

VOLUNTEER IRELAND STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2022

1. About Volunteer Ireland

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

Highlights of our work at Volunteer Ireland

The following is a selection of highlights of our work:

Increasing awareness

- National Volunteering Week: Our flagship communications campaign, National Volunteering Week, has gone from strength to strength. Media coverage has increased steadily each year with 2017 delivering a newspaper article in every county, a PR value of €1.5 million and social media reach of 5.1 million. In 2017, National Volunteering Week centred on the theme of the health and well-being of volunteers with the launch of a piece of research focusing on this topic.
- VI Awards: Celebrating their 10th year in 2017, the VI Awards are a unique way to celebrate volunteers all over Ireland. Nominations are nationwide culminating in a gala ceremony in December which, in 2017, was held in Sligo for the first time. In 2017, we received 540 nominations from 28 counties. The awards were featured on prime time television, garnered over 341,000 social media impressions and received editorial coverage valued at over €718,000 in 2017 alone.
- Growth of web and social media presence: Over the course of the last strategic plan, www.volunteer.ie was updated to a new and improved content management system making the experience for the user easier and more enjoyable. A new blog series and video were delivered to drive traffic to the site. Users have remained steady with 2017 seeing over 230,000 visits and 170,000 unique visitors to the website.
- Extensive media coverage secured about volunteering and the volunteering infrastructure: Our two major campaigns, National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards, have consistently achieved strong levels of media coverage with levels of ad hoc coverage continuing to increase – peaking at an overall PR value of

€1,334,055 in 2017. Highlights include a feature on Nationwide and slots on the RTÉ 9pm news, Morning Ireland and Ireland AM. Prompted awareness of Volunteer Ireland increased by 4 percentage points from 37% in 2014 to 41% in 2017 - an 11% increase.

- Research: With limited resources, our research has mostly relied on nationwide surveys of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. In 2017, we delivered a piece of research exploring the impact of volunteering on health and well-being. The research, which was widely disseminated following a launch by Minister Katherine Byrne, concluded that volunteering has a significant positive impact on those who volunteer.

Increasing accessibility

- I-VOL: I-VOL is the national searchable database of volunteering opportunities in Ireland. It continues to be the daily working tool for the network of Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Centres across Ireland. In 2016, we secured funding from the Department towards future proofing I-VOL. The focus of this development was redesigning the registration page providing easier access to volunteering and bringing our forms in line with GDPR.
- Garda Vetting: Garda Vetting processing has streamlined and increased over the course of our previous strategic plan. A change in legislation in 2016 brought about a movement from paper to electronic vetting. Consequently the processing time for vetting has reduced from 6 weeks to 2 weeks. In addition to this, the number of Garda Vetting applications processed by VI has increased significantly from 913 applications in 2014 to 2,043 applications in 2017.

Increasing quality

- Volunteer Ireland Training Programme: Over the last three years we have provided 228 full days of training to 1,358 organisations and 1,649 volunteers. Over 2,390 participants attended our training and capacity building events. Our attendees scored us on average 4.8/5 for content and 4.9/5 for delivery. Over 93% of organisations said the training helped them greatly improve their volunteer programmes and the implementation of their policies.
- Volunteer management at festivals and events: Following our experience with the Tall Ships in 2012, we developed a service to recruit and manage volunteers at festivals and events which has since tripled in size. In 2015 we undertook a partnership with Fingal VC around the “Event Volunteers” programme, which has allowed us to recruit a new audience of volunteers, in particular reaching recent arrivals to the country and young people, by providing a short-term, flexible entry to volunteering.

- Quality Standards for Volunteer Centres: This major undertaking during 2015 and 2016 saw us review, update and implement a new Volunteer Centre Quality Standards Framework. Working closely with the Volunteer Centres, we changed the approach from outputs to, instead, focusing on outcomes and impact. All Volunteer Centres have completed the review process and are due to be awarded their quality mark during 2018.
- Investing in Volunteers: Investing in Volunteers was adopted and rolled out as the national Quality Standard for volunteer management in 2013 in partnership with Volunteer Now. Since then, ten volunteer involving organisations have achieved the Quality Standard Award. One of these organisations has since renewed their accreditation, three more are in the process of renewing and five organisations are currently beginning the process. There are now eight active Advisors and Assessors who support organisations through the process.
- National Volunteer Management Conference: Now in its seventh year, the conference provides an opportunity for likeminded people in the field of volunteer management to come together for a day of professional development, networking and informative master classes. Year on year we have secured interesting speakers and high attendance with a good break-down of attendees from 35% from organisations outside Dublin and 65% from Dublin based organisations with a 50/50 split between local and national organisations.
- A volunteer support body in every county in Ireland: In 2013, Volunteer Ireland established a Volunteering Information Service (VIS) model with the aim to provide access to volunteering in the counties without a full Volunteer Centre. In 2017 we reached national coverage with a VC or VIS in every county in Ireland. Having a VIS in the counties without a VC has allowed VI to meet our national vision of providing volunteering services in every county in Ireland.
- Partnership with Points of Light: Points of Light (POL) is an international non-profit headquartered in the United States dedicated to engaging people and resources in solving serious social problems through voluntary service. In 2016, Volunteer Ireland became the Irish partner for the POL global corporate programme. Through our employee engagement projects with POL in 2016 and 2017 we have engaged over 990 volunteers who have contributed 4,285 hours to 10 projects that benefited from a refurbishment budget of over €59,000.
- Team Impact Days: Team Impact Days have seen a 51% increase in project days since we launched the programme in 2013. Through Team Impact Days we have supported 2,267 employee volunteers giving 13,141 volunteer hours from 50 companies across Ireland. A

total of €60,000 has been spent on projects with 45 charities since 2013. The programme has a 100% satisfaction rating.

Volunteer Ireland's effectiveness and sustainability

- Partnership with the Charities Regulator: We facilitated the volunteering infrastructure to establish a partnership with the Charities Regulator. In 2015 this took the form of supporting the Regulator's "road show" around the country. In 2016, Volunteer Centres established "registration hubs" to help small, local organisations with the process of registering with the Regulator. These projects also helped the local volunteering infrastructure strengthen and develop new relationships with local organisations.
- Leading role with the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charity organisations in Ireland: Together with other national infrastructure bodies, Volunteer Ireland played a key role in developing this voluntary code. In 2015, we became compliant ourselves, and our CEO took on the chairmanship of the working group that leads the Code. In 2017, we took an active role in discussions with the Charities Regulator about their role in supporting good governance in the sector.

2. Our Vision

Our vision is an Ireland where everyone who wants to volunteer can volunteer to create a better society.

3. Our Values

At Volunteer Ireland we hold four high level values and these are woven through our way of working and our commitment to volunteering.

Inclusion

We work to foster a positive and inclusive workplace in Volunteer Ireland, where the talents and contribution of each member of our team can be utilised. Our policies and practice are inclusive and accessible. We value each other as equals. Everyone is encouraged to perform well and enjoy their work.

Respect

We show consideration for and value one another. We acknowledge and respect the unique contribution of each team member, their ideas, work styles, backgrounds, experiences and talents. We strive to conduct our work in a manner respectful to all.

Integrity

We conduct ourselves to the highest professional standards. We work cooperatively and engage openly and honestly with all our stakeholders. We operate a transparent organisation and commit to working in partnership with those who share our values.

Courage

We bring courage to our work and we are willing to pioneer new ways forward. We lead boldly and act decisively for good. We enjoy freedom to change and pursue new possibilities for our future and the future of volunteering.

4. Context of this Strategic Plan

We completed background research, reflection and consultations with stakeholders to inform this Strategic Plan for the next five years. We know that the world is ever evolving and that we will see changes and encounter challenges that will call us all to use our resources wisely and respond creatively. We see that participation, engagement and collaboration are becoming the norm and that relationships and relating matter more than ever. Volunteering is a positive, natural and spirited way to realise meaningful human interaction and purposeful contribution. The transformative effect of volunteering on individuals, organisations, communities and society is a portal to active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity.

The volunteering infrastructure (Volunteer Ireland, Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services) provides nationwide cover. This means that communities all around Ireland have access to support and resources, through their local Volunteer Centre or Volunteering Information Service in every county. This encourages a rich breadth of volunteering in response to local needs. Volunteer Ireland is here to support and strengthen this infrastructure and be a central actor over the coming years.

Volunteering is changing and the way people seek to volunteer and the way that organisations engage and value the contribution of volunteers is shifting. For example, volunteers are seeking more flexible, short-term and one-off volunteering opportunities and volunteer involving organisations are calling for support to engage volunteers. We are watching the emerging landscape and preparing to respond nimbly and constructively. We intend to support volunteering so that it is an easily accessible, meaningful and enjoyable human experience. We are attentive to ethics and continue to convey the philosophy of quality volunteering and how it can serve causes and policies practically. The heart and soul of volunteering matters.

We notice that the corporate world is becoming more curious about volunteering, especially meaningful volunteering that supports worthy causes and has positive impact. This is considered a good way to engage employees, build teams and meet corporate social

responsibility targets. We are responding to the needs of the corporate world and to people who wish to volunteer as part of specific corporate initiatives. We do so in ethical, practical and innovative ways.

We receive funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development to be the national volunteer development organisation. In 2017, this accounted for 45% of our income. We also receive income from delivering training, working with corporate organisations, sponsorship, garda vetting, delivering volunteer management programmes for events and festivals, and grants for specific projects. We are alert to the challenges that changes in government policy may bring, the way the economy can impact volunteering, the effect that expectations and shifting patterns and norms in society may have and the emergence of new ways to resource our work.

During the strategic planning process we discussed a wide range of volunteering topics that we could choose to focus on in our day-to-day work. Should we commit to increasing the levels of volunteering in Ireland? For example, the percentage of people who volunteer, the number of hours volunteered, or even the causes or diversity of people who volunteer? Knowing that the levels of volunteering are influenced by factors beyond our control (such as levels of employment) we chose not to set a hard target for increasing levels of volunteering. Instead our strategic efforts will be on ensuring the best conditions to facilitate meaningful volunteering.

We carefully considered Volunteer Ireland's choice of whether to place our priority focus on the volunteer **or** the causes that depend on volunteers? We believe that we exist for and serve both, individuals and causes, and that each will receive our attention.

Volunteer Ireland is aware of and ready for the challenges and possibilities that will arise. We believe that best practice volunteering and volunteer management is moving from strength to strength. The value of volunteering is deepening as it is recognised as a measure and means to encourage engagement, connectedness, community and social inclusion.

We recognise that in order to deliver our strategic vision in the next five years, external collaboration will be critical. We are enthusiastic about working closely with other non-profit organisations, government bodies and companies.

As Volunteer Ireland, we position ourselves to be a strong national presence, a trustworthy team and a source of solutions and innovative responses to achieving diversity, integration, active citizenship and community development, through volunteering, for a healthy and resilient society.

5. Our Strategic Priorities

We believe in the power of volunteering. We want to be at the heart of volunteering in Ireland and manifest all that is good and worthy about volunteering. We exist to make volunteering as good as it can be, to affect the quality of volunteering experiences and to shape volunteering for the future in service and support of a highly functioning society.

With this in mind five strategic priorities will contain and propel our work over the period 2018-22.

Strategic Priorities for Volunteer Ireland 2018-22



Strategic Aim One

Advance Volunteering

Volunteering is vital and valuable to Irish society. Volunteering is becoming more visible and valued as a way to better social cohesion, mental health and well-being, inclusion and connectedness within communities. These are policy priorities.

Our first strategic aim is to **advance** volunteering. Our intention is to be at the forefront of all matters relating to volunteering. We seek to ensure the quality of volunteering and to realise the future of volunteering so that it flourishes and evolves as a mechanism to support a thriving society.

Objective One:

Volunteering is recognised as a practical and powerful mechanism to support the implementation of national priorities.

High Level Performance Indicators for Objective One:

- A national policy for volunteering in Ireland is developed and implemented.
- Presence and position of Volunteer Ireland as the national agency for volunteering.

We will work to progress this objective through the following actions:

1. **Position** Volunteer Ireland as the national volunteer development organisation, a source of knowledge and voice of volunteering in Ireland.
2. **Drive** the development and implementation of a national volunteering policy in collaboration with our departmental colleagues, Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services and lead organisations in the sector.
3. **Deliver & Share** robust research showing the positive difference volunteering makes to society.
4. **Engage** with politicians and policy makers activating the power of volunteering as a solution centred way of supporting the implementation of relevant policies.
5. **Initiate** strategic alliances and innovative projects with like minded organisations, particularly our sister organisations in the community and voluntary sector.
6. **Inspire** fresh thinking about the future of volunteering, innovative ways of engaging volunteers and how we want volunteering to develop in Ireland.

Strategic Aim Two

Support the Volunteering Infrastructure

Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services are vital to volunteering in Ireland. They work on the ground providing a placement service between individuals and groups who want to undertake voluntary activity and organisations that are seeking to involve volunteers. They also play a significant role in the local community and voluntary sector, providing additional services such as garda vetting, information about governance and advice about registering with the Charities Regulator. The local volunteering infrastructure are the local leaders in community engagement, supporting and promoting volunteering. To maximise our impact on volunteering, it is critical that we support and develop the local volunteering infrastructure, i.e. Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services.

With this in mind our second strategic aim is to **support** the volunteering infrastructure in Ireland. Each Volunteer Centre exists and operates independently of each other and Volunteer Ireland and yet also coexists interdependently with each other. The Volunteering Information Services operate in a separate organisational structure. Together, with Volunteer Ireland, all work to ensure positive volunteering experiences and support for volunteer involving organisations.

Objective Two:

The volunteering infrastructure is supported to maximise its positive impact on volunteering in Ireland.

High Level Performance Indicators for Objective Two:

- Positive impact of our training, CPD (continuous professional development), networking and technical support to the volunteering infrastructure.
- Positive impact of volunteering on volunteers engaged through the infrastructure.
- Positive impact of volunteering on volunteer-involving organisations supported through the infrastructure.

We will work to progress this objective through the following actions:

1. **Be** the national voice for volunteering and advocate together with the infrastructure.
2. **Respond** to the training, development and support needs of the Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services.
3. **Strengthen** local competence through continued delivery of train the trainer, continuous professional development and technical support throughout the volunteering infrastructure.

4. **Work alongside** the Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services to pilot innovative projects and initiatives to raise awareness, enhance best practice volunteering and support good volunteer management.
5. **Work alongside** the Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services to strengthen the national infrastructure and increase its resourcing, capacity and effectiveness.
6. **Support** the development of Volunteering Information Services to become Volunteer Centres.
7. **Lead** the development, implementation and evaluation of best practice standards and quality in the volunteering infrastructure.
8. **Manage, improve and enhance** I-VOL as the national volunteering database.
9. **Extend** further our presence and reach across the country by holding projects, events and meetings outside Dublin, where possible.

Strategic Aim Three

Support Volunteering and Volunteers

Ireland is ahead of other countries in terms of participation in volunteering. In 2017 we were number one in Europe and number eleven in the world ([World Giving Index 2017](#)). Volunteering is integral to our culture and extends, often in invisible ways, into all aspects of our lives, e.g. sport, culture and care. Volunteering is ever-changing and evolving. For example, older people currently deliver the majority of volunteering. Younger people are looking for new, flexible and more short-term ways to volunteer and many organisations find it challenging to respond to new ways of volunteering. To continue to be a leading nation when it comes to volunteering, we must watch for and respond to changing trends.

With this in mind our third strategic aim is to **support** volunteering and volunteers in Ireland. We will encourage new people to volunteer. We will ensure that volunteer involving organisations provide good quality experiences that meet the changing expectations of volunteers. Wherever volunteering happens, we intend to be present to ensure quality and good practice.

Objective Three:

There is an increase in the volume, quality and diversity of volunteering in Ireland.

High Level Performance Indicators for Objective Three:

- Positive volunteering experiences in volunteer programmes we directly deliver.
- Quality volunteering programmes delivered by volunteer involving organisations.

We will work to progress this objective through the following actions:

1. **Create** networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing of new and emerging thinking about volunteering.
2. **Provide** training, support and guidance to volunteer involving organisations on volunteer management and volunteer leadership.
3. **Support** and guide the interest in volunteering of corporate organisations, ensuring best practice standards across all programmes.
4. **Facilitate** garda vetting as a vital practical support to organisations.
5. **Deliver** volunteer management services for events and festivals, engaging new volunteers and demonstrating best practice.
6. **Lead** the development, implementation and evaluation of best practice standards and quality in volunteer programmes within volunteer involving organisations.
7. **Be the voice** for volunteers, articulating volunteers' needs and expectations.

Strategic Aim Four

Celebrate Volunteering

Positive volunteering has transformational power. Our research shows that volunteering is an enriching experience and brings feelings of well-being to those who volunteer ([The Impact of Volunteering on the Health and Wellbeing of the Volunteer 2017](#)). These benefits include social inclusion and cohesion, personal empowerment and transformation, lifelong learning and improved employability. Volunteering also benefits organisations that involve volunteers in their work, 60% of whom say they could not survive without volunteers. With this in mind our fourth strategic aim is to *celebrate* volunteering by showing all that is good about volunteering.

Objective Four:

The benefits of volunteering are showcased both for those who volunteer and those organisations who choose to involve volunteers.

High Level Performance Indicators for Objective Four:

- Increased awareness and appreciation of volunteering as a positive experience that can transform lives and support causes.

We will work to progress this objective through the following actions:

1. **Track, measure and communicate** the positive difference volunteering makes to the work of volunteer involving organisations.
2. **Demonstrate**, with sturdy metrics, the valuable and vital ways that volunteering serves and supports organisations and their causes.
3. **Gather and tell** the stories of volunteers to convey how volunteering has a positive effective on their energy, well being, sense of purpose, enjoyment and employability.
4. **Promote** volunteering through events such as National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards.
5. **Use** informed research to proclaim the power of volunteering.
6. **Continue** to develop our website and use of social and traditional media to share useful information, helpful resources and interesting stories.
7. **Work strategically and collegially** with volunteer involving organisations.

Strategic Aim Five

Strengthen our competence and capacity

Volunteer Ireland is the national agency for volunteering. We are committed to organisational development, good governance and financial stability. Our intention is to be reliable and trustworthy through our adherence to best practice in governance, financial reporting and strategic decision making to meet our stated objectives and agreements with our funders.

Objective Five:

Volunteer Ireland's presence as the national agency for volunteering in Ireland is sustained and strengthened.

High Level Performance Indicators for Objective Five:

- Staff development, satisfaction and professionalism.
- All our corporate governance obligations honoured.
- Sustainable funding and finances secured.

We will work to progress this objective through the following actions:

1. **Work** to annual operational plans to implement and monitor this Strategic Plan with agreed metrics for each of the high level indicators.
2. **Ensure** that governance structures, processes and policies meet standards of best practice in governance for the charity sector.
3. **Manage** our financial resources carefully and transparently in line with requirements set by our funders and national regulations.
4. **Implement** an effective management system and organisational culture to utilise resources - human and financial - in an accountable, cost effective and transparent ways.
5. **Be** a learning organisation by arranging for all staff, Board members and volunteers to participate in continuous professional development events and networking with a view to strengthening our organisational culture, capacity and competence.
6. **Share** best practice through our research, training, quality, support and guidance.
7. **Attract, develop and retain** competent personnel who reflect our values.
8. **Deliver** a sustainable funding model.

6. Consultation to Inform this Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan was informed by background research and consultation with a selection of people involved in and interested in our work.

We consulted with our funders in the Department of Rural and Community Development, our **Volunteer Ireland** team and our Board. We also completed a survey of volunteer involving organisations and a round of consultations with surrounding stakeholders. This included the Volunteer Centres, the Volunteering Information Services, people working in the community and voluntary sector, public sector, corporate world and experts in the field of volunteering, youth and social inclusion.

There were a number of recurring messages for Volunteer Ireland as an organisation that came through this process.

Main Messages from our Stakeholders

- Be a strong and visible **presence** as the national organisation for volunteering.
- Be convincing and clear about who we are and what we do and the **difference** we make in terms of impact, advocacy and power of volunteering.
- Lead out on a **national strategy** for volunteering.
- Strengthen **support** for the Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services.
- Be a reliable **source** of information and guidance on matters relating to volunteering.
- Dedicate time and resources to continue **building the profile of volunteering** and how it connects to different departments, policies and strategies.
- Promote volunteering with gusto and capture people's **imagination**, e.g. through brand ambassadors.
- Broadcast the joy, fun and **life enhancing** aspects of volunteering, through all media platforms.
- Set clear baselines, measures to **track progress and claim contribution** of volunteering.
- Show, through robust **research**, the impact, value of and the positive difference that volunteering makes.
- Be **brave and bold**, e.g. seek philanthropic funding and carefully chosen corporate connections that share our values.

We appreciate all contributions to the development of our strategic plan and value all feedback received.