

Submission to Ireland's Fourth Open Government National Action Plan

2023-2025

By

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Introduction

Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Ireland recognises that the active engagement of citizens and civil society is an essential element to the co-creation of Ireland's Open Government National Action Plan.

Every two years, Ireland's Open Government Partnership Round Table commits to the co-creation of a National Action Plan that will make the State more transparent, more accountable, and inclusive. These commitments are formulated on the basis of consultation with citizens and civil society.

OGP invited members of the public and civil society to submit their priorities under the following four thematic areas.

Core Thematic Areas

The Open Government Partnership has identified the following core thematic areas/topics for inclusion in the next National Action Plan and has invited the public and civil society, to propose relevant actions in respect of:

1. **Transparency and Accountability in Public Office:** The disclosure of more information on how policies are made and services provided, improving the quality of disclosed information, and improving the access to, and enabling the right to information. Incorporating overarching integrity principles in the areas of rules on public ethics and combatting corruption, regulation of lobbying, campaign finances, civil society freedom, and media integrity.
2. **Citizen Decision-making:** Creating, proposing or improving opportunities, accountability, or capabilities for the public to inform or influence decisions, improving the enabling environment for civil society in order to strengthen participatory democracy. Further development of participatory budgeting, and communication of the benefits of participatory dialogue. For example: Public Participation Networks (PPNs), Participatory Democracy, Participatory Budgeting. Deliberative Democracy e.g. Citizens' Jury, Citizens' Assembly, Deliberative Dialogue.
3. **Public Access to Government Data:** Improving public access to information including more published information, and a more coherent approach to accessing information. Improving information on public contracts and information relating to the environment. Providing access to reporting and statistics relating to Freedom of Information and improving public access and understanding of the justice system.
4. **Strengthening Public Trust in Government:** Including taking specific steps to improve understanding of and access to the Justice system Increasing participation of interested members of the public in informing decision making throughout the policy cycle, via formal public participation and/or broader civic participation. Improving the accessibility to the measures that hold public officials answerable for their actions. Developing open government data guidelines. Increasing the use of plain language protocols in government communication online and in print.

Consultation Process:

The OGP consultation used an online platform for submission asking the broad question - Do you or your organisation have a proposed action or actions that could further enhance the open government values of transparency, civic participation and public accountability?

This broad question was followed by these thematic questions:

- Which theme does your proposed government action relate most closely to?
- What specific action do you think the government should take to make government more open, transparent and accountable in relation to the thematic area?
- How would the proposed action contribute to achieving the objective and making government more open, transparent and accountable in the thematic area?

Basis for Submission

During 2019, Carlow PPN brought community groups together to develop *a shared vision for community wellbeing* for the County of Carlow. Through these meetings and online consultations, community groups were asked what their aspirations were for their community for generations to come. These contributions have formed the '**Vision for Community Wellbeing for the County**'. This guiding Vision informs the work of Carlow PPN Representatives on county policy and decision-making bodies.

What is this Vision for Community Wellbeing?

Although we often think about wellbeing in terms of good physical and mental health, it is also a combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential. It can describe the wider conditions needed by individuals and communities to have a better quality of life, a healthier environment and increased prosperity.

Considering all the aspects of community wellbeing together helped identify actions that can be undertaken by communities alongside local and national governments.

It was developed through an open, participative, transparent process which involved all member groups.

Health – Physical and Mental: Vision:

We are well-informed and educated citizens who are able to actively support our own good health. We have a range of community activities and services involving all generations that protect the vulnerable, prevent isolation and support the mental and physical health of all community members. We have seamless provision of excellent and accountable mental and physical health services across the County.

- We have good provision of high-quality, immediately accessible services to address both mental and physical health needs. All initiatives that support our health are well co-ordinated.

- There is easily available information on health services and supports. Appropriate education on all aspects of mental and physical health and healthy living is provided to all citizens in the County, thereby increasing awareness and reducing stigma.
- Widespread recreational and social activities such as sports and crafts, throughout the County, supports good mental and physical health of individuals and strong, cohesive communities.

Work, Economy and Resources: Vision:

In the County of Carlow we have creative models and supports for enterprise and workers. We have sustainable infrastructure that meets the needs of businesses, workers and the community. Flexible, future-focused training is available for all. Our businesses adopt the highest ethical standards and best practice in all aspects of operation.

- Innovative planning delivers sustainable development; supporting a wide variety of commercial enterprises to include indigenous and social enterprises.
- Our transport and communication infrastructure meets the needs of all.
- Comprehensive business supports are available and fully utilised to energise our economy. Businesses operate in a secure and healthy environment.
- We embrace training from a diverse range of skill sources and institutions which is available to all.

Social and Community Development: Vision:

In the County of Carlow all people are valued and supported. We share our diverse cultures and build strong relationships throughout our communities. There is well-planned infrastructure, housing and community facilities that meet the needs of all citizens. Community services, supports and activities are in place that enable us all to live fulfilled, secure and valuable lives.

- We have a sustainable housing plan that includes flexible and creative measures to meet all housing needs.
- Our vibrant community has access to a variety of spaces that can accommodate multiple needs.
- Citizens are educated and empowered to take leadership roles and actively participate.

Participation, Democracy and Good Governance: Vision:

In the County of Carlow there is meaningful participation in civic society across all age ranges where transparency and accountability are held in high regard. Citizens are properly informed and understand the structures and processes of government and actively engage in these. Proactive local government communicates and engages with communities and demonstrates that it prioritises their wishes and wellbeing. Resources and supports are available for the effective operation and administration of community groups.

- There are mechanisms in place to ensure the voices of all groups in our community are included in decision making that affects them.
- Relevant best practice is adopted in all agencies, organisations and voluntary groups.

Environment and Sustainability: Vision:

Everyone in the County of Carlow is enabled to live sustainably. We are leaders in actively caring for our environment and make wise use of all our assets; natural or made.

- All our citizens have access to continuous education and appropriate upskilling that supports sustainable living.
- Agencies and individuals are committed to protecting our biodiversity, water and air, ensuring we can enjoy these now and into the future.
- Our built environment is well-planned and constructed and designed to be sustainable. It has minimum impact on the natural environment and we make creative use of our built and natural heritage, waterways and urban spaces.
- We are conscious consumers that minimise waste production at all points in production and consumption. We actively repair and reuse goods and materials and recycle wherever possible using accessible, up to date and efficient facilities.
- Sustainable both public and private are available and accessible transport options

Values, Culture and Meaning: Vision:

The County of Carlow is a respectful and inclusive community. We protect and celebrate our historical and multi-cultural heritage. We value and enjoy our built and natural heritage. We thrive as a community rich in arts, local history and culture. All our citizens are empowered and enabled to participate fully in the community.

- We understand the needs of our citizens and have social amenities and activities that support all groups within our communities and their interaction and integration. These are accessible to all.
- The positive impact of our diverse cultures is recognised, valued and supported.
- We have skills and expertise available and accessible to communities and agencies.



This submission is based on what we heard from groups based in County Carlow

Transparency and Accountability in Public Office		
Which theme does your proposed government action relate most closely to?	What specific action do you think the government should take to make government more open, transparent and accountable in relation to the thematic area?	How would the proposed action contribute to achieving the objective and making government more open, transparent and accountable in the thematic area
Accessibility of information	Ensuring a broad range of methods are used to reach people. There is a digital divide emerging in the community with older people not able to use social media, and not being able to/having access to digital technologies. The PPN is well embedded in the community and could be used as the mechanism for communicating to a broad range of people.	This would ensure a broad reach of people to communicate with
Using Plain English as laid out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) https://www.nala.ie/plain-english/	Communiques should be laid out in an easy-to-read format, without 'flowery' language	Easy to understand documents engages people to read and helps them to understand the message being conveyed.

Citizen Decision Making		
Which theme does your proposed government action relate most closely to?	What specific action do you think the government should take to make government more open, transparent and accountable in relation to the thematic area?	How would the proposed action contribute to achieving the objective and making government more open, transparent and accountable in the thematic area
Resourcing of networks, and assemblies E.g. Age Friendly, Citizen's Assemblies, Comhairle Na nOg, Traveller Fora, Sage advocacy etc	Similar to PPNs, other networks are ideally placed to ensure members voices are included in local and national decision making.	This would increase the inputs from a broad range of voices in the community
Encourage use of 'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning & Decision Making'	The guide highlights tried and tested consultation principles to support maximum community engagement with policy development, including a focus on marginalised communities. Incorporate the guide into training programmes - The guide can be incorporated into training programs for government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders involved in local planning and decision-making.	The tools devised in the manual are reliable and easy to follow and have been developed by people who understand this arena very well. This will help to ensure that the principles and practices outlined in the guide are understood and applied in practice.
Encourage understanding and implementation of 'The Values & Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community & Voluntary Sector'	The utilisation of the values and principles will foster respect and understanding between government and community groups.	This will promote collaboration and active citizenship.
Undertake a review of the Strategic Policy Committee Scheme.	The review should start by examining the objectives and mandate of the SPC scheme. This includes assessing whether the scheme is aligned with the overall objectives of the local government and whether it is effectively contributing to the development of local policies and strategies.	The review should assess the effectiveness of the SPC scheme in terms of its structure, governance, and operations. This includes examining the composition and roles of the SPCs, their level of engagement with stakeholders, the effectiveness of their decision-making processes, and the extent to which they are achieving their objectives.
Education on the work of Local Authorities	Create an educational module to be taught in secondary schools about the varied work done by local government.	Creating awareness of the work of Local Authorities may lead to increased civic engagement. and

		in more women coming forward for election
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Public Access to Government Data		
Which theme does your proposed government action relate most closely to?	What specific action do you think the government should take to make government more open, transparent and accountable in relation to the thematic area?	How would the proposed action contribute to achieving the objective and making government more open, transparent and accountable in the thematic area
Increased resourcing of the PPN to facilitate consultation and engagement with the public	PPNs are well placed to share Government data and we share information regularly with our member groups.	PPNs engage with members to facilitate consultations and to help them create submissions. PPNS hold the link between the community and local (and increasingly, Government bodies nationally)
Government websites and information	Make government websites easier to navigate	If websites are easier to navigate, people will engage and trust the information. The Citizens Information website is a good example.

Strengthening Public Trust in Government		
Which theme does your proposed government action relate most closely to?	What specific action do you think the government should take to make government more open, transparent and accountable in relation to the thematic area?	How would the proposed action contribute to achieving the objective and making government more open, transparent and accountable in the thematic area
Ensure that government departments have consistency when there is a change in government	Government should consider the confusion it causes with the constant changing of department names	Consistency is key to good governance and accountability
Working with government	Make sure to provide feedback to people who participated in the creation of plans, strategies and submissions.	This will build relationships, improve trust and appreciation for others work and time.
Citizen participation	Citizen participation in monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating plans and strategies that affect their lives is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance.	Make information readily available: Government should make relevant information about plans and strategies available to the public in a timely and accessible manner. This includes publishing documents, reports, and data related to the plans and strategies, as well as providing regular updates on progress and outcomes. Create independent oversight mechanisms: Independent oversight mechanisms, such as citizen review boards or ombudsman offices, can provide additional accountability and transparency to the process. These mechanisms can investigate complaints, review progress reports, and make recommendations for improvement. Foster a culture of transparency and accountability: Governments and other organizations should work to foster a culture of transparency and accountability, where citizens are empowered to hold

		decision-makers accountable for their actions. This can include measures such as open data policies, whistleblower protection, and public reporting on outcomes and performance.
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End of submission

6.6.2023