

**Community
Development
Programme**



**Clár
Forbartha
Pobail**

Community Development Programme

Autonomy in the Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development



**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
Department of Rural and
Community Development

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Autonomy

[Sustainable Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2024](#), A 5 Year Strategy to Support the Community & Voluntary Sector (SIEC) in Ireland sets out a long-term vision for our communities in Ireland. With actions to be implemented over the next five years, the Strategy sets a general direction of travel for Government policy in relation to community development, local development and the community and voluntary sector for the coming years. It also copper-fastens the renewed relationship and partnership between Government and the community and voluntary sector.

A number of objectives and actions in the Strategy refer to the need to facilitate and promote an autonomous community and voluntary infrastructure.

The current Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, commits to “Introduce, on a phased basis, a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects”¹. To advance this commitment, in 2021, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) announced the introduction of a pilot Community Development Programme ‘to promote an autonomous approach to community work with marginalised communities’².

The aim of the Community Development Pilot Programme is to trial community development initiatives that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promote human rights (SIEC Page 37).

The *5 Year Strategy* refers to Autonomy as follows – Autonomy ensures local organisations can be creative, innovative and flexible in responding quickly to issues as they emerge and evolve, supporting approaches that meet the needs of a diverse society and empowering communities to identify and shape responses to their needs (SIEC Page 21).

Funding was provided by DRCD to 7 Community Development Projects³ under the Community Development Programme to advance this work, with a further 3 projects⁴ included in 2023.

¹ *Our Shared Future*, page 92

² Community Development Pilot Programme, Framework and Guidance Document

³ Donegal Intercultural Project, Inner City Organisations Network, Independent Living Movement Ireland, Longford Roma and New Communities, Clare Travellers CDP, Cultúr Migrants Centre, Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement.

⁴ Amal Women’s Association, AMACH! LGBTI+ Limerick Traveller Network (Hosted by Exchange House Ireland)

Suggested features of autonomy within a community work setting

Key features of an autonomous approach within the understanding and values of community development include the ability of organisations to:

- Develop partnerships and collaborative arrangements and processes within the community sector and cross-sectorally.⁵
- Maintain and express a critical perspective in relation to policy and practice based on experience and practice and informed by work within the communities affected by such policy and practice.
- Advocate and organise collectively for positive social change, including through calls for changes in policy and practice, campaigning and other legal routes.
- Be responsive and flexible to changing and unexpected contexts and emerging challenges⁶
- Identify the most appropriate governance structure and appoint/elect members to that governance structure.

Build a relationship with funding bodies that allows for flexibility in responding to needs and is supportive of the imperative of collective organisation and advocacy and articulating a critical perspective. Funding supports can allow for a degree of flexibility in line with Circular 13/2014 <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/10b42-circular-132014-management-of-and-accountability-for-grants-from-exchequer-funds/>

Policy Overview

Objective 1 in the government strategy [Sustainable Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2024](#) (SIEC) commits to strengthening and developing participative approaches to the development of public policy and programming underpinned by an autonomous community and voluntary infrastructure, through a number of actions, including by:

- developing and sustaining national, regional and local structures and policies that facilitate and promote effective local development, autonomous community development, and meaningful engagement of marginalised communities (action 1.1)

Objective 4 of the *5 Year Strategy* seeks to develop capacity of organisations supporting communities to participate in community development and local development, with a specific focus on marginalised communities, through a number of actions, including by:

- Scoping and developing a sustainable funding model to support the C&V sector, recognising the importance of certain key elements to be considered including the issue of core funding for autonomous community development and local development at local level, including employment of professional community workers (action 4.1)

In so doing, government recognises that “A renewed community-statutory partnership is essential for better outcomes for communities” and highlights the fact that “The partnership, underpinned by strong, autonomous community development and local development structures, can facilitate

⁵ Such as with government departments, state agencies, trade unions and others

⁶ Such as the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and migration

effective interventions for long-term change, with local organisations contributing in a way that Government acting alone cannot” (SIEC Page 20).

Case studies contained in the *Strategy* also highlight the impact of autonomy for meaningful community development to take place.

“... local people are working in local projects such as the new National Children’s Hospital. We need to be independent and autonomous to engage with these types of major projects and ensure there is a community dividend”

“Independence is key to the work of FGU (Fatima Groups United). The community organisation responds to issues in the community as they present themselves – no matter what these are – drugs, unemployment, poor health, and mental health issues – and we need to be independent to do this”.

One of the key values underpinning the strategy is that of collectivity which “recognises the rights of communities and groups, including funded organisations, to work autonomously and maintain a critical voice. It involves seeking collective outcomes in pursuit of a just and equal society” (SIEC Page 37).

The All-Ireland Standards for Community Work⁷ articulate community development as; “a developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision-making in a structured and coordinated way”(SIEC Page 16).

Community workers help to create the conditions where agencies, including local authorities, Government Departments and others, can engage meaningfully and directly with communities (SIEC Page 16).

A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making was launched by the Department in February 2023, this new resource guide has been developed in conjunction with Pobal and the community and voluntary sector, as part of a wider Dormant Accounts Funded project on the engagement of marginalised communities at local level.

The guide is aimed at ensuring that the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities have opportunities to engage and participate in local planning and decision making.

Such inclusive engagement will ensure that their perspectives are reflected in the decisions which affect them and will facilitate more inclusive measures to support sustainable development at a local level.

The Community Development Programme seeks to build positive, collaborative, open and transparent relationships with all stakeholders who have a responsibility and a remit to build an inclusive Ireland. Central to this is a recognition of and respect for the distinct and unique roles of all stakeholders and the importance of ensuring that the conditions are in place that allow them to fulfil these roles with integrity and transparency.

⁷ <https://www.cwi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/All-Ireland-Standards-for-Community-Work.pdf>