



National Volunteer Management Conference

Tuesday 28 April 2026
Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street
Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 D953



**Volunteer
Ireland**
Obair Dheonach Éireann



INTERNATIONAL
VOLUNTEER YEAR 2026

Conference programme

- 09:00 Volunteer conversations, informal networking **Zsé Varga** (*optional*)
- 09:00 Registration opens
- 10:00 Ignite & Inspire: conference & programme essentials **Stuart Garland**
- 10:10 Welcome address **Nina Arwitz**
- 10:20 Opening address **Jerry Buttimer T.D., Minister of State for Community Development and Charities**
- 10:35 Morning keynote: Courageous lessons in leadership
Faiza Venzant CVA
- 11:00 Thriving through learning: a path to success **Stuart Garland**
- 11:10 **Mid-morning tea and coffee break** Chat & connect with your peers
- 11:30 **Morning master classes** (*select one*)
- Am I making the right decision? The role of ethics in volunteer engagement
Faiza Venzant, CVA (*red*)
 - The value revolution: capturing volunteer impact for strategic power
Chris Wade (*yellow*)
 - Beyond badges - from quality assurance principles to practical volunteer management improvement **Alice O'Boyle** (*blue*)
 - Exploring a framework for promoting values-led practice in volunteering
Fiachra Brennan (*purple*)
- 12:30 **Lunch** Informal networking
- 13:30 Afternoon Keynote: Raising the profile of volunteering: what public attitudes tell us about winning cross-party support **Dr. Stuart Fox**
- 13:45 Launch of Institute of Volunteer Leadership **Alice O'Boyle and Zsé Varga**
- 13:50 **Afternoon master classes** (*select one*)
- Recognition that matters: building a culture where volunteers feel valued and supported **Dympna Kenny** (*orange*)
 - Beyond the day out: unlocking sustainable income through high-impact corporate volunteer partnerships **Lisa Keegan** (*pink*)
 - Beyond good intentions: corporate volunteering that delivers
Gráinne O'Reilly (*green*)
 - From survival to leadership: Migrant led volunteer innovation
Carine Mambou (*navy*)
- 14:50 **Afternoon comfort break** Chat & connect with your peers
- 15:00 Practice session: Many hats, one head, the role of the Leader of volunteers
Jennifer Glansford, Martina Greene, Emma McLoughlin, Elizabeth Morrin, and Nicola Yau
- 16:00 Announcement of the location of the National Volunteer Management Conference 2027
- 16:10 Closing remarks
- 16:15 Conference ends

Welcome

A warm welcome to Volunteer Ireland's annual conference. With a mix of national and international speakers, eight master classes and networking over the course of the day, we look forward to engaging with you at the premiere event for leaders of volunteers.

Visit the Volunteering Village

Drop in early, join us for some networking with colleagues and visit some of our exhibitors' stands.

- **Arachas**
- **Comhlámh**
- **Data Protection Commission**
- **Léargas**
- **St. Joseph's Centre**
- **StudentVolunteer.ie**
- **TeamKinetic**
- **Virtual Routes**



The Investing in Volunteers (IIV) Award recognises organisations that meet a national quality standard, showing commitment to excellent volunteer management, meaningful volunteer experiences, and valuing volunteers through strong systems and support. Find out more on the [IIV web site](#)

Morning master classes (11:30 to 12:30)



Am I making the right decision? The role of ethics in volunteer engagement, Faiza Venzant CVA (red)

Ethical dilemmas are common in community work, yet organisations rarely focus on ethics related to volunteer engagement. This session helps practitioners understand personal, organizational, and professional ethics; introduces core values and principles; teaches a practical ethical decision-making process using real-life volunteer scenarios; and offers strategies to increase ethical awareness among volunteers and staff.



The value revolution: capturing volunteer impact for strategic power, Chris Wade (yellow)

Are your volunteers viewed as a “nice to have” or a vital strategic asset? While many organizations track volunteer hours, few translate data into the language of impact, value, and investment. This workshop introduces the Volunteer Impact Scorecard Toolkit, using Logic Models and Balanced Scorecards to capture impact, influence leaders and funders, and position volunteering at the strategic core of the organisation.



Beyond badges, from quality assurance principles to practical programme improvement, Alice O'Boyle (blue)

Recent volunteering research shows that organisations thriving today are those that adapt and follow good practice in volunteer management. While volunteer expectations have changed, the desire to give back remains strong. This masterclass explores the six Investing in Volunteers quality areas, using practical examples to show how organisations can improve volunteer experiences and build stronger, more effective teams.



Exploring a framework for promoting values-led practice in volunteering Fiachra Brennan (purple)

This session introduces the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice as a practical framework for embedding values-led organisational practice. It explores the code's evolution over 20 years, its role in transforming organisational approaches, and the strong community of practice it has generated. Attendees will learn how the Code supports ethical reflection, action experimentation, organisational learning, and adaptation across diverse volunteering and community action contexts.

Thank you to volunteers from **Midlands Polish Community** and **MPC TV** who are recording the event and to **Leah Carroll** our event photographer.



The Volunteer Charter

Welcoming All, Growing Together

Volunteers bring passion, dedication, and energy to every organisation. But for volunteering to thrive, there must be trust, respect, and clear expectations, that's where The Volunteer Charter comes in!

This two-way commitment outlines what volunteers and organisations can expect from each other, creating a positive and rewarding experience for all.

Why does it matter?

- **Clarity & Confidence** – Everyone knows what to expect.
- **Stronger Relationships** – Built on trust and respect.
- **Better Experiences** – Motivated and engaged volunteers make a bigger impact.

The Volunteer Charter helps VIOs show their commitment to to build a thriving, inclusive environment. We currently have 60+ VIO signatories impacting the experience of 47,751 volunteers.

Networking

Today is about meeting with and networking with your peers. Chat to colleagues but also take the opportunity to connect with leaders of volunteers you haven't met before.

Afternoon master classes (13:50 to 14:50)



Recognition that matters: building a culture where volunteers feel valued, Dymrna Kenny (*orange*)

This interactive workshop explores how meaningful volunteer recognition and development can strengthen engagement, well-being, and inclusion. Drawing on Victim Support at Court's experience, it shares practical, low-cost ways to value volunteers, reduce participation barriers, and build inclusive cultures. Aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda, the session highlights volunteering as a powerful driver of social impact and community resilience.



Unlocking income through high-impact corporate volunteering, Lisa Keegan (*pink*)

In 2025, 1,700 corporate volunteers from 64 partners contributed over 7,000 hours to FoodCloud's programmes. This session explores how they transformed corporate volunteering into a sustainable, income-generating model aligned with core operations. Participants will learn a practical framework for building strategic partnerships that support daily delivery and long-term financial resilience.



Beyond good intentions: corporate volunteering that delivers, Gráinne O'Reilly (*green*)

Gas Networks Ireland will share its journey to Investing in Volunteers quality mark and the practical levers that increased participation from 10% to 25%. The session covers diversifying volunteering pathways, building distributed ownership, improving inclusion, addressing participation gaps, and demonstrating the tangible business benefits of a strong volunteer programme.



From survival to leadership: Migrant led volunteer innovation, Carine Mambou (*navy*)

Carine presents a migrant-led model of volunteer engagement shaped by lived experience, resilience, and cultural insight. Drawing on work with CAD AID Foundation, it reframes migrants and refugees as leaders and co-creators. Using trauma-informed, dignity-based practices, storytelling, and peer learning, the session shows how inclusive, decolonised approaches build trust, remove barriers, strengthen leadership, and inspire innovative, equitable volunteering.

This year marks International Year of the Volunteer for Sustainable Development or IVY 2026.

It is a global year aimed at celebrating and recognising the incredible contributions of volunteers everywhere. It's a moment to raise awareness, spark conversations, and inspire even more people to get involved. It's also a time to reflect on our strong culture of volunteering in Ireland and what we can do to further strengthen it.

As national lead on IVY 2026 in Ireland, we are working with stakeholders across civil society and the public and private sectors to deliver an ambitious programme aimed at increasing awareness of volunteering, recognising its value and encouraging participation.

You may have already seen our **26 for '26** campaign – a call to action for everyone to take part and pledge to volunteer 26 hours in 2026. Stay tuned throughout the year and check out our [website](#) to learn more.

Presenters & contributors



Nina Arwitz (She/Her), Chief Executive Officer, Volunteer Ireland

Nina's background is in the environmental non-profit sector where she focused on social inclusion, engaging new audiences and volunteering; as well as fundraising, campaigning and strategic development. Nina is responsible for the overall strategic direction of Volunteer Ireland and ensuring that we deliver our mission to promote, support and advocate for excellent, accessible and inclusive volunteering in Ireland.



Jerry Buttimer T.D., Minister of State for Community Development and Charities, Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

Jerry has been TD for the Cork South-Central constituency since the 2024 election and from 2011 to 2016. He was Leas-Chathaoirleach from July 2020 to August 2020. He also served as a senator for the Labour Panel from 2007 to 2011 and 2016 to 2024, and as Leader of Fine Gael in the Seanad from 2016 to 2020.



Fiachra Brennan, Solidarity and Capacity Building Coordinator, Comhlámh

Fiachra coordinates the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Agencies, working with over 50 organisations to promote values-led international volunteering and solidarity-based engagement. His work challenges harmful, neocolonial and ethnocentric practices, including through the End Orphanage Volunteering Campaign. With an MA in Social Justice and Public Policy, he brings extensive experience in international volunteering, policy development, advocacy, and efforts to end institutional care of children.



Dr. Stuart Fox, Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Exeter

Stuart, a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Exeter, specialises in political behaviour and youth engagement. His research examines how volunteering influences civic participation, particularly among disadvantaged youth. Committed to bridging academia and practice, he collaborates with organisations like the Centre for European Volunteering, SALTO, and NCVO. Previously, he lectured at Brunel University London after earning his PhD from Nottingham in 2015.



Stuart Garland (He/Him), Learning and Capacity Building Manager, Volunteer Ireland

With over 30 years of leadership experience across the third sector and youth work, he is a recognised specialist in volunteer management, inclusive engagement, and organisational capacity building. Stuart works strategically with national and European partners to drive sector-wide impact. A lead trainer in volunteer impact assessment and quality standards, he has delivered training and consultancy internationally, underpinned by qualifications in volunteer leadership.



Jennifer Glansford, Volunteer Coordinator, National Rehabilitation Hospital

Jennifer is in this role since 2021. She has been instrumental in developing the NRH volunteer service, which now has over 130 active volunteers. With over 20 years of experience in the non-profit sector, Jennifer initially trained and worked with Addiction Services and moved to become the National Development Manager for the Getting Started Programme at Age Action Ireland. Jennifer has been a volunteer all of her adult life with various organisations.

Presenters & contributors



Martina Greene, National Volunteer Manager, Irish Heart Foundation

With over 20 years' experience in the non-profit sector, she specialises in risk management, leadership, programme development, and volunteer engagement. Since establishing the Irish Heart Foundation's volunteer programme in 2021, Martina has grown it into a flexible, volunteer-centred model delivered online, in person, and by phone. She is passionate about ensuring volunteers have safe and meaningful experiences supporting impactful services.



Lisa Keegan (She/Her), Volunteer Manager, FoodCloud

Lisa leads corporate volunteer partnerships and sustainable income targets that underpin organisational growth, and has designed and maintained partnerships featured in this case study. She has over seven years of public speaking experience, engaging senior corporate leaders, community partners, and volunteers. Previously, she worked for five years in Canada for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regional Humane Educator role.



Dympna Kenny, Chief Executive Officer, Victim Support at Court

As CEO of Victim Support at Court for nine years, Dympna brings public-speaking experience with stakeholders, including Volunteer Ireland, the Department of Justice, Courts Service, the judiciary, and voluntary organisations. She has addressed the Oireachtas on courthouse victim supports. In 2025, V-SAC partnered with the Solas Project to deliver national court-accompaniment training, reaching over 400 Youth Justice Workers nationwide.



Carine Mambou, Chief Executive Officer, CAD AID Foundation

Carine is a Cameroonian-Irish journalist and social entrepreneur with over ten years of experience in volunteer engagement, migrant inclusion, and trauma-informed practice. She is the founder of CAD AID Foundation and leads MEMA Group. Her work is recognised through roles with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and as an African Union girls' education ambassador.



Alice O'Boyle, Business Development Coordinator, Volunteer Now Enterprises

Alice is an experienced trainer with over 20 years in the third sector, supporting volunteer recruitment, development, and management across organisations, including Macmillan, the Red Cross, and Cruse Bereavement Support. She has supported organisations to achieve Investing in Volunteers accreditation and works with volunteering managers and leaders to improve practice, respond to changing volunteer needs, and deliver effective, good-practice-led training.



Gráinne O'Reilly, Social Sustainability Manager, Gas Networks Ireland

Gráinne delivers presentations on volunteer engagement, sustainability strategy, and the Sustainable Development Goals within Gas Networks Ireland. She also contributes to external webinars and partner forums, sharing best practice in corporate volunteering. Her expertise is grounded in postgraduate study in Sustainable Development for Business at Trinity College, alongside active volunteering with her local school, GAA, and Scout Group.



Elizabeth Morrin, Volunteer Manager, Children in Hospital Ireland

Elizabeth has been a Volunteer Manager with Children in Hospital Ireland since 2017. She has a background in children's rights and a particular interest in the value of play. Elizabeth currently supports over 400 volunteers in 15 different hospitals across Ireland, and she loves that every day of working with Children in Hospital volunteers and in hospitals is different.

Presenters & contributors



Emma McLoughlin (She/Her), Volunteer Coordinator, LauraLynn Children's Hospice
Emma is Volunteer Coordinator at LauraLynn, where she leads the development and support of a dedicated volunteer programme that enriches care and community engagement across the organisation. With extensive experience in coordinating volunteers who bring compassion and commitment to families and children facing life-limiting conditions, Emma champions volunteer impact and recognition within Ireland's leading children's hospice.



Mary Spain, Programme Coordinator, Living Well with Dementia
Mary is Programme Coordinator for Living Well with Dementia, a community-based initiative supporting people living with dementia and their families through arts, social activities, education and engagement. She leads development and delivery of inclusive weekly programmes, from choirs and movement classes to art and bridge groups, that empower participants to stay active, connected and valued in their communities.



Zsé Varga (She/Her), Development and Capacity Building Manager, Volunteer Ireland
Zsé drives innovation in volunteering, focusing on flexibility, diversity, and meaningful engagement. She leads initiatives to empower leaders and has a background in volunteer management training and consultancy across Ireland, Hungary, and Europe. With expertise in flexible volunteer roles, she is shaping the future of engagement. Zsé is a Blood Bikes East volunteer.



Faiza Venzant CVA (She/Her), Executive Director, Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration
Faiza is a lifelong volunteer and advocate for equitable volunteer engagement, inspired by her parents' migration from Uganda to Canada. With over 25 years of experience, she champions excellence in volunteer management and inclusion. She is an active member of the Association for Leaders in Volunteer Engagement, contributed to AmeriCorps-funded research, and has led award-winning initiatives advancing access, equity, and impact across the volunteer sector.



Chris Wade, Managing Director, Time for Impact
Chris is a facilitator, a qualified adult educator, and a former Head of Learning and Development. He hosts the Time for Impact podcast, engaging audiences on the strategic value of volunteering. With over 25 years' leadership experience, he has served as Chief Executive Officer, Director of People and Volunteering, board trustee with bodies, and works as a consultant on strategic volunteering impact.



Nicola Yau, Volunteer and Community Manager, St. John of God Dementia Care
Nicola is the Volunteer and Community Manager at St. Joseph's Centre, the largest home in Ireland solely dedicated to dementia care. St. Joseph's Centre is the first and only nursing home in Ireland to have achieved the Investing in Volunteers Award, demonstrating their commitment to providing an excellent volunteering experience for all.

Venue information

Is the venue wheelchair accessible?

Yes, the hotel is fully wheelchair accessible. There are lifts to all floors from the underground car park, which also has designated EU Parking Card spaces. Service dogs are welcome. The venue has step-free access throughout.

I use a JAM Card / Sunflower Hidden Disabilities lanyard

We welcome people with visible and hidden disabilities. Volunteer Ireland team members have completed [JAM Card](#) training. Check in with us at registration if you have any questions or need support.

What if I have additional support needs?

Contact Stuart Garland at stuart@volunteer.ie or call (087) 696 4020 in advance of the conference. If you have a carer or assistant, they can attend with you and will only need to pay for refreshments.

Can I get a scholarship or bursary?

Yes, a limited number of free, reduced-cost and subsidised tickets are available for those with limited resources. To apply, email stuart@volunteer.ie explaining how attending would benefit you and why you need a scholarship.

Diversity and inclusion

We recognise that attendees come from diverse and inclusive backgrounds. Our conference is a place where everyone is valued, respected, and celebrated. We are committed to creating a welcoming space where all attendees can engage, learn, and connect in a positive and supportive environment. By being part of this conference, you join a community that champions respect, equality, and kindness – ensuring that everyone feels safe, heard, and empowered. Together we can inspire change.

How can I show if I want to network or not?

We offer three wristbands to help with social interaction: **Red** – Prefer to keep your distance, **Orange** – Okay to chat but no physical contact, **Green** – Comfortable with handshakes and high-fives. Wristbands are available at registration.

What is the full address of the venue?

Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street, Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 D953, Ireland

Can I travel by train to the conference?

Yes, trains arrive in Athlone train station from Westport/Ballina at 09:11, Galway at 08:33 and Dublin Heuston at 09:12. Trains depart at Westport/Ballina at 17:00, Galway at 16:23 and Dublin at 16:05. It's best to reserve a seat at www.irishrail.ie. The conference venue is a six minute walk from the Athlone train station.

Can I travel by bus to the conference?

Yes, Bus Éireann operates services to Athlone bus station. Visit www.buseireann.ie for details. [CityLink Service 763](#) runs between Dublin Airport, Dublin City, and Galway, with the nearest stop at B&Q Arcadia Retail Centre, Athlone (a 25 minute walk from the venue). The conference venue is a six minute walk from Athlone bus station.

How easy is it to access the venue by car?

The venue is: a 3-minute drive from Exit 10 on the M6 Dublin-Galway Motorway, a one-hour drive from the M50 and a 50-minute drive from Galway. There is an underground car park at the venue.

Where in the hotel is the conference?

- Car park: **Level -1**
- Reception: **Level 0**
- Main plenary (Hoey Suite 1, 2 & 3): **Level 1**
- Breakout rooms (Masterclasses):
 - **Level 2:** Burke 1, Burke 2, Grace 3
- Quiet spaces: **Level 2** (Siege Suite & an area outside Grace 1 & 2)
- Outdoor area: **Level 2** (accessible from Siege Suite)

Lifts and stairs provide access to all floors. Toilets and baby-changing facilities are available on each level. Lunch is in La Provence Restaurant on **Level 1**.

Are there electric car charging points?

Six charging stations are on **Level A** of the underground car park.

**Join the conversation
on social media with the
hashtag #NVMC2026**



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To reduce our impact we have reduced the amount of materials we print, if you have a requirement to have a hard copy of this programme please ask at the registration desk.