



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to Consultation to Support the
Community and Voluntary Sector
Department of Rural and Community Development

15 August 2025



A. The Vision

The vision of the current strategy was to create vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities that support the social, cultural and economic well-being of all members.

Is this vision still valid? Do you have any suggested changes to the vision?

89/500 words max

We believe improvements could be made to this vision. Our suggestion for updating this vision is:

"To create thriving, connected communities where people of all ages are supported to live well and have the resources and opportunities to shape their futures together."

Our suggestion is to update this vision so that it references empowerment, social connection and wellbeing, and the tools and supports required to achieve this vision. It also aspires to social cohesion with a reference to 'togetherness', which is an important goal.

B. Mission - what the strategy aims to achieve

The previous strategy identified six high level ambitions to be attained:

- *A thriving community and voluntary sector*
- *A strengthened partnership between Government and the community and voluntary sector*
- *Community supports underpinned by societal value and community need*
- *Resilient communities empowered to meet emerging challenges*
- *Empowered communities informing and shaping responses to their needs*
- *A thriving volunteering culture*

Taking account of the current environment, challenges and priorities for the C&V sector, do these six high level ambitions still reflect the priority for the sector, do you propose any amendments or additional ambitions be included in the new strategy?

438/500 words max

ALONE suggests the following amendments:

A thriving, **sustainable** community and voluntary sector [addition of the word 'sustainable']

- The Community and Voluntary sector provide a range of key supports for older people, from befriending and social inclusion supports, to home care and assistive technologies.
- However, many community and voluntary sector organisations struggle to achieve financial sustainability. A lack of multi-annual funding mechanisms from Governmental organisations prevents medium- and long-term planning, though our organisations are often central to core service delivery (for example, in relation to the HSE home support service).
- A report by TASC and the Wheel detailed increasing staff turnover rates, waiting lists and closures of some services due to inadequate funding (TASC & The Wheel, 2023)
- A lack of funding security can also prevent expansion of services even where demand is clearly identified.

Evidence-based, high-quality community supports underpinned by societal value and community need [addition of 'evidence-backed, high quality']

- It can be extremely challenging for organisations to prove their value and impact, and it is important they should be supported to do so.
- However, it is vital that Government funding goes to services which are shown to be impactful, cost effective and evidence-based. This ensure best use of Government funds,

while also highlighting the services and supports which are most effective for replication, and providing the best quality services possible.

- This is most important for larger organisations whose services are central to core Government service delivery.
- We also suggest the inclusion of 'high-quality' here. Government depends on community organisations and volunteers to provide a range of vital services. In order to do our best for our service users, it is vital that our organisations are enabled to provide high quality services.

Empowered **and connected** communities informing and shaping responses to their needs, **supported at a national level** [addition of 'connected' and 'supported at a national level']

- It is vital that communities are empowered to respond to local needs. However, to ensure this approach is effective, it is equally important that communities are supported at a national level through policy, shared practice, knowledge-sharing, and are involved in development of best practice approaches.
- Communities should also be connected. The use of this word speaks to connection between communities, connection within communities, and access to the tools which support connection (such as digital access).

A thriving, **supported** volunteering culture [addition of the word 'supported']

- Volunteers are at the core of many organisations, including ALONE, and are vital to the operation of a successful community and voluntary sector in Ireland.
- It is our belief that a volunteering culture cannot thrive without also being supported – by staff, organisations and by national policy.

C. Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives which define the scope of the previous strategy were:

- *Strengthen and develop participative approaches to the development of public policy and programming underpinned by an autonomous community and voluntary infrastructure*
- *Support and facilitate communities to participate in community development and local development*
- *Develop and strengthen processes and mechanisms to secure meaningful consultation, inclusion and participation in local, regional and national decision-making structures, particularly by non-engaging and marginalised communities and their representative organisations*
- *Develop capacity of organisations supporting communities to participate in community development and local development, with a specific focus on marginalised communities*
- *Supporting commitments in Our Public Service 2020, develop the strategic and operational capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), including in coordinating, monitoring and supporting community development and local development*
- *Strengthen and build understanding and capacity to meet Public Sector Duty obligations in local government and community and voluntary organisations*
- *Supporting commitments in Our Public Service 2020, continue to develop and strengthen Public Participation Networks as the primary mechanism for communities to engage with local government decision-making*
- *Strengthen and build understanding and capacity to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) National Implementation Plan*
- *Strengthen the Local Economic and Community Plan process, enhancing community participation in the development and implementation of plans and securing more effective collaboration and partnership working nationally, regionally and locally.*
- *Support, develop and enhance capacity in the local government sector in community development and local development*
- *Support community development and local development to engage with Climate Change adaptation and mitigation strategies.*

Which of these strategic objectives do you consider to be most relevant and are there further objectives that should be considered?

472/500 words max

We suggest that the below new objectives are considered for inclusion:

- **Support and develop the capacity of organisations to engage with evaluation and research.**

As described in response to the previous question, improving services' capacity to gather evidence about their impact can ensure best use of Government funds, while also highlighting the services and supports which are most effective for replication. It also enables improvement of our services and delivery of high quality services.

- **Promote and facilitate sustainable funding mechanisms for voluntary and community organisations.**

As described in response to the previous question, a lack of multi-annual funding mechanisms from Governmental organisations often prevents medium- and long-term planning, though our organisations are often central to core service delivery. DRCD can improve this by working with other Government departments, such as the Department of Health, to promote the use of sustainable funding mechanisms for organisations.

- **Support and facilitate the development of digital infrastructure, tools and processes which enhance provision of community and voluntary supports.**

Ongoing improvement and maintenance of current digital infrastructure, such as I-VOL, should be included in the strategy. However, enhancing digital structures within organisations to improve data collection, as well as service efficiency and effectiveness, should also be prioritised. This may be particularly relevant to organisations which have a national reach but are run and managed at local level.

Investing in digital infrastructure offers significant potential to enrich the volunteering experience. Research in England found a "wide ranging consensus among experts, providers, VIOs [Volunteer Involving Organisations] and volunteers that digital tools benefit volunteering" (1). At present this includes volunteer management systems, matching tools, and non-volunteering-specific digital tools and systems in England. The strategy should therefore support the development and adoption of digital tools in Ireland which enhances experiences of volunteering and improve effectiveness within organisations.

- **Facilitate ongoing upskilling, education and training of community and voluntary sector staff and volunteers.**

Ireland requires a highly trained and educated workforce working across industry, and the CV sector is no exception. The continued upskilling and training of CV sector staff and volunteers is vital. A range of opportunities should be provided which cater for all levels, as the training requirements of organisations in the community and voluntary sector can vary widely depending on the size, scale, and services delivered by organisations.. The National Social Enterprise Strategy states that "Higher education institutions have an important role to play in informing the continuous development of policies to support social enterprises through sharing of best practices, research, and analysis" and the same must be applied to the CV sector.

We also believe that the below objective could be further honed:

- Support and facilitate **volunteers and their** communities to participate in community development and local development [addition of 'volunteers']

We believe this objective remains relevant but suggest that it names volunteers.

- (1) 'Digital tools that support volunteering'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-tools-that-support-volunteering/digital-tools-that-support-volunteering>

D. Strategic Actions

The previous strategy included 43 strategic actions/commitments, summarised here:

- *Develop processes for meaningful consultation, inclusion and participation of all communities in decisions that affect them*
- *Develop capacity in community and voluntary organisations to support communities*
- *Support education and training opportunities for community workers, volunteers in community organisations and voluntary board members*
- *Ensure local decision-making and participatory structures are fit for purpose (e.g. PPNs, LCDCs)*
- *Introduce a sustainable funding model for the community and voluntary sector*
- *Develop capacity at all levels to deliver key policy initiatives including UN SDGs, Climate Action and Public Sector Duty*

Considering the current context, challenges and opportunities, what specific strategic actions/commitments do you consider could be included in the new strategy?

Total wordcount: 500/500 words max

ALONE has suggestions for nine strategic actions which could be included in the new strategy. We have proposed these to align with high level aims and strategic objectives outlined earlier in this submission, and the format set out in the current strategy.

The nine actions are:

- Make available social impact measurement best practices, and capacity building supports to community and voluntary organisations.
- Provide training in monitoring and evaluation techniques and good practice and, where necessary, enhance approaches to programme and project assessment, monitoring and evaluation.
- Enhance and develop funding mechanisms for community and voluntary sector organisations to carry out evaluations of their services.
- Scope and develop a sustainable funding model to support the community and voluntary sector, including a multi-annual funding approach and cost-recovery model for public-funded programmes, including costs of compliance and administration.
- Support ongoing improvement and enhancement of the I-VOL online database.
- Improve the Garda vetting system to reduce requirements on community and voluntary sector staff.
- Explore opportunities for improving access to digital infrastructure, including:
 - a) Bring together community organisations, developers and volunteers to discuss opportunities for collaboration and provide a learning and workshop opportunity for digital tools which would be helpful for the sector.

- b) Pilot a fund for community organisations to apply to enhance their current systems and develop digital tools.
- c) Share the learnings from (a) and (b) and develop resources which can inform the work of other organisations.
- Provide access to training and mentoring in areas such as business planning, leadership, board membership, governance, HR / Volunteer management, capacity building, diversification, planning, digital innovation, and artificial intelligence (AI).
- Examine the potential for community and voluntary sector organisations to access Skillnet Ireland's training supports.

Further detail is included in the tables below:

High level aim: Evidence-based, high-quality community supports underpinned by societal value and community need.
Strategic Objective: Support and develop the capacity of organisations to engage with evaluation and research.
<p>Suggested Strategic Action 1: Make available social impact measurement best practices, and capacity building supports to community and voluntary organisations.</p> <p><i>This action is included in the National Social Enterprise strategy, applying to social enterprises. We believe that this would also benefit the CV sector, particularly where matched with training opportunities.</i></p> <p>Suggested Strategic Action 2: Provide training in monitoring and evaluation techniques and good practice and, where necessary, enhance approaches to programme and project assessment, monitoring and evaluation.</p> <p><i>This action was contained within the current strategy, but applying to LCDC staff. We believe that this would also benefit the CV sector.</i></p> <p>Suggested Strategic Action 3: Enhance and develop funding mechanisms for community and voluntary sector organisations to carry out evaluations of their services.</p> <p><i>In general, CV sector organisations depend on their fundraising efforts to afford to commission research. This is often only within the reach of large organisations.</i></p>

High level aim: A thriving, sustainable community and voluntary sector.
Strategic Objective: Promote and facilitate sustainable funding mechanisms for voluntary and community organisations.
Suggested Strategic Action 1: Scope and develop a sustainable funding model to support the community and voluntary sector, including a multi-annual funding approach and cost-recovery model for public-funded programmes, including costs of compliance and administration.

This action is included within the current strategy as a long-term action. It has not yet been achieved. An update on its status would help to inform further actions in the next strategy.

High level aim: Empowered and connected communities informing and shaping responses to their needs, supported at a national level.

Strategic Objective: Support and facilitate the development of digital infrastructure, tools and processes which enhance provision of community and voluntary supports.

Suggested Strategic Action 1: Support ongoing improvement and enhancement of the I-VOL online database.

Suggested Strategic Action 2: Improve the Garda vetting system to reduce requirements on community and voluntary sector staff.

Suggested Strategic Action 3: Explore opportunities for improving access to digital infrastructure, including:

- a) Bring together community organisations, developers and volunteers to discuss opportunities for collaboration and provide a learning and workshop opportunity for digital tools which would be helpful for the sector.
- b) Pilot a fund for community organisations to apply to enhance their current systems and develop digital tools.
- c) Share the learnings from (a) and (b) and develop resources which can inform the work of other organisations.

High level aim: Empowered and connected communities informing and shaping responses to their needs, supported at a national level.

Strategic Objective: Facilitate ongoing upskilling, education and training of community and voluntary sector staff and volunteers.

Suggested Strategic Action 1: Provide access to training and mentoring in areas such as business planning, leadership, board membership, governance, HR / Volunteer management, capacity building, diversification, planning, digital innovation, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Suggested Strategic Action 2: Examine the potential for community and voluntary sector organisations to access Skillnet Ireland's training supports.

Both of these actions are included in the National Social Enterprise strategy, but applying to social enterprises. We believe that this work would also benefit the CV sector.