

Why care about our community and voluntary sector?

Every year over two-thirds of Irish adults – that’s over two million people - participate in the myriad of social, sporting, cultural and humanitarian activities offered by our 19,000 community and voluntary organisations.

You might be surprised to know that community and voluntary organisations employed over 40,000 full-time and 23,000 part-time staff in 2004 - with volunteers providing the equivalent full-time work of a further 31,000 people⁴

Why a manifesto?

Community and voluntary organisations clearly form an important part of the fabric of society. These organisations face similar challenges – they all have to raise funds to survive, they need support and advice, and they have to attract committed volunteers if they are to thrive.

Responding to these shared challenges forms the day-to-day backdrop for people who volunteer and work with community and voluntary organizations. It is time that we supported all this activity in a coherent manner to make these challenges a little bit easier for the people on whom all this community activity depends.

Community and voluntary organizations need to help themselves – but they also need the help of Government and business if they are to thrive:

Our community and voluntary organisations are rightly proud of the voluntary commitment and professional attitude they bring to everything they do. The extensive role identified for the community and voluntary sector in the national agreement Towards 2016 is demanding ever increasing levels of professionalism and accountability from our community and voluntary organisations. The commencement of all sections of The Charities Act 2009 will further increase the demands made on the volunteer directors, board members and trustees on whom responsibility for all this activity depends.

This manifesto outlines what we need to do to provide a supportive and enabling environment for community and voluntary activity.

An environment that supports voluntary activity will help us to create the vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities of place and interest that will underpin a more equal and just Ireland.

³ "The Hidden Landscape: First Forays into Mapping Nonprofit Organisations in Ireland", CNM TCD 2006

⁴ Uncovering the Non-Profit Sector in Ireland: its Economic Value and Significance, O'Donoghue 1999

The Wheel's Policy Objectives

1 We need a **coherent policy framework** and a national development strategy for the community and voluntary sector. Our charities and community and voluntary organisations work constantly to improve their effectiveness in supporting the communities we serve – but this work is hampered by the fragmented nature of government policy towards the sector. We need Government to take the lead and provide a coherent policy framework - including a national development strategy - for the sector. We also need to make sure that spaces for dialogue are available for discussions on sector-development issues between the sector and the State.

2 Government should work with our sector to deliver a **nationwide support-infrastructure** so that our community and voluntary organisations receive the services and supports we need.

3 We need a **new framework for partnership working** between the sector and the state, one that deepens the existing social partnership approach. Many charities and community and voluntary organisations work in partnership with Government bodies to provide essential services and supports for our people. Partnership working is complex and demanding, requiring strong shared understandings by both voluntary and statutory partners if beneficial outcomes are to be maximised for the people and communities we serve. We need a new framework for partnership working that sets out

- the principles that would inform the partnership engagement when community and voluntary organisations work with statutory agencies
- a mechanism to develop, drive implementation, and monitor/review a new agreement
- a new statutory funding regime that makes provision for
 - multi-annual funding that is index-linked to national agreements.
 - Funding that is provided on a full-cost-recovery basis and
 - Funding that includes automatic training and pension budgets for staff.



4

We need to simultaneously develop a strategy to **diversify funding** for the sector. Over 60% of funding for our community and voluntary organisations comes from the state – the sector needs to develop a strategy to diversify this funding mix to avoid becoming over-dependent on statutory support.

5

Government should **involve our communities** in designing our public services. Our community and voluntary organisations provide good locations for government to involve people in designing more responsive public services

6

We need to make sure that the **Charities Act 2009** provides supportive regulation for the community and voluntary sector, and that charities are resourced appropriately to respond to the challenges regulation will pose.

7

The right of charities to engage in **advocacy** activity must be protected.

8

Government should **encourage volunteering** and support voluntary trustees in their work by developing a national policy on volunteering

9

Government should **incentivise private-giving** through extending tax relief on donations

10

Government should introduce a **VAT refund scheme** for charities so that charities can spend all the money they get from donors on beneficiaries

**The above objectives are not listed in any particular order.*

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Supporting and Enabling Voluntary Activity

A manifesto on the cross-cutting needs of community and voluntary organisations

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