

Valuing the power of volunteering

Pre-Budget Submission 2025



**Volunteer
Ireland**

Obair Dheonach Éireann



Volunteer Ireland

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Summary of requested budget allocation for volunteering

Volunteering plays a significant role in our society, whether it is responding to a humanitarian crisis or meeting local community needs. Volunteering strengthens communities by building resilience, promoting integration and social inclusion, and contributing to a sustainable future for all.

Ireland has a strong culture of volunteering, but it must be supported if we want it to continue and develop. Data from the 2022 Census demonstrates the significant role of volunteering in our society, with more than 700,000 people or around 14% of the population volunteering regularly.¹

Volunteer Ireland requests a total increase of €2,445,805 (from €4,477,268 to €6,923,073) to support volunteering and the volunteering infrastructure. In addition, we request a continuation of the annual budget of €1,100,000 to support the delivery of the Government's National Volunteering Strategy and to maintain the €1 million funding provided to Volunteer Centres to support International Protection Applicants and displaced people from Ukraine.



This requested allocation is calculated as follows:

Maintain core funding to Volunteer Ireland at the current level of €378,185.

Provide **additional funding** to Volunteer Ireland to continue to deliver elements of the National Volunteering Strategy on a sustainable basis (€100,000) and develop volunteering through two specific programmes: Volunteer Friendly (€50,000) and the Volunteer Ireland Awards (€15,000).

Fund the Community Volunteers programme beyond the completion of the pilot phase at an **additional cost** of €591,344.

Continue to support the national volunteering database I-VOL by funding 120 Salesforce licenses at an **additional cost** of €44,635 and the continued support and maintenance of I-VOL at €94,826.

Continuation of the annual budget to support the delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy at an **additional cost** of €1,100,000.

Increase funding to Volunteer Centres at an **additional cost** of €1.5 million as part of a review of the funding model for Volunteer Centres and maintain the €1 million funding provided to Volunteer Centres to support International Protection Applicants and displaced people from Ukraine.

Fund a full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to support the growing volunteering infrastructure at an **additional cost** of €50,000.



Introduction

Volunteer Ireland welcomes the opportunity to outline measures that we believe should be reflected in Budget 2025. Volunteering has long been at the core of Irish society; it ensures the delivery of 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, the public identified 'not enough support for people in society who need our help' as the number one issue of concern.² In many cases, volunteers and the organisations that engage them are at the core 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 tackle a cost-of-living crisis, volunteering continues to play a critical role in our society. Beyond fiscal savings to the state, volunteering creates social capital that helps our communities survive in times of crisis and thrive in better times. From sports clubs to clean up groups and support lines, volunteering

is not just 'nice to have', it's critical to the survival of our communities.

With the current National Volunteering Strategy coming to an end in December 2025, it is imperative that key actions are funded and implemented to ensure more actions are delivered by the end of the strategy. In particular, it is important for volunteer involving organisations and volunteers to experience the benefits of the National Volunteering Strategy. Increased funding to Volunteer Ireland to deliver key elements of the strategy and ensure the future of the national volunteering database is vital to allow us to support volunteering into the future. 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. Budget 2025 is an opportunity for the Government to demonstrate a commitment to promoting volunteering for all and upholding Irish values of inclusion, tolerance, solidarity, justice and civic participation.

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.

As our country continues to recover from recent global events and faces a cost-of-living crisis, volunteers will continue to play a critical role in our future. The recently published 2022 Census data demonstrates the importance of volunteering to Irish society, including delivering critical services in our communities.

Economic value

Results from Census 2022 show that more than 700,000 people in Ireland regularly volunteer each year,³ which adds up to a significant economic contribution in terms of the value of hours volunteered. 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 the Government.

Volunteering has a real impact that contributes to our economy in several ways:



As we experience a cost-of-living crisis, 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 plays a key role in preparing the workforce of the future, with 70% of those between 16 and 24 saying they volunteer to develop skills to help their career.⁴ 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, while 74% felt that it increased funding coming into the community.⁵



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.

3. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>

4. Irish Charity Engagement Monitor, Winter Report 2022

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

Social value

Volunteering offers a wealth of benefits to individuals, communities and society as a whole. Without volunteering, we would see poorer mental health, lower sense of belonging in our communities, and increased isolation.⁶ 'Loneliness and a lack of human connection' was identified as a top concern in recent research commissioned by Volunteer Ireland.⁷

We saw evidence of the importance of volunteering for social connection during the pandemic when many volunteers spoke to us of their increased isolation, as for many, volunteering was their only social outlet. Volunteering continues to provide value in society 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.⁸ Delivering on the commitments in the National Volunteering Strategy will be key to addressing challenges unique to rural organisations like access to transport and quality internet.



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 services delivered by volunteers across the country are vital to growing our social capital. From critical services like Meals on Wheels to support lines like the Samaritans, volunteers connect our communities in incalculable ways. Initiatives like befriending services, dementia cafes, 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 Local Authorities, and delivered by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres, plays a huge role in supporting social inclusion in our communities. For example, over 60% of Community Volunteers list their nationality as being other than Irish which highlights the critical role volunteering plays in increasing integration, diversity and inclusion in Ireland.

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

7. Irish Charity Engagement Monitor, Winter Report 2022

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

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

As volunteering plays such a huge role in our society, it is imperative that we protect it.

Volunteering doesn't happen without investment and support. Many organisations report increasing difficulties in both finding and retaining volunteers, and the way people want to volunteer continues to change.

We must address these challenges and invest in volunteering now or we risk a drop in levels of volunteering. Not only would this lead to negative social outcomes in our communities, but it would also lead to gaps in delivery of critical services in many areas.



Current Funding

The Department of Rural and Community Development currently supports the volunteering infrastructure through a budget of €4,477,268 broken down as follows:

- €4,099,083 to support a network of 29 local county-based Volunteer Centres.
- €378,185 to support the national volunteer development organisation, Volunteer Ireland.

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

Budget 2025

Priorities

Develop Volunteer Ireland

Maintain the Community Volunteers Programme

Secure the future of the national volunteering database

Deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

Increase capacity in Volunteer Centres



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Develop Volunteer Ireland

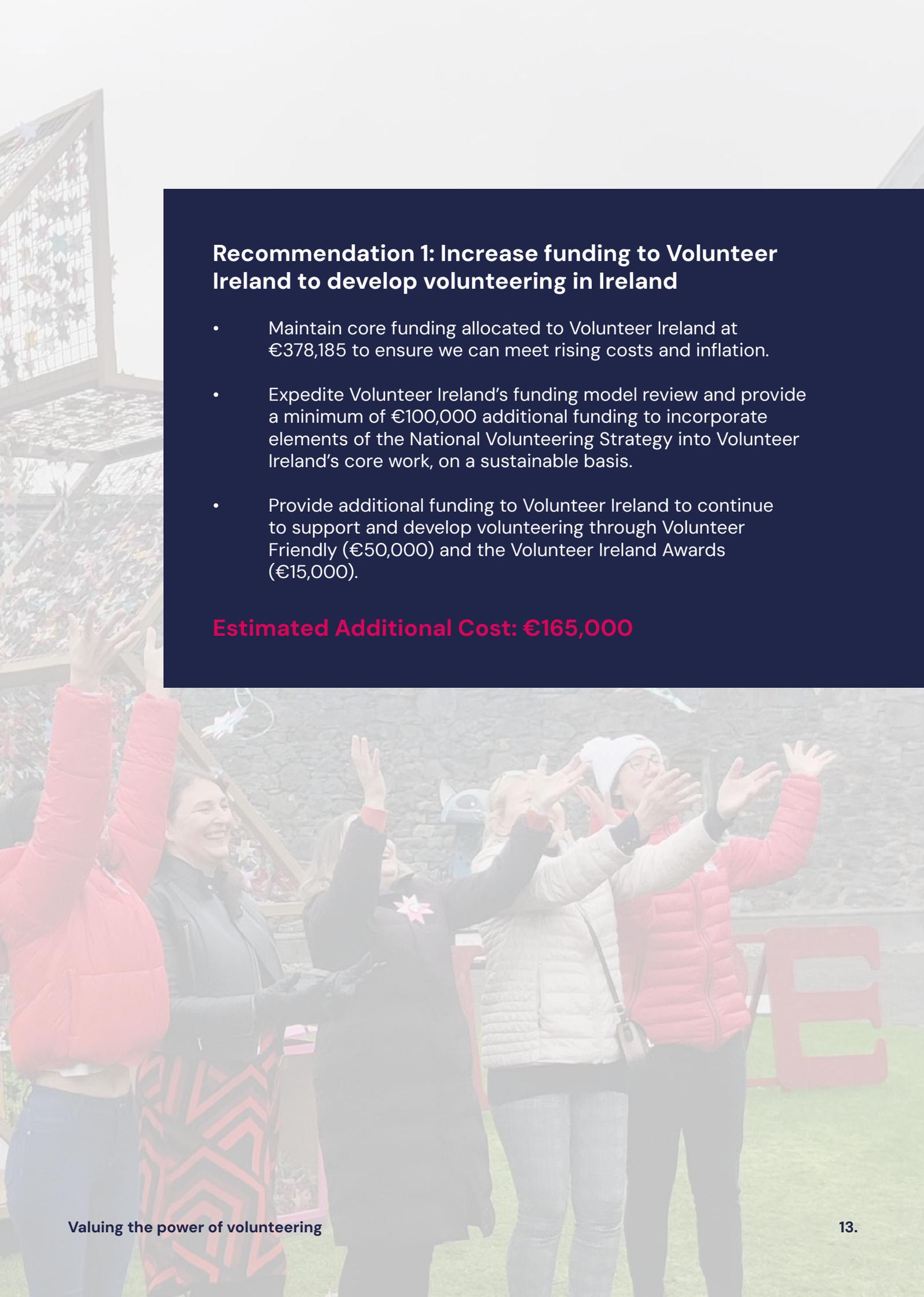
Volunteering has played a critical role in Irish society for a long time, has shown its true value in our response to recent crises, and continues to be essential to our social cohesion and service delivery. It represents a huge return on investment to the State, with volunteers providing many services that would otherwise need to be delivered by the Government. This doesn't even consider additional cost savings around improved health and employability, as well as societal benefits such as decreased isolation and increased citizen engagement.

We appreciate the core funding received on an annual basis from the Department of Rural and Community Development and understand that there is an ongoing review of Volunteer Ireland's funding model. We request that this review be expedited and that it takes into consideration Volunteer Ireland's capacity to deliver elements of the National Volunteering Strategy, not just in 2025, but beyond the strategy's lifetime. Until the review is completed, we estimate the need for an additional €100,000 to incorporate elements of the National Volunteering Strategy into Volunteer Ireland's core work, on a sustainable basis.

One of the biggest barriers to volunteering doesn't lie with volunteers or society but is related to the limited capacity of the organisations that involve volunteers. Between 2021 and 2022, Volunteer Ireland and five Volunteer Centres piloted

Volunteer Friendly, which is a user-friendly quality standard to support, recognise and reward groups who are good at involving volunteers. It is a self-assessment tool for organisations that also provides numerous resources to help them achieve each element of the standard. Through the pilot, Volunteer Ireland and the Volunteer Centres supported 14 volunteer involving organisations to achieve the standard. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. We now aim to roll this out across more Volunteer Centres and volunteer involving organisations, to build capacity in these organisations and support quality experiences for volunteers. The cost to support Volunteer Centres and coordinate Volunteer Friendly nationally, as well as pay associated costs such as licencing and website fees, is estimated at €50,000.

Volunteer Ireland is grateful for the ongoing support provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development for the annual Volunteer Ireland Awards, as part of delivering Action 32 in the National Volunteering Strategy. The Volunteer Ireland Awards are the major annual initiative to celebrate volunteers in Ireland and shine a light on the remarkable achievements of volunteers around the country by honouring them at a national level. We request an increase of €5,000 (from €10,000 to €15,000) to help us continue to deliver the awards amid the increased costs of goods and services.

A group of people, mostly women, are shown from the waist up, wearing winter jackets and hats. They are all smiling and have their arms raised in the air, suggesting a celebratory or enthusiastic gathering. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor event space with a stone wall and some structures.

Recommendation 1: Increase funding to Volunteer Ireland to develop volunteering in Ireland

- Maintain core funding allocated to Volunteer Ireland at €378,185 to ensure we can meet rising costs and inflation.
- Expedite Volunteer Ireland's funding model review and provide a minimum of €100,000 additional funding to incorporate elements of the National Volunteering Strategy into Volunteer Ireland's core work, on a sustainable basis.
- Provide additional funding to Volunteer Ireland to continue to support and develop volunteering through Volunteer Friendly (€50,000) and the Volunteer Ireland Awards (€15,000).

Estimated Additional Cost: €165,000

Maintain the Community Volunteers Programme

The Community Volunteers programme is a unique way for people to volunteer in distinct one-off instances while also building the quality and community that comes with regular volunteering. It gives people an opportunity to get involved in local events and festivals while also supporting more urgent needs that arise unexpectedly, like we saw with the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Volunteers programme has over 4,000 active and trained volunteers. Having these volunteers in place has greatly increased Ireland's community resilience. Not only are they there ready to act in times of crisis, but they are also involved in many types of community events, festivals, climate awareness and sustainability campaigns. Community Volunteers continue to play an important role in supporting displaced people arriving in local communities. In addition to this, we have found that the programme is a powerful integration tool for new arrivals into Ireland, getting people out into their communities, all with a common purpose.

As well as the many benefits volunteers receive from being involved in the programme, the feedback we receive from Local Authorities and volunteer

involving organisations is also positive. The Community Volunteers programme has built up a recognisable brand with a reputation for enthusiastic volunteers who are led by good volunteer management. This is demonstrated by requests for Community Volunteers to return, year upon year, to events or festivals.

Volunteer Centres have also noticed that their visibility within their county has increased by being a part of the Community Volunteers programme. Where once they were mainly office based, they are now seen out in their communities, and this is having a positive effect on other services that Volunteer Centres provide. We believe that the Community Volunteers programme is crucial in ensuring communities' preparedness in responding to crises as well as meeting local needs as they arise and should be continued beyond the pilot phase to actively support our communities in times of need.

**Recommendation 2: Continue to fund the
Community Volunteers programme beyond the
completion of the pilot phase**

Estimated Additional Cost: €591,344



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, volunteer hours and motivations. As a bespoke solution, I-VOL has undergone several 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 the goal of increased participation and diversity in volunteering. As such, we have already worked with our colleagues in Comhlámh so that international volunteer roles are now available on I-VOL. We appreciate that there is a planned review of the national volunteering database and that this may lead to the development of a new database on a different platform. However, given that this review has not yet commenced, it is critical that I-VOL is supported in the meantime. Even if a decision was made to move to a new database, there would be a

lengthy transition period so it's vital that support for I-VOL is maintained until the end of 2025.

Since 2018, Salesforce have granted Volunteer Ireland with 90 free licenses meaning we could operate the database at minimal cost. However, as of 2024, these free licenses are no longer available and with Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres already operating within extremely limited resources, we must find a way to fund them. 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.

It is vital that these licenses continue to be funded so that the national volunteering database not just survives but thrives, enabling the volunteering infrastructure to continue to deliver key elements of the national volunteering strategy, into the future.



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, at a cost of €44,635.
- Fund the support and maintenance of I-VOL, including the employment of an I-VOL Super Administrator, at a cost of €94,826.

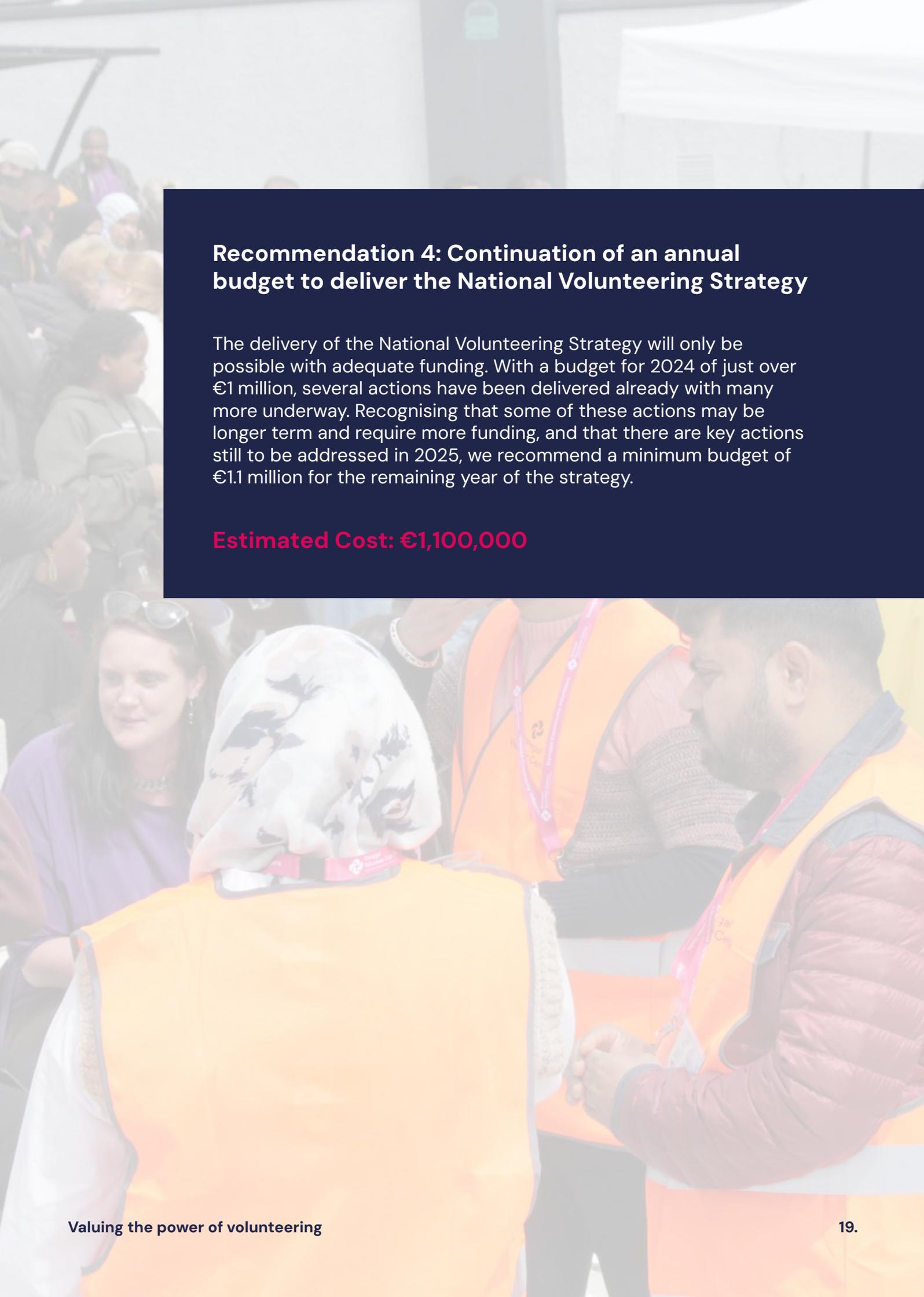
Estimated Additional Cost: €139,461

Deliver the National Volunteering Strategy

The 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 a year 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 through undertaking research and setting baselines. 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.



Recommendation 4: Continuation of an 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 2024 of just over €1 million, several 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 2025, we recommend a minimum budget of €1.1 million for the remaining year of the strategy.

Estimated Cost: €1,100,000

Increase capacity in Volunteer Centres

Volunteer Centres provide vital supports to volunteering in our communities across Ireland through the provision of a referral service, maintenance of the national volunteering database I-VOL, delivery of volunteer management training, the processing of Garda vetting and collaboration with other stakeholders like jobs clubs, mental health services and the library service. They also deliver several bespoke projects across a variety of areas, for example, social inclusion for people with disabilities and older people.

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 with very limited resources and despite their desire to take a leading role in the delivery of the strategy they have restricted capacity to do so.

To increase this capacity and ensure 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. We urge the Department to expedite this process and ensure the inclusion of a significant funding increase for Volunteer Centres.



Recommendation 5: Increase funding to Volunteer Centres by €1.5 million and maintain the funding provided to support International Protection Applicants and displaced people from Ukraine (€1 million)

Volunteer Centres are specifically named as a responsible body in 20 actions within the National Volunteering Strategy, along with their contributions 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. It is critical that the new Volunteer Centre funding model includes a significant increase in funding to allow VCs to continue to support volunteering locally and engage with the National Volunteering Strategy.

Estimated Additional Cost: €1,500,000 (plus maintaining the €1 million funding to support International Protection Applicants and displaced Ukrainians)

Recommendation 6: Fund a full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to support the growing volunteering infrastructure

Volunteer Ireland supports the network of 29 Volunteer Centres with training, communications, advocacy and general administration. With the dramatic increase in workloads in recent years, including supporting delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy, the network needs a dedicated full time Volunteer Network Support Officer to continue to provide this support to a high level.

Estimated Additional Cost: €50,000

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.



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