## Valuing the power of volunteering

**Pre-Budget Submission 2024** 





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# Summary of requested budget allocation for volunteering

Volunteering plays a critical role in our society, delivering vital services in our communities and increasing our social capital.

Ireland has a strong culture of volunteering, but volunteering is not free. It requires investment in recruiting volunteers, supporting volunteer involving organisations, training volunteer managers and much more. Volunteering must be supported if we want to sustain it and see it thrive.

Volunteer Ireland requests a total increase of €1,805,907 (from €4,450,883 to €6,256,790) to support the volunteering infrastructure and organisations that engage volunteers.

In addition, we request a budget of €1,100,000 to deliver key actions in the Government's National Volunteering Strategy.

## This requested allocation is calculated as follows:

€1,100,000	Continuation of annual budget to support the delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy.
€365,000	Mainstream funding for specific projects to Volunteer Ireland, as part of a review of the funding model for Volunteer Ireland, to continue to deliver actions underway as part of the National Volunteering Strategy.
€51,010	Increased support for the national volunteering database I-VOL, by funding 120 Salesforce licenses.
€26,385	Increased support to Volunteer Ireland to cover rising costs and inflation.
€1,363,512	Funding for one additional full time Project Officer for each of the 29 Volunteer Centres, as well as a full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to provide adequate support to the growing network as part of a review of the funding model for Volunteer Centres. This would enable Volunteer Centres to engage with and deliver key elements of the National Volunteering Strategy now and beyond the life of the NVS.



## Introduction

Volunteer Ireland welcomes the opportunity to outline measures that we believe should be reflected in Budget 2024.

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. In recent research carried out on behalf of Volunteer Ireland, "not enough support for people in society who need our help" was identified as the number one issue of concern among respondents.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, volunteers and the organisations that engage them, are at the coal face of providing help to the most vulnerable members of society. We saw that throughout the pandemic and now again in our response to the war in Ukraine.

As we recover from recent global emergencies and find ourselves in the middle of a cost of living crisis, volunteering continues to play a critical role. Aside from the fiscal savings to the state, volunteering creates social capital that help our communities survive in times of crisis and thrive during better times. From sports clubs to homeless organisations to mental health support lines, volunteering is not just 'nice to have', it's critical to the survival of our communities.

With the National Volunteering Strategy more than halfway through its lifetime, it is now imperative that key actions are implemented and funded in 2024 to ensure all actions are delivered by the end of 2025. Furthermore, capacity must be increased in Volunteer Centres to ensure they can engage with and deliver actions within the strategy on top of their existing work. Finally, increased funding to Volunteer Ireland to cover rising costs and ensure the future of the national volunteering database is vital to allow us to support volunteering into the future.

#### **About Volunteer Ireland**

Volunteer Ireland is the national organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for volunteering in Ireland.

## Our vision is an Ireland where volunteering thrives.

We work with a range of stakeholders to make volunteering accessible, inclusive and of high quality.

We build capacity in organisations and companies to create meaningful volunteering experiences.

We celebrate volunteering and communicate its impact to Government and the wider public.

We advocate for volunteering so that its value is recognised.

We support the network of Volunteer Centres and work closely with them to ensure volunteering thrives at local and national level.

## **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. Fundamentally, the answer to most challenges that we face lies in mobilising communities, and volunteers are critical to that.

As our country continues to recover from recent global events and faces a cost of living crisis, volunteers will continue to play an important role in our future.

#### **Economic value**

With over 700,000 people in Ireland regularly volunteering each year,<sup>2</sup> that adds up to a significant economic contribution just in terms of the value of hours volunteered. But in addition, and more important than the value of hours volunteered, 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 that contributes to our economic circumstances in several ways:



In the face of economic uncertainty, existing problems in housing and health are exacerbated. Charities and community groups that respond to these societal challenges rely on volunteers to deliver their critical services. Without the support of volunteers, these services would need to be delivered at a much greater cost by the state.



Volunteering also plays a key role is preparing the workforce of the future, with 70% of those between 16 and 24 saying they volunteer to develop skills to help their career.<sup>3</sup> Aside from skills development, volunteering also provides young people with a broader perspective and awareness of society making them more well rounded professionals.



Volunteering has a significant economic impact in rural areas. According to Volunteer Ireland's research into rural volunteerism, 83% said that volunteering in their area saved on public spending by relieving pressure on public services and over 74% felt that it increased funding coming into the community.<sup>4</sup>



Significant benefits to health and wellbeing are experienced by those who volunteer and by extension, their communities. This represents a significant cost saving to an already overstretched HSE.

2 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-

- summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/
- 3 Irish Charity Engagement Monitor, Winter Report 2022
- 4 https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rural-Volunteerism-Report.pdf

#### **Social value**

Volunteering has been proven to have many benefits for both individuals and communities. Without volunteering, we would see poorer mental health, lower sense of belonging in our communities, and increased isolation.<sup>5</sup> "Loneliness and a lack of human connection" was identified as a top concern in recent research commissioned by Volunteer Ireland.<sup>6</sup> We saw evidence of the importance of volunteering for social connection during the pandemic. Many volunteers spoke to us of their increased isolation, as for many volunteering was their only social outlet. Volunteering continues to provide social value in several ways:



In rural areas, which typically suffer from greater levels of isolation, volunteering has been shown to be a key social connector with volunteers reporting increased access to support networks as a result of their volunteering.<sup>7</sup> Rural organisations often face even greater challenges such as access to transport and broadband. Delivering on the commitments in the National Volunteering Strategy will be key to addressing rural isolation.



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. Volunteer Centres are 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 services delivered by volunteers across the country are vital to improving our social capital. Aside from critical services like Meals on Wheels or support lines like the Samaritans, volunteers connect our communities in incalculable ways. Initiatives like befriending services, dementia cafés, knitting groups and community choirs to name just a few are all part of our rich social fabric.



The Community Volunteers programme, funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and delivered by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres, plays a huge role in supporting social inclusion in our communities. For example, over 44% of Community Volunteers list their nationality as other than Irish, highlighting the critical role volunteering plays in increasing diversity and inclusion in Ireland.

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

5 https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Volunteer-Ireland-Report-FINAL.pdf

6 Irish Charity Engagement Monitor, Winter Report 2022

<sup>7</sup> https://www.volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rural-Volunteerism-Report.pdf



## **Current Funding**

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) currently support volunteering through the National Volunteering Strategy and by providing core funding annually to the volunteering infrastructure.

In 2023, this core funding totalled  ${\small {\textcircled{}}}4,450,883,$  broken down as follows:

- €4,099,083 to support a network of 29 local countybased Volunteer Centres.
- €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 2024 Priorities

Deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

Secure the future of the national volunteering database

**Develop Volunteer Ireland** 

Increase capacity in Volunteer Centres



## **Deliver the National Volunteering Strategy**

The Government's National Volunteering Strategy was published in December 2020 and was a milestone for volunteering in Ireland. We welcome the investment in the strategy to date and the progress that has been made. With just over two years left to implement the strategy, it's vital that funding is allocated to ensure all actions are delivered.

We know that volunteering in Ireland is changing. In a post pandemic world, it is increasingly important to engage new volunteers and adapt to how people want to volunteer. Much of the work of the strategy so far has understandably been laying the groundwork for future actions such as, for example, undertaking research. It is now time to focus on addressing the key challenges that face volunteering like building capacity in organisations to adapt to new ways of volunteering, communicating the impact and value of volunteering to a broader audience and tackling inequalities in volunteering. These ambitious actions will require significant funding.

We note that the Department of Rural and Community Development are currently undertaking a review of the volunteer infrastructure funding model. Volunteer Ireland is named as a responsible body in 34 actions under the national volunteering strategy. We have already progressed a number of actions and feel we are well placed to deliver more actions within the strategy over the remainder of its lifetime. However, many of these actions must continue beyond the lifetime of the strategy and it's imperative this funding becomes part of Volunteer Ireland's core funding. Specifically, we request that funding for the following actions be mainstreamed:

- Action 24 Introduce a standard tiered code of conduct for Volunteer Involving Organisations (now Volunteer Friendly), to offer protection and clarity on expectations of the volunteer and the VIO. Annual cost: €50,000.
- Action 32 Support the Volunteer Ireland Awards, which recognise the contribution and impact our volunteers, VIOs, community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises are making to society. Annual cost: €15,000.
- Action 56 Establish a national "Reserve Volunteering Corps" (now Community Volunteers) in order to support national, regional and local emergency responses. Annual cost: €300,000.

### Recommendation 1: Continue the annual budget to deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

The delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy will only be possible with adequate funding. With a budget for 2023 of just over  $\in$ 1 million, a number of actions have been delivered already with many more underway. Recognising that some of these actions may be longer term and require more funding, and that there are key actions still to be addressed in future years, we recommend an annual budget of  $\in$ 1.1 million for each remaining year of the strategy.

#### Estimated Cost: €1,100,000

#### Recommendation 2: Mainstream funding to Volunteer Ireland to continue to deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

Volunteer Ireland has put significant time and resources into delivering a number of key actions within the strategy to date. This work is critical to the development of volunteering in Ireland. The projects have ongoing annual costs that should become part of the core funding for Volunteer Ireland as part of a new funding model that incorporates this additional activity.

#### Estimated Cost: €365,000

## Secure the future of the national volunteering database

Volunteer Ireland, along with the network of Volunteer Centres, manage the national volunteering database I–VOL. This Salesforce powered platform allows organisations to advertise volunteer roles and allows volunteers to search for roles that suit their interests and skills. It provides a wealth of data into volunteering such as demographic information along with volunteer hours and motivations. As a bespoke solution, I–VOL has undergone a number of developments in recent years including a new user friendly website and the integration of the Community Volunteers platform.

The national volunteering strategy has identified 'more cohesion in the various online volunteering services' as a core action under increased participation and diversity in volunteering. As such, we have already worked with our colleagues in Comhlámh so that international volunteer roles will be available on I-VOL.

Since 2006, Salesforce have granted Volunteer Ireland 90 free licenses meaning we could operate the database at minimal cost. However, as of 2024, these free licenses will no longer be available. With Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres already operating within extremely limited resources, we must find a way to fund these licences to allow this critical part of the volunteering infrastructure to continue. With the opening of eight new Volunteer Centres in recent years and the development of the Community Volunteers programme, 90 licenses are no longer sufficient and we estimate that a minimum of 130 licences are required to run the database, 10 of which we receive in kind from Salesforce.

It is vital that these licenses are funded so that the national volunteering database cannot just survive but thrive, as the volunteering infrastructure continues to deliver key elements of the National Volunteering Strategy and look to the future of volunteering.

## Recommendation 3: Increase funding to the national volunteering database I-VOL

Fund 120 Salesforce licenses for the volunteering infrastructure to continue to operate Ireland's national volunteering database, I-VOL.

Estimated Additional Cost: €51,010



## Develop Volunteer Ireland

Volunteer Ireland is the national organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for volunteering in Ireland. As such, we believe that volunteering is a force for good, and central to creating and sustaining an inclusive society.

We are living through a period of rapid and considerable social change. An ageing population, which at the same time is becoming increasingly diverse, creates opportunities and poses challenges for us, but they are challenges which we are willing and able to embrace.

Volunteering itself is changing. The way people want to volunteer is changing, many volunteer involving organisations are struggling to engage volunteers, and we need to actively work to ensure volunteering is inclusive and accessible.

Volunteer Ireland is facing the same inflationary pressures as everyone. For example, we have seen a 50% increase to rent, communication costs are up 77%, audit fees have increased by 37% and recruiting and retaining staff on current salaries has proven a significant challenge.

We cannot continue to provide the same level of support and leadership needed by volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and Volunteer Centres, at our current funding levels.

#### Recommendation 5: Increase funding to Volunteer Ireland to manage rising costs

Increase the core funding allocated to Volunteer Ireland by 7.5% from  $\bigcirc$  351,800 to  $\bigcirc$  378,185 to ensure we can meet rising costs and inflation.

Estimated Additional Cost: €26,385



## Increase capacity in Volunteer Centres

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.

As experts in volunteering and the key support to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in local communities. Volunteer Centres are critical to the delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy.

However, they currently operate within very limited resources and despite their desire to take a leading role in the delivery of the strategy and already engaging on some actions, they have restricted capacity to do so. the effective delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy, funding to the Volunteer Centres must be increased.

We note that the Department of Rural and Community Development are currently undertaking a review of the Volunteer Centre funding model which has been welcomed by the volunteering infrastructure.

It is vital that funding to Volunteer Centres is increased to ensure the national volunteering strategy can continue to deliver. We believe the best way to do that in the immediate term is to fund an extra staff member in each Volunteer Centre who can engage with the actions assigned to VCs in the National Volunteering Strategy.

To increase this capacity and ensure

#### Recommendation 6: Fund a full time Project Officer in each Volunteer Centre to deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

Volunteer Centres are specifically named as a responsible body in 20 actions with in the National Volunteering Strategy, along with contributing to a range of other actions. Volunteer Centres already work within extremely limited resources and need to be properly funded to effectively engage with the National Volunteering Strategy. A dedicated Project Officer in each Volunteer Centre would dramatically increase their capacity to deliver on the strategy.

Estimated Additional Cost: €1,319,413

#### Recommendation 7: Fund a full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to support the growing volunteering infrastructure

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Volunteer Ireland supports the network of 29 Volunteer Centres with training, communications, advocacy and general administration. With the dramatic increase in all our workloads in recent years, and the proposed addition of 29 new staff to the Volunteer Centres, the network will need a dedicated full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to continue to provide this support to a high level.

#### Estimated Additional Cost: €44,099

## Conclusion

Investing in volunteering presents extraordinary value for money: a budget of only just over €4 million per annum yields a return to the nation valued at €5 billion in hours alone.<sup>8</sup>

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, having played a critical role in Irish society for a long time, has shown its true value in our response to recent crises, and continues to be essential in our recovery. An investment in volunteering now, will lead to long-term benefits that will make us more resilient in addressing challenges our society faces in the future.

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 volunteering in Ireland.







Pre-Budget Submission 2024 volunteer.ie