

SUBMISSION following
Call for Input (CFI) on Key Aspects to be included in a
National Volunteering Strategy
(The closing date for submissions is Thursday, 14 February 2019.)

Organisation/Individual: Kildare Public Participation Network

Completed by: Bernard Higgins

Title/position: Title PPN Coordinator

Contact Details: kildareppn@gmail.com

All materials received by the Department will be subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. This means that all materials submitted during the CFI could be released to a wider audience on request. If you wish to claim exemption from the Act please state this case in your submission along with the justification for so doing.

SUBMISSION

Call for Input (CFI) on Key Aspects to be included in a National Volunteering Strategy

| | |
|---|--|
| | Section 4: Definition of Volunteering |
| 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? |
| | European Union Definition |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Section 5: Background on Irish Volunteering |
| 2 | Do you agree with the outline of the Department's role in volunteering? What additions or amendments would you suggest? |
| | <p>The Department's stated strategic goal is to support the community, voluntary and charity sector and strengthen the sector's capacity to contribute to civil society. In this regard, the Department needs to provide strong leadership to ensure the development of <u>sustainable and quality</u> volunteering in Ireland. Its role should not only relate to the <i>development</i> of volunteering policy - it should also play a key role in supporting the <i>implementation</i> of policy in a practical way at grassroots level. This can be achieved by improving the model of support for VIOs and volunteer supporting infrastructure, as outlined in Question 8.</p> <p>With this in mind, Kildare PPN suggests that the Department's role should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● develop <i>and support the implementation</i> of policy; ● support the development and growth of <i>sustainable and quality</i> volunteering; and ● provide funding and other supports to enable the development of volunteering infrastructure. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Section 6: A Vision for the Future of Irish Volunteering |
| 3 | Do you agree with this vision for the purposes of this strategy? If not, what should our vision be? |
| | Kildare PPN suggests the following vision: |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>“A society where volunteering contributes meaningfully to <i>developing and supporting vibrant, inclusive, sustainable and resilient</i> communities throughout Ireland.”</p> |
|--|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Section 7: Objectives of a Volunteering Strategy</p> |
| 4 | <p>What objectives for Irish volunteering should be set for the purposes of this strategy?</p> |
| | <p>An ambitious volunteering strategy is needed to strengthen volunteering in Ireland and to ensure that it is delivered in a much more sustainable, supported and strategic way.</p> <p>The objectives of the volunteering strategy should inspire a vibrant volunteering sector, which delivers quality supports/services, values and nurtures volunteers and ensures sustainable outcomes. Kildare PPN suggests the following outline objectives, in the following order:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Support volunteering and volunteers 2) Support volunteering infrastructure to enable sustainable, quality and coordinated volunteering 3) Celebrate volunteering 4) Advance volunteering (this is listed last as, if Objectives 1, 2 & 3 are implemented, volunteering will inherently be advanced) |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>Section 8: The Volunteering Community</p> |
| 5 | <p>What is the role of the public in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</p> |
| | <p>The Department’s view of the public’s role in volunteering is stated as “providing services to the community”. This raises some concerns as the emphasis on “service provision” implies a role more consistent with that of an agency or organisation, rather than “the public”.</p> <p>Care is needed to ensure that the model of volunteering in Ireland does not place undue responsibility on “the public” to provide services which are largely within the domain of the State. The volunteering strategy needs to provide a clear vision on the role of the State in “service provision” and the supporting role of the public as volunteers. It is essential to achieve a balance between what is expected of volunteers in terms of service provision and what is the responsibility of the State.</p> |
| 6 | <p>What is the role of the VIOs in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>The role of a VIO is to support volunteers to fulfil their volunteering role effectively. VIOs must be well-governed and managed so that they can deliver quality and sustainable volunteering.</p> <p>However, in order to do this, VIOs require resources/supports to build their capacity to meet the ever-increasing standards expected of them (e.g. Governance Code, GDPR, Child Protection). Given that many smaller VIOs have minimal or no staff and are managed by voluntary committees and Boards of Management, the onus on them to meet these standards can be very challenging.</p> |
| | <p>Should the role of volunteer supporting infrastructure be expanded for the purposes of this strategy?</p> |
| | <p>Yes, the role of volunteer supporting infrastructure (VSI) should be significantly expanded to respond more effectively to the (at times) overwhelming challenges faced by VIOs and volunteers. VSIs should play a more hands-on role in the development and sustaining of VIOs, particularly those that rely heavily or entirely on volunteers.</p> |
| 8 | <p>Is the current model adequate? If not, what volunteering infrastructure and funding model would best support the development of volunteering?</p> |
| | <p>No, the model is not adequate.</p> <p><u>Context:</u></p> <p>a) While Volunteer Centres (VC) play an important role, they have limited impact on the day-to day challenges faced by smaller VIOs. Most VCs have only a handful of staff and therefore their focus is primarily on placements, garda vetting, advice and general training. While the training they provide is helpful, it is largely delivered in short modules and often relates to “involving volunteers” and governance issues. VCs are generally unable to provide the intensive, hands-on support required by the large number of local smaller VIOs needing significant capacity building supports.</p> <p>b) Volunteer Ireland provides very extensive and quality training and support programmes. However, again, VI’s resources are limited and so they cannot provide the intensive support needed on the ground by many smaller VIOs across the country. Also, VIs fees can be prohibitive for many these VIOs.</p> <p>In order operate to good practice standards, smaller VIOs need to be able to <u>easily access</u> local, bespoke, ongoing support, mentoring, advice and technical skills.</p> |

c) A further challenge is that the current model does not adequately respond to the administrative burden placed on smaller VIOs. The reality is that, this burden is very onerous. Where there are minimal or no staff, volunteer committees must undertake this work with little support. VIOs need ringfenced funding to cover the cost of this administration (i.e. finances, governance, policies, funding applications etc). In the absence of this, many struggle to “keep afloat” and perform well below their optimum. In addition, they become so stretched that they can provide only minimal supports to their volunteers. In turn, this significantly impacts on the quality of volunteering and on outcomes for those who rely on volunteer services.

d) A further issue is that volunteering can be somewhat fragmented at local level, with limited formal, supported opportunities for coordination and collaboration.

e) At times, there is a sense that public bodies are exploiting VIOs and volunteering. Organisations and agencies that rely on smaller VIOs to deliver services need to be more cognizant of the demands placed on them. The volunteer strategy should aim to ensure that public bodies increase their understanding of these challenges and provide adequate supports and funding to VIOs to address them. For example, the HSE and Local Authorities provide funding to many small VIOs, through Section 39, environmental grants, community grants. These are essential services and VIOs can become overwhelmed with administrative work attached to them, with minimal administrative budgets available. VIO committees must do all the administrative work in their own time, often without the specialist knowledge needed (e.g. finances, strategic planning, Governance Code)

Recommendation:

In order to enhance the current model to meet the challenges faced by many VIOs, Kildare PPN recommends the following:

a) Volunteer Centres should be expanded and resourced to provide more extensive, in-depth, supports to VIOs. Specifically, all Volunteer Centres should have an in-house team of professional training and development officers that provide targeted, bespoke supports to VIOs in a manner that suits their needs. A proposed outline of the role of these training and development officers is provided in Question 27.

b) VCs should be resourced to offer a much broader range of training programmes, provided free of charge, in local community settings and at times that suit volunteers.

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>c) VIOs should be provided with annual training and development budgets to enable them to access independent training and supports to meet their specific needs (e.g. how to write a submission, committee skills, monitoring your impact, training on using equipment).</p> <p>d) Public bodies that rely on VIOs to deliver essential services should provide a supplementary budget to VIOs, separate to the cost of the actual service/activity. This budget would contribute to the administrative costs of running the VIO and would enable small VIOs to access help with administrative and governance tasks (such completing funding applications, doing financial returns, submitting reports to funders, developing plans, policies and procedures and getting insurance). Public bodies should also be required to have in-house teams of community workers to support small VIOs with the administrative and governance responsibilities attached to delivering their essential services.</p> <p>e) Volunteer supporting infrastructure should have a role in facilitating better coordination between VIOs locally, in order to reduce duplication and fragmentation</p> <p>f) Ringfenced funding should be provided to Local Development Companies to enable them to deliver more professionalised community supports at grass roots level. The current model of community development still focuses very much on activation, progression and targets relating to employment and education/training. The Department needs to promote a broader role for LDCs which acknowledges the value and role of community development in empowering local communities. LDC's and other grassroots development organisations should be properly funded to undertake this core work upon which voluntary effort is built.</p> <p>g) Volunteers should receive a tax-credit to acknowledge their contribution to society.</p> |
| 9 | <p>How can Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and PPNs work together to develop volunteering, active citizenship and participation in the community?</p> |
| | <p>While there are opportunities for Volunteer Centres (VCs), Volunteer Ireland (VI) and PPNs to work together, their role and function differ significantly. The central role of VCs and VI is to support volunteering and VIOs. On the other hand, the central role of PPNs is to influence local policy. While VC and PPNs often have the same constituents/members, their role is very different and should be not confused or diluted.</p> |

| | |
|----|--|
| | <p>PPNs give a voice to community volunteers and professionals in policy-making at both a local and national level. This is a fundamental part of a democratic State, underpinned by both international and national policies/instruments. While this role involves the provision of training and supports to members, it is very clear in the Department’s PPN Circulars and Guidelines that the core role of PPNs is to influence policy. PPNs should be careful not to duplicate the role of Volunteer Centres or Local Development Companies and should concentrate on advocacy and policy-influencing activities.</p> <p>The role of VC, VIs and PPNs must remain very separate and, crucially, the autonomy and independence of PPN’s protected.</p> |
| 10 | How can the Department facilitate co-operation between Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and the PPNs? |
| | |
| 11 | Are there other areas of research that could be included? |
| | <p>Research to capture the real cost of volunteering, the actual funding provided to VIOs and the challenges faced at grassroots level. Use the findings of this research to inform a better funding model for volunteering in Ireland which reflects the real costs and responds to the identified challenges.</p> |
| 12 | What is the role of local authorities in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy? |
| | |
| 13 | What is the role of central Government (outside the Department of Rural and Community Development) in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy? |
| | |
| 14 | How could the Department further facilitate engagement between the business sector and volunteering? |
| | |
| 15 | What steps can the Department and other stakeholders take to enhance engagement with European and international partners in volunteering? |
| | |
| 16 | What other relevant stakeholders, if any, should be considered in developing a volunteering strategy to support volunteering in Ireland? |
| | |

| | |
|----|--|
| | Section 9: Governance and Funding |
| 17 | Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons. |
| | Yes |

| | |
|----|--|
| 18 | Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons. |
| | Yes |

| | |
|----|---|
| | Section 10: Challenges to Volunteering |
| 19 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering? |
| | |
| 20 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities? |
| | |
| 21 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage general participation in volunteering? |
| | <p>The Volunteering Strategy needs to recognise the significant challenges faced by volunteers and the personal impact of volunteering due to the limited supports and resources available (as outlined in Question 8 and 27). In the absence of a comprehensive, needs-based strategy which ensures that volunteering in Ireland is <u>more supported and resourced</u>, VIOs (particularly smaller ones) will continue to find it very difficult to sustain their volunteer effort.</p> <p>Kildare PPN's view is that the actions outlined in Questions 8 and 21 will result in greater participation in volunteering and, crucially, that those currently volunteering are retained, sustained and operating to good practice standards.</p> <p>The actions can variably be applied to Questions 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30 and 31. All actions are aimed at providing a volunteering environment which is attractive to individuals and facilitates their ongoing participation – whether they be young people, older people, from marginalised groups or otherwise.</p> |
| 22 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of young people in volunteering? |
| | |
| 23 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in volunteering? |
| | |
| 24 | Should the strategy seek to focus on or identify particular marginalised group(s) to encourage their participation in volunteering? |

| | |
|----|---|
| | |
| 25 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to mitigate the risks posed by the changing demographic of volunteers? |
| | |
| 26 | What specific audiences should the national volunteering strategy focus on? |
| | <p>The Volunteering Strategy needs to focus on 4 key audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The General Public: to promote more volunteering and to demonstrate a supportive, quality environment for volunteers - Volunteers: to acknowledge their effort and value and, crucially, to lay out a clear roadmap for how Government intends to deliver a more sustainable and supported volunteering environment into the future - VIOs: to present a clear and strategic outline of the State’s relationship with VIOs in the delivery of essential (and non-essential) services and activities - Public Bodies (particularly those that rely on volunteers to deliver essential services): to provide direction on their role in supporting VIOs and volunteers more effectively |
| 27 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteers? |
| | <p>All VCs should have a <u>dedicated team</u> of professional VIO Training and Development Officers, with a corresponding budget. These teams should be <u>adequately staffed</u> to provide in-depth capacity-building supports to VIOs in a variety of areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - general and bespoke training to VIOs to build their capacity and confidence - support to VIOs to develop and <u>implement</u> policies and practice relating the recruitment, training and sustaining of volunteers - support to VIOs to embed socially-inclusive practice by recruiting and retaining a broad spectrum of people in volunteering (e.g. young people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities) - capacity building for volunteer-led Boards of Management and other committees to operate in a transparent, inclusive and participative manner and to good practice standards. This should focus on governance, HR and finance (including committee skills, conflict resolution, facilitation skills) - provision of in-house training and supports on the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their programmes, services and support - support to VIOs understand and navigate the funding environment and provide hands-on support in completing funding applications |
| 28 | In what other ways can the Department support enhanced volunteer performance in Irish volunteering? |

| | |
|----|--|
| | |
| 29 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteer managers? |
| | |
| 30 | What steps may be taken by the Department to support enhanced management performance in Irish volunteering? |
| | |
| 31 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to address the perception of volunteering involving too large a commitment of time? |
| | More support and resources! |
| 32 | Should a volunteering code of conduct for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) be developed and implemented? What should this code include? |
| | Yes |
| 33 | Should a potential Irish code of conduct for volunteers and VIOs be mandatory or optional? Who would regulate it? |
| | |
| 34 | What particular challenges are facing smaller volunteer involving organisations and how can the Department assist? |
| | <p>Smaller VIOs faced considerable challenges, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● VIOs are increasingly relied on to deliver services with limited supports and minimal resources. They are often overworked, and some have to deal every day with complex situations and/or with very vulnerable individuals. Often, a small handful of people are relied on to undertake duties which should, in reality, be delivered by the State or by paid professionals. ● Volunteer committees are the backbone of volunteering and often manage complex governance, funding and legal situations. Many of these situations require technical expertise or a degree of specialist knowledge. Many volunteers are self-taught and, often, do not have the skills/knowledge required. Committees find it difficult to attract volunteers who can bring the skills/knowledge required (financial, legal, planning, funding, social inclusion). This is due, in part, to the fact that volunteering involves considerable time and commitment with limited supports or resources. ● VIOs must invest considerable time and effort in recruiting and training volunteers before getting meaningful return. This involves a lengthy process of recruitment, training, mentoring, ongoing support, monitoring |

| | |
|----|--|
| | <p>and review. It is a never-ending cycle given the fluctuating nature of volunteerism - volunteers move on, new volunteers join, the nature of the voluntary activity evolves and changes, new guidelines/legislation are introduced and so on. Often, all of this is expected from groups and organisations who, themselves, are managed either primarily or exclusively by volunteers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some volunteers feel undervalued, with a sense that they are being “taken for granted” by the State |
| 35 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to facilitate QQI assessment of volunteers for the purposes of accrediting skills? |
| | |
| 36 | What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the creation of volunteering opportunities? |
| | |
| 37 | What other significant challenges to volunteering should be considered as part of this strategy? How can they be addressed? |
| | |
| 38 | Are there any further challenges, strategic objectives and actions that you feel should be included in a national volunteering strategy? |
| | |

| | |
|----|--|
| | Section 11: Monitoring, Measuring and Evaluating the Impact of Volunteering |
| 39 | What criteria should be used to assess our progress in assessing the impacts of volunteering? |
| | |
| 40 | What criteria should be used to gauge success in delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy? |
| | |

| | |
|----|--|
| | Section 12: Proposed National Advisory Group on Volunteering |
| 41 | Do you agree that a National Advisory Group is the most suitable vehicle to drive this strategy forward? |
| | |
| 42 | Who should participate in a National Advisory Group? |

| | |
|----|--|
| | |
| 43 | How broad should the terms of reference (TOR) be for the proposed Advisory Group or other mechanism found suitable to drive this strategy forward? |
| | |
| 44 | Does any better mechanism exist to drive this strategy forward? |
| | |