



Galway City Community Network
Líonra Pobail Chathair na Gaillimhe

STRATEGIC PLAN

2016 - 2019



Introduction



Galway City Community Network (GCCN) is the network of community, voluntary and environmental organisations and groups active in Galway City. As the Public Participation Network¹ for Galway City, GCCN is the main link through which the local authority, agencies and the state connects with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City.

GCCN Vision

The GCCN vision for Galway City is Galway, a creative and inclusive city that respects and values its people and communities, their wellbeing and quality of life, that will develop a vibrant, sustainable, economy and environment and participative and transparent governance.

¹ Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established in each local authority area in Ireland as part of the process local government reform under the Local Government Reform Act 2014

GCCN Values

The shared values that motivate and guide the priorities that GCCN pursues are:

- **Sustainability** - including valuing, preserving and protecting the natural environment.
- **Equality** - including working in a non-discriminatory way, valuing and respecting diversity, empowering people, and securing people's access to social and economic resources.
- **Culture** - including valuing, empowering, and fostering the diversity of cultures in the city and enabling people to express their creativity.
- **Community** - involving the physical space, identity, and/or interests shared by a group, where people enjoy wellbeing and harmony, organise collectively, and engage in shared creativity.
- **Empowerment** - including representation and participation in decision-making and democracy in the city.
- **Inclusion** - involving fostering and ensuring a sense of belonging to and opportunities to engage with one's community and the city

GCCN Role

The role of Galway City Community Network is to:

- Act as a platform for the groups/organisations engaged in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City to develop policy and positions on issues of common concern to the sectors and to communities and to advocate for these policies and positions to be implemented.
- Facilitate the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors on the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee, other local government and local development bodies and any local, regional, national or international body deemed appropriate by Galway City Community Network.
- Contribute to the development and achievement of a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.

Galway City Community Network:

- Facilitates participation and representation of communities on decision-making bodies in a fair, equitable and transparent manner through the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors on decision making bodies;
- Works to strengthen the capacity of communities and of the environmental, social inclusion, and voluntary groups to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate;

- Provides information relevant to the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors and acts as a hub around which information is distributed and received.

GCCN takes on this mandate in the belief that civil society organisations have a contribution to make that can improve policy *and* have a right to make this contribution.

GCCN is independent and autonomous in its structure and operations. It strives to ensure its voice and the voice of civil society is articulated and heard in policy-making and programme development at local level.

GCCN Purpose

The twin objectives that GCCN pursues are to:

- Advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society.
- Develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy development and implementation.



GCCN Activities

In seeking to advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment, and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society, we will work to:

A. Develop the GCCN as the 'go-to' network to support, empower and enable community participation in policy making and programme development through the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors with:

- The local authority;
- Other relevant state agencies;
- Initiatives emanating from state agencies, including the local authority.

B. Apply and bring forward the GCCN values in:

- Evidence based policy submissions;
- Proofing and responding to policy proposals;
- Developing GCCN policies to be promoted;
- Ongoing review and evaluation of GCCN work.

C. Create civil society alliances, as the need arises, of interested organisations that share GCCN values to bring forward goals such as:

- Sustainability in seeking to achieve an environmentally sound infrastructure in a sustainable city.
- Equality in seeking non-discrimination and accessibility in terms of physical infrastructure, attitudes held, means of communication, and service design and delivery, in a city of equals.
- Culture in seeking a socially engaged arts practice and enabling communities to be creators of culture in a city of community culture.

In seeking to develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy making and programme development, we will work to:

A. Promote participatory forms of democracy in:

- Developing GCCN as an important part of an infrastructure for participatory local democracy such that people and their organisations can inform and influence decision-making that impacts on them.
- Determine the terms of and protocols for engagement between GCCN and the local authority at a senior level.
- Supporting representatives from the environmental, social inclusion, and voluntary sectors to promote GCCN values, make a meaningful impact, and develop their policy influencing capacity.

B. Promote and test out progressive models and approaches in:

- Bringing community based initiatives to the decision makers to consider replication and to provide learning and inform policy making.
- Bringing the policy making process into communities to consider policy drafts or to engage directly with policy makers.
- Bringing policy decisions back to grass roots to explore issues of implementation and enable co-creation in this process of implementation.

C. Engage existing and potential stakeholders to:

- Highlight the role and importance of GCCN and promote the values and approaches of GCCN to existing members.
- Highlight the role and values of GCCN to a variety of organisations and people currently not part of GCCN.
- Outreach and make links to encourage and support organisations to become involved in GCCN, and stimulate and support the engagement and capacity to participate of those organisations that are members of GCCN.
- Build solidarity across the different sectors of civil society.
- Link with like-minded local and regional organisations and with less traditional partners, such as business, where there might be common objectives.

GCCN deploys a range of tools in seeking to achieve these objectives:

▪ Policy Initiatives

- Developing and promoting GCCN policies on issues of shared concern and based on GCCN values.
- Making policy submissions based on GCCN values.

▪ Representative Issues

- Supporting representatives through the development and support for thematic Linkage Groups.
- Enabling shared agendas to be advanced based on the policy positions established by GCCN in a flexible manner and using the GCCN values as a touchstone in responding to policy proposals where there is no such policy initiative.
- Supporting capacity of current and future representatives through training, mentoring, and meetings of representatives.
- Monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes agreed.

▪ Alliance Based Initiatives

- As appropriate to create, support, lead, and/or lend the GCCN name to alliances of civil society organisations pursuing key policy priorities identified by GCCN.

▪ Campaign Initiatives

- Develop GCCN actions to bring forward issues of concern into the policy domain, into local communities, and into the wider population of the city.
- Make full use of the mainstream and social media to promote the work and policy positions of GCCN.

In implementing this plan GCCN will be guided by the following principles:

- **Empowerment:** Empowerment is about participation in GCCN, being heard, and having a voice in the decisions that are made by GCCN.
- **Autonomy:** Autonomy is about the independence of GCCN in the choices that it makes and the importance of a vibrant and independent civil society.
- **Solidarity:** Solidarity is about the relationships built in GCCN between the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors and the different agendas pursued by each.
- **Accountability:** Accountability is about how GCCN sets shared policy positions and is accountable for advancing these, and about transparency in GCCN's work.

In implementing this plan, GCCN will:

- Prepare a detailed set of actions on an annual basis, within the resources available to GCCN.
- Focus on advancing issues prioritised in the plan as well as being sufficiently flexible to respond and react to issues that arise and are deemed a priority.
- Keep the implementation and focus of the strategic plan under review.
- Maintain an independent office and employ staff sufficient to implement the plans of GCCN.

GCCN Structure

GCCN holds four Plenary (membership) meetings a year, one of which is the Annual General Meeting. The Plenary meetings are critically important for GCCN. The membership retains responsibility for all decision-making and the plenary meetings provide the opportunity to discuss issues of importance and adopt policy and/or positions where appropriate.

The GCCN Secretariat is elected at the GCCN Annual General Meeting and is responsible for the management of GCCN activities.

Linkage Groups are subgroups of Galway City Community Network that are convened on a thematic basis. The Linkage Groups discuss and develop GCCN policy, support the GCCN representatives in the thematic area and provide the platform for electing replacement representatives as appropriate.



GCCN Representation

There are three Electoral Colleges in the PPN, social inclusion, environment and voluntary, and each member must opt for membership of one. Members represent GCCN on the following local committees;

- Local Community Development Committee (LECP);
- Strategic Policy Committees:
 - Economic Development, Enterprise Support and Culture SPC
 - Environment, Recreation & Amenity SPC
 - Housing SPC
 - Planning SPC
 - Transportation SPC
- Joint Policing Committee;
- Galway City & County Childcare Committee;
- Western Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force;
- The European Region of Gastronomy.



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Galway City Community Network would like to thank GCCN members for participating in the development of the Strategic Plan and Niall Crowley for his work in facilitating and documenting the process.