



# volunteer centre

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Corcaigh

CORK

Submission	Working Draft of Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025
On behalf of	Cork Volunteer Centre CLG 13 North Main Street Cork T12 Y6W0
Contact details	Julie Connelly Manager julie@volunteercork.ie 021-4251572

# Munster Volunteer Centres

## Call for Input Summary

### WHAT WE HEARD?



- + Fear of Governance & Regulation
- + Urban and Rural challenges differ
- + Volunteers do not feel valued
- + Volunteer burn out and wellbeing is a real issue
- + Lack of funding is limiting service provision
- + Restricted access to locally delivered support and information
- + Frustration with Garda Vetting
- + Limited Volunteer Management Capacity across the province



### WHERE WE HEARD IT?



- + 31 Focus Groups across Munster
- + Attended by 321 people
- + 224 responses to the national survey (33% of the total)

### HOW WE HEARD IT?



- + Structured and formalised approach to regional workshops
- + Support documentation for facilitators
- + Province wide plan
- + Joint Social Media campaign
- + Dedicated website

### WHAT SHOULD THE STRATEGY INCLUDE?



- + A robust volunteering infrastructure
- + A national volunteering awareness campaign
- + Assistance to small organisations
- + Proportionate governance and legislative requirements for C&V groups
- + Fairness across the urban / rural divide
- + Opportunity for feedback into the implementation of the strategy



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

Supported by The Department of Rural and Community Development

## Background

### Call for Input 2019

In response to the Department of Rural and Community Development call for input into the Volunteering Strategy, Cork Volunteer Centre undertook the following actions;

- **Munster Volunteer Centres focus group collaboration:** (see infographic on previous page). Cork Volunteer Centre hosted 6 focus groups (Cork City x 2, Clonakilty, Mallow, Mitchelstown and Youghal) to obtain the views of the volunteers and volunteer involving organisations we represent. Approximately 60 people were in attendance.
- **Volunteer Ireland Survey:** 353 representatives from Volunteer Involving Organisations completed this survey, along with 534 volunteers.
- Consulted **staff, volunteers and board members** of Cork Volunteer Centre.
- On specific questions, Cork Volunteer Centre **consulted representatives from Cork City PPN, Cork County PPN and Cork City and County Council.**
- Cork Volunteer Centre staff members attended the **Volunteer Centres Managers Network annual conference** on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019 held in response to the call for input.

The views outlined in our submission to the call for input summarised the views of all listed above.

### Draft Strategy 2020

In response to the Draft Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025, Cork Volunteer Centre undertook the following actions;

- Consulted with **Volunteer Centres across the Munster region.**
- Held a **public consultation** on the content of the draft Strategy.
- Consulted **staff, volunteers and board members** of Cork Volunteer Centre.
- **Assessed the draft strategy** against the recommendations from our initial submission in February 2019 and out **pre-budget 2020 submission** to government.
- Examined initial findings of **comparative research conducted by UCC** on the needs of urban and rural volunteer involving organisations (survey of 511 Volunteer Involving Organisations across Munster).

The views outlined in our submission on the draft strategy represent a summary of the above.



## **Introduction**

Cork Volunteer Centre broadly welcomes the publication of the draft Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025 by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Overall, however we are concerned that political will is required to deliver on the strategy. Therefore, we ask that whomever is in government after the 2020 General Election, they commit to the following actions with immediate effect;

1. Publish and fully resource the National Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025.
2. Promptly publish an implementation plan to deliver and implement the actions and objectives of the National Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025.
3. Support the volunteering infrastructure with a commitment to multi-annual funding of Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres. This includes honouring the current Government's commitment to create new Volunteer Centres in counties where none currently exist.
4. Recognise the importance and contribution of volunteers to the delivery of vital services in any Programme for Government.

Please note that while Cork Volunteer Centre recognises the importance of volunteering abroad, our role is to support volunteers and organisations based in our County. Therefore, this submission will not put any emphasis on Strategic Objective 4 of the draft strategy.

### **1. Recognise the significant role of Volunteer Centres**

Cork Volunteer Centre offers support and guidance to individuals and volunteer-involving organisations to reach their goals, while making a significant contribution to their local community and society. We provide a placement service matching individuals who would like to volunteer with non-profit organisations who need volunteers. Advice and support is offered to both through a range of services including information, consultation, volunteer management training and Garda vetting administration. The following infographic highlights the work we have engaged in across Cork City and County in 2019.

## PLACEMENT

1714

New Volunteer Registrations

59

New Organisations

430

Volunteers Placed  
with Organisations

Supported

590

registered organisations



39143

Volunteer hours logged  
representing

366

Face to face Meetings

€919,860.50

value to Cork's Economy

205

New Opportunities



111

Volunteer Award  
Nominations

10

Volunteer Award  
Categories

Supported by

11

Cork based  
businesses

**CELEBRATING  
&  
RECOGNISING  
VOLUNTEERS**

## SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

38

Face To Face  
Support meetings

Delivered

7

summer lectures  
on best practice.  
Viewed by:

136

Engagements with  
non-profits  
(Phone & In person)

1976

people online.



## OUTREACH

Delivered in

23

locations across  
Cork City & County.

## INFORMATION

Delivered

21

information sessions to

1261

attendees.



(Students, Businesses,  
Social Welfare &  
Marginalised groups)

## GARDA VETTING

Processed

1802

applications

for

235

affiliates

**MUNSTER VOLUNTEER CENTRES:  
CALL FOR INPUT INTO NATIONAL  
STRATEGY**

31

focus groups attended by:

321

people



## TRAINING

141

Vetting Officers  
Trained

28

participants in  
Volunteer Leadership  
Training



Trained

6

organisations in  
Social Media Skills

Hosted

3

governance webinars  
attended by:

19

organisations

As is clearly demonstrated above, Cork Volunteer Centre plays a significant role to support both volunteers and non-profits across Cork. The Draft Strategy fails to recognise the extent of this work in any meaningful way.

Section 1.5 *Shaping this Volunteering Strategy* fails to recognise the significant consultation work undertaken by both the Volunteer Centres network and Volunteer Ireland in relation to the call for input. It is also very disappointing that Section 4.2 *Volunteer Supporting Environment* does not appear until page 26 of the document. This section should be front and centre of the strategy and should emphasise the extent of the services provided locally; examples of innovation and partnerships undertaken by Volunteer Centres; and, reference the impacts and outcomes of our work.

This is disappointing given that Volunteer Centres are listed as responsible bodies for 21 actions in the strategy. Furthermore, three actions are included which fail to mention Volunteer Centres as responsible bodies, even though Cork Volunteer Centre is undertaking this work already.

- Strategic Objective 1, Action 4.2: Failure to mention Volunteer Centres as responsible body to deliver local awareness campaigns even though we engage with local media (leaflets, newspapers, radio and social media) on a regular basis to encourage volunteering.
- Strategic Object 2, Actions 2.2 1-4: Fails to recognise the work engaged in locally to encourage corporate volunteering (see more detail below).
- Strategic Objective 3, Action 4.1: Fails to recognise the work engaged in with local social welfare branch offices to encourage jobseekers to view volunteering as a valuable means to obtain employment.

#### **Recommendation**

- A Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025 that recognises the value and local impact of the Volunteer Centre network.

## **2. A Robust Volunteering Infrastructure**

Cork Volunteer Centre welcomes action 6.1 *Provide Funding to Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland in order for them to provide support and capacity building to volunteer involving organisations and volunteers (Strategic Objective 2).*

However, the McLaughlin Report (2018) highlighted some of the inconsistencies and shortcomings of Volunteer Centre funding. McLaughlin (2018) indicated that there should be a minimum amount of funding that every Volunteer Centre receive to cover staff and overhead costs. However, the report

correctly identified other factors that should determine additional funding for Volunteer Centres. These were population size; geographic area; and level of deprivation and disadvantage, in that area.

The population of Cork City according to the 2016 census was 125,657 while 417,211 people resided in the rest of the county. This brings the total population of Cork to 542,868 (CSO, 2016). This number represents a staggering 11.4% of the entire country and the **largest population served by any Volunteer Centre.**

County Cork is the **largest county** in Ireland by geographical area at approximately 7,500 km<sup>2</sup>. With major towns scattered throughout this area, outreach is a costly venture. With the most people to serve over the largest area, Cork Volunteer Centre needs to be adequately and proportionally funded. However, the McLaughlin Report (2018) demonstrated that in 2016, Cork Volunteer Centre received the lowest funding per capita across the entire country.

For 2020, Cork Volunteer Centres allocation for funding is expected to be €123,800. This is the same amount allocated in 2019. In our funding application for 2020, we estimate that it will cost **€232,873.80 to cover salaries, overheads and administration.**

Cork Volunteer Centre advocates for multi-annual funding for Volunteer Centres and the community and voluntary sector on the whole. This would allow for long-term projects and help with staff retention. Numerous reports such as the White Paper (2000) and the Independent Review Group Report (2019), have recommended multi-annual funding for the sector. “There should be a move to multi-annual budgets for 3-5 years in duration to facilitate strategic service planning and reform of services” (IRG, 2019).

#### **Recommendations:**

- An implementation plan which provides a clear and transparent funding model for Volunteer Centres. This should be a priority, with each centre receiving additional funding depending on factors such as population and geographical area.
- Bearing in mind factors such as population size, geographical area and outreach burden, fund Cork Volunteer Centre in 2020 to at least the amount of €200,000.
- Provide multi-annual funding across the volunteer centre network for more effective strategic planning.

### **3. Promotion of Volunteering through a National Campaign.**

Cork Volunteer Centre welcomes the actions 3.1 and 3.2 outlined in Strategic Objective 3 as this was recommended in both our call for input submission and pre-budget 2020 submission. However, we emphasise the need to adequately resource both of these actions. Cork Volunteer Centre would also like to emphasise that the national campaign should do the following;

- Raise awareness of the existence and the role of the network of volunteer centres.
- Highlight the existence of I-Vol.
- Promote the benefits of volunteering.

### **4. Assistance to Volunteer Involving Organisations**

Cork Volunteer Centre's call for input and pre-budget 2020 submission recommended a number of actions which would provide assistance to smaller volunteer involving organisations in particular. We welcome that the strategy has attempted to address some of these issues. Smaller volunteer involving organisations are subject to the same legislation, rules and regulations as larger organisations. However, many lack the staff, knowledge or capacity to deal with these issues. Cork Volunteer Centre also welcomes the recognition in the draft strategy of the regulatory and governance burden on volunteer involving organisations.

- Strategic Objective 1, Actions 2.2, 1-4 in relation to funding are welcomed. However, those present at our consultations recommend that this should be a short rather than a medium term goal. It was also noted that volunteer involving organisations have been identified as the responsible body to deliver actions in the strategy. Any implementation plan associated with the strategy should clearly resource volunteer involving organisations to deliver these actions.
- Strategic Object 2, Action 2.6 in particular is welcomed by Cork Volunteer Centre. However, under our existing budget we do not have the staff or resources to deliver on this action.
- Strategic Objective 2, Action 3.1 is much needed. However, it is worrying that the timeframe listed is long term. Frustration with Garda Vetting has been repeatedly noted across the Volunteer Centre network as problematic to volunteering in Ireland. This system should be reviewed with immediate effect.
- Strategic Objective 2, Action 4.1 is a little confusing. A recent study by the Public Participation Network (also funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development) has already highlighted the impact of insurance costs on the community and voluntary sector. Cork



Volunteer Centre argues that this research should be utilised by Government to address this issue with immediate effect. The current action has listed this as a long term timescale which is very disappointing.

- Strategic Objective 2, Action 5.3 requires clarity on what is defined as capacity building. Furthermore, those in attendance at our public consultation argued that a bursary model is limited and sustained funding is required for this action. This ties into Action 6.1 under the same strategic objective. Funding to Volunteer Centres to assist with capacity building is necessary in the short term. In particular, with the Charities Regulator Governance Code compliance and reporting requirements for 2020 and 2021.
- Strategic Objective 5, Action 2.4 is welcomed. However, given the requirements of the Regulators Governance Code, this action should be given immediate priority. Otherwise the deadline to comply with the Code should be extended.
- Strategic Objective 5, Actions 2.5 and 2.6 are ongoing in Cork Volunteer Centre through the existing training and networking opportunities we provide to the organisations we support. The extent of these activities are listed elsewhere in this submission.

#### **5. A Strategy on Volunteering that is representative of the needs of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in both urban and rural areas.**

The consultation process undertaken by the Volunteer Centres of Munster for the call for input, clearly identified that there are significant challenges facing rural communities in particular. Recognising the importance of this issue to the populations what we serve, Cork Volunteer Centre, in collaboration with the Volunteer Centres across the Munster region, funded comparative research into the topic (Scanlon, ongoing). Initial findings from a survey conducted on **511 representatives from urban and rural organisations** across the region found that;

- There were clear differences by location, with volunteer involving organisations in rural areas significantly more likely to experience challenges in recruitment of volunteers and board members. They are also more likely to report that their volunteers were overburdened.
- There are also very clear differences in relation to recruitment methods and use of Volunteer Centre services – rural organisations are far less likely to advertise through Volunteer Centres than organisations in other locations. The service which rural VIOs are most likely to use is the Garda Vetting Service, although over one quarter of respondents in rural areas said that they had not availed of any VC services.

- One of the recurring themes in the questionnaire is that some organisations do not know very much about the VCs or the services that they provide – there were suggestions for more out-reach and information.

The data provides a clear rationale for the provision of more Volunteer Centre services at a local level. In line with other government policies on rural regeneration and development, we ask that the National Volunteering Strategy recognises the unique challenges faced by rural volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, and adequately resources Volunteer Centres with large rural populations to provide much needed services.

#### **6. Opportunities for feedback into the implementation of the strategy.**

Cork Volunteer Centre welcomes the opportunity given to respond to the draft national strategy. However, the draft strategy fails to recognise the extent of the consultation undertaken across the Munster region to ascertain the views and understand the needs of the volunteers and volunteer involving organisations on the ground.

The draft strategy itself is cumbersome. The feedback from our public consultation indicates that a finalised strategy should be written in **plain English** to make the strategy accessible and understandable to all. Further clarity is required on the meaning behind numerous actions.

The feedback from consultation participants was that the draft strategy was launched with too short a timeframe to respond; at a time of year when most people were focused on their Christmas holidays; and, in language that was not easy for a lay person to understand.

Participants welcomed the approach taken across the Munster region and they would ask that their voices are heard and that their needs are responded to. There was a strong sense from this consultation process that volunteers and volunteer involving organisations would like to be offered further opportunities to give feedback on the implementation of the strategy.

#### **Recommendations:**

- When the strategy is eventually launched, it needs to be in language that is relevant for all members of the volunteering community. It should be accessible and easy to understand.
- An inbuilt feedback process on the implementation of the strategy should be made available to the public.

## **7. Develop an appropriate research agenda in relation to volunteering in Ireland**

Cork Volunteer Centre welcomes Action 2.3 *Inclusion of a question on volunteering as part of the 2021 Census of Population and beyond (Strategic Objective 3)* as suggested in both our call for input and pre-budget 2020 submissions to government. We recommend that the question include a definition of volunteering that is easily accessible and understandable by all. We also recommend that the question asks respondents to indicate the number of hours per week volunteered.

We fail to understand why Action 2.2 (*Explore the potential of the CSO regularly including a question on volunteering in their quarterly national household survey annually*), under the same Strategic Object has been given a long term timescale. Cork Volunteer Centre recommends that this be changed to a short term action and implemented.

A significant number of actions are targeted at specific groups of Irish society. In order to ensure that these actions are appropriate, we urgently request that the government emphasises funding research activities as a short term goal of the strategy. This includes utilising data from the Census next year as well as Quarterly national household surveys form any basis of targeted actions.

Furthermore, if the current state of volunteering in Ireland is not appropriately researched, it will be difficult to provide any metrics of success on the implementation of the strategy. To this end Actions 1.1, 1.2 and 2.1 under Strategic Objective 5 should be given immediate priority and not listed as medium term goals.

## **8. Fund Volunteer Centres to develop relationships with businesses and employers to enhance corporate social responsibility locally.**

In our pre-budget 2020 submission to government, Cork Volunteer Centre recommended that;

- Cork Volunteer Centre and other volunteer centres to roll out a corporate volunteering strategy.
- A media campaign to tackle the perceived barrier of time.
- Incentivise employers to allow employees to take paid time off work to volunteer.
- Provide public sector employees with paid time off to volunteer.

Therefore, we broadly welcome the activities listed under Action 2.2 (*Develop the potential for further volunteering partnerships between the corporate sector and community organisations*).

However, Cork Volunteer Centre notes that Volunteer Centres are not listed as a responsible body under this action. This fails to recognise the dynamic work we are already undertaking on the ground locally through;

- Information sessions to local employers and chambers of commerce.
- The work Cork Volunteer Centre undertakes with the careers service in UCC to outline the value of volunteering to students seeking work experience.
- The relationships we have with businesses across the county through our volunteer discount card scheme.
- The relationships we have developed through corporate sponsorship of Cork Volunteer awards.
- The relationships we have developed with large corporations such as Dell and Otterbox through benefiting directly from their employees CSR hours.

Cork Volunteer Centre would like to build upon and expand this aspect of our work, but we require adequate resources to do so.

Further comments raised at our public consultation were that this action fails to recognise the impact of small to medium enterprises locally through sponsorship of local events.

Cork Volunteer Centre questions why action 2.3 (*Explore the potential for a volunteering policy across the public sector*) is given a long term timeframe. This action should be short term and the government should lead by example. Indeed, Connolly (2013: 225) found that public sector employees involved in the delivery of social services donated more blood and time than the national average, and at least as much money to charity. Thus, we can envisage that there would be ample uptake of our proposed scheme.

## **9. Celebrate Volunteering Locally.**

In our call for input and pre-budget submission Cork Volunteer Centre recommended that funding be provided for Volunteer Centres to celebrate volunteering locally. On 11<sup>th</sup> October last, Cork Volunteer Centre hosted our inaugural Cork Volunteer Awards. As noted above, we received 111 nominations for 10 categories. This ceremony cost **€7,103** to deliver and was co-hosted by our media partners C103 radio station. The ceremony could not have taken place without generous corporate sponsorship and ticket sales. We also received marketing and promotional support from our corporate partners. Cork Volunteer Centre hosted this celebration of volunteers in Cork in response to the feedback we received in our consultations for the call for input into the national strategy. The feedback we received from the award winners; their friends and families; and the local volunteer involving organisations

was inspiring and heart-warming. The coverage generated increased volunteer and organisational registrations with Cork Volunteer Centre in 2019. We plan to host our second ceremony on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020. However, we are in a situation where we will have to struggle to seek corporate donations yet again.

We welcome Action 2.1 (*Support local and national awards ceremonies that recognise the contribution and impact our volunteers, VIOs, community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises are making to society*) under Strategic Objective 3. We also welcome that the timescale for this action is short-term. However, given our current (under) funding situation we fail to see this action being delivered.

#### **10. Fully resourced implementation plan with clear timeframes.**

Cork Volunteer Centre advocates that the National Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025 be published without delay. Most importantly, an implementation plan for the delivery and implementation of the actions and objectives of the National Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025 is required. The implementation plan should provide clarity on actual timeframes for short, medium and long term. Finally, the implementation plan should be adequately resourced.

#### **Conclusion**

Overall, while Cork Volunteer Centre welcomes the long overdue draft strategy, it appears very aspirational and should provide more clarity on implementation. Adequate funding and resources, as well as strong political commitment are required to fully implement this strategy. Disappointingly, the strategy fails to recognise the dynamic and extensive work undertaken by Volunteer Centres to continue to enhance their local communities across the nation. Most worryingly, this draft strategy fails to engage with other government policies on rural and community development and recognise the unique challenges faced by rural volunteer involving organisations and volunteers. Any final strategy should be written in a language that is accessible to all. This strategy presents a unique opportunity to adequately resource supports for organisations and volunteers across the country, and recognise the importance and contribution of volunteers to the delivery of vital services in their local communities.



Cork Volunteer Centre is maximising the voice of volunteering in Cork. We champion the benefits of volunteering. We provide opportunities for community involvement and social inclusion. We support the non-profit organisations and volunteers registered with us.

We at Cork Volunteer Centre are proud of our achievements. We also recognise, however, how much more we can achieve with adequate support from the Department of Rural and Community Development. We request that Government seriously consider all of our recommendations to ensure a brighter future for volunteering in Cork and nationwide.

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