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Volunteer Ireland Pre-Budget Submission 2021



volunteer ireland
obair dheonach éireann

Funding to the volunteering infrastructure

Current €3,197,060



€794,132 to support **8 new Volunteer Centres**
(from Dormant Accounts funding)



€351,800 to support the national volunteer development organisation **Volunteer Ireland**



€2,845,260 to support a network of **21 local county-based Volunteer Centres**

Proposed €4,540,926



€968,000 to support **8 new Volunteer Centres** through our core grant allocation
(originally funded from Dormant Accounts)



€443,140 for increased support to Volunteer Ireland for the **national volunteering database I-VOL**



€3,129,786 to ensure adequate funding for each of the **21 local county-based Volunteer Centres**

plus **€1,164,000** to deliver key actions
in the **National Volunteering Strategy**

Summary of requested budget allocation for volunteering

Volunteers have played a critical role in the national response to COVID-19 and will continue to be essential in our recovery. In order to ensure that volunteering can continue to contribute to our national recovery from this crisis, Volunteer Ireland requests a total increase of €1,334,866 (from €3,197,060 to €4,540,926) to support the volunteer infrastructure and the voluntary sector. In addition, we request a budget of €1,164,000 to deliver key actions in the National Volunteering Strategy.

This requested allocation is calculated as follows:

- Creation of a new budget to support the delivery of the national volunteering strategy, at an **additional cost** of €1,164,000.
- Increased support to Volunteer Ireland to allow for the development of the national volunteering database, I-VOL, at an **additional cost** of €91,340 (from €351,800 to €443,140).
- Mainstream funding of the eight new Volunteer Centres whose funding has so far been mostly allocated from Dormant Accounts (€794,132 in 2019). This represents an **additional cost** to our core allocation from the Department Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands of €968,000.
- Increased support to ensure adequate funding for each of the 21 local county-based Volunteer Centres, at an **additional cost** of €284,526 (from €2,845,260 to €3,129,786).

Introduction

Volunteer Ireland welcomes the opportunity to outline measures that we believe should be reflected in Budget 2021.

Volunteering has long been at the core of Irish society. Volunteering is the lifeblood of communities across the country and in many cases delivers vital services that otherwise would not be delivered or be delivered at great cost to the State. During the past few months, the Irish people showed their *meitheal* with more volunteers than ever before signing up to our national response to COVID-19. Volunteers signed up in their droves (over 18,000 alone to the national volunteering database, I-VOL) to support front line services and the most vulnerable members of our communities. Without the volunteers who stepped up during this crisis, many people would have gone without basic supports like grocery shopping or medicine drop offs.

However, despite this overwhelming level of support from volunteers, many organisations that mobilise and support them are operating on a knife's edge. As we move into a precarious economic situation, the demand for services and volunteers will only increase. These organisations have shown their ability to respond quickly and adapt to the crisis, and with the support of volunteers, delivered many critical services as part of the national response.

With the publication of the National Volunteering Strategy imminent, it is imperative that key actions are identified and funded this year to ensure we can build on the current national enthusiasm for volunteering. Furthermore, it is critical that the current level of funding to the volunteer infrastructure is sustainable to allow volunteering to continue to deliver for organisations and individuals across Ireland. Budget 2021 represents a key opportunity for the Government to capitalise on this outpouring of support, future proof volunteering and support our recovery from this national emergency.

About Volunteer Ireland

Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development organisation. We are the voice of volunteering and the national support organisation for Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services in Ireland. We believe volunteering has the power to transform our world for the better, and that through it people can fulfil their potential while building healthier and more resilient communities. We work collegially and collaboratively to maximise the reach and impact of volunteering in Ireland, and encourage good practice in volunteering across all sectors.

Volunteering in Ireland

Volunteering is at the heart of every community across Ireland and affects every member of the population either directly or indirectly. It provides a wealth of benefits to the organisations that involve volunteers, the volunteers themselves and the wider community. As our country begins to recover both socially and economically from the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteering has a critical role to play.

Economic Recovery

With over 1 million people in Ireland volunteering each year¹, that adds up to an economic contribution of over €5 billion per annum. In addition, volunteering produces cost savings by delivering services in areas such as homelessness, disability and health that otherwise would need to be delivered by Government. Volunteering has a real impact and will be critical to our economic recovery in several ways.

- As in any time of economic uncertainty, levels of poverty and unemployment rise which result in an increased demand for services. Many of these such as homeless services and care services rely on the support of volunteers to function effectively.
- With increased levels of unemployment predicted, volunteering has a role to play in getting people back to work. Volunteering supports those in unemployment to return to the workforce by helping them develop skills and build confidence. According to our most recent survey, 71% of volunteers felt increased confidence in their abilities while 56% felt their employability and skills had increased.²

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-vwb/qnhsvolunteeringandwellbeingq32013/>

² Volunteer Ireland National Survey of Volunteers 2020

- Volunteering has a significant economic impact in rural areas. According to Volunteer Ireland's research into rural volunteerism³, 83% said that volunteering in their area saved on public spending by relieving pressure on public services while over 74% felt that it increased funding coming into the community.
- Volunteering also has significant benefits to the health and well-being of those who volunteer and by extension their communities. This represents a significant cost saving to an already overstretched HSE.

Social Recovery

Volunteering has been proven to have many benefits both individuals and communities. Without volunteering, we would see poorer mental health, lower sense of belonging in our communities, and increased isolation.⁴ Anecdotally, throughout the pandemic many volunteers have reported an increased sense of isolation as for many, volunteering is their only social outlet. As we move to the 'new normal', volunteering will support our social recovery in several ways:

- The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland have warned of a rising mental health curve as a result of the pandemic with social isolation identified as a contributing factor.⁵ Volunteering can provide a social outlet and a sense of purpose for those who volunteer. In our most recent survey, 64% of volunteers reported an increase sense of feeling included and not alone while 62% reported an increase in their mental health and well-being.⁶ Investing in the volunteering sector has many knock-on benefits for the wider community particularly around mental health and well-being.
- In rural areas, which typically suffer from greater levels of isolation, volunteering has been shown to be a key social connector with volunteers

³ <https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Rural-Volunteerism-Report.pdf>

⁴ https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Volunteer_Ireland-Report_FINAL.pdf

⁵ <https://www.irishpsychiatry.ie/blog/press-statement-survey-of-consultant-psychiatrists-shows-increase-of-mental-health-referrals-and-relapse-amongst-those-with-mental-illness-following-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁶ Volunteer Ireland National Survey of Volunteers 2020

reporting increased access to support networks as a result of their volunteering.⁷ Rural organisations often face even greater challenges such as access to transport and broadband and delivering on the commitments in the National Volunteering Strategy will be key to addressing these.

- The services delivered by volunteers across the country are vital to our social recovery. For example, older persons' charity ALONE rely on over 2,700 volunteers to deliver their in-person and telephone befriending service. This is a vital social support to older members of our communities that relies on volunteers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres supported ALONE to rapidly increase their number of volunteers to cope with demand.
- Local Volunteer Centres play a critical role supporting those with additional support needs to volunteer. People with disabilities, chronic illnesses or poor mental health often need extra support to find a suitable volunteer role and the VC is uniquely placed to support them on their journey. They also act as a social hub in the community providing training, support, advice and vital services like Garda vetting.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to change how we operate, and most volunteer involving organisations will have to think differently about how they engage volunteers – for example socially vital roles such as befriending have moved to telephone support, and new virtual volunteering roles will need to be developed. Volunteer Ireland and local Volunteer Centres have the expertise to advise organisations as they adapt to the changing nature of volunteer roles and the challenges of keeping volunteers engaged.

Imagine the improved health outcomes, the increased sense of belonging, and the reduced social isolation, we could achieve if we invest in volunteering.

⁷ <https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Rural-Volunteerism-Report.pdf>

Current funding

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) currently support volunteering through a budget of €3,197,060, broken down as follows:

- €2,845,260 to support a network of 21 local county-based Volunteer Centres.
- €794,132 to support 7 Volunteering Information Services in 7 counties that do not have a Volunteer Centre but are in the process of setting one up, as well as our new Volunteer Centre in Cavan, with funding allocated from Dormant Accounts.
- €351,800 to support the national volunteer development organisation Volunteer Ireland.

This funding is vital to support volunteering and is gratefully acknowledged by Volunteer Ireland.

Budget 2021 priorities

Deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

The National Volunteering Strategy has been in development for 18 months now. It is vital that this strategy is published and adequately funded without delay. The Programme for Government has made a clear commitment to *'publish a strategy to support volunteering'* but without the funding to back this up it will simply become another static document on the shelf.

Volunteering in Ireland is at a turning point. With an ageing volunteering population, it is increasingly important to engage new volunteers and adapt to how people want to volunteer. Increasingly, people want more flexible volunteering roles and this crisis has shown us that organisations are willing to adapt – with the right support. We have an extremely strong culture of volunteering here and with so many people offering their support over the last few months, now is the time to capitalise on this and future proof volunteering. Key actions such as providing a bursary fund for volunteer involving organisations, delivering a national communications strategy on volunteering and commissioning research are simply not plausible without the funding to implement them.

Recommendation 1:

Establish a budget to deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

The delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy, as promised in the current Programme for Government, will only be possible with adequate funding. This strategy has the potential to develop and enhance volunteering well into the future cementing Ireland's position as a world leader. Funding to deliver key elements of the strategy is critical to its success. We recommend the prioritisation of five key actions within the first 6 months of the life of the strategy. These are (references to current draft strategy):

- 1 Strategic Objective 1- Action 3.1:** *National survey on volunteering.* This is required to give a baseline to measure the strategy against.
Cost: €30,000
- 2 Strategic Objective 3 – Action 3.1:** *Develop a national communications strategy.* This is critical to raise much needed public awareness of the impact and availability of volunteering.
Cost: €500,000
- 3 Strategic Objective 2 – Action 5.2:** *Provide a bursary fund to support volunteer involving organisations to build capacity in their organisations.* This grant will allow small and volunteer led groups to reduce barriers to volunteering and cover costs like training and expenses for volunteers.
Cost: €400,000

4 Strategic Objective 5 – Action 1.2: *Commission a report on the economic and social value and impact of volunteering on our economy.*
With little research on volunteering in Ireland, this will provide valuable data about the services undertaken by volunteers and their impact.
Cost: €30,000

5 Strategic Objective 5 – Action 2.3: *Provide a shared “volunteer manager” service to volunteer involving organisations with one full time volunteer manager in each region, hosted in a local Volunteer Centre.*
The majority of volunteer involving organisations operate without a volunteer manager meaning best practice volunteer management around recruitment, training and support is often a challenge. This will provide vital support to these organisations to continue to engage volunteers.
Cost: €204,000

Estimated Cost: €1,164,000

Budget 2021 priorities

Develop the National Volunteering Database

The national volunteering database, I-VOL, is a critical tool in the current volunteering model. Managed by Volunteer Ireland and the network of county-based Volunteer Centres, I-VOL is an online database that allows everyone in Ireland to search for volunteer opportunities and organisations to post volunteering roles. The database currently has 92,000 people registered on it, with over 18,000 having joined during the crisis to volunteer on COVID-19 roles and an additional roughly 15,000 new people joining each year.

As the recent COVID-19 response showed, this technology is more important than ever. Within hours of the original restrictions being announced by An Taoiseach, we were able to email all volunteers and organisations registered with I-VOL to update them on the situation and let them know how they could help. We were also able to add a COVID-19 tick box to I-VOL meaning that volunteers could quickly indicate they wanted to support the national pandemic response when they signed up. This system saw over 18,000 volunteers offer their support across the country. The technology also allowed us to communicate key Government messages to volunteers as directed by the Departments of Rural and Community Development and Health.

Aside from supporting an emergency response like COVID-19, I-VOL is vital to the continued development of volunteering in Ireland. It allows people to find volunteer roles near them, connect with organisations in need and support their communities in just a few clicks. It also provides an unprecedented level of data such as demographics, interests and skills, which we have yet to fully exploit due to a shortage of resources.

We are extremely appreciative of capital investment received to develop and improve the national volunteering database in 2019. However, this funding reflects one-off development work. It needs to be complemented by annual resources to support adequate administration, oversight, data analysis and training around the technology.

For example, with regard to administration, most organisations that operate a Salesforce system such as I-VOL with more than 50 users, have a full-time Super Administrator. I-VOL has over 90 users, and only the equivalent of a 2/5 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. With a full time administrator we could significantly improve both the quality of the service I-VOL provides the public, and the vital data we collect from it.

Recommendation 2:

Allow I-VOL to reach its full potential

To address the challenges facing the volunteer sector, ongoing investment and technological development is vital. I-VOL is a powerful resource in this regard but requires ongoing, sustainable investment to allow the database to reach its full potential. An allocation of €91,340 would provide for the recruitment of a super administrator, additional data storage, ongoing training for licence users to improve the public's experience, and further data protection and compliance assessments.

Estimated Additional Cost: €91,340

Budget 2021 priorities

Develop the volunteering infrastructure

We welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to “*publish a strategy to support volunteering, including development of comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice*”. At present, the volunteering infrastructure in the form of Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres already exists with one of our core remits being to deliver training and guidance in best practice in volunteer management.

As we begin a new phase of volunteering post COVID-19 and implement the National Volunteering Strategy, the volunteering infrastructure will be critical. Volunteer Centres provide vital supports to volunteering in our communities across Ireland through a referral service, maintaining the national volunteering database I-VOL, the provision of volunteer management training, processing of Garda vetting and working collaboratively with other stakeholders like jobs clubs, mental health services and the library service.

Aside from delivering this level of service with limited resources, the volunteering infrastructure is responsible for several core actions in the upcoming National Volunteering Strategy. We welcome this responsibility and as experts in the field, we are well placed to deliver these actions. However, doing so within our current resources will not be possible. To unlock the network’s full potential and ensure the effective delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy, the core funding provided to the Volunteer Centres must be increased.

Along with this modest increase in funding, it is imperative that the Dormant Accounts funding provided to open the remaining eight Volunteer Centres is streamlined as part of the core allocation to the volunteering infrastructure in 2021. Only then will we have a secure comprehensive supporting infrastructure as promised in the Programme for Government.

Recommendation 3:

Upgrade the eight new VCs to mainstream funding

Once all VISs are upgraded to full VC status, thanks to previously allocated Dormant Accounts funding, it will be necessary for an increased allocation of €968,000 to be included in future core allocations made to VCs. This will ensure the eight new Volunteer Centres are in a position to continue to operate at the minimum level⁸ into the future.

Estimated Cost: €968,000

Recommendation 4:

Adequately fund existing Volunteer Centres

Increase the core funding allocated to existing VCs by 10% from €2,845,260 to €3,129,786 to ensure all existing centres can meet the increased demand for their services.

Estimated Additional Cost: €284,526

⁸ *Developing Funding Criteria for Volunteer Centres in Ireland*, McLaughlin, 2016

Investing in volunteering presents extraordinary value for money: a budget of only just over €3 million per annum **yields a return to the nation valued at €5 billion in hours alone.** This doesn't even take into account additional cost savings around improved health and employability, as well as societal benefits such as decreased isolation and increased citizen engagement. Volunteering played a critical role in Irish society before COVID-19, has shown its true value in our response to the crisis, and will be essential in the recovery.

Volunteer Ireland is available to discuss this submission and to provide any additional information or research required to support the rationale for greater support for volunteers in Ireland.

