

## AGREEMENT RE:GARDA VETTING BETWEEN VCI, VETTING UNIT AND OFFICE OF DATA PROTECTION

### ***Agreement on Policy and Procedures relating to Garda vetting between the Central Garda Vetting Unit and Volunteer Centres Ireland***

#### ***Policy Statement***

VCI understands that its member Volunteer centres are ideally placed to provide a garda vetting service to volunteer involving organisations that do not have access through other means. VCI recognises the need for the delivery of a quality Garda Vetting Service through Volunteer Centres and has developed, in consultation with the Central Garda Vetting Unit and the Data Protection officer, an agreement on Policy and Procedure between the Central Garda Vetting Unit, Volunteer Centres Ireland and its member Volunteer Centres.

*The purpose of this policy is:*

- to outline the role of volunteer centres in relation to providing a Garda vetting service for volunteer involving organisations in their geographical remit
- to develop minimum standards and agreed practices and procedures for delivering Garda vetting through volunteer centres in Ireland
- to define channels of communication between the CGVU and individual volunteer centres in Ireland
- to clarify agreed reporting structures with the Central Garda Vetting Unit

***Please note that this policy has been developed by the Central Garda Vetting Unit in consultation with VCI and with the support and agreement of the Data Protection office.***

***It is the responsibility of each volunteer centre to implement and adhere to the policy.***

**In this policy:**

**Central Garda Vetting Unit (CGVU)** is the unit within the Garda Síochána responsible for conducting Garda Vetting.

**Garda Vetting** is the process by which the CGVU discloses details regarding 'all prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed, and/or convictions' in respect of an individual and, with that individual's consent, to their prospective employer and/or the organisation with which they wish to volunteer.

**Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI)** is the national agency for supporting and developing Volunteering in Ireland. It has a membership base of local Volunteer Centres.

**Volunteer Centres** are local volunteer development agency whose primary role is to recruit and place volunteers and to help organisations develop good practice around volunteer management. As part of the services they provide to volunteer-involving organisations, Volunteer Centres also provide a Garda Vetting service for local voluntary organisation.

**Organisation** refers to not-for-profit / volunteer involving organisations. For vetting purposes each organisation will nominate a vetting officer.

**A Garda Vetting Form** is a form on which a person fills in their name, date of birth and complete address history, thereby enabling the Garda Vetting Unit to do a

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search using the Garda “Pulse” Database to ascertain if there are any details as outlined in the definition of Garda Vetting above..

**Garda Vetting liaison officer** is the named person within Volunteer Centres Ireland who acts as a liaison between the Central Garda Vetting Unit and VCI and who acts as a first point of contact for volunteer centres with queries on Garda Vetting.

**Authorised signatory** is a person who is trained by the CGVC to process Garda Vetting Forms.

### **1. National and Local policy**

- 1.1 As detailed in the government policy on volunteer centres and volunteering, volunteer centres will be required to facilitate Garda vetting for local volunteer involving organisations that do not have access to Garda Vetting.
- 1.2 Volunteer centres are ideally placed to provide this service to local volunteer involving organisations that do not have access to the vetting by other means.
- 1.3 The service will only be provided to not-for-profit organisations and is not available to individuals and/or for-profit businesses to acquire Garda vetting.
- 1.4 This service is delivered free-of-charge to not-for-profit organisations.

### **2. Consistency**

- 2.1 In order to maintain clarity and consistency of service Garda vetting, it is important that Volunteer Centres deliver an agreed standard of quality in their vetting service.

### **3. Clientele**

- 3.1 Volunteer Centres will only vet for organisations within their own geographical remit. However, Volunteer Centres may be asked to vet for organisations in a county where there is no Volunteer Centre, provided the organisation has been referred to the Volunteer Centre by the CGVU.
- 3.2 Volunteer Centres will only vet for organisations that are not-for-profit.
- 3.3 Should a Volunteer Centre be receiving a particularly large volume of vetting applications beyond its capacity to deal with, it is acceptable for that Volunteer Centre to work with other Volunteer Centres in their region to process forms.

### **4. Agreed procedures.**

- 4.1 While Volunteer Centres may wish to put in place extra checks and balances around vetting, the following are the minimum standards/procedures that are required to be in place.
- 4.2 In order to facilitate a uniform quality service that facilitates the vetting process across all Volunteer Centres, certain minimum agreed procedures have been put in place.
- 4.3 Completed Garda Vetting Application Forms (received from registered organisations) will be stored separately by each Volunteer Centre in lockable storage with access limited to those who are entitled to see them as part of their duties.
- 4.4 Volunteer Centres will always retain in line with the Centre’s retention policy, completed Garda Vetting forms on file in the Volunteer Centre office. These forms will NOT be passed on to the voluntary organisation unless the Garda Vetting Unit returns a disclosure. This information, in the Garda Vetting Unit format, will be shared with the nominated vetting officer within the voluntary organisation and may be discussed by the organisation’s Garda Vetting

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- Committee.<sup>1</sup> The form must, however, be returned to the Volunteer Centre within a four week period. The nominated vetting officer can view original forms in the offices of the volunteer centre. If forms are not received back from organisations, the Volunteer Centre will suspend the service until all forms have been received.
- 4.5 A record will be maintained of all those to whom disclosed information has been revealed as it is prohibited to pass disclosed information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.
  - 4.6 All centres must keep a list of nominated vetting officers on file and this must be checked and updated yearly but should also be amended as changes occur.
  - 4.7 Where a volunteer has provided a Volunteer Centre with their personal data, they have a right to be given a copy of their personal data in accordance with section 4 of the Data Protection Acts subject to certain exceptions. The conditions on and procedures for making a request are outlined in the Volunteer Centre Access Request Policy, which is available upon written request.
  - 4.8 There must be one named person within the voluntary organisation to whom Volunteer Centres pass on relevant material on potential volunteers.
  - 4.9 For the purposes of record keeping, this person will be named as the 'nominated vetting officer'.
  - 4.10 This person will sign off on a garda vetting agreement with the local Volunteer Centre. The garda vetting agreement describes the service provided by the Volunteer Centre and outlines the relationship between the Volunteer Centre and the local organisation regarding vetting.
  - 4.11 The nominated vetting officer must be available to meet with potential volunteers should any issues arise with the volunteer's vetting form.
  - 4.12 The nominated vetting officer may request further support and advice from the volunteer centre authorised signatory when dealing with disclosures.
  - 4.13 The nominated vetting officer within the organisation must agree to participate in individual training and support sessions with the Volunteer Centre. The Volunteer Centre's authorised signatory will determine the level of support and training needed.
  - 4.14 It is the responsibility of the nominated vetting officer to furnish volunteers with Garda vetting forms (available from the Volunteer Centre) and to ensure that these forms are returned to the Volunteer Centre.
  - 4.15 A checklist form (available from the Volunteer Centre), indicating the number of forms and other relevant data must be returned with the Garda Vetting forms.
  - 4.16 Vetting forms will NEVER be returned directly to the Volunteer Centre by volunteers but will be gathered by the nominated vetting officer and returned to the Volunteer Centre.
  - 4.17 Whereas the Volunteer Centre will hold on file the volunteers' vetting details in a confidential manner (in accordance with their own Data Protection Policy), it will always remain the responsibility of the local organisation to decide whether a volunteer is suitable to volunteer with their organisation.
  - 4.18 All organisations must have a confidentiality policy/Garda vetting policy in place internally to ensure that all information gathered in the vetting process is used in a correct and appropriate manner.

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<sup>1</sup> A Confidential Disclosure Agreement will be signed by the volunteer centre and the voluntary organisation to facilitate the set up of an internal Garda Vetting Committee within the organisation.

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- 4.19 Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, CGVU disclosed information will not be stored for longer than is necessary. It is the policy of the Volunteer Centres to retain this information for a period of 6 months after which it will be destroyed.
- 4.20 Volunteer Centres also keep details of batch forms plus the Garda reference number for each vetting form on file for a period of 3 years. This allows for consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints.
- 4.21 Once the retention period has elapsed, the Volunteer Centre will ensure that any CGVU disclosed information is destroyed.
- 4.22 The Volunteer Centre will reserve the right to discontinue this service for any organisation that the Volunteer Centre deems not to have abided by agreed good practice procedures including data protection legislation.

### **5. *Garda Vetting liaison officer***

- 5.1 In order to streamline the service and speed up supports to Volunteer Centres as well as prevent unnecessary queries being channelled to the CGVU, the Gardai will appoint one of the authorised signatories within VCI as a 'garda vetting liaison officer' (GVLO).
- 5.2 All Garda vetting queries in relation to policy and procedure must first be referred to the garda vetting liaison officer.
- 5.3 Should the garda vetting liaison officer be unable to give advice and support on a specific issue, then the Central Garda Vetting Unit will be contacted, either by the GVLO or by the local Volunteer Centre authorised signatory.
- 5.4 The GVLO will be informed by the CGVU should there be any changes to Garda Vetting practices. The GVLO will in turn pass on this information to local Volunteer Centres and provide support to centres in changing any procedures.
- 5.5 In order to ensure that the process is working effectively and efficiently, a bi-annual meeting will take place between the GVLO and CGVU at which the queries, questions and any changes in process that have occurred in the previous six (6) months will be reviewed.

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Central Garda Vetting Unit

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Volunteer Centres Ireland