development of young people as informed and active citizens. An education system which incorporates the development of such values is likely to contribute to the creation of a positive climate for volunteering.

In a culture which values, emphasises and cherishes work (in the labour market) and related career paths, inevitably there is a lower status conferred on those outside the labour force. This lower status also tends to apply to people who are not currently or were never actually in the paid workforce (e.g. people working full-time in the home). School curricula could do much more to give young people a broader understanding of work and a broader perspective on how people can contribute to society. A dedicated social media campaign targeted at young people and specific ethnic groups could be developed in tandem with experts on social media such as Spunout.ie

Question 20:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities?

The media can play an important role in promoting the value and benefits of volunteering, both for the individual and for the community. Social media can also complement this role as it has particular audiences that may be more difficult to reach through traditional media outlets, such as ethnic minority groups. It also provides a two way communication channel allowing people to engage interactively with other individuals and communities. It can provide a non-intimidating entry point, for people to seek information and access new groups and volunteering opportunities.

The role of Volunteer Centres needs to be promoted and publicised locally through the use of local and social media.

Question 21:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage general participation in volunteering?

The benefits of volunteering should be emphasised throughout the Strategy as follows:

- For the individual, involvement in community activities and public life can create opportunities for self-expression and personal development;
- For the community, volunteering can help create active vibrant communities and can improve the quality of life for members of those communities; and
- For society, volunteering can result in greater participation in public and community life and in policy making processes, resulting in more diverse representation and more effective, targeted policies.

Ensuring appropriate incentives to encourage volunteering is particularly important. Such incentives should include more flexible and diverse options, more proactive matching and training and more opportunities for intergenerational volunteering. Potential barriers to volunteering need to be identified and addressed, including negative perceptions of volunteer activities, fear of encountering ageism or racial discrimination and concerns about the increasingly regulatory organisational environment.

Question 22:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of young people in volunteering?

The involvement of young people in volunteering is essential to ensure that they develop their skills, knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Being heard is part of young

people's civic education and can strengthen their commitment to democracy and social solidarity. It can also lead to their active participation in society as adults.¹

Question 23:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in volunteering?

The fact that Ireland is now a multi-cultural society needs to be acknowledged and reflected in the approach to volunteering. In order for new communities to feel part of the society, it is important that there is a long term approach to immigration and integration policy that encourages migrants to participate fully in society. Active citizenship programmes should promote and encourage the participation of new communities. Education programmes within communities and in schools should promote diversity and mutual respect for all cultures and races. Migrants need to be proactively encouraged to become active volunteers in their local communities (as many already do).

Older people possess a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience acquired over their lifetimes, which can be tapped into through the systematic creation of a range of volunteering opportunities:

- Working in schools in varying capacities, e.g. in Transition Year, pre-employment courses or with individual students in a one-to-one support/counseling role;
- Working with and supporting younger parents who are experiencing difficulties in coping;
- Working with children/younger people in, for example, the development of creative art forms and traditional crafts;
- Health promotion by older people for older people;
- Information provision;

The concept of older people working as mentors to younger, less experienced people on a voluntary basis is one that could potentially be applied much more widely than is currently the case – in business settings, schools and colleges, local community development initiatives, training and development programmes and, very importantly, in the work of voluntary bodies.

Question 24:

Should the strategy seek to focus on or identify particular marginalised group(s) to encourage their participation in volunteering?

¹ Hearing Young Voices – consulting children and young people, including those experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy development in Ireland, Executive Summary, Children's Rights Alliance and National Youth Council of Ireland, 2002

In addition to the targeting of older people and younger people already referenced, there is likely to be undeveloped potential for volunteering within some socially excluded groups – people with disabilities, Travellers and other ethnic minorities, and long-term unemployed people.

Question 25:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to mitigate the risks posed by the changing demographic of volunteers?

As already stated, there is a need to put in place school programmes which would inculcate in children and young people core values relating to citizenship and social solidarity and the essential contribution of volunteering in maintaining such values. There is a need to address the age profile issue that exists in some volunteer reliant organisations that have a significant cohort of volunteers in the over 65 age bracket. These organisations need to be supported to promote their volunteering opportunities to a wider range of age cohorts to allow for the sustainable involvement of volunteers long-term.

Question 26:

What specific audiences should the national volunteering strategy focus on?

The Volunteering Strategy is likely to have the following audiences:

- 1) The public
- 2) Government
- 3) Volunteering supporting organisations
- 4) VIOs
- 5) Local Authorities
- 6) The business and corporate sector

Question 27:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteers?

There should be structures in place to provide integrated training and support for volunteers commensurate with responsibilities. This should be accompanied by appropriate accreditation which recognises both prior learning and experience to date. This would help to address the situation where many volunteers receive no accreditation for the work they do.

Clear provision needs to be made in the Strategy for organising and facilitating a systematic training and education programme for volunteers working in VIOs.

Question 28:

In what other ways can the Department support enhanced volunteer performance in Irish volunteering?

Support the introduction of Codes of Conduct for volunteers that promote the assessment of volunteers to ensure they receive adequate support, mentoring and training and also that they are properly matched with the most appropriate role within organisations. The agreement of defined role profiles outlining the required levels of performance and time commitment for volunteers would also be helpful in this regard. Particular consideration should be given to the promotion of specialist volunteering to get the optimum benefits from the experience and skills of volunteers.

Question 29:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteer managers?

Volunteer managers now have increased responsibilities as well as demands for greater accountability. Board members are increasingly required to have skills in a number of areas such as financial management, negotiating contracts, risk management and strategic planning. If voluntary boards are to remain effective they will need to respond to the changes that are occurring in the area of management. There is a real challenge in developing management techniques that are appropriate to a non-profit environment.

Volunteer managers should have available arrange of mechanisms to enable them to work including collaborative working with Volunteer Centres and other volunteer managers in their local area.

Question 30:

What steps may be taken by the Department to support enhanced management performance in Irish volunteering?

There should be more focus on impact assessment and on identifying the factors that contribute to successful volunteering.

There should be active consideration of the development and rollout of a dedicated performance management training tool for VIOs. This tool could be developed on an eLearning platform that could be tailored to specific organisation's needs. The core modules would be generic across all organisations and could be incorporated in to a wider suite of training supports for VIOs.

Question 31:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to address the perception of volunteering involving too large a commitment of time?

This matter needs to be addressed by a strong focus on developing a climate and ethos within communities where more people volunteer and where new volunteers are clearly welcomed, supported and provided with training commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. Clearer role descriptions for volunteers should be developed that outline

the time commitment required to act as a volunteer including a specialist or event specific volunteer.

Question 32:

Should a volunteering code of conduct for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) be developed and implemented? What should this code include?

National Standards for Volunteering should be developed which incorporate the following principles²:

- Volunteer involvement could be a considered and planned part of an organisation's strategic development, aligning with the organisation's strategic aims and incorporated into its evaluation framework;
- Effective volunteer involvement requires organisational leadership, and a culture and structure that supports and values the role of volunteers;
- Volunteers have rights, which include the right to work in a safe and supportive environment with appropriate supervision and effective management practices;
- Volunteers have responsibilities, which include acting responsibly, being accountable for their actions to the organisation, and respecting the organisation's values and practices.

A Code of Conduct should be related to National Standards for Volunteering which would have the following components:

- Maximising the benefits of volunteer involvement
- Developing effective volunteer involvement strategies and practices
- Involving volunteers in meaningful and useful activities that contribute to the outcomes of the organisation's work
- Ensuring the rights of volunteers are protected and that they are supported to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Question 33:

Should a potential Irish code of conduct for volunteers and VIOs be mandatory or optional? Who would regulate it?

The Code of Conduct should be mandatory for larger organisations with paid staff but should be recommended best practice for smaller groups. Regulation should be considered

² See Volunteering Australia, *Towards a National Strategy for Volunteering*, https://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1376977222VAPolicySubmissionDecember2008FeedbackonDiscussionPaperTowardsaNationalStrategyforVolunteering.pdf

by linking the adoption of such codes to funding opportunities. Funding bodies should require proof of the implementation of the code as part of the funding application process.

Question 34:

What challenges are facing smaller volunteer involving organisations and how can the Department assist?

The main challenges are likely to relate to:

- Recruiting and maintaining sufficient suitable volunteers
- Providing appropriate training, support and supervision
- Ensuring adequate governance through effective and strong Boards of Management
- Meeting additional financial, legal and regulatory requirements in the longer term e.g. Codes of Conduct

Question 35:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to facilitate QQI assessment of volunteers for the purposes of accrediting skills?

Blocks to training and development encountered by voluntary/community organisations, including resources, time, attitudes, lack of information, lack of understanding/awareness of training needs, require further identification and consideration with a view to (a) providing additional resources and (b) developing inclusive and incremental models of training. Exploration of existing models of accreditation both in Ireland and abroad required e.g. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for accredited training within QQI programmes

Question 36:

What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the creation of volunteering opportunities?

- 1) Local volunteering databases which are actively promoted
- 2) Strong support structures at local level for VIOs
- 3) School programmes, particularly at second level, promoting active citizenship

Question 37:

What other significant challenges to volunteering should be considered as part of this strategy? How can they be addressed?

VIOs have increasing demands in relation to legal and technical requirements. This puts significant pressures on some organizations, particularly smaller organizations involved in service delivery.

Voluntary Boards of Management now have responsibilities as employers and financial managers. The burden of such responsibilities can sap the energy and initiative that is so vital to a vibrant and inclusive voluntary sector. Many volunteers are now faced with much

greater responsibilities and may not have the confidence or skills to take up a role which requires a complex set of skills, with reporting and accountability requirements. The skills required for these roles need to be further identified and mechanisms put in place at local level for appropriate relevant training

- There is a need for further research to explore issues of recruitment, organisational capacity, accountability and overall standards in the voluntary sector;
- Additional and ongoing capacity-building relating to the roles and responsibilities of management boards is vital in order to encourage adequate levels of membership at this level.

Question 38:

Are there any further challenges, strategic objectives and actions that you feel should be included in a national volunteering strategy?

There are substantial costs associated with the appropriate recruitment, training and management of volunteers which need to be fully acknowledged. These can be significant if the organisations see a large turnover in volunteer numbers from year to year. Therefore, volunteer retention is also a key issue.

Promoting the idea of the volunteer as active citizen can help to re-frame the locus of volunteering from the local or regional community to the national community. This identification with the national community will support the sense of belonging to a national movement rather than a localised endeavour.

Despite the valuable and essential contribution of volunteers to the work of their organisations and the key role played by volunteers in the delivery of services, many organisations may not have developed a Volunteer Policy *per se*.

Also, it is likely that in many VIOs, considerably less attention paid to the training of volunteers than to the training of staff. This can be measured in the frequency of any training for volunteers; in the budget allocated for volunteer training; and in the attention to assessing the training and development needs of volunteers.

Question 39:

What criteria should be used to assess our progress in assessing the impacts of volunteering?

Question 40:

What criteria should be used to gauge success in delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy?

The following Template is suggested in response to Questions 39 and 40

Variable	KPIs	Measurement Tools
----------	------	-------------------

Increasing volunteering at national and local levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer numbers – projected and actual • Volunteer turnover and retention • Deployment of volunteers • Staff/volunteer satisfaction levels 	Targeted research
Profile of volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population groups (e.g. adults, Over 65s, Young people, Minorities) • Reach • Overall volunteers to catchment populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Databases • Consultation with service VIOs
Types of volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal • Structured • Short-term • Longer-term 	Data collection and analysis
Training, education and CPD	Recognition and accreditation	Targeted research
Value for money	Overall Budget	Budgetary analysis – projected vs. actual spend; Regional spend; SROI Analysis
Volunteer satisfaction	Positive/Negative	Annual volunteer satisfaction survey
Active citizenship	Volunteering among different population categories	Targeted research

There should be a strong emphasis on measuring the quality of volunteering taking into account the following factors:

- Efficiency – are we delivering the best possible model of volunteering within the resources available?
- Effectiveness – are we reaching the best achievable outcomes for volunteers and VIOs and for the end users of services which are provided by volunteers?
- Person-centeredness – are we focusing on the needs and rights of volunteers and respecting their rights, values and preferences?
- Equity – is there equitable access to volunteering based on need and interests?
- Risk – are we identifying, assessing and managing risks for volunteers?