

VOLUNTEER IRELAND SUBMISSION

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

	Section 4: Definition of Volunteering
1	<p><i>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?</i></p>
	<p>Neither, we should develop a new definition.</p> <p>While both of the proposed definitions are generally acceptable, neither fully captures the range and diversity of volunteering in Ireland. When put to the respondents of our surveys, neither definition emerged as the preferred option.</p> <p>To inform our response to this Call for Input, Volunteer Ireland (VI) conducted a survey of volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), which received just under 1,500 responses. We also delivered a series of regional workshops across the country, in partnership with Volunteer Centres (VCs) and Volunteering Information Services (VISs), which had about 125 participants.</p> <p>Amongst the respondents who provided comment, many noted that the language used in both definitions was somewhat off-putting to the average person. Given the significant anecdotal evidence that many people who fall under these definitions do not consider themselves volunteers, it is vital that the final definition is succinct, in plain English and clearly understandable by the majority of people.</p> <p>Volunteer Ireland strongly believes that the final strategy must be, first and foremost, a robust policy document. However, the definition of volunteering has far wider public applications and its drafting offers a unique opportunity to foster a sense of ownership within the general public. We believe the definition introduced by Volunteering Australia in 2015 (“Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”) is superior, and demonstrates the value of engaging in a structured public consultation process with volunteers and VIOs.</p> <p>Given the unique opportunity that this strategy presents, we should develop a new definition of volunteering for Ireland through a similar method.</p>
	Section 5: Background on Irish Volunteering
2	<p><i>Do you agree with the outline of the Department’s role in volunteering? What additions or amendments would you suggest?</i></p>

	<p>Yes, but we feel it can be expanded.</p> <p>The Department cannot create volunteer opportunities directly, but it can foster an environment where their creation is supported and facilitated. We believe the Government must make a clear commitment to fostering such an environment.</p> <p>The Department can make a valuable contribution in this regard, by playing an active role in research and monitoring trends. Therefore, we suggest adding the following two bullet points to describe the Department’s role: <i>“Gathering research to inform the future of volunteering and the value of volunteering”</i> and <i>“Looking at trends and future challenges in order to future proof and ensure sustainability of volunteering.”</i></p> <p>International evidence indicates that any step growth in volunteering in Ireland can only be achieved by working to enable VIOs (Volunteer Involving Organisations) to develop quality volunteering opportunities and programmes. Therefore, we suggest adding another bullet point to describe the Department’s role in relation to volunteering, as follows: <i>“supporting volunteer involving organisations to develop quality volunteering opportunities and programmes.”</i></p>
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	Section 6: A Vision for the Future of Irish Volunteering
3	<p><i>Do you agree with this vision for the purposes of this strategy? If not, what should our vision be?</i></p>
	<p>If the vision for the future of Irish volunteering is a destination – where we want to be in X years – then the suggested vision needs to be reworded. We already have a society where volunteering contributes to supporting communities throughout Ireland. What we need is a society where anyone who wants to volunteer can volunteer; the strategy should support and facilitate this.</p> <p>Our suggested vision is <i>“A society that actively supports and facilitates volunteering so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities.”</i></p> <p>This puts the onus on Government and civil society to create the right environment for volunteering, rather than on the volunteer.</p> <p>We believe that the National Volunteering Strategy must also be framed in the context of a clear policy statement. We propose a policy statement as follows:</p> <p><i>The government recognises the unique value and contribution by volunteers to Irish society, and that volunteering is critical to our nation.</i></p> <p><i>We are proud to have one of the highest levels of volunteering in the world, but we are</i></p>

	<p><i>mindful of challenges facing volunteering and the actions we need to take now to ensure we retain this position into the future.</i></p> <p><i>We recognise that volunteering is diverse; it happens formally and informally, and it ranges from decades of regular commitment to short-term micro-volunteering.</i></p> <p><i>Volunteering is a critical part of our community and voluntary sector, but it also sits outside it and occurs in the private sector, by individuals, in politics and in sport.</i></p> <p><i>Volunteering cuts across every single government department, each of which in some way depends on volunteers. Volunteering helps us deliver our international commitments, for example around climate change and the sustainable development goals.</i></p> <p><i>We appreciate that volunteering is not free, and that investment is essential to creating a dynamic and thriving volunteering culture.</i></p> <p><i>We recognise and value the contribution of volunteers to wider society by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Providing skilled and enthusiastic individuals to support the valuable activity of non-profit groups and organisations</i> <i>• Bringing a unique and irreplaceable passion and commitment that is unique to volunteers</i> <i>• Adding local and personal knowledge and perspective into the work of non-profit organisations</i> <i>• Ensuring the on-going delivery of a range of important services in our community</i> <i>• Helping to build social networks, connectivity and community resilience</i> <i>• Delivering community advocacy</i> <i>• Contributing to active citizenship, inclusion and social capital</i> <p><i>Ireland as we know it would not exist without volunteers, and for that reason the government is committed to supporting and facilitating volunteering.</i></p>
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	Section 7: Objectives of a Volunteering Strategy
4	<i>What objectives for Irish volunteering should be set for the purposes of this strategy?</i>
	<p>We agree with these objectives, and greatly appreciate the steps the Department is taking to align the strategy with Volunteer Ireland’s own. It should also be noted that these objectives received overwhelming support (97%) in our survey, which saw just under 1,500 responses from volunteers and VIOs.</p> <p>It is important that there is a clear roadmap as to how the strategy will deliver each of these objectives. Consequently, we strongly urge that the strategy detail the specific actions that will be taken to achieve each objective, alongside an assigned budget, timeline, and lead</p>

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	Section 8: The Volunteering Community
5	<p><i>What is the role of the public in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</i></p> <p>We broadly agree with the proposed role of the public in volunteering.</p> <p>However, the first bullet point should be amended to read, <i>“Being formal and informal volunteers”</i> in order to recognise and bring attention to the fact that about half of volunteering in Ireland is informal (CSO QNHS Volunteering and Wellbeing, Q3 2013), and 70% of volunteering globally is informal (UN, State of the World’s Volunteerism Report, 2018).</p> <p>The fourth bullet point should be amended to read, <i>“Funding some volunteer organisations”</i> to reflect that not all organisations are funded by the public.</p> <p>A fifth and final bullet point should be added to read <i>“Identify own community needs and address these as volunteers”</i> to recognise the unique role that the public can play in identifying and taking action on local issues.</p>
6	<p><i>What is the role of the VIOs in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</i></p> <p>We welcome the fact that the call for input recognises the vital importance of VIOs and volunteer managers. We believe that VIOs are critical to the successful implementation of the National Volunteering Strategy. One of the biggest barriers to volunteering doesn’t lie with volunteers, but is related to the limited capacity of organisations that involve volunteers to (a) develop new and varied roles that suit people’s changing needs and limited time; and (b) engage volunteers well once they’re in the door, from recruitment to retention, training, support and most importantly day-to-day management. So it is important that the strategy puts a lot of emphasis on the role of volunteer involving organisations and how their work can be facilitated.</p> <p>At the same time, it should be recognised that VIOs also face some of the largest challenges themselves. Attendees at our recent consultation events consistently raised their concerns that the costs of and time associated with regulatory compliance and its implications on limited resources is becoming a serious barrier to volunteering. The level of concern this is causing the sector is clear from the responses we received to our survey, with one respondent going as far as to say, “Volunteerism is dying under the myriad of paperwork expected of all.”</p> <p>There are three specific things that the National Volunteering Strategy can do to address the challenges faced by VIOs:</p>

	<p>1) Set up a fund that small VIOs (under a specified size) can apply for, to support their volunteer programme – e.g. to train and recognise volunteers.</p> <p>2) Provide additional resources for capacity building and training to support and improve the volunteer programmes of VIO. VCs are well placed locally to provide that capacity building and training, but currently do not have the resources to do this. In order to meet the demand evidenced in our consultation, we recommend that an additional full time “Volunteer Management Officer” function be created and funded in each VC, and that a national training and capacity building programme be rolled out and quality controlled with support from Volunteer Ireland.</p> <p>3) Take steps to streamline the regulatory process and assist VIOs in meeting the administrative and financial costs associated with regulatory compliance.</p>
7	<p><i>Should the role of volunteer supporting infrastructure be expanded for the purposes of this strategy?</i></p>
	<p>Yes.</p> <p>The existing volunteer infrastructure is uniquely placed to support the development of volunteering throughout the country. Given that a Volunteer Centre will be in operation in every county by the end of 2019, a dedicated national network already exists to provide the on the ground implementation that will be necessary to successfully deliver the objectives of the National Volunteering Strategy.</p> <p>We strongly support the Department’s suggestion that the current infrastructure be expanded to increase the services it currently provides. Throughout our public consultation events, volunteer involving organisations and individual volunteers themselves consistently identified a number of issues facing the sector that they believed the current infrastructure is best placed to address. For example, there was significant support for expanding the role of the infrastructure to include working with VIOs to expand their capacity to recruit and manage volunteers in quality roles. The independence and local reputations of Volunteer Centres also make them ideal candidates to assist and guide smaller organisations in meeting their regulatory and governance requirements, particularly in the case of organisations that are not registered charities.</p> <p>At present many Volunteer Centres engage in this work on an ad-hoc basis. However, they are limited by the time and resources available to them. Research commissioned by the Department in 2016 (the “McLoughlin report”) shows that the minimum funding necessary for VCs to function is €121,016. Twelve VCs’ funding still falls under this minimum level, and we urge the Department to ensure that each VC is funded at €121,016 at a minimum. However, it is also very important to recognise that this calculation was based on the minimum standard of existing services. Any expanded role will require additional funding. In</p>

	<p>addition, the report did not look at additional factors such as geography, levels of deprivation and population and it recommends further research into these factors. We call on this second stage research into adequate VC funding, to be delivered as part of a National Volunteering Strategy and inform a fair and transparent formula for determining VC funding.</p> <p>Given that about 14,000 volunteers come through the VCs' door each year, with about 8,000 VIOs on the database, additional capacity delivered by just 1 additional staff member would deliver a substantial increase in both the number of placements but also the quantity and quality of the roles provided. Volunteer Ireland calls on the Department to fund a dedicated "Volunteer Management Officer" to be hosted within each VC, to empower organisations and build their capacity to provide quality volunteer opportunities.</p> <p>Throughout our surveys and public consultation events the main issue raised in relation to the infrastructure was the level of public awareness. In our survey of volunteer involving organisations almost 60% identified a national "Get Involved" campaign as one of the top three ways to increase general participation in volunteering. Such a campaign should showcase current good practice and existing broad spectrum of volunteering roles available.</p> <p>With its current limited communications budget of only €10,000 per annum, VI consistently delivers earned media coverage to the value of over €1 million annually. However, because volunteering is a "good news story" and unusually not controversial, there are limits to how much editorial coverage can be secured outside our two key media campaigns, National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards. In order to reach the level of awareness required to make a step change to volunteering levels, the Department should work with the volunteering infrastructure to coordinate a large scale media campaign that includes paid advertisement to raise awareness of the infrastructure and volunteering.</p> <p>On a final note, if the National Volunteering Strategy is successful and increases the demand from individuals to volunteer and the supply of more volunteer roles, then we need an infrastructure to meet that demand. The current volunteering infrastructure is working at capacity to meet current levels of volunteering, so it must grow in order to meet increased activity and expectations.</p> <p>Another development to note is that if informal volunteering in Ireland grows, as it did from 2016 to 2018, then the infrastructure needs to grow and adapt and consider how it can be a channel to support informal volunteering alongside the formal. For example, we will need to consider developing a database to include informal volunteering (see www.wehelpen.nl in the Netherlands for an example of an informal volunteering database).</p>
8	<p><i>Is the current model adequate? If not, what volunteering infrastructure and funding model would best support the development of volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>We believe the current model is not only adequate, but also the best vehicle through</p>

which the Department can achieve a step change in volunteering In Ireland.

For clarity, VI understands the current infrastructure model to be as follows: The Department funds a national volunteering body and a network of local VCs (and VISs, who are soon to become VCs). The VCs are independent and report directly to the Department. Quality is ensured through a quality standards framework developed by VI and the VCs, and VI undertakes assessment of the VCs against that quality standard. Funding for the VCs from the Department is subject to compliance with the quality standards. VCs are affiliated with VI, and an MoU guides that affiliation.

The reasons we think that this model works well are as follows:

1. A network of independent local VCs is critical for volunteering because:
 - It allows each local VC freedom and capacity to develop and innovate - for example, one VC has taken leadership in providing technological solutions to volunteering, and others have taken leadership in delivering local governance projects;
 - It allows local VCs to fundraise independently, and leverage additional funding beyond their Department grant – which facilitates innovation and growth;
 - The distinct local identity and independence has allowed local VCs to build strong relationships of trust and an excellent local reputation;
 - The current model gives VCs the governance and oversight structures that enable local determination. If VCs are hosted in other structures, they must have the space and independence to innovate and have an optimal impact on volunteering; and
 - It allows VCs to work in close partnership with other local bodies (such as local authorities, local development companies and PPNs) while retaining their own focus on *volunteering* – which is broader and distinct from the priorities of other local actors.
2. In the current model, the fact that funding and oversight of VCs comes directly from the Department allows VI the space to act as a coordination and support role to the network and retain a positive and trusting relationship. Department oversight is complemented by Charities Regulatory Authority oversight, including their new governance code that all charities will be expected to comply with from 2020.
3. In the current model VI is not *only* a support body for VCs, in fact our support for the infrastructure is only one of our five strategic aims. VI also undertakes additional work on volunteering at a national level – for example around engaging with government departments, research, thought leadership on good practice in volunteer management, corporate volunteering, training to VIOs, international engagement, support of volunteering at events and festivals, partnerships with other organisations, and extensive communications work. Although VCs are a critical part of volunteering, a huge amount of volunteering also happens outside the VCs. As the national volunteering body, VI needs to have the remit and capacity to act across *all* areas that relate to volunteering.
4. Linked to the above, in the current model VI is also independent. Although we reserve two places on our board for VC nominees, our remit is broader and we are able to act independently beyond VC interests, in the best interests of volunteering nationally.

5. The VC quality standards framework we have developed allows for a fair and open system of oversight; allows for concerns to be identified; and allows for recommendations to be made by VI to the Department.
6. The model has developed and embedded good formal internal communications mechanisms. The network communicates through:
 - A Volunteer Centre Managers Network that meets quarterly and discusses operational matters;
 - The “Executive” (Joint Volunteer Ireland Volunteer Centre Manager Executive Group), which consists of a VC rep from each region and VI and discusses strategic matters;
 - The Placement & Organisation Support Officers’ Forum, coordinated by VI, where VC Placement and Organisation Support Officers meet regularly to share best practice;
 - A “News Digest” from VI to everyone in the network every two weeks.
7. VI is the result of a 2012 merger of two organisations, VCI (which was an umbrella body for VCs) and Volunteering Ireland, which worked on a national level. Although the process of that merger was difficult, we have come a very long way since then and have established a very positive, constructive and effective way of working together – as evidenced in our recent “working even better together” project.
8. The view that this model is adequate was shared by a significant majority of survey respondents with 70% of volunteers agreeing that the current infrastructure is working well. And 45% of VIOs identified “continuing support for Volunteer Ireland, Volunteer Centres and other relevant national organisations that help volunteering support structures to develop locally” as one of the top three ways to increase general participation in volunteering.
9. The evidence around our achievements to date indicate that the current model works very well in delivering positive outcomes for volunteering. To highlight just a few recent examples, together the volunteering infrastructure achieves the following:
 - Out of 1,735 volunteers who responded to a survey in 2018, 87% felt that the VC makes it easy to volunteer; and 87% found it easy to access their local VC.
 - Out of 799 VIOs who responded to a survey in 2018, 97% would recommend their local VC to another VIO; 91% stated that they were satisfied with the service provided by their VC, and 94% agreed that the presence of their local VC was important for their community.
 - In 2017, the VCs directly facilitated 480,820 hours of volunteering, valued at over €10.5 million; 14,125 people used the service of VCs to explore volunteering; over 8,000 VIOs engaged with VCs; 13,835 individuals attended talks hosted by their local VC; and 3,463 new volunteering vacancies were created on the national database.
 - VI, in partnership with the VCs, secured editorial media coverage about volunteering valued at over €1.3million in 2017 alone, with a circulation of 3.9 million.

	<p>10. When discussed at our public consultation events, attendees frequently echoed these sentiments and stressed the importance of the independence of both VI and their local VC as key strengths of the current model. There was concern that the National Volunteering Strategy may try to “re-invent what is already working” rather than reinforcing the existing design.</p> <p>Although the model broadly works well, there are improvements that could be made to it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, there is no formal collation of all VI and VCs’ annual reports, outputs and impacts. Reporting could be improved by formalising a national annual report to give a full view of the impact of the national infrastructure, to the Department. This report could be structured against the objectives of the new National Volunteering Strategy. • On the quality standards, VI provides both support to the VCs in their work toward compliance and continuous quality improvement, as well as the assessment of their compliance. Being both a supporter and assessor is not ideal or good practice. We recommend that VI continue to act as a support to VCs on the quality standards, but an independent third party delivers that assessment of the VCs’ compliance with the quality standards. • The national volunteering database I-VOL, which is powered by Salesforce licences, is a critical tool in the current model. We are very grateful for recent capital investment to develop and improve I-VOL. However, this funding reflects one-off development work. It needs to be complemented by annual resources to support adequate administration, oversight and training around the technology. Most organisations that have more than 50 Salesforce users have a full-time Super Administrator. I-VOL has over 90 users, and only the equivalent of a 24% FTE (full time equivalent) Super Administrator. This is wholly inadequate, and impacts how we are able to make the most of I-VOL to maximise volunteering.
9	<p><i>How can Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and PPNs work together to develop volunteering, active citizenship and participation in the community?</i></p>
	<p>It is important to recognise the unique qualities and remit of the PPNs and VCs. While PPNs work in conjunction with their relevant local authority on matters of democratic participation and representation, the VCs are entirely non-political and value their reputation for neutrality on matters of local policy. VCs’ focus is on formal and informal volunteering, and thereby they operate in a separate sphere to PPNs.</p> <p>Individual VCs already work closely with PPNs at a local level. For example, they deliver shared training and events. This was quite evident at VI’s recent consultation events, which were well attended by representatives of the PPNs.</p> <p>We believe it is in the interest of both VCs and PPNs to maintain their distinct roles, and allow relationships between organisations to continue to develop at the local level.</p> <p>Volunteer Ireland is happy to facilitate this by engaging with the PPNs at a national level, sharing best practice and making our training available to PPN members.</p>

10	<i>How can the Department facilitate co-operation between Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland and the PPNs?</i>
	<p>While co-operation already exists, one should be mindful that the VCs' origins as grassroots organisations are central to their ethos and value within their communities. As discussed in question 9, we believe the individual remits of the VCs and PPNs are distinct and greater co-operation between the two should be allowed to continue to develop naturally over time.</p> <p>The department can facilitate this co-operation by encouraging all PPNs to engage with their VCs, and by supporting opportunities for shared learning e.g. through the PPN and VC conferences.</p>
11	<i>Are there other areas of research that could be included?</i>
	<p>Yes.</p> <p>In designing policy on volunteering, the lack of comprehensive research is a continual issue. We welcome the department's intention to address this as part of the National Volunteering Strategy.</p> <p>For a number of years Volunteer Ireland has been campaigning for the inclusion of questions on volunteering within the census. We believe it is vital that this data be made available on a small area basis to establish a strong evidence base for volunteering policy going forward. Census data would also facilitate monitoring and evaluation of progress in delivering the National Volunteering Strategy.</p> <p>When asked as part of our recent survey, 60% of VIOs identified social return on investment in volunteering as one of the pieces of research they would like to see, a project that we believe would require the technical research skills of a specialist organisation such as the ERSI. In the survey, 54% of respondents selected research into "the main challenges facing volunteer involving organisations in terms of volunteering, and how can these be overcome" as a priority. As part of our consultations a number of attendees also raised specific research into the administrative cost of meeting regulatory compliance as a valuable exercise.</p>
12	<i>What is the role of local authorities in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</i>
	<p>Many local authorities already facilitate volunteering in one form or another, for example providing bags for autumn leaf clean ups, and this should continue.</p> <p>With regard to the involvement of the local authorities in the volunteer infrastructure, it is important that the independence of VCs is maintained. As per question 8, a network of independent local VCs is critical for volunteering because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows each local VC freedom and capacity to develop and innovate; • It allows local VCs to fundraise independently, and leverage additional funding beyond their Department grant;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The distinct local identity and independence has allowed local VCs to build strong relationships of trust and an excellent local reputation; • Independent VCs have the governance and oversight structures that enable local determination as independent civil society actors; and • It allows VCs to work in close partnership with other local bodies while retaining their own focus on <i>volunteering</i> – which is broader and distinct from the priorities of other local actors. <p>It should be noted that many VCs work closely and positively with their local authorities already. For example, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre is hosted within the Council Offices. One avenue of further investigation may be the provision of low cost office and meeting space within local authorities for VCs and VIOs.</p>
13	<p><i>What is the role of central Government (outside the Department of Rural and Community Development) in volunteering for the purposes of this strategy?</i></p>
	<p>Volunteering plays a huge role in the work of every single Government Department. As our colleagues in the Wicklow Volunteer Centre demonstrated in their 2017 research paper (“<i>Do voluntary and community groups and their volunteers impact the delivery of Departmental Objectives?</i>”), volunteer activity makes an enormous contribution to every Government Department. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that there be widespread buy-in from every government department. We were heartened to hear that the Secretary General of the Department had written to his counterparts to request their input on the strategy. We highly support this cross-departmental approach to the strategy’s drafting and implementation, and believe that volunteering’s contribution across all departments should be reflected in the funding of the strategy’s implementation.</p> <p>Furthermore, we propose the Government should make two volunteering days per year available to all public sector employees. This would not only demonstrate the government’s commitment to volunteering, but could spearhead a wider cultural shift on this issue. Funding needs to be allocated to support this, to recognise and allow for the costs associated with undertaking employee volunteering.</p>
14	<p><i>How could the Department further facilitate engagement between the business sector and volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>We are highly supportive of businesses providing the opportunities for their employees to take up volunteering opportunities, but it is important that they be connected to quality volunteering roles that are suitable to their time commitments, employee and business interests and skill sets.</p> <p>This does not happen on its own. Most VIOs do not have the capacity to identify suitable corporate volunteering projects - when discussed at our public consultation events, many of the volunteer managers in attendance noted the difficulties they face in engaging corporate volunteers for one or two days per year. And most corporates do not have the skills or connections in the voluntary sector to find suitable team volunteering opportunities. It</p>

requires investment and support to (a) help ensure that employees use their volunteer days; (b) identify suitable skilled and practical projects with host community groups and not-for-profit organisations; and (c) ensure that the volunteering experience is meaningful, impactful and is of high quality.

VI delivers a corporate volunteering programme that meets this need, by connecting corporates with relevant VIOs through a variety of projects including practical one-off “Team Impact Days” and skilled volunteering programmes. VI’s programme maximises the impact of corporate volunteers by connecting them with local, grassroots community groups and organisations that would not normally have the capacity to engage volunteers in this manner. Evaluation of VIs’ corporate programme shows huge positive impacts. In 2017: (a) 91% of employee volunteers reported an increased interest in volunteering again through their company volunteer programme while 82% reported and increased interest in volunteering outside their company; (b) 100% of host organisations reported that their premises had been enhanced by their hands-on project, 100% said service user and staff morale was boosted by the completion of the project and 100% said they were more likely to engage volunteers in the future; and (c) the companies saw increased staff motivation with 72% of employees feeling more motivated at work and 84% reporting an increase in their sense of belonging to the company.

Over the years, the interest from the corporate sector to engage in volunteering has increased significantly – as evidenced by the 152 enquiries VI received from companies in 2018, compared to 55 in 2015. We are also seeing increased demand from corporates outside of Dublin, and there is limited capacity to engage with them. We also see a huge enthusiasm and demand for further corporate engagement from small organisations that we match with companies. In 2018 VI engaged 1,500 employee volunteers, who contributed 10,000 volunteers hours over 50 project days. There is significant potential for growth in this area.

Greater investment is needed in the volunteer infrastructure to allow the expansion of the corporate volunteering programme. Corporates need to be informed about the value and benefits of volunteering, the services available to help facilitate employee volunteering, and that volunteering can cost money. Any initiatives to encourage corporate engagement must be matched by investment in the infrastructure to support that need.

The Department can further facilitate business engagement with volunteering by supporting focus groups between companies and VIOs, to explore new and unique ways of working together and effectively support and engage larger numbers of employee volunteers.

Volunteer Ireland is also eager to work more closely in partnership with Business in the Community Ireland, who look at CSR more broadly, and investigate how we can work together to increase corporate engagement in volunteering.

15	<i>What steps can the Department and other stakeholders take to enhance engagement with European and international partners in volunteering?</i>
	<p>Volunteer Ireland is a member of the International Association of Volunteer Effort (IAVE), and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV). VI's CEO is also a board member of CEV. VI has also been part of the British Irish Volunteering Forum, with which the Department has previously engaged. VI and some VCs also have a successful track record of securing European funding, mainly through the Erasmus+ programme. Volunteer Ireland is also working actively with Volunteer Now in Northern Ireland on cross border initiatives, as well as the American organisation Points of Light.</p> <p>One policy area relating to volunteering at a European level, on which we welcome engagement by the Department, is the European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps. These programmes provide a great way for young people in Europe to volunteer. The potential of these programmes should be maximised in Ireland, by supporting the volunteering infrastructure to more pro-actively engage with them.</p> <p>In addition to these policy areas, another way the Department can enhance international engagement is by supporting Volunteer Ireland to host a future global IAVE conference. Ireland is considered to be a leader in volunteering internationally – for example with the highest level of per capita volunteering in Europe, the quality standards framework we have developed for the infrastructure, Investing in Volunteers (the international quality mark for VIOs), and our progress in measuring outcomes and impacts. Hosting an international volunteering conference would allow us to showcase volunteering in Ireland, raise our profile, engage with international counterparts and of course learn from others.</p>
16	<i>What other relevant stakeholders, if any, should be considered in developing a volunteering strategy to support volunteering in Ireland?</i>
	<p>As discussed in question 13, we strongly believe that every government department is a stakeholder, and call on every level up to and including the Taoiseach's department to engage with the consultation process and commit to a coordinated response to its implementation.</p>

	Section 9: Governance and Funding
17	<i>Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons.</i>
	<p>Yes, we welcome all efforts to streamline and rationalise the reporting process. A consistent issue raised by VIOs is the extent and cost of the regulatory compliance they face, and the impact this has on their ability to invest time in volunteer recruitment, management, and training. We welcome the leadership shown by the Department and the Charities Regulator, to explore mechanisms to streamline compliance requirements, through which organisations can report only once across all government departments and other funders. It</p>

	<p>is important that whatever system is designed reduces duplicate reporting.</p> <p>In addition, compliance and reporting requirements have significantly increased costs to organisations, without any allocation of funds to cover that cost. Streamlined reporting must go hand-in-hand with allocation of funding to cover the increased costs of regulatory compliance.</p> <p>Streamlining the reporting process and providing funding to cover compliance costs, will have an indirect positive impact on volunteering by freeing up resources within VIOs to support their volunteer programmes as part of their core work.</p>
18	<p><i>Do you agree with the approach outlined above? If not, please provide reasons.</i></p>
	<p>Yes. We welcome that this matter is being addressed, but agree this is not the correct strategy for its inclusion.</p>

	<p>Section 10: Challenges to Volunteering</p>
19	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>Volunteer Ireland already gathers and tells stories that convey the positive effect of volunteering on the energy, well-being, sense of purpose, enjoyment and employability of volunteers. For example, we have recently published research on the impact of volunteering on the health and well-being of the volunteer.</p> <p>Throughout our survey responses and public consultation events the need to raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering was a consistent theme, and widely shared amongst stakeholders. 85% of respondents noted the need to focus on the “the joy, fun and life enhancing aspects of volunteering, through all media platforms” as a key method of raising awareness of the benefits. When this point was explored at our public consultation events, attendees often suggested that this should be achieved through the sharing of real volunteers’ experiences in the vein of the RSA and Quit Smoking advertisements.</p> <p>This approach is in keeping with Volunteer Ireland’s 4th strategic priority, to celebrate volunteering. We work to achieve that through, for example: tracking, measuring and communicating the positive difference volunteering makes to the work of VIOs; gathering and telling the stories of volunteers to convey how volunteering has a positive effect on their energy, well-being, sense of purpose, enjoyment and employability; and promoting volunteering through events such as National Volunteering Week, the Volunteer Ireland Awards and the Community Hero Award.</p> <p>While these actions continue to yield positive results, increased investment in</p>

	communications could radically increase our ability to reach a wider audience, and could allow the production of the paid advertising necessary to achieve national awareness of the benefits of volunteering.
20	<i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities?</i>
	<p>The strategy should reflect the excellent work already being done by VI and VCs to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities. For example, VI already delivers two major national flagship campaigns, National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards, which communicate the breadth of volunteering opportunities available. We secure media coverage annually valued at over €1 million. VI and VCs also already engage actively online and on social media, highlighting volunteering opportunities available. In 2018, volunteer.ie had 186,762 unique visitors and the I-VOL website had 215,429 unique visitors. VI reached 1,253,453 people through social media, and saw engagement of 43,272.</p> <p>Additional promotion of volunteering opportunities should take place on two levels:</p> <p>Firstly, on the national scale, investment in I-VOL is necessary to continue its development and keep up to date with technological developments over time. Along with development, investment must be made for daily administration, training (online and regional) and monitoring of the national database. This is essential to ensure the quality of the data in I-VOL, and that volunteering opportunities reach as wide an audience as possible.</p> <p>Secondly, on the local level, consideration should be given to issuing VCs with dedicated marketing and communications budgets to allow them to advertise in their area, in local papers, and on social media.</p> <p>It's important to note that it's not just about raising awareness of volunteering opportunities but also supporting the creation of new and varied volunteering opportunities such as short-term, virtual and skilled roles; as well as helping VIOs explore how existing volunteer roles can be rejuvenated into project-based or episodic volunteering opportunities. This requires additional support to the infrastructure and to VIOs.</p>
21	<i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage general participation in volunteering?</i>
	<p>The following concrete actions would encourage general participation in volunteering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the variety and quality of roles on offer by VIOs, including short-term, virtual, skilled and episodic volunteering opportunities. • Address the prohibitive cost of insurance to some volunteers (e.g. increased car insurance premiums when volunteering as a driver for cancer patients). • Support VIOs to offer a quality volunteering experience, in order to retain volunteers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a bursary fund to assist smaller VIOs to meet the additional costs of delivering good volunteer management programmes – e.g. to fund training and recognition of volunteers • Deliver a national education and awareness campaign on the benefits of volunteering, and the volunteering infrastructure as a route to get involved. • Launch an awards system to recognise volunteer milestones formally (similar to the Gaisce award, or the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service in the UK). • Explore rewarding volunteering, for example through volunteer discounts for long-term volunteers, tax credit, free travel passes, or free dental checks through the PRSI system. However, it is very important to note that some consultation participants questioned if this would go against the ethos of volunteering; and that all volunteers want different types of rewards. This idea requires further thought and discussion. • Simplify and provide more clarity on the Garda vetting process for volunteers, as this came up as a strong recurring barrier in every consultation meeting held and throughout the surveys. • Ensure volunteers are not out of pocket as a result of their volunteering. • Develop initiatives to create more time to volunteer, for example introducing two volunteer days in the public sector; ensuring that those in receipt of social welfare benefits are able to volunteer; and encouraging corporates to facilitate employee volunteering.
22	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of young people in volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>The most commonly selected option to encourage younger people to volunteer amongst those under 23 was “helping volunteer involving organisations to develop roles specifically for young people”, with targeted programmes for schools as the second most often selected option amongst this age cohort.</p> <p>Throughout our recent consultations, a recurring theme was the need for the strategy to foster a culture of volunteering throughout Irish life. In particular attendees believed this should be introduced at an early stage through a dedicated educational programme in schools to make students aware of the scale of volunteering already taking place within their own communities. While it is important to get young people involved in volunteering, it’s also important to make them aware at a young age of what goes on in their local communities and how volunteering is critical to Irish society. This step was supported by 81% of volunteer respondents to our survey.</p> <p>However, in order to provide these young people with appropriate volunteering opportunities it is also vital that specific roles are developed to suit their needs, interests, and available time. For example, in addition to short term and flexible roles, the strategy should examine if there is scope to promote and develop family volunteering to address the child protection issues that VIOs face if they were to take on a young person under 18. As one respondent to our survey noted, “it’s crucial that the strategy finds ways to be</p>

	<p>inclusive of children in age appropriate ways. Getting involved in volunteering could be developed and promoted as a family-friendly activity.”</p> <p>VI has been working with NYCI, Foróige, Gaisce, Spun Out and Accenture to develop the “Skills Summary” – a tool to help young people capture and communicate the skills and competencies they’ve gained as volunteers to potential employers. Further support to roll out this tool will be another effective way to support engagement of young people in volunteering.</p> <p>Finally, another way to encourage participation of young people in volunteering is to look at the branding and language used in volunteers, and its perception among young people. We should also investigate more opportunities for peer-to-peer promotion of volunteering, for example through social media and influencers.</p>
23	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the participation of marginalised groups in volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>The needs of marginalised groups are complex but often interconnected. The Department should give consideration to consulting directly with the identified groups to assess their needs and establish the barriers they face, be they shared barriers or unique to the individual group. Across all groups dedicated outreach projects should be developed to connect with marginalised groups to promote the value of volunteering and match those who want to volunteer with suitable roles.</p> <p><i>New Communities/ Refugees/ Migrants</i></p> <p>Our public consultations and surveys identified language difficulties and prejudice as the most frequently cited barriers to members of new communities getting involved in volunteering. These can be overcome by ensuring appropriate supports are put in place to assist in matching potential volunteers with suitable roles, and that the members of our new communities are aware these supports are in place.</p> <p><i>Economic Disadvantage</i></p> <p>Recognition should be given to the fact that volunteering is not free, and that those living in economic disadvantage face additional challenges in meeting the basic requirements of many volunteering positions such as the cost of travelling to and from the role.</p> <p>While we recognise that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has taken steps to clarify the issue, we continue to receive reports of inconsistencies in the information being provided by Deciding Officers to jobseekers and those on disability allowance in regard to their entitlement to volunteer while in receipt of a payment. We believe the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection should be engaged with at an early stage to identify how this situation may be remedied with a view to encouraging greater appreciation of the value of volunteer</p>

	<p>experience amongst its officials. The way volunteering is addressed in relevant legislation may need to change.</p> <p>Volunteering is and should be recognised as a valuable way to build skills and gain experience. Our 2018 annual survey of volunteer involving organisations showed that 30% of organisations had hired someone who had volunteered with them. This doesn't account for those that found employment elsewhere thanks to the skills and experience they gained while volunteering. According to a 2014 LinkedIn survey, 42% of hiring managers said they considered volunteering experience to be equivalent to work experience.</p> <p><i>Volunteers with additional support needs</i></p> <p>Those with additional support needs (e.g.: a disability, mental health difficulties) face difficulty in finding volunteer roles that appropriately meet their additional support needs. One of the key services provided by VCs is matching those with additional support needs with fulfilling roles. However, this is often a labour intensive process with a limited number of appropriate roles being available.</p> <p>In all cases, further research is required to identify the barriers to those from marginalised groups taking up volunteering roles. While VCs often conduct specific outreach work into these groups, they do so on an ad-hoc basis dependant on available resources. We believe representatives from these groups should be consulted directly ahead of the drafting of the strategy with a view to designing appropriate outreach programmes to engage members of the community and meet any additional needs.</p> <p>Education and training for VIOs is also important, to demonstrate that engagement with diverse audiences in volunteering can be achieved, and the benefits of engaging a broad range of people from society.</p>

24	<p><i>Should the strategy seek to focus on or identify particular marginalised group(s) to encourage their participation in volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>No, we do not believe that that strategy should limit its scope. It should attempt to address the needs of as many marginalised groups as possible. Specific consideration should be given to engaging the Departments most responsible for policy matters relating to each group. Relevant civil society stakeholder groups should also be involved in the process.</p>
25	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to mitigate the risks posed by the changing demographic of volunteers?</i></p>
	<p>Demographic changes can only be addressed through greater diversity in those volunteering, particularly taking steps to include more young people. As discussed above,</p>

	<p>this requires the creation of more varied roles such as short term and episodic roles, and assisting VIOs in their creation.</p> <p>The volunteering infrastructure has proven itself very effective at engaging a diverse audience that reflects changing demographics. For example, about 33% of volunteers engaged by VCs are non-Irish nationals. About 65% of volunteers registered with VCs were under the age of 35, compared to the national average of 17% of volunteering hours being delivered by young people (CSO QNHS 2013). Similarly, VI's event volunteer programme is very diverse with 69 nationalities ranging in age from 18 to 74. The volunteering infrastructure plays a key role in addressing diversity and changing demographics, by providing targeted support. Further investment in the infrastructure is part of the answer to how we mitigate risks posted by changing demographic of volunteers.</p> <p>It is also important that the strategy does not focus excessively on formal volunteering alone, but also nurtures informal volunteering. Anecdotally, many of those involved in informal volunteering do not identify their activity as volunteering. The strategy should increase awareness of the scope of volunteering, without formalising its casual nature.</p>
26	<p><i>What specific audiences should the National Volunteering Strategy focus on?</i></p>
	<p>The stakeholders listed in "Section 8: The Volunteering Community" are the key audiences the National Volunteering Strategy should focus on. We reiterate our call for volunteer involving organisations and volunteer managers to be at the core of the strategy. To grow and future proof volunteering we need quality volunteer experiences and volunteer management practices; the creation of new and varied volunteering roles; and adequate funding for volunteer programmes within organisations. These can all be addressed with greater support for and focus on VIOs.</p> <p>It should also be noted that Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres are best placed to support the delivery of the strategy across a range of audiences with increased financial support.</p> <p>The National Volunteering Strategy should primarily act as a roadmap for government action. It should be aspirational and interested parties should be able to engage with the document, but it must set concrete actions and timelines to deliver its objectives.</p>
27	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteers?</i></p>
	<p>We are supportive of the call for input's suggestion of incremental credit, and note that this proposal received a great deal of support at our consultation events. However, in order to maintain the ethos of volunteering, any additional training should not be mandatory, should be proportionate to the role, and should be delivered in a sufficiently flexible manner.</p> <p>Volunteer Ireland already provides a suite of volunteer management and leadership training</p>

	<p>programmes for VIOs. While this is very well received, feedback from our survey indicates a demand for more course dates/times, and a greater variety of subjects. However, the most common request from responding organisations was to request more online classes. We are in a position to provide this training. However, we believe there is a clear need to develop a new suite of online resources that can be delivered online or within local VCs to address the issues with broadband faced by many volunteers in rural areas.</p>
28	<p><i>In what other ways can the Department support enhanced volunteer performance in Irish volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>Volunteers perform best when they are placed in roles that are suitable to their skill set and interests, and where they are supported through good volunteer management practices. As discussed in greater detail earlier in this submission, we believe the best way to facilitate this is through expanding the volunteer infrastructure and ensuring the strategy gives suitable recognition to the role of volunteer managers, and their professional needs.</p> <p>As stated previously we believe that good volunteer management is vital, regardless of the size of the organisation. We reiterate our call for a dedicated Volunteer Management Officer to be hosted in each VC in order to foster good volunteer management and leadership practices at every level.</p>
29	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage training and development opportunities for volunteer managers?</i></p>
	<p>We welcome the inclusion of this question on the call for input. Volunteer managers are a critical factor in achieving the objectives of the strategy, and steps must be taken to provide a path for professionalization and recognition of the importance of this role. We also welcome the development of a 3rd level course in this area, and provide a full suite of training to volunteer managers ourselves. However, our ability to offer continued professional development on the scale we believe is necessary is limited by our current capacity and funding levels. We believe consideration should be given to funding the production of a dedicated suite of online resources that can be delivered online or within local VCs as part of the strategy's implementation plan.</p>
30	<p><i>What steps may be taken by the Department to support enhanced management performance in Irish volunteering?</i></p>
	<p>We believe the most effective step the department could take would be to fund the educational and development programme referred to in question 29.</p>
31	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to address the perception of volunteering involving too large a commitment of time?</i></p>
	<p>For many, this is not a perception but a reality. Some roles will always require a more significant time commitment than others. However, the changing needs of volunteers mean the sector must respond to the increased time commitments people face and create roles</p>

	<p>that are more diverse and flexible. Support for volunteer involving organisations to create new and varied roles is critical to the success of the strategy.</p> <p>It is also important to deliver initiatives that create more time to volunteer, for example introducing two volunteer days in the public sector; ensuring that those in receipt of benefits are able to volunteer; and encouraging corporates to facilitate employee volunteering.</p>
32	<p><i>Should a volunteering code of conduct for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) be developed and implemented? What should this code include?</i></p>
	<p>Volunteer respondents to our survey overwhelmingly agreed with the introduction of a code of conduct for volunteers and VIOs, with 95% supporting the introduction of a code.</p> <p>For organisations, we propose that a code be introduced in which the burden placed on organisations reflects their size and the number of volunteers involved. Therefore, we suggest a three-tiered approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the smallest organisations, a minimum standard of treatment and conditions that volunteers should expect. • An intermediate-level code would apply to medium sized organisations, outlining a strong but achievable standard. This could be along the lines of the “<i>Volunteer Friendly</i>” Award in Dundee, Scotland, encouraging people to move from minimum standard to intermediate level. • A top-tier gold level standard, such as the current Investing in Volunteers (iIV) quality mark overseen by VI, would be available to those VIOs who want to demonstrate the highest possible level of volunteer management. However, delivering this quality mark is cost-prohibitive for many smaller organisations, and we call on the National Volunteering Strategy to create an iIV bursary to ensure it is accessible to all.
33	<p><i>Should a potential Irish code of conduct for volunteers and VIOs be mandatory or optional? Who would regulate it?</i></p>
	<p>While substantial support for the code of conduct was evident, our survey found mixed opinions on whether or not it should be mandatory.</p> <p>We believe that there is a significant body of evidence that a formal mandatory system would be a barrier to taking on volunteers and an increase in the regulatory burden faced by VIOs. Instead we support a voluntary code, and note the international evidence that suggests voluntary, principles-based governance codes are more effective.</p> <p>However, we believe that a remedy must be introduced to deal with serious breaches of the code or when a volunteer or VIO feels their rights have been infringed by the actions of the other. We propose the establishment of a mediation service to work with both parties to find a solution and make recommendations for improvements to the organisation’s</p>

	<p>volunteer management practices.</p> <p>The issue of legal protection for volunteers also arose in the process of consultation. At the moment, there is no legal protection for volunteers – for example in instances such as discrimination, protected disclosures and health and safety. When a volunteer feels that they have been unfairly treated, there is little legal recourse for them to take. However, introducing legal protection for volunteers may create a barrier to volunteering and would increase the regulatory burden on VIOs. These questions should be further explored and carefully considered as part of developing a National Volunteering Strategy.</p>
34	<p><i>What particular challenges are facing smaller volunteer involving organisations and how can the Department assist?</i></p>
	<p>From our public consultations and survey of VIOs, we have identified two key areas that disproportionately impact smaller organisations. Firstly, the demands of regulatory compliance they face are significant. While there is general understanding of, and support for, the enhanced regulation that has been introduced in recent years, there must also be recognition of the increased administrative costs that are associated with it. We support any efforts the department could make to streamline and rationalise these processes to reduce duplication, while maintaining the correct and necessary level of oversight.</p> <p>The VIO's concerns are particularly acute in relation to the Garda vetting process, and there remains a significant degree of confusion in regards to the legislation. Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres already provide a range of supports and training in relation to Garda vetting and, of equal importance, volunteer screening, which could be further enhanced.</p> <p>As previously outlined we believe improved volunteer management and leadership is vital for all organisations, but recognise the difficulties faced by smaller organisations in implementing this. Alongside the proposed Volunteer Management Officer, we believe consideration should be given to establishing a dedicated bursary fund for small VIOs to assist them in the management of their volunteer programme.</p>
35	<p><i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to facilitate QQI assessment of volunteers for the purposes of accrediting skills?</i></p>
	<p>First and foremost we believe that accreditation must reflect the different reasons people get involved in volunteering, and provide a range of levels of accreditation. We recognise a number of European projects currently examining the accreditation of competencies, and believe the department should work with the QQI to identify best practice in this regards. We would also support consideration being given to integrating volunteering into formal learning at third level.</p> <p>It is important to note that people come to volunteering at different times of their lives and for different reasons and motivations. Any training needs to take on board meeting the volunteer where they are in their lives when they start volunteering.</p>

36	<i>What actions should be included in a volunteering strategy to encourage the creation of volunteering opportunities?</i>
	<p>In the words of one respondent to our survey, “having capacity to train and mentor volunteers; currently this is a huge issue particularly among voluntary organisations who are looking to recruit additional volunteers.”</p> <p>As outlined in greater detail in previous responses, we believe the creation of volunteering opportunities requires on-going investment in the volunteer programmes of VIOs; the enhancement and professionalization of the role of volunteer managers including the establishment of Volunteer Management Officers to assist smaller organisations; and rationalisation of the regulatory burden to remove concerns VIOs have about creating volunteering opportunities.</p>
37	<i>What other significant challenges to volunteering should be considered as part of this strategy? How can they be addressed?</i>
	<p>As part of any examination of the impact of the regulatory burden on VIOs, it is of the utmost importance that the Garda vetting process is given particular attention. Throughout our public consultations it was constantly cited as a point of particular concern by both volunteers and VIOs. It is important to note that Garda vetting in itself, is not a barrier. However, a number of adjustments could be made to the current process to ensure that it minimises avoidable barriers to volunteering. The National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána have informally suggested to VI that they would be happy to engage with us to review and make recommendations on improvements to the process.</p> <p>The prohibitive cost of insurance and concerns regarding the risk of liability when taking on volunteers were also frequently cited as barriers to VIOs expanding their volunteer programme, particularly in relation to taking on young volunteers.</p>
38	<i>Are there any further challenges, strategic objectives and actions that you feel should be included in a national volunteering strategy?</i>
	<p>Consideration should be given to conducting an analysis in relation to the impacts, both positive and negative, of extending statutory provisions relating to anti-discrimination, protected disclosures and health and safety matters to volunteers.</p>
	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?
	<p>The criteria should look to measure the impact of volunteering on the volunteer, volunteer involving organisations, service users and communities - all of which impact society. The National Volunteering Strategy should set out clear actions with timelines under each strategic objective, and progress should be evaluated against those. I-VOL, the national volunteering database, offers a huge level of granular detail and analysis that can be used to set and monitor progress against KPIs annually. The exact detail of those KPIs can only be determined once the objectives and associated actions have been agreed.</p> <p>VI would be very happy to assist in developing a detailed M&E framework for the National Volunteering Strategy.</p>
40	What criteria should be used to gauge success in delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy?
	<p>While it is tempting to set targets for general participation, external factors play a significant role in this figure and could easily give rise to misleading findings. For example, volunteering levels tend to go up during a recession, and vice versa. In addition, a blunt figure like overall per capita volunteering fails to take into account the quality and impact of that volunteering – it might be better to have fewer volunteers doing more impactful and meaningful activities, than more volunteers achieving less.</p> <p>Instead we propose that we evaluate success of the National Volunteering Strategy against the strategic objectives agreed. For each strategic objective, the National Volunteering Strategy should detail a series of outcomes we want to achieve, and then determine a baseline and KPI (key performance indicators) targets for each outcome. These measures can then be assessed over time, and will allow for the control of external factors in any statistical analysis of the impact. We propose that the setting of the KPIs be included in the terms of reference of the proposed advisory group.</p> <p>The below gives an idea of what this approach could look like:</p> <p>Strategic Objective 1: Advance volunteering Key Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved understanding among the public of volunteering and its contribution to Irish society. 2. Increased political awareness at local and national level of the importance of volunteering and its relevance to policy. 3. Enhanced partnerships and collaborations between stakeholders to enable a more cohesive environment for volunteering. 4. Increase the knowledge base on volunteering through robust research that shows the positive difference volunteering makes to society. <p>Strategic Objective 2: Support the volunteering infrastructure Key Outcomes:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Volunteering infrastructure is sufficiently resourced to maximise its positive impact on volunteering and society. 2. The Volunteering infrastructure delivers effective volunteer management and leadership training across the country. 3. Increased adherence to best practice throughout the volunteering infrastructure. 4. Technology harnessed to increase the capacity of the volunteering infrastructure. <p>Strategic Objective 3: Support volunteering and volunteers</p> <p>Key Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced barriers to volunteering. 2. Increased in the volume, quality and diversity of volunteering. 3. Greater engagement in volunteering with specific marginalised groups. 4. Increased capacity of VIOs to implement best practice in their volunteer programmes. 5. Increased diversity in volunteering roles. <p>Strategic Objective 4: Celebrate Volunteering</p> <p>Key Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased public awareness of volunteering. 2. Benefits and impact of volunteering showcased to the public. 3. Delivery of national and local volunteer awards and events. 4. Volunteering recognised by national and local government for its contribution to maintain and enhancing a thriving Irish society. <p>Including questions about volunteering in the census will be critical to evaluating success of the National Volunteering Strategy, as it will provide a consistent and accurate picture of changes in volunteering and progress against targets agreed. We propose the Department engage with the CSO on this matter, to align its assessment model with the data that could be collected through the census.</p>
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Section 12: Proposed National Advisory Group on Volunteering	
41	<p>Do you agree that a National Advisory Group is the most suitable vehicle to drive this strategy forward?</p> <p>We support the establishment of the advisory group under the Department of Rural and Community Development. However, we believe it should play a strategic and oversight role in the main. As detailed in question 44, we propose that delivery and implementation be carried out inter-departmentally at government level.</p> <p>It will be critically important to the success of this strategy that coherence between it and the other strategies being developed by the department (Social Enterprise and Local and Community Development) is achieved. Taken together, the three constitute the department's delivery of the Programme for Government commitment (page 131) to develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector.</p>

42	<i>Who should participate in a National Advisory Group?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Ireland; • Two representatives of the Volunteer Centres; • The Wheel; • Sport Ireland/ Representatives of the Sport Leadership Group; • Representative organisations of key demographics such as the youth sector, migrants, disability groups, and older people; • Two volunteer managers, one from a large VIO and one from a small rural organisation; • Two volunteers, preferably one from a small rural organisation and one from an urban area; • Representatives from the key Departments of Rural and Community Affairs, Health, Social Protection, Education, and Public Expenditure and Reform.
43	<i>How broad should the terms of reference (TOR) be for the proposed Advisory Group or other mechanism found suitable to drive this strategy forward?</i>
	<p>The terms of reference should be drawn broadly to allow the Advisory Group sufficient scope to develop its role over time. The advisory group should oversee both the development of the National Volunteering Strategy itself, and its subsequent implementation.</p> <p>The terms of reference should include responsibility for ensuring coherence of the National Volunteering Strategy, with other strategies being developed by the Department.</p>
44	<i>Does any better mechanism exist to drive this strategy forward?</i>
	<p>In order for the proposed strategy to succeed, we believe there must be both policy and budgetary authority to see its implementation through. We believe a delivery group at Government level should be established amongst the departments to ensure the coordinated delivery of the strategy's actions. While the Department of Rural and Community Development should take the lead on this, given the number of Departments potentially involved we propose co-ordination be provided by the Department of the Taoiseach.</p> <p>As noted in question 41, it will be critically important to the success of this strategy that coherence between it and the other strategies being developed by the department (Social Enterprise and Local and Community Development) is achieved. Taken together, the three constitute the department's delivery of the Programme for Government commitment (page 131) to develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector.</p>