

THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE

PROJECT REPORT

August 2010



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Finally we would like to express our appreciation of the opportunity to undertake this project, which has particular significance and resonance for the Community and Voluntary sector at this time.

Owen Keenan
Pat Montague



Executive Summary

The Advocacy Initiative has its origins in a discussion at the Centre for Non-profit Management (TCD) Summer School in 2008, which addressed the theme of *Relationships and Representation: Irish Civil Society at the Crossroads*. This event considered various aspects of the development of the Community and Voluntary sector and its relationship with the State and public agencies. The sector's engagement in, and experience of, advocacy was one element that featured prominently in discussions and Summer School participants agreed to support an initiative to explore the current state of 'advocacy and the sector'. Subsequently, a 'Café Workshop' was held in October 2008 to further examine this question and to test the sector's interest in taking some form of collaborative action on the issue.

At the conclusion of the Café Workshop a small number of individual sectoral leaders indicated their commitment to further action and, through a series of subsequent meetings, a Steering Group of organisational representatives, eventually numbering 17, was formed. Over a period of some months the Steering Group developed a proposal for collaborative action to examine the current status of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations and its impact on the sector's relationships with Government and public agencies. Having sourced philanthropic funding the Steering Group appointed Middlequarter Limited and Montague Communications, following a tendering competition, to jointly manage the first phase of the Initiative.

The motivation that underpins the Advocacy Initiative can be summarised as an interest in exploring the experience, practice and principles of advocacy with the following goals:

- a) To advance knowledge on the current state of advocacy in Ireland;
- b) To provide a perspective on the Community and Voluntary sector's current challenges; and
- c) To contribute to informed debate with the sector and the State

In addition, the origins of the Initiative owed much to a growing view within the sector that government and senior civil servants were becoming increasingly hostile to advocacy. Yet this was a view that was not shared by everyone. So, the Initiative's establishment was prompted by an interest in exploring the idea that there is a threat to advocacy.

The Initiative was established during a period of profound social, political and economic change and, as a result, the context for advocacy today is significantly different from what it was when discussions began. Community and Voluntary organisations are now operating in a resource constrained environment which is



likely to continue for the foreseeable future and where an unintended consequence of successful advocacy is that it can sometimes be won at the expense of some other vulnerable group.

The new context also compels a re-examination of the role of Community and Voluntary organisations in a societal context in which the major institutions including church, politics and business have all lost credibility, some very dramatically. This presents an opportunity to the Community and Voluntary sector to provide leadership and to be more ambitious in considering the potential for a much more fundamental transformation of society.

The activities undertaken in this, the anticipated first phase of the Advocacy Initiative, included the following distinct components:

- **Literature Review**
- **Quantitative Survey**
- **Qualitative Interviews**
- **Forum**
- **Conference**

The output from each of these elements is summarised, and their specific contribution towards addressing the primary goals (see above) that are at the heart of the Advocacy Initiative is identified in Sections 3 to 7 (inclusive) of this report.

In Section Eight, the most significant findings from these disparate elements of the Initiative are synthesised and discussed. The primary insights to emerge include:

- 93% of organisations participating in the quantitative survey (170 organisations out of a sample of 362 – a response rate of 47%) stated that they engage in advocacy, and most (73.7%) are currently doing more advocacy than they were five years ago;
- Overwhelmingly, 86% of survey respondents believe the environment for advocacy is becoming more challenging;
- In spite of the perception that advocacy is under threat, more than 56% of respondents stated that they have not experienced any real or threatened (implicit or explicit) loss of funding or opportunity arising from their advocacy activity;
- The level of understanding of Community and Voluntary organisations as to how the policy making system works in Ireland is variable;
- Policy makers and observers agree that there is an imbalance in the extent to which Community and Voluntary organisations are critical of Government against its acknowledgement of progress and provision of solutions;
- The issue of respect is a major bone of contention between policy makers and advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations;

- There is a need for advocates to become more strategic and proactive – and more realistic in the context of the current economic circumstances;
- The legitimacy of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is based on the twin democratic rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech;
- Advocacy organisations help to address some of the democratic deficits that are created by the representative model of democracy – they are indispensable intermediaries, but the space they occupy is often contested;
- Very few of the policy makers interviewed had developed a clear and considered view on the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in a democratic society;
- It was accepted almost universally by the interviewees that state funding of Community and Voluntary organisations does impose some element of constraint on such organisations in terms of how they approach their advocacy work. However, differing views were expressed on the extent of the constraints involved and how they actually impact on advocacy;
- Policy makers and observers believe that there is a need for greater coordination amongst Community and Voluntary organisations, possibly along the lines of the trade union movement and employers' bodies; although the need for greater coordination is accepted amongst advocates, the notion of one overarching organisation for Community and Voluntary organisations is seen as misguided;
- Community and Voluntary organisations would seem to welcome the idea of a formal Code of Conduct or a Framework of Understanding for managing the relationship between the State and such organisations. Policy makers do not seem to have engaged much with this concept yet.

The Forum and Conference provided opportunities to share findings and engage in discussion with significant numbers of Community and Voluntary sector colleagues. There was broad endorsement of the veracity of the research and, although some of the findings are challenging, there was a general acceptance that they provide an important overview of the current state of advocacy in Ireland, including how policymakers and external observers perceive this advocacy. Equally, these events were also important opportunities to access a more in-depth and nuanced perspective from advocacy activists that included:

- While organisations could be more effective in their advocacy, they are performing reasonably well given the resources at their disposal;
- The deficits in understanding of the policy making system are real and need to be addressed;
- There was an acceptance that the majority of Community and Voluntary organisations are not being 'persecuted' due to their advocacy; however some organisations are experiencing difficulties in their relations with some parts of the state;

- Although lack of respect from some state institutions is a real and pressing issue, Community and Voluntary organisations have to persevere in their advocacy work;
- There is a strong body of opinion that the Advocacy Initiative should continue with its work.

In considering the considerable and rich tapestry of data and perspective gathered in the course of the first phase of the Advocacy Initiative, the authors have identified the following challenges for the sector:

- To develop a common and shared definition of advocacy;
- The issue of threats to advocacy organisations, whether explicit or implicit, remains important for some organisations and therefore for the sector, and requires further exploration and investigation;
- To address the question of the legitimacy and role of advocacy and to forge more respectful relationships between advocates and policymakers, possibly by way of a Compact, or similar device;
- To bring greater coherence to advocacy work, possibly through increased coordination, alliance working and consolidation of organisations;
- To address major skill and knowledge deficits, e.g. in terms of how the policy making system works, and how to bring the voice of members and service users to the fore in advocacy;
- To access adequate resources to address these deficits and to ensure that skilled personnel and appropriate funding are available to Community and Voluntary organisations to support effective advocacy;
- To develop mechanisms to more accurately measure and assess the effectiveness of Community and Voluntary organisations' advocacy work;
- To examine the possible constraining impact of legislative provisions, including the Electoral Act and the Charities Act, on advocacy.

Based on consideration of the data and perspectives gathered, and these identified challenges, we make the following recommendations for the Advocacy Initiative and to the sector as a whole (see Section Nine):

1. Defining Advocacy

There is a clearly identified need to develop a common and agreed definition of advocacy. This definition would need to be situated in the context of democratic theory in order to demonstrate clearly the legitimacy of, and necessity for, NGO advocacy in a modern developed democracy. Such a definition would need to specify and define the main components of advocacy including lobbying, public campaigning and media relations. In carrying out this exercise, the sector should be open to exploring the use of new terms – rather than “advocacy” – if they receive widespread support.



2. Research

The requirement for more research on a number of fronts was clearly identified during Phase One of the Initiative and we are recommending that the following pieces of research be undertaken in a possible Phase Two:

(a) While 56% of organisations said that they had not experienced threats, clearly a substantial number of NGOs have reported being threatened – or feeling threatened – because of their advocacy. We believe it is necessary to undertake a more sophisticated and in-depth analysis of this issue. For example, such an analysis would need to examine if such threats are experienced across the board or in particular sub-sectors and try and establish why this might or might not be the case.

(b) Further research is required in order to develop common tools and processes for evaluating the effectiveness or otherwise of NGO advocacy. Indeed, developing common and agreed definitions and measurements of what constitutes effectiveness will be required.

(c) Having settled on what constitutes effectiveness, research is also needed into the advocacy methods and approaches that are proving to be most effective and the correlation between the level of resources being invested and real or perceived outcomes. This research should also look at how the sector compares in terms of effectiveness with other sectors like business and trade unions. A tangible outcome of this research should be the development of a suite of case studies of ‘effective’ advocacy.

(d) To enable the research to maximise its reach into the sector it will be necessary to develop and maintain a comprehensive electronic database of Community & Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy.

3. Resources/Knowledge/Skills

The need to improve the knowledge and skill levels of NGO advocates was acknowledged by virtually all who took part in the Advocacy Initiative. The following are some of the areas that require action:

(a) Development of an up-to-date information resource (for example a book or online toolkit) on how the process of policymaking actually works in Ireland and the provision of information/training courses in this area.

(b) Development and delivery of training in campaigning and advocacy skills, including the development of a manual. This training programme should include the use of new media and the role that service users or clients should play in advocacy. It should also focus on the examples or case studies of effective campaigns developed under Recommendation 2.c above.

(c) The notion of greater coordination of the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations has gained some momentum during this phase of the

Advocacy Initiative. However, there is no consensus as to what shape such coordination should take. As a first step, and with a view to stimulating wider discussion, we recommend the creation of a repository or shared space where the network of NGO advocates can provide mutual support to each other. Some specific ideas that emerged from the Conference that are worth exploring are the development of mentoring relationships, an online portal for sharing resources and ideas, an annual conference on advocacy, and a regular e-newsletter.

4. Building Relationships

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the research was the strong sense of a lack of respect experienced by both NGOs and policy makers in their relationships with each other:

(a) Much of this arises from a lack of understanding of the pressures that both sides are working under. In order to create more understanding we recommend that a series of informal and 'off the record' encounters be created between groups of NGO advocates and senior policy makers.

(b) In addition, we recommend that a sector-wide dialogue be undertaken to identify and agree on what constitutes principles of good advocacy practice with a view to developing a Code of Conduct that would be promoted within the sector and would, in turn, help shape the sector's relationship with the State.

5. Legislative/Policy Issues

A number of interviewees and participants at the Forum and Conference raised questions about the constraints being placed on NGO advocacy by service level agreements with the public sector as well as the Electoral and Charities Acts. We recommend that legal expertise be retained to examine these issues and to make recommendations for policy or legislative change that the NGO sector can pursue.

6. Taking Ownership

In order for these recommendations to be acted upon, ownership needs to be taken of this process. It is clear from the conference feedback that there is a strong consensus that the Advocacy Initiative should continue in some shape or form. This view is strengthened by the high levels of participation in all of the Initiative's activities – including by senior leaders within the sector. On these bases, we recommend that the Initiative continue and take the lead in implementing these recommendations.

Section One: Background

The Advocacy Initiative was established by a group of Community and Voluntary organisations with the aim of exploring the principles, practices and experience of policy advocacy by organisations in their sector. It owes its origins to deliberations at the Centre for Non-profit Management (TCD) Summer School in 2008 which addressed the theme of *Relationships and Representation: Irish Civil Society at the Crossroads*. This event considered various aspects of the development of the Community and Voluntary sector and its relationship with the State and public agencies. The sector's engagement in, and experience of, advocacy was one element that featured prominently in discussions and Summer School participants agreed to support an initiative to explore the current state of 'advocacy and the sector'. Subsequently, a 'café workshop' was held in October 2008 in All Hallows College. The workshop sought the views and drew on the experience of people in the sector around the question of 'advocacy and the non-profit or civil society sector'. A copy of the report on the workshop is available at <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/advocacy.php>

At the end of the workshop Kieran Murphy, National Director, Society of St Vincent de Paul extended an invitation to others with a similar interest in developing thinking on this question to contact him. This resulted in a number of meetings taking place leading to the setting up of a Steering Group to lead the project and agreement on Terms of Reference for a proposed Advocacy Initiative.

The Steering Group comprises 17 organisations¹ that came together in late 2008 to form the Initiative. The organisations reflect a wide range of voluntary and community organisations. They spent the first nine months determining the nature and goals of the Initiative, in agreeing terms of reference for a research project and exploring potential sources of funding. They succeeded in attracting funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and, following a tendering competition, awarded the contract for managing the Initiative's first phase jointly to Middlequarter Limited and Montague Communications in December 2009.

¹ Members of the Advocacy Initiative Steering Group are: Kieran Murphy, Chair (National Director, Society of St Vincent de Paul), Caroline Fahey (Society of St Vincent de Paul), Frances Byrne (One Parent Exchange Network), Anthony Carrick (Disability Federation of Ireland), Sheila Nordon (Irish Charities Tax Reform), Noeline Blackwell and Edel Quinn (Free Legal Aid Centres), Mike Allen (Focus Ireland), Ava Battles (Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups), Noeleen Hartigan (Amnesty), Mary McDermott, Kathleen O'Meara (Irish Cancer Society), Lorna Jennings (Irish Cancer Society), Patrick Burke (Simon Communities of Ireland), Sheila Cannon (Glencree), June Tinsley (Barnardos), Eugene Flynn (54 Degrees), Andrew O'Regan (Centre for Non-profit Management), David Lynch (Community Worker's Co-Op); Siobhan O'Donoghue (Community Platform), Judy Dunne (Consumers' Association of Ireland)

Purpose

The organisations that came together to establish the Advocacy Initiative shared a number of experiences and concerns:

- They shared a conviction that a developed and robust civil society sector is critical to contemporary forms of participative democracy, and a concern that within the Irish context generally there is a lack of clarity and understanding about the importance of this role and the types of processes that are vital to its conduct. The Advocacy Initiative sought to address this problem, viewing advocacy as a key tool in a functioning civil society.
- They were aware that advocates and advocacy organisations were very busy doing advocacy but that there was very little opportunity for a shared reflection on their activity. While there had been reflections and reviews on specific campaigns and in particular organisations, there was little structured reflection about advocacy within the wider sector. They sought to begin with a simple question: *What is your experience of being an advocate and doing advocacy?* and, from that starting point, to build up a picture of advocacy at this point in time.
- They were conscious of a growing view within the sector that the government and senior civil servants were becoming increasingly hostile to advocacy, were prepared to use their power to frustrate some advocacy efforts and in some cases to actually undermine organisations. Yet this was a view that was not shared by everyone. So, one of the concerns that prompted the Initiative's establishment was to explore the idea that there is a 'threat to advocacy'.
- The organisations involved recognised that, while they all use the term advocacy, they sometimes mean very different things by it. They wanted to get a better understanding and shared agreement of the role of advocacy in a democracy.
- They also wanted the Initiative to explore the experience of advocacy from the perspective of those who were on the receiving end of advocacy – the politicians and senior civil servants – as well as from the perspective of those who were doing the advocacy. Otherwise it was felt that it would be unbalanced and would leave an important piece of the advocacy context unexplored.
- They were also conscious that the sector is doing a great deal of advocacy – but this begs the question, how effective is this advocacy, and how might it be enhanced further?

In summary, the Steering Group shared an interest in exploring the experience, practice and principles of advocacy and sought to:

- a) Contribute to the body of knowledge on the question of advocacy at a sectoral



level;

b) Generate informed debate within the sector, and with the State;

c) Enhance capacity in exercising advocacy within the sector through a range of measures, for example, through the promotion of best practice “Rules of Engagement”.

It is relevant to acknowledge the particular timeliness of the Advocacy Initiative. Although it seemed an important undertaking in June 2008 – which we now know to have been post-boom, pre-recession Ireland – the context for advocacy today is significantly different from what it was then. Community and Voluntary organisations are now operating in a resource constrained environment, where the public finances are shrinking and likely to be in poor state for at least the next 5 – 8 years and where an unintended consequence of successful advocacy now is that it can sometimes be won at the expense of some other vulnerable group. This unintended consequence is a new feature of advocacy that has to be taken into account.

The new context also compels a re-examination of the role of Community and Voluntary organisations in a societal context. Ireland is going through significant changes where the major institutions including church, politics and business have all lost credibility, some very dramatically. This presents an opportunity to the Community and Voluntary sector to provide leadership as the values and attitudes of Irish society are being reshaped. Much of our advocacy efforts are focused on achieving progress in particular areas of policy – youth, older people, income adequacy, homelessness, or disability to name but a few. Yet the current climate offers an opportunity to be more ambitious and consider a much more fundamental transformation of society.

Section Two: Methodology

Terms of Reference

Following a tendering competition Middlequarter Limited and Montague Communications were jointly awarded the contract for the management of the first phase of the Advocacy Initiative with the following terms of reference:

- Identify principles and diverse models of advocacy used internationally across the public, private and 3rd sectors in the context of the role of Civil Society in contemporary democracies.
- Draw on the experience of international experts in this area
- Convene a Forum to consider the future practice of effective advocacy in Ireland.
- Describe and distil the contemporary practices of advocacy i.e. what is done, how is it done, and is there a problem?
- Review the role, practice and function of civil society advocacy from several perspectives
- Determine if there is a problem regarding organisations' ability to advocate as a direct result of government/public sector policy and intervention
- Assess the nature and extent of such a problem.
- Explore the subjective experiences of advocates.
- Convene a forum of stakeholders, and a Conference aimed at a wider audience, to examine and explore implications of the research findings.
- Develop a proposal for a follow on project to enhance sectoral capacity and promote effective advocacy amongst key actors (community and voluntary sector organisations, statutory agencies, elected representatives, government and civil servants).

Methodology

The methodology had several distinct components as follows:

Desk research

International literature was reviewed in order to locate the work of the Advocacy Initiative within current international perspectives that include definitions; the importance of advocacy by civil society actors within democracies and its



contribution to their mission fidelity; how civil society advocacy impacts on relations between these actors and the state; and how these relations might be managed productively. A summary of this desk research will be found in Section Three.

Quantitative Survey

An online survey of a sample of 362 Community and Voluntary organisations was undertaken in February and March 2010. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Project Management Group, which also approved the final version. The questionnaire may be found at Appendix 1. At the beginning of the questionnaire respondents were informed that the focus of the Initiative is on advocacy to influence policy, legislation and the provision of resources and/or services – rather than advocacy on behalf of individuals. Examples of advocacy given were lobbying, campaigning, making submissions, influencing politicians and officials, public information and raising public awareness, press releases, press conferences, media interviews, demonstrating, petitioning, etc. Using the SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) survey tool, the questionnaire was issued on 16th February 2010 with a covering letter from the Chair of the Initiative. Two reminders were subsequently sent, on 23rd February and 2nd March, and the survey was finally closed on 16th March. A total of 170 community and voluntary organisations responded to the questionnaire – a response rate of 47%. The results of the survey are summarised with accompanying graphs in Section Four.

Qualitative Interviews

In addition to the quantitative survey, in-depth interviews were undertaken with nine Community and Voluntary sector leaders of organisations of different size, areas of focus and parts of the country. A further twelve in-depth interviews were undertaken with a variety of individuals with a specific perspective on advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations. These observers included politicians, party officials, senior civil servants, senior personnel of state agencies, philanthropy, and interested observers drawn from social partners and the media. These interviews were primarily undertaken during March and April 2010 and followed a Discussion Guide (see Appendix 2) that had been previously agreed with the Project Management Group. Section Five comprises an overview of these qualitative interviews.

Forum

A Forum of almost 50 organisations drawn from the sector was held in All Hallows, Dublin on the afternoon of 25th March 2010 based on an adapted form of the café workshop model. The Forum was therefore highly participative. It sought to stimulate discussion and elicit participants' current experience of advocacy and their ideas for making advocacy by the sector more effective and productive. Section Six provides a summary of the discussion and output from the Forum.

Reference Group

A Reference Group of twelve members was invited to assist in interpreting the results arising from the quantitative and qualitative data and the outputs from the Forum. The Reference Group comprised broadly equal representation from the Steering Group and others with a perspective on advocacy by the Community and Voluntary sector and/or with a detailed knowledge of the political system and process. The Group met on one occasion, on 27th April, and had been provided with a summary of the data in advance. The contributions of the Reference Group members assisted in the formulation of conclusions arising from the research undertaken for the Initiative.

Conference

The final activity in Phase 1 of the Advocacy Initiative was a conference for representatives of Community and Voluntary organisations held in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin on 10th June 2010. Participation in the Conference was free and the event was over-subscribed with approximately 130 participants. An overview of the research findings was presented and this was augmented by the presentation of three perspectives by three members of the Steering Group. There was a high level of participation both in discussion groups and plenary sessions, which focused both on participants' experience of advocacy and how it could be improved, and on their views on potential next steps for the Advocacy initiative. A summary of the Conference presentations and discussion will be found in Section Seven.

Section Three: The Literature on Advocacy

In order to ground the research for this phase of the Advocacy Initiative within current national and international perspectives on advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations, Brian Dunphy, the Research Assistant to Middlequarter and Montague Communications undertook a detailed literature review. It's important to point out to readers of this report that there is relatively little academic literature addressing advocacy from an Irish perspective, so, by necessity, much of the material relied upon here originated from the United States of America, as well as Australia, Britain and South Africa, and reflects the experience of advocacy in their particular contexts.

The review addressed a number of different areas:

- Definitions of advocacy;
- The role of advocacy in a democracy;
- Importance of advocacy to NGOs and their mission in society;
- How advocacy impacts on NGOs' relations with the State;
- How these relationships are managed.

The material below demonstrates that many of the debates and issues that have emerged through the research on this phase of the Advocacy Initiative are also very current in the academic discourse around advocacy.

Definitions of Advocacy

The range of organisations that could be considered as part of civil society is wide indeed and academic efforts to refine the definition of this “confusing agglomeration” continues (Frumkin 2002; Martens 2002). However the concept of advocacy provides a useful parameter with which to define the different ways Community and Voluntary organisations attempt to add to the “public good”. Implicit in the choice of terminology is the understanding that such organisations are engaged in extra-parliamentary representation or policy advocacy work and are a relatively small subset of the broader ‘third sector’ (Lyons 2001). Cohen has defined advocacy as the pursuit of influencing outcomes — including public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions — that directly affect people’s current lives (2001).

Advocacy activity includes a diversity of strategies. It may include ‘insider’ approaches, in which organisations participate within official policy-making spaces, such as through writing submissions to government and sitting on government

committees. It may also include more 'outsider' approaches, such as the more radical activities of street protests or occupying spaces (Carbert 2004). Organisations that engage in advocacy do so on behalf of the interests they represent. Their hope is that by engaging in the public sphere, they will influence 'public policy or the decisions of any institutional elite' (Casey et al. 2008). Hence, advocacy organisations are political, or as Marian Sawer writes, it is their job to 'get up the government's nose' (2002). The point of these organisations is not simply to do the work of government; it is to *change* the work of government. Their intent is to influence change or to shore up support for an existing position and they are likely to encounter some form of opposition because advocacy can affect other stakeholder's interests.

Community and Voluntary organisations' advocacy work is grounded in the premise that social change occurs through politics and that the power of the State can be moved to act on behalf of people (Reid 1999). Organisations that engage in advocacy articulate policy positions on behalf of citizens or interest groups. They direct their efforts at a range of audiences and seek to use ideas and speech to shape the environment in which they operate. If one's aim is to shape public priorities, some believe advocacy is a way of achieving substantial leverage. While direct service programmes change the world one client at a time, advocacy efforts focus on broad changes in systems and policy. It works like the wholesale part of the nonprofit sector. The reason it creates leverage is simple, instead of converting nonprofit resources into units of service on a one-to-one basis, advocacy work takes a small number of resources and tries to multiply their impact by changing public priorities. The appeal is that many issues are so broad and intractable that their resolution would require government action at a national level over a long period of time. Nonprofit activity may create useful models but achieving scale and mobilising resources are difficult tasks for a sector that does not have the state's enforcement power and relies on voluntary action (Frumkin 2005).

Lobbying, which is a part of the broader repertoire of advocacy work, is a form of action that, relates to influencing a specific piece of legislation or a quite specific policy process, like the annual budgetary process. While trade associations generally use paid professionals, Community and Voluntary organisations tend to rely on mobilizing networks of volunteers. Critical to success in lobbying is knowledge of the issues and personal contacts with decision makers. It requires knowledge about the legislative or policy making process; an understanding of the details of the piece of legislation or piece of policy and its effects on legislators' constituents; and a strategy for communicating with concerned citizens at the grassroots level. The type of lobbying carried out is usually related to the type of organisation carrying out the work (Berry & Arons 2005).

Role in a Democracy

Frumkin (2002) argues that public life has become atomised and alienating because of the success of narrow interest groups, which have separated citizens from politics by promising to act on their behalf. The failure of interest group pluralism to resolve long running public problems is apparent. One of its great unfulfilled promises was that it would represent everyone. Experience has shown however that representation is not necessarily a good substitute for participation. The level of citizen participation is a critical issue in any democracy. Without adequate involvement at all the levels of political decision-making, there is a real risk that legitimacy and support for public decisions will fade.

Frumkin roots the legitimacy of Community and Voluntary organisations' advocacy in the twin rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech. While such organisations often have an adversarial relationship with government, the diverse forms of their political activity are still guaranteed government protection under the principles of free speech. No matter what cause they seek to advance, Community and Voluntary organisations do not risk the loss of their protected status as long as they follow a few basic rules i.e. complying with defamation laws, laws relating to the incitement of hatred and health and safety laws, when exerting their fundamental rights to speech and association. There is no test of reasonableness when it comes to the political views of such organisations, nor are there prohibitions on coalitions forming behind any peaceful cause imaginable. This has led to the advocacy of policies and agendas that have been controversial, often because they challenge the majority positions. Still, law and public policy have affirmed that the role of Community and Voluntary organisations in the political arena is a good in itself. Beyond protecting speech and association by enacting and enforcing laws, government also promotes this work by funding and supporting nonprofits that engage in all kinds of political work both domestically and abroad.

Community and Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy can all be considered to offer some degree of compensation for what Hindess (2002) describes as the 'democratic deficit', the insurmountable design flaw in the parliamentary system of representative democracy. Such organisations provide 'democratic legitimacy' when they are involved in public policy processes that see citizens as central to solving community problems (Rawsthorne 2004); they reduce the social isolation that leaves people vulnerable (Pixley 1998); and they enhance public accountability and participation through opening up state administration to a democratically conceived 'citizen-based community' (Yeatman 1998). Far from being an anathema of democracy, as public choice theorists would have it (see for example Buchanan and Tullock 1999 [1962]; Buchanan 1999 [1969]; Rowley et al. 1988), there is widespread support for the view that the extra-parliamentary representative role that Community and Voluntary organisations play when they act as advocates in public policy processes is, in fact, essential to a healthy democracy.

They are 'indispensable intermediaries' between community and government (Melville 2003) conveying important information about the needs and preferences of a wide range of groups in the community to governments that would otherwise remain remote and uninformed. Community and Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy provide the means and opportunities for otherwise marginalised citizens to make claims on government between elections. Indeed, as Verspaandonk (2001) has suggested, it is a legitimate expectation that a 'well-functioning democracy' will 'grant citizens the right to be consulted between elections about the work of government'. Community and Voluntary organisations provide one very important consultative mechanism that contributes to democratic governance.

Even those who do not access the services of Community and Voluntary organisations engaged in advocacy do themselves benefit from living in a community in which these organisations operate because an active Community and Voluntary sector maintains a democracy that is both participatory and deliberative. A participatory model of democracy demands the participation of individuals and groups; a deliberative model explains how it is they should participate. Both are important because they recognise the public to be agents, not 'passive subjects to be ruled' (Gutmann and Thompson 2004). Edwards describes participatory governance as being about collaborative relationships; specifically about the role of non-government players, beyond delivering services to a role in the policy development process. It requires structures and arrangements that support effective relationships across public, private and community sectors as they collaborate in decision-making processes towards agreed objectives (Edwards 2002).

A participatory and deliberative democracy requires Community and Voluntary organisations to take an active role in public debates and in policy-making, thus ensuring that 'those affected by a collective decision' are able 'to deliberate in the production of that decision' (Dryzek and List 2003). Community and Voluntary organisations engaged in advocacy do this in a number of ways. They speak up for the interests of marginalised groups. This function is particularly important since many groups within the community can be considered 'electorally unpopular' (Sawer 2002) and may lack the influence and/or means to speak for themselves. Their extra-parliamentary involvement in the political process also acts as a check against stronger, better-organised and better-financed interests. Organisations such as business councils, employer groups and trade unions are influential enough to have their interests heard in policy-making arenas but Community and Voluntary organisations can provide a counter to their ability to dominate the process. The participation of such organisations in the policy making process may decrease the likelihood of public policy mistakes occurring by the simple fact that the involvement of more people, particularly experts, within decision-making spaces 'provides an opportunity for advancing both individual and collective understandings' (Gutmann and Thompson 2004).

Importance of Advocacy to Community and Voluntary organisations and their mission in society

Frumkin (2002) argues that advocacy forms an essential cog in the machinery of Community and Voluntary organisations on two fronts:

1. It is a means by which organisations achieve their mission goals. Depending on the organisation, advocacy will either form the basis for its existence or an instrument to achieve more favourable conditions conducive to service provision.
2. Advocacy also enables constituency representation. If the representation of the interests of a membership or a constituency can be counted as a mission of a Community and Voluntary organisation, then advocacy is an essential means by which the organisation can achieve its goals. Many organisations that provide services to a particular group in society will naturally evolve towards advocacy over a period of time in order to try and resolve the structural deficiencies at the root of the issues they are confronting on the ground. The reason for this is that as organisations provide a service or solution to a social need they will become familiar with the issues at play and formulate more efficient solutions to the underlying causes of the problems.

Frumkin puts forward opposing models of demand and supply rationale to explain the driving force behind Community and Voluntary activity. From the former perspective, the necessity of advocacy work by such organisations arises from the demand in society for Community and Voluntary organisations to address urgent social need not tended to by government. From the supply perspective, it is the advocacy and vision of social entrepreneurs and nonprofit actors that define the direction of Community and Voluntary activity. Nonprofit advocacy is an important instrument for the accomplishment of tasks that communities view as important. Through these it acquires a powerful value. It becomes a concrete tool to achieve some collective purpose that society considers important. The sector's instrumental value is measured in terms of its concrete outcomes. The idea that Community and Voluntary organisations are valuable because they can be useful tools for the accomplishment of public purposes constitutes the "instrumental dimension" of the 'sector'. Community and Voluntary organisations can also be seen as valuable because they allow individuals to express their values and commitments. This "expressive dimension" answers a powerful urge. The attempt to address a need or fight for a cause can be a satisfying end unto itself. The normative rationale for Community and Voluntary activity lies in the powerful expressive character of the work such organisations carry out. By underscoring the fact that nonprofits embody and allow for the expression of important values and commitments, this alternative rationale for Community and Voluntary organisations has significantly highlighted the gulf between such organisations and the more instrumental dimension of profit-seeking work. This expressive function constitutes a critical component of why Community and Voluntary organisations came into existence and how they operate.

Capturing and taking advantage of the expressive function is critical to the success of the instrumental function. However, it is difficult to measure and therefore often overlooked. Community and Voluntary organisations are full of people who seek to do works that are not only good for society in general but also in line with their own beliefs and values. They represent a way to connect work with core beliefs. Frumkin believes this insight supports the supply argument that it is the advocacy of Community and Voluntary actors that drives forward nonprofit activity. The idea that there might be a moral dimension to such organisations is significant because it allows Community and Voluntary organisations to distinguish themselves from the state and chart for themselves a new direction. The value content of nonprofits is in fact their “value added”, which gives Community and Voluntary activity its worth and justifies the effort and expense needed to support it.

Expressive activity is directly gratifying action for the sake of the action itself. David Mason (1996) argues that Community and Voluntary organisations can succeed more fully in their instrumental purposes if they harness and cultivate expressive behaviour. Finding ways of enabling workers to connect personally with their work and express themselves through their organisation can be a powerful way of motivating them to work for instrumental purposes. Without an expressive component, Community and Voluntary organisations can slowly turn into close analogs of bureaucratic public sector agencies or of unimaginative businesses.

However, as Staples (2007) argues, Community and Voluntary organisations cannot ask any government to give them legitimacy. That legitimacy only comes from a model of democracy in which such organisations contribute to a vigorous public sphere, in which there is a contestation of ideas and reasoned argument and where Community and Voluntary organisations and the social service sector are valued for their social and democratic contribution. Community and Voluntary organisations do not need to deviate from their core purposes to achieve this end but they should be looking for opportunities to re-engage in the public sphere and in so doing, when appropriate, to note the democratic role they play. Raising the value of such organisations in the eyes of the public will strengthen their hands in any negotiations with government. It must always be remembered that governments will change and new governments will not continue the initiatives of their predecessors. Only by re-instituting Community and Voluntary organisations in the mind of the public as a key democratic player will a bulwark be constructed against the vagaries of changes of government and any future attempts to undermine their important role in our society.

How advocacy impacts on relations between the Community and Voluntary organisations and the State

It is difficult to decipher whether it is the manner in which advocacy is conducted or the viewpoints held by stakeholders in the process of advocacy that more forcefully

defines the nature of the relationship between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state. Depending on the particular context, the answer probably lies somewhere in between. One thing is clear, relationships between individuals are what define relationships between institutions and hence between sectors. Taliaferro & Ruggiano (2010) argue that successful relationship building with policymakers requires strategy development and skills. Hence, relationship building should be viewed within Community and Voluntary organisations as a set of activities that should be formally integrated into an organisation's objectives and strategic planning. In addition, these activities should be viewed as professional skills that can be further developed through training and further education. Maddison & Denniss (2005) argue that the attitude held by government is the deciding factor in determining state/sector relations. Governments tend to seek out a certain sort of advocacy work performed by Community and Voluntary organisations as it can contribute expertise that government agencies do not necessarily possess. In this situation, advocacy more generally occurs 'through predetermined institutional channels' than through the 'range of collaborative and confrontational strategies' (Casey & Dalton 2006) organisations may otherwise employ. Both forms of advocacy, 'insider' and 'outsider', expose organisations to the mood of the government of the day. Because they are engaged in the political arena, at some point they are likely to be critical of those in power, or indeed of those who might one day be in power. If they annoy certain individuals through public criticism or by appearing too 'cosy' with political opponents, they may find that they no longer have access to policy-making spaces and hence are constrained in their capacity to advocate.

Habib (2007) sets out how the political recalibration of the post apartheid political elites brought about a situation where different types of Community and Voluntary organisations operate and relate to the government in different ways. Those acting in a service provision role, which tend to be organisations that formed before the fall of the apartheid regime, generally have more collegiate relations with the state. These relationships have also been criticised as being contractually subservient (Price 1995). Social movement organisations that have arisen subsequent to the African National Congress (ANC) assuming executive power have had a far more confrontational relationship with government. They have emerged to counter perceived deficiencies within contemporary South African society and therefore hold the present government responsible for such. Habib suggests when it comes to the balance of power in relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state that these organisations can interact with government on a relatively equal footing when compared with their service providing counterparts. He suggests their presence injects a substantive uncertainty into the political system that is essential to maintain accountability on the part of a democratically elected government. Their independence from government influence is what gives them influence over the government.

Because of the nature of what advocacy practitioners are trying to achieve – whether it be trying to influence the development of legislation, protect a constituency from the effects of particular policy or ensure that government adhere to a specific regulation – the role is essentially an attempt to influence the power relations within society. This, by necessity, can run the risk of being interpreted as instructive as opposed to suggestive and collaborative. Staples (2007) argues that the Howard administration in Australia during the late 1990s saw civil society advocates as unaccountable elites dictating public policy to the detriment of the silent majority. She concludes that it was the preconceived beliefs of that administration of the role of civil society that determined the parameters of the sector/state relations. Her paper illustrates well how the context of state/sector relations are more often than not framed by the policies of the state and it is for the sector to adapt their strategies to the prevailing conditions.

How relationships are managed in other countries

There are many different ways in which relations between the state and Community and Voluntary organisations are formed. Each state will have its own particular relationship with the civil society actors operating within its jurisdiction according to the socio-political, economic and cultural development of the state. Casey (2008) in a comprehensive working paper for the Center for Australian Community Organisations and Management set out some broad distinctions that can be drawn between certain types of arrangements that have evolved in different states:

The Anglo-Saxon “liberal” model

Strong Community and Voluntary sectors based on multiple ethnic, religious, social and geographic identities. The impact of New Public Management has made government contracting a central organising principle. Government funding of Community and Voluntary organisations but also high levels of private giving through foundations and trusts and high levels of volunteering. Advocacy relationships are based on the perceived strength of Community and Voluntary organisations and their capacity to mobilise.

The Continental “corporatist” model

Community and Voluntary sectors based on ideological-religious divisions that have formed social “pillars” that link government and organisations through the principle of subsidiarity. Advocacy relationships are channeled through the strong corporatist arrangements somewhat similar to the partnership process in Ireland.

The Nordic “social-democratic” model

Relatively strong state and small, member-serving Community and Voluntary organisations that have self-organising as a central principle. There is a high

level of volunteering, but a small foundation sector. Advocacy relationships are channeled through strong corporatist arrangements.

New democracies and developing nations “emerging” model

Less developed Community and Voluntary organisations, which are a relatively recent phenomenon. Such organisations are often under the auspices of religious organisations or political parties. There are relatively low levels of giving and volunteering and in poorer nations the majority of funds for Community and Voluntary organisations may come from foreign aid agencies and foundations. Advocacy relationships are often mediated through the patron organisation and may be marked by high levels of distrust and conflict between state and organisations, which may be considered more as “anti-government” agencies (Casey et al. 2008).

Casey argues that in many states the move towards New Public Management models of public governance and the implementation by states of neoliberal policies has led to the increasing prevalence of contractual relationships over grant funding based relationships. In the US, Community and Voluntary organisations are characterised by multiple funding arrangements with local, state and national administrations and foundation grantee/grantor arrangements. There is a complex system of regulation that regulates how and to what extent such organisations can become involved in attempting to influence policy. Advocacy is not seen as an activity warranting state subsidies.

The arrival of the Compact in the UK in the late 1990s heralded an era of collective agreement between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state. The New Labour administration and civil society representatives signed up to *The Compact on Relations between Government and the Third Sector in England*,² which was followed by local agreements signed between councils and the local voluntary sector. The Compact was an agreement to improve relationships between government and Community and Voluntary organisations to their mutual advantage. It contained a list of government and Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ understandings. The commitments applied to all central government departments and agencies, including non-departmental public bodies, regional government offices and local public bodies (Commission for the Compact 2008). The concept of a collective agreement has also been adopted in Canada and Australia to varying degrees of success.

In Switzerland (Helmig et al. 2009) a mutual dependency exists between institutionalised Community and Voluntary organisations, or federations as they are known, and the government who collectively engaged in the process of drafting and

² Home Office (1998). *Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England*, HMSO, London.

implementing political measures and coordinating economic processes. The federations hold a significant role in the political process and are involved in nearly every political decision. By these means, citizens and Community and Voluntary organisations have the opportunity to disagree with proposed legislation or to enforce the process. Consequently, Swiss legislators try to incorporate as many Community and Voluntary organisations as possible at the consultation stage of policy-making in order to avoid having the referendum process occur too frequently. The state, however, is an important source of income for the concerned organisations and helps them with tax exemptions and financial aid in particular. Instead of distributing general subsidies, the state rather opts for service level agreements between the public authorities and Community and Voluntary organisations. This engenders a close and constructive cooperation between the two parties. The state may thus consider such organisations sector as an indispensable civil societal link between citizens and the state.

The Irish context

In the Irish context, relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state have developed in a somewhat unstructured fashion. The relationship could be said to hang on two distinct government initiatives. Despite an extensive history of voluntary sector activity within the state since its formation, the first time the status and role of the voluntary sector was officially recognised was in the Green Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (1997). This formed the basis of the White Paper of the same name on state relations with Community and Voluntary organisations published by the Department of Social Welfare in 2000. The paper was compiled after comprehensive analysis of domestic and international best practice and wide ranging consultation with all the relevant stakeholders. It was considered a progressive and well-balanced foundation from which to build more constructive relations (Acheson 2004). Unfortunately, the policy document found little purchase among the statutory bodies to which it most applied and has been largely ignored as a template for relations between the state and Community and Voluntary organisations.

The second major development in relations was the advent of a Community and Voluntary Pillar within the corporatist structure of Irish Social Partnership. In the context of the severe economic stagnation of the 1980s, the Irish government embarked on a model of tripartite, triennial national pay agreements that was unique in its formulation involving employers, trade unions and farmers as partners in a process which, as it evolved, attended to a far greater palette of policies than just wage negotiation. This broadening of perspective was deepened by an invitation extended by the government of the day to a number of Community and Voluntary organisations working in the areas of unemployment rights, social welfare activism and community development to join the process. The process involved seven separate rounds of negotiations that set out economic and increasingly social

policy throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. The intentions of the different stakeholders and more particularly the outcomes generated by the Community and Voluntary Pillar through participation have been hotly debated (Larragy 2006; Meade 2005; O'Connor 2002) but the very fact of its presence signalled a significant mindset change within the political community towards the Community and Voluntary organisations.

Since the withdrawal of the employers from the Social Partnership process in December 2009, the continued existence of the governance structure has been called into question. Negotiations between the public sector unions and government have continued under the guise of social dialogue. The members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar have continued to meet with government officials and continue to contribute to policy formation through the mechanism of the National Economic and Social Council.

How the Literature Review contributes to the Advocacy Initiative's Goals

Advancing Knowledge on the Current State of Advocacy in Ireland

Not surprisingly the literature review tells us little about the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations because, as was mentioned earlier in this report, there is precious little published academic research in this area.

Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Current Challenges

The literature review does provide some limited insights into the nature of some of the challenges facing Community and Voluntary organisations in their advocacy work:

- Unlike some other countries, the Irish Government's relationship with Community and Voluntary organisations is still largely unstructured;
- While Social Partnership did provide a formal route into policy making for some Community and Voluntary organisations, the future of the process is currently uncertain and this, in turn, poses significant questions and challenges for such organisations in their advocacy work.

Contributing to Informed Debate within the Sector and with the State

Perhaps the area where this literature review will contribute most to the Advocacy Initiative's goals will be in creating a clear sense among Community and Voluntary organisations that many of the challenges confronting them in their advocacy work

are shared by similar organisations right around the world. The literature review clearly shows that:

- While Community and Voluntary organisations often have adversarial relations with Governments, their right to advocate is guaranteed (in a formal legal sense) once the law has not been breached;
- Governments tend to seek out certain types of advocacy work as it contributes expertise and insights that Government does not necessarily have;
- Because advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is likely to be critical of those in power, such organisations may find themselves denied access to this power and, as a result, may find that their capacity to advocate has been constrained;
- Service providers tend to have more collegiate relationships with the State, although they can also be seen as being subservient;
- Social movement organisations are more independent of Government and this gives them more power in their dealings with Government;
- Relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the State are managed in many different ways around the world;
- There is an increasing prevalence for more formal and contractual relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the State which tend to be more regulated – in this context, advocacy is rarely seen as an activity that attracts state funding;
- A number of countries have agreed compacts or formal collective agreements with their Community and Voluntary sectors including the UK, Australia, Canada and Switzerland.

The issue of arriving at an agreed definition of advocacy is one that will emerge on a number of occasions later in this report. The literature review provides some assistance in meeting this need identified by Community and Voluntary organisations:

- Advocacy is defined as the pursuit of influencing outcomes that directly affect people's lives;
- A wide diversity of strategies and techniques are used grounded in the premise that social change occurs through politics.

Another area identified as needing to be addressed later in the report is arriving at a consensus amongst policy makers and advocates in relation to the role of advocacy in a democracy and its legitimacy. The literature review has been helpful in this regard by showing that:

- The legitimacy of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is based on the twin democratic rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech;
- Advocacy organisations help to address some of the democratic deficits that are created by the representative model of democracy – they are indispensable intermediaries;
- Community and Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy provide mechanisms through which those affected by particular political decisions can be part of the production of those decisions.

Section Four: Quantitative Research Results

A sample³ of 362 nonprofit (Community & Voluntary) organisations was invited to participate in an online survey between the middle of February and early March 2010. A total of 170 organisations responded, giving a satisfactory response rate of 47%. The profile of the responding organisations, as captured by the survey, appears in Appendix X. It should be noted that a small number of respondents did not answer every question, so the response rate to individual questions fluctuates to a small degree.

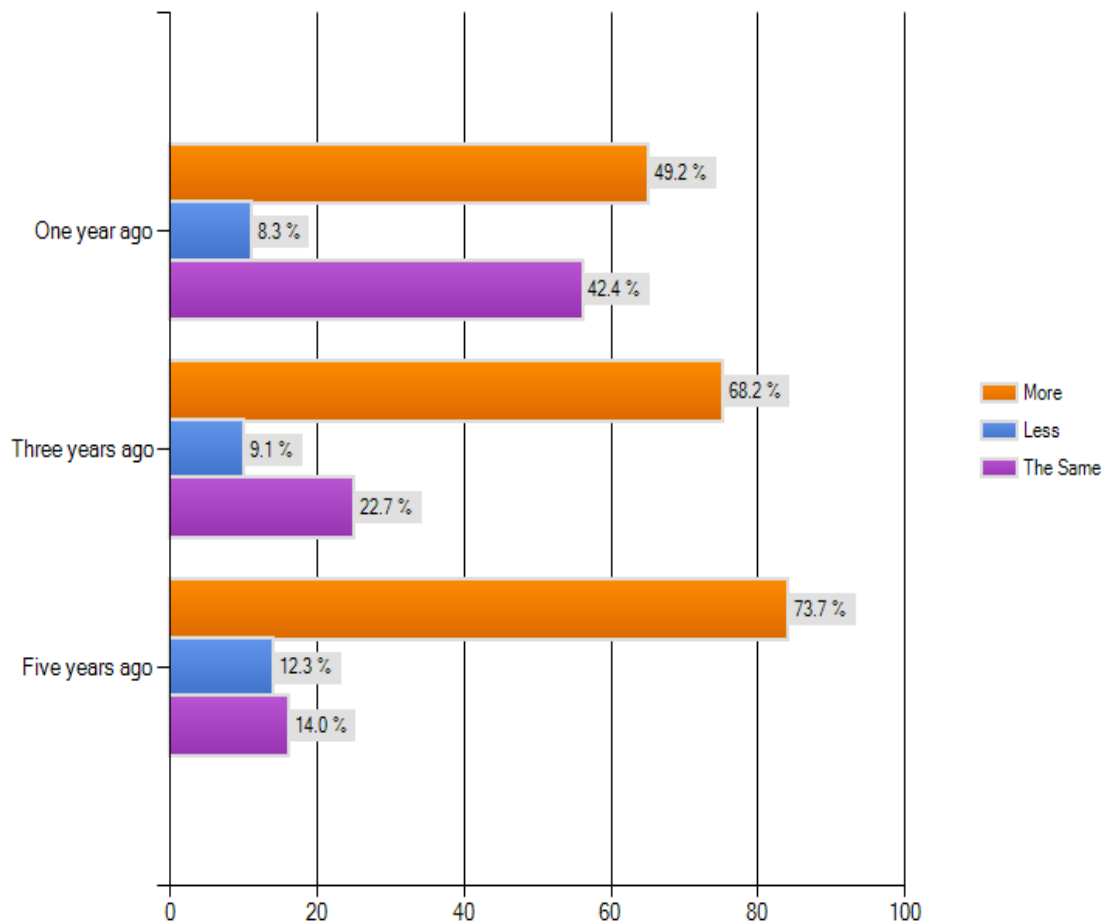
93% of respondents stated that their organisations do engage in advocacy – which, *inter alia*, suggests that although the sample was rather small, it did include a high proportion of organisations for which the focus of the survey was relevant. A similar proportion of almost 93% of respondents stated that they had always engaged in advocacy – this suggests that these organisations have had a longstanding commitment to advocacy as a key activity (N=137).

Respondents were asked to state whether their organisations are currently doing more, less, or the same advocacy as one year ago, three years ago, or five years ago. (N=143):

- Almost three quarters of respondents say they are doing more advocacy than 5 years ago; 1 in 8 are doing less;
- Over two-thirds of respondents say they are doing more advocacy than 3 years ago; 1 in 11 are doing less
- Almost one half of respondents say they are doing more advocacy than 1 year ago – this seems significant, particularly in the context of the current climate; 1 in 12 are doing less.

³ It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the task of compiling a sample of community and voluntary organisations proved quite difficult and time-consuming. There is no one place where one can access a comprehensive list of email addresses for C&V organisations without encountering data protection problems. The researchers would like to acknowledge the assistance of several membership and network organisations that facilitated them in encouraging their members to proactively choose to participate in this particular survey – but there is a clear need for the publication of a directory of organisations, including their email addresses, and for this to be continuously maintained and updated. There is a fundamental problem at the moment in communicating directly with organisations in the sector as a whole – as things currently stand, the development of the embryonic Irish Nonprofit Knowledge Exchange (INKEx) possibly offers the best opportunity to address this deficit.

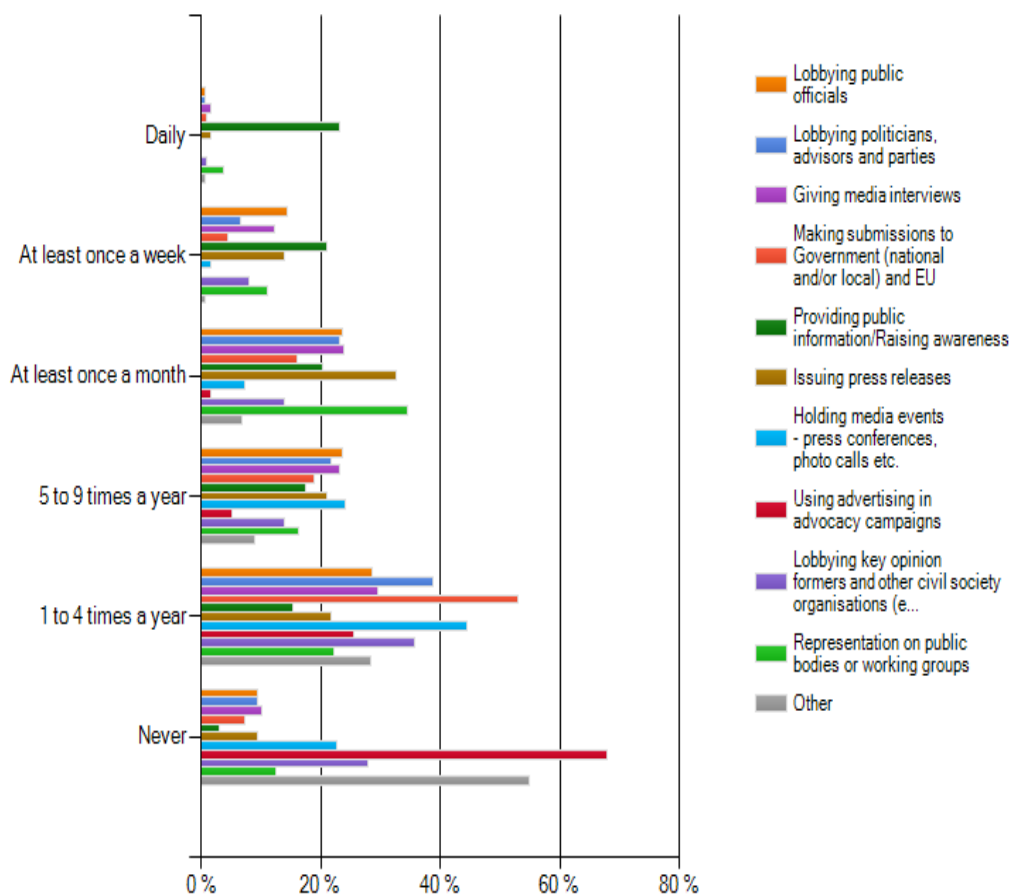
Are you currently doing more, or less, advocacy than



When asked to indicate the range and frequency of their advocacy activity, respondents (N=144) reported that:

- Nearly a quarter engage in public information and awareness-raising on a daily basis;
- Over a third participate in public bodies or working groups at least once a month;
- More than half make submissions to Government or EU between 1 and 4 times a year; while
- Two-thirds of respondents never use advertising in their advocacy campaigns.

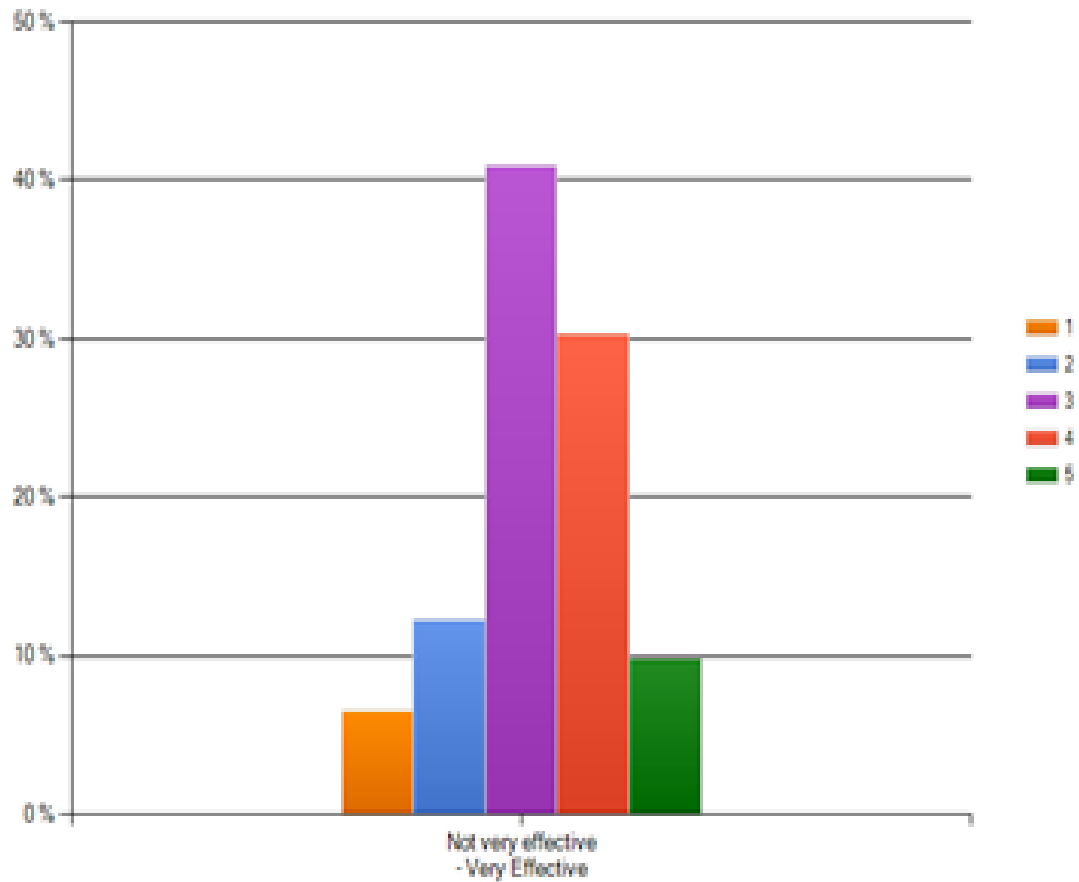
How often does your organisation engage in the following forms of advocacy? Please rate according to the frequency that you use each form of advocacy



Although there is a perception that many organisations routinely produce pre-Budget submissions, the survey tells us a slightly different story – although a high proportion of respondents engage in advocacy slightly under a third usually make a pre-Budget submission; 2 out of 5 organisations do not usually make a pre-Budget submission; while 28% sometimes do so. (N=143)

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their advocacy. The response might suggest a degree of modesty in respondents’ self-assessment with most organisations awarding themselves a score of 3 out of 5. (N=122)

Please rate the effectiveness of your organisation's advocacy work. Please use the numbers 1 to 5 where 1 = Not very effective and 5 = very effective



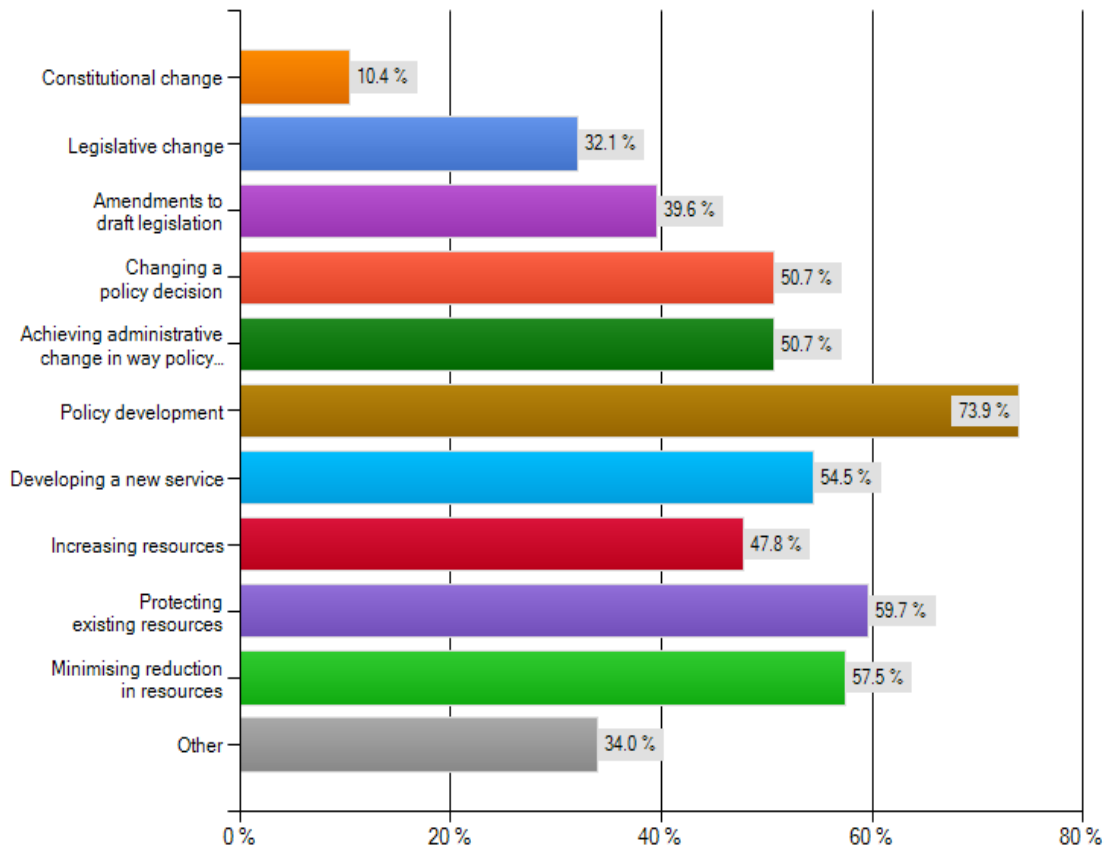
As we will see in Section Five, this score conforms reasonably closely to the perceptions of interested observers outside of the sector. At the same time, it is interesting to note that 2 out of every 5 respondents rated their advocacy at 4 out of 5, or better.

When asked to indicate the types of successes they had achieved in their advocacy respondents (N=134) reported the following:

- Almost three-quarters indicated that they have been successful in contributing towards policy development;
- 3 out of 5 claim success in protecting existing resources while almost the same proportion cite that they have managed to minimise a reduction in resources.
- Slightly more than half have succeeded in developing a new service; changing a policy decision; or achieving an administrative change in the way a policy or service is delivered.

- It is interesting to note that one in 10 claim success in achieving constitutional change.

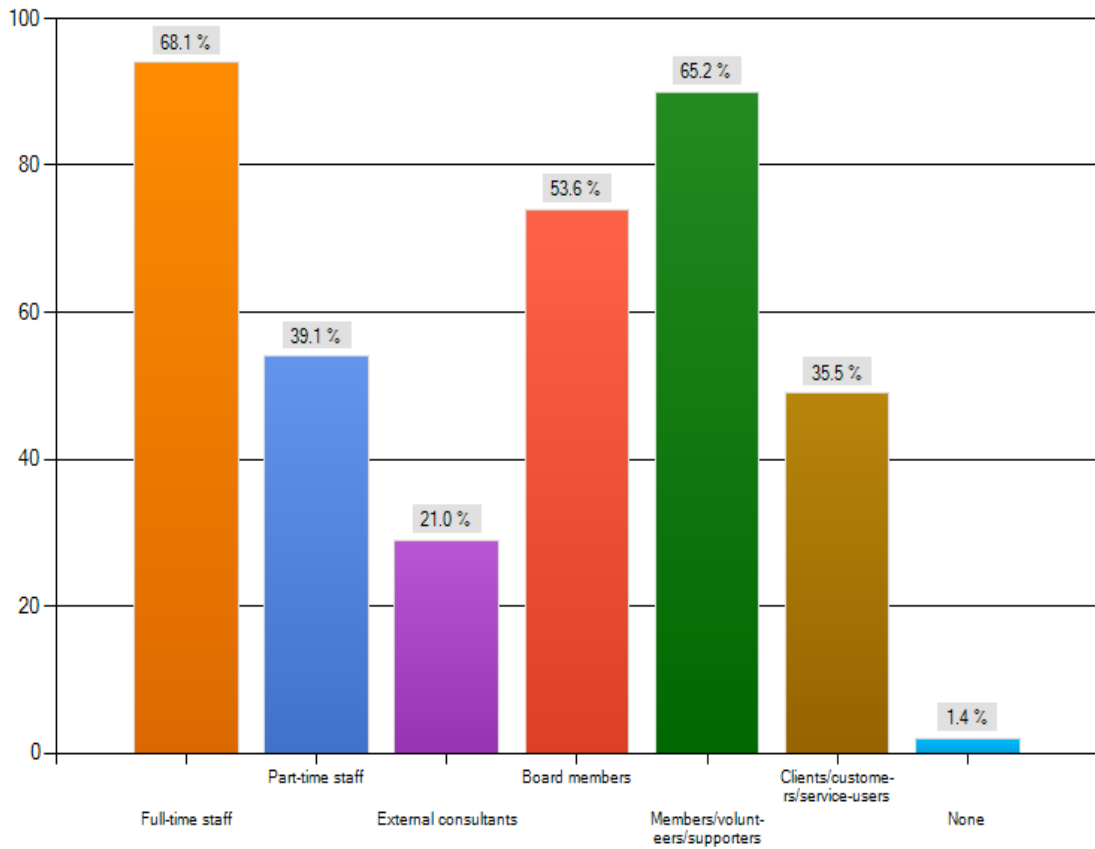
Please indicate advocacy success or successes that you feel your organisation has achieved or made a significant contribution towards:



When asked to identify the type of personnel resources that organisations are applying to their advocacy (N=138) we found that

- Just over two-thirds of respondents use full-time staff, and 2 in 5 use part-time staff, in their advocacy
- Slightly less than two-thirds use members, volunteers and supporters – while almost 54% use Board members – in support of their advocacy
- A little over one-third use clients/customers/consumers, while only one-fifth use external consultants.

Please indicate the personnel resources your organisation applies to its advocacy work. Please tick all appropriate categories.

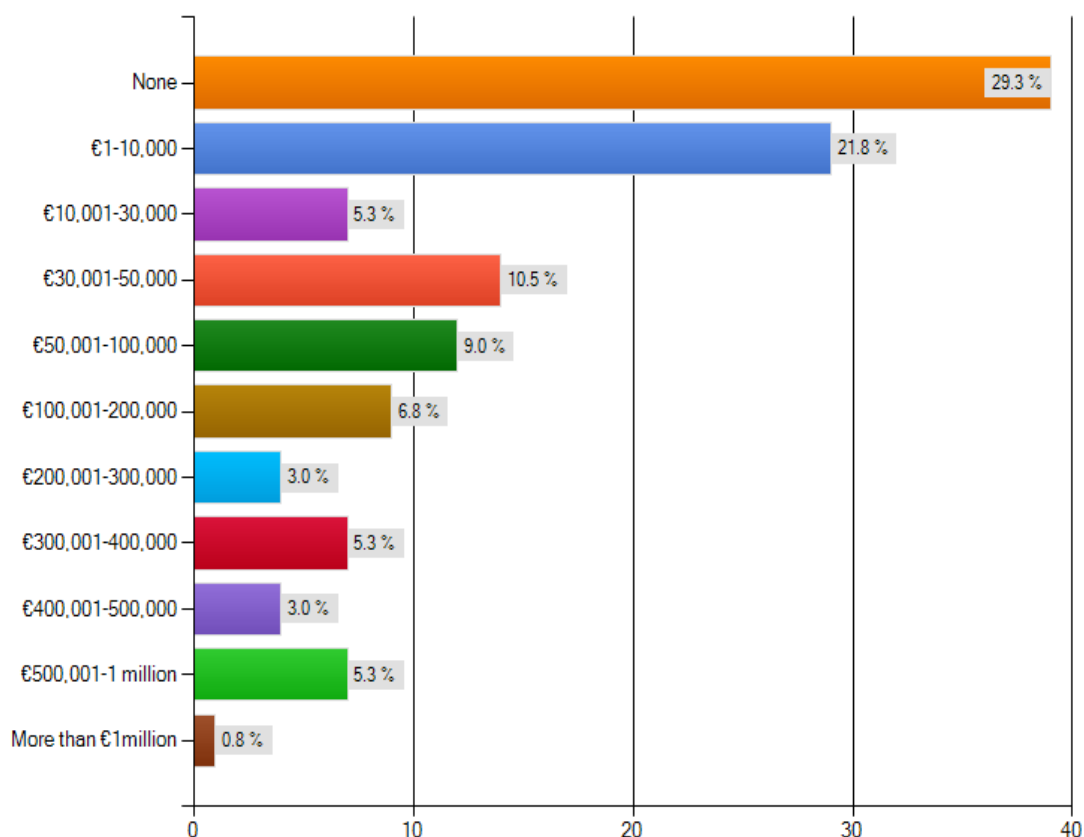


In response to a question on the budgetary resources that organisations are applying to their advocacy respondents (N=133) revealed that

- almost three out of 10 respondents do not have a dedicated budget for their advocacy
- A further fifth have a budget of less than €10,000 in 2010
- At the other end of the scale, 1 in 20 respondents have a budget between €0.5m and €1m.

These results indicate that, in spite of the high proportion of organisations that state that they engage in advocacy, a substantial proportion apply little or no specific budget to the activity.

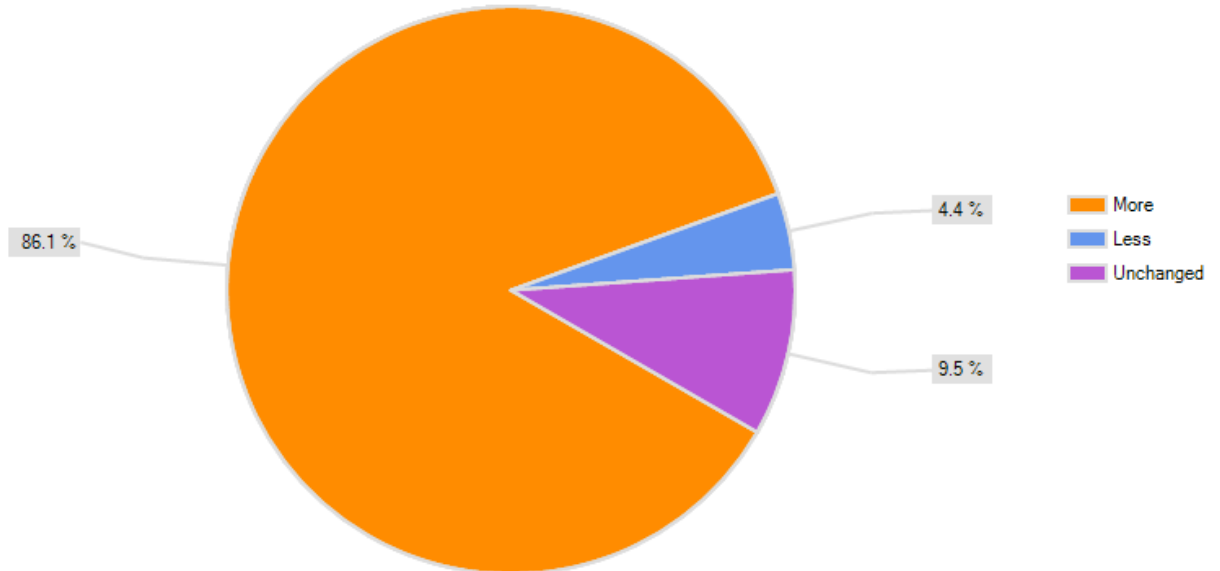
What is your organisation's budget allocation for advocacy in 2010?



When asked to state an opinion on the relative environment within which advocacy by the sector is taking place, overwhelmingly, 86% of respondents believe the environment for advocacy is becoming more challenging. When invited to give reasons for their answer, those that featured most prominently were

- Government hostility to the equality agenda – and to dissent, more generally; Increasingly limited civil society “space”
- Effects of the economic recession – including a more challenging funding environment, and diminished prospects for positive change
- Compassion fatigue in media and amongst public
- Increased competition – both between NGOs and with other sectors. Several responses questioned whether there are too many advocacy groups.

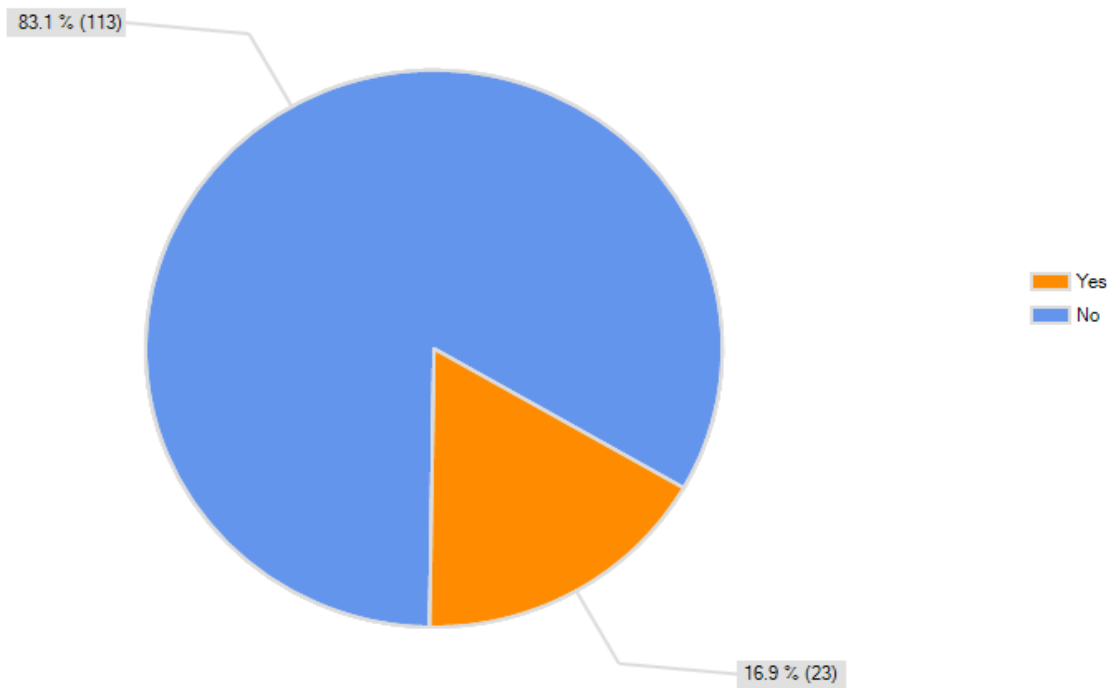
Do you think that the environment for advocacy by nonprofit organisations is becoming more, or less, challenging?



Given the expressed concerns within the sector as reflected in the response to the previous question, we considered it important to establish if organisations had had to reduce their advocacy activity in the past two years.

Interestingly, more than 4 in every 5 respondents state that they have not had to reduce their advocacy in the past two years. This concurs with the response to Question 3 where respondents typically indicated that they are currently doing more advocacy than 1, 3 or 5 years ago.

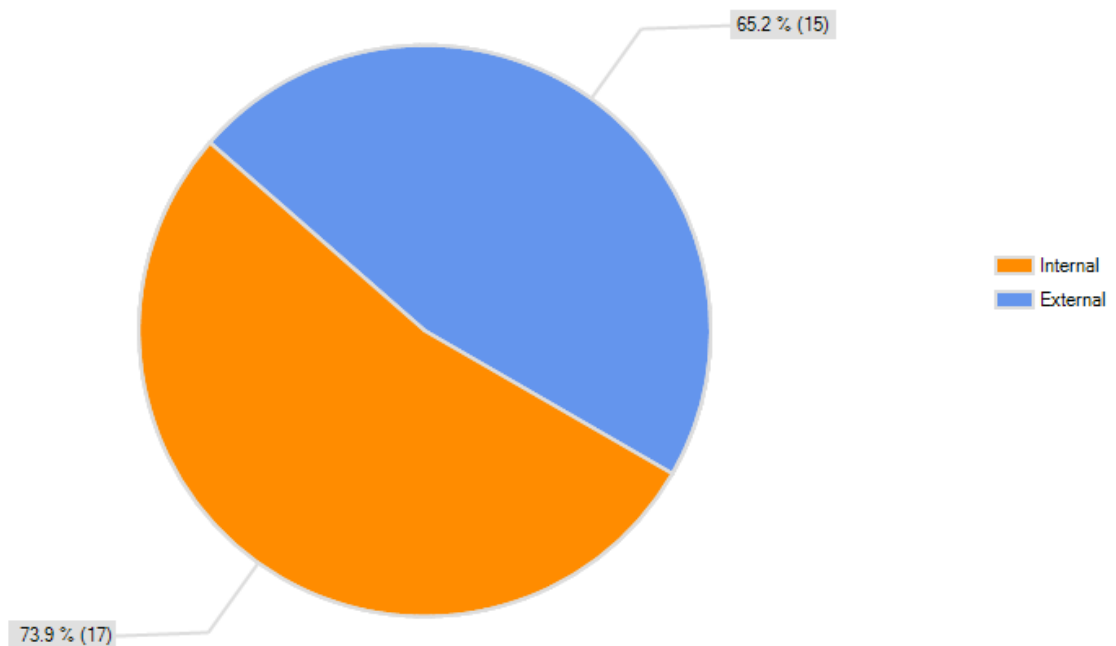
Has your organisation had to reduce its advocacy activity within the past two years?



Those organisations (23) that stated that they had had to reduce their advocacy activity over the past two years were asked to indicate whether this was due to internal or external reasons. (They could indicate both in their answer, where appropriate).

Almost three-quarters of organisations that had reduced their advocacy (a total of 17 organisations) attributed the reduction to internal factors while close to two-thirds (15 organisations) cited external factors. (N=23)

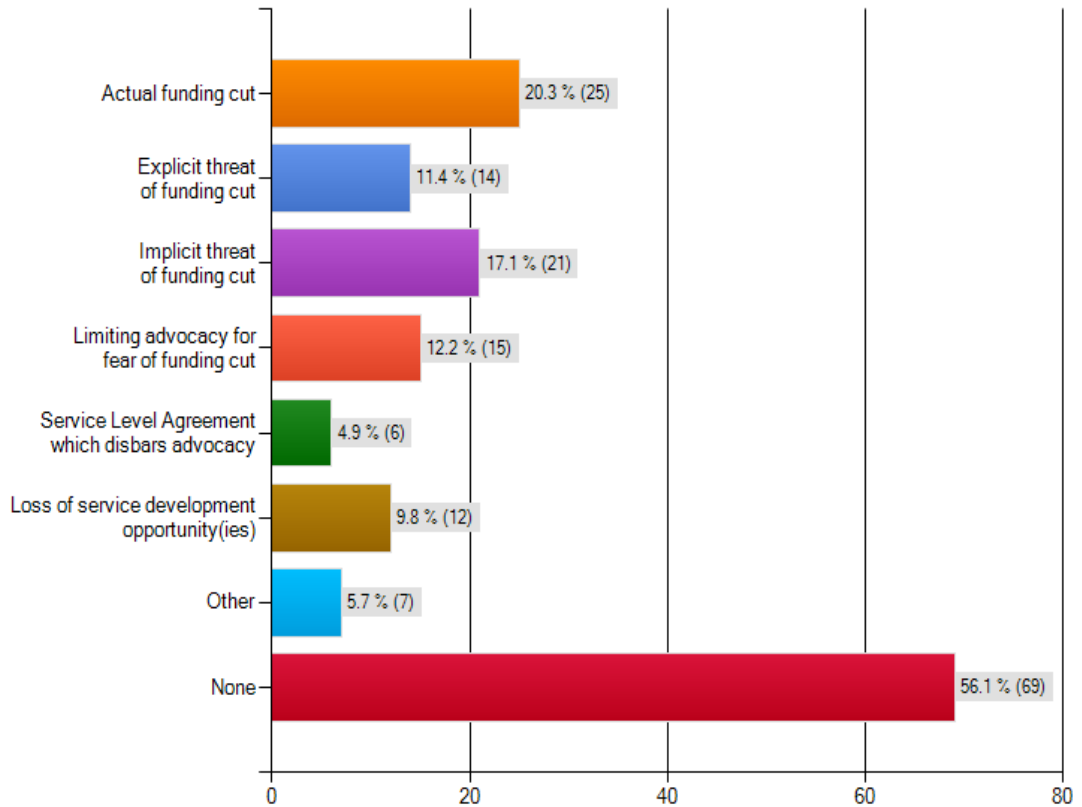
If you answered "Yes" to Question 11 please indicate whether this was for internal or external reasons, or both? Please tick both if appropriate.



All respondents were asked if their organisation had experienced one or more of a list of actual or threatened funding cuts or other constraint, whether explicit or implicit, arising from their advocacy activity. (N=123)

Importantly, over 56% stated that they have not experienced any real or threatened (i.e. implicit or explicit) loss of funding or opportunity arising from their advocacy activity. On the other hand, up to 44% of respondents have had this experience, with some organisations experiencing more than one such loss or threat. This clearly challenges some current perceptions but, equally clearly, warrants further investigation not least to examine how consistent it is across specific policy areas.

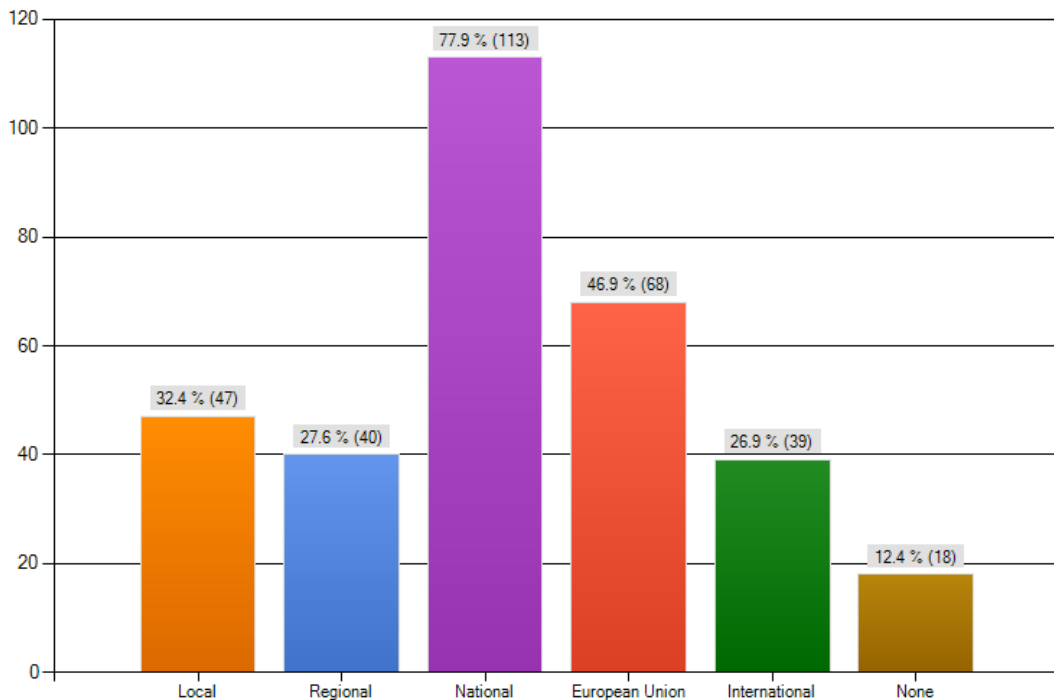
Has your organisation experienced any of the following, as a result of its advocacy activity.
Please tick all that are relevant.



Respondents were asked to state whether they are members of policy coalitions, alliances or networks that are engaged in advocacy whether at local, regional, national, EU or international levels.

More than three-quarters of respondents are members of national coalitions, alliances or networks while close to half are members of such groups at European level and more than a quarter are members of international groups. A third are members of local groups while more than a quarter are members at regional level.

Is your organisation a member of any policy coalitions, alliances or networks that are engaged in advocacy at local, regional, national, European Union, or international levels? Please tick all that are relevant.



In order to get a measure of organisations that are viewed by their peers as being effective in their advocacy, respondents were asked to pick one nonprofit organisation that they consider effective in its advocacy. (N=120)

Analysis shows that Barnardos emerged as a clear leader, receiving a total of 24 citations. Next came the Children’s Rights Alliance (7) and Amnesty International (6). The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland each received 5 citations. Following on 4 were Age Action Ireland, the Irish Cancer Society, ICTR and the Wheel. Older and Bolder, Trócaire, Focus Ireland and Cystic Fibrosis Ireland each received 3 mentions. A further seven organisations were each nominated twice, while 23 organisations received a single mention.

Of note is the fact that a number of nonprofit organisations outside the Community and Voluntary sector were nominated – these included IBEC, the Automobile Association, the Construction Industry Federation and the Irish Farmers Association.

Q.15. If you were to pick one nonprofit organisation that you consider to be effective in its advocacy, which one would you choose?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>24 – Barnardos
 7 – Children’s Rights Alliance
 6 – Amnesty International
 5 – Society of St. Vincent de Paul
 – Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland
 4 – Age Action Ireland
 – Irish Cancer Society
 – ICTR
 – The Wheel
 3 – Older & Bolder
 – Trócaire
 – Focus Ireland
 – Cystic Fibrosis Ireland</p> | <p>2 – Citizens Information Centres, Concern, CORI, Disability Federation of Ireland, Dóchas, GLEN, Irish Hospice Foundation

 1 – FLAC, One in Four, IPPA – The Early Childhood Organisation, Greenpeace, Irish Traveller Movement, MABs, Irish Association of Young People in Care, GOAL, Irish Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society, Irish Heart Foundation, Autism Association, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Friends of the Earth, Shell to Sea, European Union of Deaf, Irish Family Planning Association, Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Community Workers Co-op, Mental Health Service Users Association, Irish Autism Action, European Anti Poverty Network, Dublin Aids Alliance</p> |
|---|---|

* IBEC, AA, CIF, IFA

How the Quantitative Survey Contributes to the Advocacy Initiative’s Goals

1. Advancing Knowledge on the Current Status of Advocacy in Ireland

The leadership of the Advocacy Initiative shared an interest in exploring the experience, practice and principles of advocacy and sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on the current status of advocacy in Ireland, beginning with a simple question: *What is your experience of being an advocate and doing advocacy?* From this starting point, they hoped to build up a picture of advocacy at this point in time.

The Quantitative Survey makes a significant contribution towards this aspiration in capturing important contemporaneous data from 170 organisations currently engaged in advocacy out of a total sample of 362 (representing a response rate of 47%). This data tells us, *inter alia*, that

- 93% of participating organisations stated that they do engage in advocacy
- Most organisations are currently doing more advocacy than they have in the past: three quarters are doing more than 5 years ago; over two-thirds are



doing more advocacy than 3 years ago; while almost one half are doing more advocacy than 1 year ago

- When asked to rate the effectiveness of their own advocacy, most organisations awarded themselves a score of 3 out of 5; however, almost as many rated their advocacy at 4 out of 5, or better
- Successes achieved through advocacy include
 - Policy development;
 - Protecting existing resources;
 - Minimising a reduction in resources;
 - Developing a new service;
 - Changing a policy decision; and
 - Achieving an administrative change in the way a policy or service is delivered.
- In spite of the high proportion of organisations that state that they engage in advocacy, almost three out of 10 respondents do not have a dedicated advocacy budget; at the other end of the scale, 1 in 20 respondents have an advocacy budget between €0.5m and €1m.
- Overwhelmingly, 86% of respondents believe the environment for advocacy is becoming more challenging
- In spite of this more challenging environment, more than 4 in every 5 respondents state that they have not had to reduce their advocacy in the past two years
- Of the minority of organisations that have had to reduce their advocacy, almost three-quarters attributed the reduction to internal factors while close to two-thirds cited external factors
- When asked to pick one nonprofit organisation that they consider effective in its advocacy respondents nominated a diverse range of organisations yet with a clear consensus on the “leader” (Barnardos)

The profile of organisations participating in the survey both confirms and draws attention to several common features of the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. For example (see Appendix Two):

- The diversity of the sector is illustrated by
 - The range of “sub-sectors” represented by respondents
 - The widely differing scale of budgets
 - The correspondingly wide range in size of staffing complement
 - The diversity of sources of funding
- Yet there are very common features as represented by
 - The proportion of respondents located in Dublin
 - In spite of funding being received from a wide range of Government Departments and agencies, the overwhelming significance of the Departments of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and Health

and Children (including the HSE) in terms of scale and scope of funding.

2. Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Current Challenges

The origins of the Initiative owed much to a growing view within the sector that government and senior civil servants were becoming increasingly hostile to advocacy. Yet, since this was a view that was not shared by everyone, the Initiative's establishment was prompted by an interest in exploring the concern that there is a threat to advocacy.

In the event, more than 56% of respondents stated that they have not experienced any real or threatened (implicit or explicit) loss of funding or opportunity arising from their advocacy activity. However, up to 44% of respondents have had this experience, with some organisations experiencing more than one such loss or threat. This finding offers a somewhat more nuanced perspective on the question of whether the sector, as a whole, is operating within the context of Government and public agency hostility towards advocacy. And, while this challenges some current perceptions, it warrants further investigation – not least to examine how consistent it is across specific policy and sub-sectoral areas.

3. Contributing to Informed Debate within the Sector and with the State

Although it is not specifically the purpose of the Quantitative Survey to directly contribute to debate within the sector and its external relationships – this is more relevant to other activities within Phase 1 of the Initiative such as the Forum and Conference – the data gathered by the survey have both contributed to debate in these subsequent stages of the current phase and will have a very important contribution to make to any subsequent phases of the Initiative.

Section Five: Qualitative Interviews

Introduction

During Spring 2010, Middlequarter and Montague Communications undertook 21 in-depth interviews with a range of different stakeholders to explore in detail their understanding of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations and the role of such advocacy in the world, their experience of it, their thoughts on its effectiveness and any insights into how it could be improved.

Twelve 'external' stakeholders were interviewed – external refers to the views of those interviewees who are interfacing with Community and Voluntary organisations as targets of their advocacy or are well-placed observers of such activity. These interviewees included:

- Senior politicians;
- Senior civil servants;
- Senior managers in state agencies;
- Philanthropists;
- Social partners;
- Well-informed observers and commentators.

Nine 'internal' stakeholders were interviewed as part of this process – 'internal' refers to the views of the interviewees who are involved with Community and Voluntary organisations either as full-time staff or board members. The people we interviewed came from a diverse range (small and large, urban and rural, local, regional, national and international) of organisations from the following sectors:

- Children;
- Ageing;
- Anti-Poverty;
- Migrants;
- Development;
- Homelessness;
- Health;
- Community Development.

We set out below a high-level summary of their views on the key questions being explored in this phase of the Advocacy Initiative.

Role and Legitimacy of Advocacy by Community and Voluntary Organisations

One of the key areas for exploration was the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in a democratic society. As the material below makes clear, this extended into a discussion on the legitimacy of such advocacy and its credibility.

Contrast in Thinking on Role

The stakeholder interviews revealed quite a contrast in the level of thinking on the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations. Of the interviewees from outside of Community and Voluntary organisations only two – both of whom had previously worked with such organisations – had a developed a clear and considered view on the role of civil society advocacy in a democratic society. One of these interviewees saw such advocacy as being critical in terms of acting as a counterweight to the influence of commercial interests and unfettered state power. The other saw it in the context of one of the fundamental freedoms in a democracy – namely the right to free speech.

In contrast with the views of the interviewees from outside of the Community and Voluntary organisations, those interviewees operating within such organisations had a much more developed sense of the role of advocacy. Their perspectives on advocacy revolved around:

- The centrality of advocacy for those organisations that want to lead or achieve change – although it was acknowledged that this wasn't the case for all Community and Voluntary organisations;
- The need to use advocacy to address the root causes of poverty and inequality;
- Providing a voice for those under or unrepresented in policy making;
- Providing policy makers with an alternative social narrative that they would not otherwise be aware of;
- Holding a mirror up to the policy making system and providing a critique of what works and what doesn't work;
- Enabling communities adversely affected by current or future policies to mobilise and participate in policy making.

Not surprisingly in terms of the debate on the democratic credentials of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations, the people we interviewed from such organisations placed a much greater emphasis on the notion of participatory democracy and they view advocacy as reflecting the most dynamic aspects of society.

However, while noting that a lot more consideration had been given to the notion of advocacy by the interviewees from within the Community and Voluntary organisations, they themselves felt that more debate and discussion is required within such organisations in order to develop a shared definition and understanding of advocacy and its role within such organisations and wider society.

Emphasis on Utilitarian Role

When pressed on the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations within a democracy, most of the policy makers and observers that did express a view on the matter tended to couch their perspective within a utilitarian perspective. For example, a number of such interviewees said that Community and Voluntary organisations can play an important role in informing policy makers about what is really happening on the ground within communities in terms of the consequences of complex policy decisions.

In this context, a high premium was placed on the views of those organisations that are service providers as they are seen as representing the voice of experience. Their advocacy is also seen to play an important role in terms of driving forward innovation and adaptation in public sector service provision.

It's worth noting that a small number of the policy makers and observers we interviewed referred to the important role played by advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in providing an alternative social narrative. However, the acceptability of these narratives depends on the nature of each individual organisation's relationship with policy makers and whether they are viewed as 'legitimate' or 'credible'.

Among the interviewees involved with Community and Voluntary organisations, the utilitarian value to the State of their advocacy was well understood. They were conscious that such organisations can communicate messages up to policy makers from those who experience the effects of policy decisions but also communicate such decisions down to the same constituency so that they can understand what has been decided and how such decisions will affect them.

The premium placed by policy makers on the credibility of those organizations engaged in service provision was well understood by the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations. As one interviewee said, there are other actors who can provide detailed statistical data to policy makers, Community and Voluntary organisations should concentrate on bringing the effects of policy decisions on the lives of ordinary people to the attention of policy makers.

Issues of Legitimacy and Credibility

Above we mentioned the notions of 'legitimacy' and 'credibility' attaching to the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations and these notions were



raised consistently during the interviews we conducted with the policy makers and those observing the advocacy work of such organisations.

In relation to the legitimacy or credibility of Community and Voluntary organisations, one of the key issues raised by policy makers was about their mandate. This question principally revolved around the extent to which the views being expressed by an organisation are held by a significantly large portion of the population. As one policy maker said, 'who do they speak for or represent?' Indeed, the question of organisation's mandates was sometimes seen to take precedence over the substance of their arguments and other times seen as something to be considered in parallel with the facts of the cases being presented. However, it is worth noting here that the power of a strong argument to effect change was repeatedly acknowledged by policy makers and observers.

Some of the policy makers and observers we interviewed also tied the question of legitimacy in with how Community and Voluntary organisations put forward their arguments – in these cases legitimacy referred to the acceptability to them of the advocacy techniques being used by organisations.

'Legitimacy' for a number of the policy makers and observers was also closely associated with the 'credibility' of the cases being made by Community and Voluntary organisations. For many policy makers the voice of 'frontline experience' is invaluable when they are considering a case or argument, as are quantitative research and 'hard' evidence. As one interviewee put it, 'policy makers want facts and some organisations supply these and others don't.'

The importance of a mandate – in the sense of being representative of those whom they claim to represent – was recognised by those we interviewed from the Community and Voluntary organisations. In this context, a number of interviewees referred to the paramount importance to them of having a sense of 'connectedness' with those whom they represent. Such 'connectedness':

- Provides organisations with accurate, relevant contemporary data on which to formulate policy;
- Enables organisations to relay information back to its support base to promote empowerment and mobilisation.

It was suggested by some of those we interviewed from the Community and Voluntary organisations that over the past number of years the connection between those representing or leading organisations and those whom they seek to represent has been weakened and the sector has been weakened as a result. The issue of professionalization was mentioned in this context.

Impact of State funding on Advocacy by Community and Voluntary Organisations

The interplay between the State funding of Community and Voluntary organisations and its impact on how such organisations conduct advocacy was one of the core issues explored in the interviews.

State Funding involves Constraints

A number of the policy makers and observers we interviewed referred to the fact that many Community and Voluntary organisations are contracted to provide services on behalf of the State. In the view of some of these interviewees, such organisations are effectively sub-contractors and this relationship often involves their advocacy work being constrained due to the potential for conflicts of interest.

Looking in more depth at how Community and Voluntary organisations manage such conflicts of interest, some of the policy makers acknowledged the possibility of self censorship by organisations but felt that it was not something that should cause undue concern.

Other policy makers and observers were more conscious of and sensitive to the difficult dilemmas posed by State funding for the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations. For these interviewees, the issue was not so much about advocacy being prohibited but more about how the relationship between organisations and the State are managed. In this context, a number of the interviewees referred to the importance of organisations being aware of the 'political realities' they are dealing with. Furthermore, they agreed that the State has a reluctance to fund organisations and activities that they perceive as being inherently and constantly critical of them.

The issue of the constraints arising from accepting State funding was very much to the fore for the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations. Many of the interviewees said that such funding causes organisations to pause for thought before making representations on issues. The timing, method and location of representations must be carefully weighed up with due regard given to the political consequences that may arise. On the other hand, some of the interviewees acknowledged that there are plenty of instances of the State funding organisations that also criticise the State's activities.

In relation to being 'constrained', some of the interviewees suggested that the State now sees many Community and Voluntary organisations as an extension of itself. In their view, the State develops policies and strategies and gets organisations to implement them – in other words organisations are incorporated into the State. Some of the interviewees believe that such arrangements suit the Government from a fiscal point of view – in that services are cheaper to run through Community and

Voluntary organisations than directly by the State – and also from the perspective of ‘control’ as organisations whose primary funding comes from State sources are more likely to feel constrained than organisations who have multilayered financial sources.

Managing Advocacy and Service Provision

Some of the policy maker and observer interviewees suggested that it is difficult for Community and Voluntary organisations to concentrate on both service provision and advocacy equally well. Some felt that a solution might be found in the creation of separate policy bodies within organisations focused specifically on advocacy issues – such policy bodies should be genuinely driven by grassroots’ concerns and issues and have service users’ needs as central to their agenda. However, it was acknowledged that there had to be a link between advocacy and service provision within Community and Voluntary organisations but with separate drivers.

Among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations, Service Level Agreements were seen as a way of managing the separation of advocacy and service provision, as such agreements specifically set out what public money can be used for. These interviewees made the point that it was Community and Voluntary organisations that pushed for such agreements to be introduced so that the dealings between the State and such organisations were put on a more formal footing than through the grant system in the past.

Managing the Funding Relationship

Differing views were expressed about how tightly the State should regulate the use of its funding by Community and Voluntary organisations.

Some of the policy makers and observers felt that an overly tight system of regulating funding arrangements would inhibit innovation by Community and Voluntary organisations. Other interviewees felt that there is a clear need for the regulation of organisations that take public money to ensure that there is proper accountability and that the monies provided are used for the purposes intended.

Not surprisingly there was a very strong view among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations that it is legitimate in a democratic society to expect the State to fund organisations that provide a critical voice. However, many of these interviewees acknowledged the realities that the State doesn’t accept this perspective. In this context, these interviewees felt that it was prudent for Community and Voluntary organisations engaging in advocacy to have other sources of funding in place to support such advocacy work. Even then, some interviewees pointed out that privately sourced funding – while desirable from the perspective of supporting advocacy – also require accountability and a clear demonstration of value for money.

Code of Conduct

The interviewees were asked about the idea of putting in place a formal Code of Conduct between the State and Community and Voluntary organizations setting out how the relationship between them would be managed and conducted.

At this stage, not much consideration has been given to this concept by the policy makers that we interviewed. However, in reflecting on the concept of a Code of Conduct, these interviewees felt that the context within which such a Code was put in place would be crucially important. For example, such a Code could be seen as inappropriate and indeed unworkable if it was to be unilaterally handed down from Government without consultation and agreement. In addition, how such a code would be enforced would be a key factor for officials. On the other hand, some of the policy maker and observer interviewees felt that any formal agreement should have lots of 'space' contained in it otherwise it could descend into control of Community and Voluntary organizations by the State.

As with some of the earlier questions, the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations had given a lot more thought to the notion of a Code of Conduct or a Framework of Understanding setting out how the relationship between the State and such organisations should be managed. In this context, there was a strong view that such terms of engagement should formally recognize the role of civil society organisations in policy making processes.

Perspectives on Advocacy by Community and Voluntary Organisations

All of the participants in the interviews were asked to express their views on the effectiveness of NGO advocacy. As will become clear from the material below, there were some issues that were common to both the policy maker/observer interviewees and those from the Community and Voluntary organisations and others that were not.

Rating of Effectiveness

When asked how they rated the effectiveness of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations, most of the policy makers and observers gave it a rating of three out of five.

The interviewees from the organisations themselves were more reluctant to comment on the overall effectiveness of the 'sector's' advocacy but tended to place the effectiveness of their own organisations at a rating of three out of five as well.

Use of Public Campaigns

Some of the policy makers we interviewed raised questions about the effectiveness of large scale public campaigns in influencing policy makers. They argued that quiet diplomacy and effective relationship building can achieve more than high profile public campaigns. Others acknowledged the importance of bringing the public on board in terms of ensuring that an issue is placed on high the policy making agenda. However, they argued that such campaigning has to be carried out in a way that doesn't undermine the relationship building work with policy makers.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the perspective of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations on the effectiveness of public campaigning was somewhat different. The view expressed by some was that the extent to which the public is engaged on an issue is directly proportional to the level of interest in that issue from the policy-making system. However, there was also an understanding that effective advocates possess a keen awareness that politicians are subject to multiple demands from many constituencies and therefore that a 'patient' approach to advocacy is required.

It's worth noting that some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations did accept that some such organisations place an excessive reliance on media communications in their advocacy – the effectiveness of which is sometimes questionable in terms of its ability to persuade policy makers.

Dealing with Multiple Audiences

A number of the policy maker and observer interviewees said that Community and Voluntary organisations should not simply focus their relationship building work on policy makers alone. These interviewees felt that Community and Voluntary organisations need to look at who can deliver outcomes for their agenda and seek to cultivate relationships with them.

In this context, some of these interviewees suggested that organisations should seek to build closer relations with the trade union movement as both sectors are derived from the same 'gene pool' and largely have the same concerns, however, despite this they can sometimes be competitive with each other to the detriment of the agendas they are pursuing. However, other policy maker interviewees questioned the value of Community and Voluntary organisations forging closer relations with trade unions, saying that any perceived alliance with the trade union movement would undermine organisation's 'independence and moral authority', which in the absence of other forms of tangible leverage are very important for such organisations.

Need for Improved Understanding of the Policy Making System

A concern that repeatedly surfaced throughout the discussions with the policy makers and observers we interviewed was a strongly perceived lack of awareness among Community and Voluntary organisations about how the policy making system operates. One example cited by a senior elected representative was the failure of some organisations to understand that material aimed at politicians needs to be relevant to their brief or their constituency.

One interviewee mentioned how materials relating to the Budget process often come into the system far too late to be effective and some of the demands coming from Community and Voluntary organisations are more aimed at appeasing internal audiences than on delivering results. Likewise campaigns around influencing the election programmes of political parties tend to get underway when the manifestoes have largely been written or indeed when the elections have actually been called.

However, there was an acknowledgement from among the policy makers and observers that there are huge variations in the levels of understanding and skills in this area. Some Community and Voluntary organisations were acknowledged to be amongst the most effective campaigners or advocates in the country. In addition, a number of the policy makers and observers made the point that the deficiencies in understanding of the policy making system displayed by some Community and Voluntary organisations were also shared by many trade unions and business organisations too.

The elected representatives we spoke suggested that Community and Voluntary organisations should place a strong emphasis on investing time and effort into creating relationships with relevant political party spokespeople and other Oireachtas members. They also said that organisations need to build alliances not just with the political parties that are in Government – despite the obvious necessity to target those that can make decisions now – efforts need to be made by made by organisations to develop relationships on a bipartisan basis as an exclusive focus on one particular party can lead to an organisation’s agenda being viewed as politically partisan.

The interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations acknowledged that there are significant deficits in terms of their knowledge and skills in relation to the policy making system. Some possible solutions suggested by these interviewees to address these deficits included:

- Having research conducted into good advocacy so that learning from these examples can be shared;
- Need for greater availability of advocacy expertise in the sector.

Managing Relations with Officials

There was an almost universal agreement among the policy makers and observers about the importance of building strong relationships with key civil and public servants for Community and Voluntary organisations. These interviewees felt that there may not be sufficient understanding within some organisations of the key role played in policy development and implementation by such officials. In this context, it was suggested that community and voluntary organisations need to have a better understanding of the unwritten rules and 'etiquette' that govern such relationships.

One interviewee made strong reference to a perceived over reliance on relationships with the Department of the Taoiseach which misunderstood the role of other departments and agencies in the political decision making process. This was said to have been a consequence of the Social Partnership process.

One of the impediments to building and managing relationships with civil and public servants mentioned by some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations was the turnover of staff within public bodies – depending on how good or bad an organisation's relationship is with certain officials, such turnover can either help or hinder the path of progress on an issue.

Some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations – particularly those located outside Dublin – mentioned the impact their geographic remoteness from the capital city has on building up relationships with national policy makers. They argued that since many locally-based officials are without decision making power, it can be very challenging to find solutions that are fine-tuned to the needs of their particular location. In this context, these interviewees said that local officials become conduits of information to the higher levels of decision making power.

Never-Ending Critique or Holding the State to Account

One of the areas where sharply contrasting views were expressed was in relation to how Community and Voluntary organisations critique the activities of the State.

Among the policy makers and observers we interviewed, there was an almost universal agreement that many Community and Voluntary organisations cannot acknowledge that progress is being made on their agenda and, instead, engage in a never-ending critique of Government, some of which is quite personal in nature. One of the policy maker interviewees, who previously had worked for many years with Community and Voluntary organisations, felt that organisations are strong on expressing critique but weak on providing solutions and how they can make a contribution. As this person said: "Community and Voluntary sector discourse is based around 'us and them' rather than 'we'".

As some of the policy makers and observers pointed out, an approach based on constant criticism seems not to understand the psychological effects of such an approach. As one interviewee pointed out: 'if there is a constant barrage of criticism, a resistance and defensiveness (to this organisation and their agenda) will build up.'

Others explained that if policy makers feel personally attacked, this will have the effect of souring relations with those who are perceived to have made the attack and can make progress on that organisation's agenda much more difficult to achieve. Indeed, a number of these interviewees said that the 'critical' approach of many Community and Voluntary organisations is seen as being predictable and their views – no matter how valid – can often be simply dismissed.

However, there were some views that contrasted somewhat with these perspectives. One very experienced person in the social partnership field felt that many Community and Voluntary organisations are too meek and timid and don't "bang the table when they should be banging the table". In this context, this interviewee felt that there was a major deficit in negotiation skills among the leaders of Community and Voluntary organisations.

There was a perception, expressed by some of the policy makers that were interviewed, that such 'critical' advocacy can sometimes be used as a means for organisations to protect their own territory or that some organisations frequently and disingenuously portray a state of crisis in order to generate media attention and increase their own profiles and ability to raise funds. A number of these interviewees also believed that such campaigning can be a method of engaging with an organisation's own internal constituency – members being made aware of the activism of the leadership by the number of headlines they create.

As was mentioned earlier, the perspective among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations is that one of the key roles of advocacy by such organisations is to hold the State to account. This inevitably involves a critique of what is being done or not being done and means that the views of Community and Voluntary organisations will be contested by the State. Indeed, one interviewee said that one of the causes of the current economic crisis was the lack of a proper and effective critique of some of the policies being pursued over the last period. On the other hand, there was some level of acceptance by the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations of the need for more sophistication in the way their critique of policy is delivered.

Respectful Relations

Another key theme to emerge right across the range of interviewees was that of respect.

Several of the policy maker and observer interviewees spoke of the need to maintain a basic level of respect both for the offices individuals hold and the individuals themselves – particularly for elected representatives who have a mandate from the public. They strongly expressed the view that many advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations did not act in a respectful way and did not seem to understand the genuine constraints policy makers are working under.

One interviewee with an involvement in philanthropy felt in this context that it was important that Community and Voluntary organisations understand what their roles are and act in a way that is appropriate to those roles. “That is not to say that opinions can’t be expressed in the most vigorous way – however, they shouldn’t be expressed in a way that is publicly judgmental.” Another observer that was interviewed added that: “The NGO sector is a small sector in a small country where personal relationships are important – this makes being personally respectful even to people with whom organisations fundamentally disagree very important.”

The theme of respect was also a strong one among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations. Some of the interviewees talked of threats, of not being taken seriously, being marginalized and of funders cutting funding if they felt threatened by an organisation’s advocacy.

One interviewee also made reference to the (at that stage) soon-to-be-published report funded by the Carnegie Trust on Irish Civil Society that talked about how dissent in Ireland is being marginalised. In this context, some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations made the point that this marginalisation varies from Government department to department. Some departments and public sector bodies seem to have very well developed processes for engaging with organisations and welcome their active participation, including their critique – the children’s area was mentioned in this regard.

A number of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations called for a change in attitude by the State to such organisations through the development of meaningful partnership process and genuine consultation. In this context, it was felt that a Code or Framework of Understanding between the State and Community and Voluntary organisations would be very useful. This, while recognizing that there will be tensions between the State and advocates from the Community and Voluntary organisations, would set out how the relationship should be managed.

Media Relations

The varying capacity within sector for developing effective relationships with the media was acknowledged by the policy maker and observer interviewees. The media personnel that were interviewed cited a number of Community and Voluntary organisations as being amongst the most effective ‘communicators’ that they have



dealt with. On the other hand, they felt that many other Community and Voluntary organisations don't invest sufficient time into developing relationships with journalists and don't seem to have a good understanding of the news process and what makes for a good story. On the other hand, as one experienced media professional acknowledged, Community and Voluntary organisations also come up against the media's own agenda which tends to lie against good news. This poses a challenge for organisations in terms of achieving a balance between gaining media coverage and building relationships with policy makers because if they are to generate coverage, organisations need to bring some 'drama' to a story, the very thing that might discomfit some of the policy makers.

Some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations mentioned the importance of building popular support for campaigns or 'capturing the middle ground'. Given this perspective, it's not surprising that the media is seen as a very useful tool in raising awareness among the public about a specific issue. As one interviewee put it, without some sort of public appetite for change it is very difficult to convince the political establishment to engage with change. In addition, the media was seen by some as a useful tool in assisting organisations in managing their relationship with their own memberships.

The overall perception among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations is that the 'sector' as a whole has a very positive media profile. Although there is an acceptance that sometimes the more extreme examples of situations tend to be highlighted by the media with the 'worthy but dull' tending not to feature.

Need for Change in Approach

A number of the policy maker and observer interviewees talked about the severity of the current economic downturn and the impact it is having right across the policy making spectrum. There was a widespread view that many advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations don't seem to have grasped how bad things actually are and some are still calling for measures to be taken that predate the crisis. As one interviewee said: "Community and Voluntary organisations need to realize that the whole situation has changed and they need to recast their agendas in the light of the new conditions".

Likewise, as one senior public servant pointed out, the policy making process itself has also changed somewhat since the onset of the current crisis. "Social partnership is effectively in 'cold storage' and the Department of Finance is now in the ascendancy in Government". This particular interviewee felt that the new dynamics in government and policy making are not sufficiently understood by Community and Voluntary organisations.

A number of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations also recognised that there is a need for a change in the way such organisations approach their advocacy. One of the issues to emerge in this regard is the need for a more proactive and strategic approach to advocacy as distinct from the sometimes ad hoc and reactionary nature of advocacy by many Community and Voluntary organisations.

Who is Effective and Why?

All of the interviewees were asked to nominate which organisations they thought were effective advocates and why. It's important to state that not all of the interviewees nominated organisations in this regard but the following were the organisations that were mentioned:

- MRCI – while being very much on the edge in advocacy terms, the organisation has succeeded in getting the issue of exploitation of migrant workers addressed – even if only partially – by Government.
- Childrens Rights Alliance – have done a really good job in getting the constitutional referendum onto the agenda.
- Barnardos – good services, reasonable approach, research oriented, interfaces effectively with others, perceived as experts
- St. Vincent de Paul – nationwide service providers with enormous fact finding and research capacity.
- Social Justice Ireland – good data, Government takes them seriously; they know how to speak Government's language.
- Development sector – very well developed in their advocacy.
- An Cosain – seen as proactive and persuasive.
- Older people's organisations – strong political influence, very effective on medical cards and pensions issues. Some questioned whether these organisations have a solid evidence base.

How the Advocacy of Community and Voluntary Organisations could be improved

Interviewees were asked to say how they thought the advocacy of Community and Voluntary organisations could be improved and a number of useful suggestions were made.

Need for Greater Co-ordination

There is a perception among the policy makers and observers we interviewed that Community and Voluntary organisations are operating at a disadvantage because of the absence of a representative, coordinating body. The 'sector', rightly or wrongly, is seen by some of those interviewed as 'many headed' and therefore difficult to negotiate with. It was pointed out that senior officials and politicians have limited time availability and so, in the absence of a single representative voice, they will consult with those they already have relationships with. The position of Community and Voluntary organisations was contrasted with the trade union movement and employers' sector. While it was acknowledged that there are deep divisions within both, they have still managed to present a unified argument in relation to certain key topics.

However, short of setting up a formal co-ordinating body for Community and Voluntary organizations, some of the policy makers and observers suggested that, even on an informal basis, larger and smaller organisations – particularly those working on the same issues – should share information and co-ordinate activities with one another.

The need for greater co-ordination was mentioned by some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations. However, while the need for greater co-ordination was accepted, it was felt that the idea that Community and Voluntary organisations can be put into one unitary organisation is misguided due to the wide diversity of the organisations' agendas.

Use of Alliances

Returning to the idea of greater co-ordination, some of the policy maker and observer interviewees suggested that working in alliances could be a useful way for Community and Voluntary organisations to move forward. One interviewee said that even from a pragmatic perspective, such alliance working can 'provide cover' so that individual organisations are at one remove from criticism that may be levelled at Government – this view was corroborated by some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations.

However, one well-informed observer pointed out that a major downside to alliance working is that it can lead to individual organisations neglecting the development of their own advocacy infrastructure – again a concern expressed by some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations. Another issue raised in relation to alliance working is that they can be sometimes run in an unsustainable manner with members not having to carry any of the running costs.

Among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations, alliances are seen as providing a very useful tool to amplify the voice of smaller organisations.

Alliances are also quite adaptable and can be set up on a sectoral or an issue specific basis.

Debate over Consolidation

A number of the policy makers and observers interviewed referred to a perception that there is duplication of services in some areas and certain services being resistant to renewal and redevelopment, with legitimate requests from funders being described as threats. As one interviewee said: “There’s a need for the ‘sector’ to talk more about what it can do better”.

In this context, it was pointed out that consolidation is occurring within other sectors of society and a more strategic approach is required to this issue among Community and Voluntary organisations. In addition, the need for more turnover of personnel within Community and Voluntary organisations to help freshen thinking and develop new approaches was mentioned.

In the advocacy context, one policy maker, who has a strong background in working for Community and Voluntary organisations, said that there is a need for a shift of focus in the content of the organisations’ advocacy work. “What is our contribution, what should we change? The sector needs to examine its own performance and then be able to demonstrate the results in the context of how it delivers for its clients not simply the organisation”. In this context, the danger of self-perpetuation and ‘service creep’ was referred to.

As with the earlier discussion on the need for greater coordination among Community and Voluntary organisations, there was a strong emphasis among the interviewees from the organisations on the importance of respecting diversity when the issue of consolidation was raised. However, it was acknowledged by some that there might be too much diversity amongst Community and Voluntary organisations.

Some of the interviewees suggested that consolidation is necessary to overcome many instances of duplication of services: “It is happening in other sectors so the Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ should be no different”. A view was expressed that there is an abundance of CEOs in Community and Voluntary organisations that is unsustainable. On the other hand, it was contended by some interviewees that many of the organisations working on similar issues serve different needs and functions in relation to those issues.

Among the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations the general consensus was that if consolidations are to take place, they should ideally come about through agreement rather than being imposed by funders. Some interviewees felt that alternatives to formal consolidation should be pursued as well, including innovative solutions like sharing offices and other costs and larger organisations mentoring smaller organisations.

Need for Training and Support

A number of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations felt that more training and support is needed to improve the standard of advocacy work by organisations. For example, one interviewee suggested that there is a lack of continuous professional development within the sector in advocacy skills with practitioners having to gain skills and knowledge through a process of trial and error. However, given the budgetary constraints being experienced by Community and Voluntary organisations, it was suggested that more external advocacy expertise needs to be offered to organisations whose primary work is wholly effective.

Wariness of Over-Professionalisation

Some of the interviewees from the Community and Voluntary organisations drew a sharp distinction between the trend towards the professionalisation of their organisations and the increasingly professional standards to which organisations are holding themselves to account. It was suggested that leading organisations are more transparent and comply with higher standards of service provision than counterparts within the state sector.

On the other hand, concerns were expressed about the effect professionalisation could have on Community and Voluntary organisations. As one interviewee said: “the level of risk involved in challenging the status quo isn’t conducive to providing stable career paths for professionals”. In this context, maintaining a strong voluntarist ethic was deemed to be essential.

How the Qualitative Research contributes to the Advocacy Initiative’s Goals

1. Advancing Knowledge on the Current State of Advocacy in Ireland

The qualitative interviews have provided a considerable amount of data that reinforces some of the conclusions from the quantitative research and also adds some new perspectives. Among the key findings on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations are:

- There is a consensus across most interviewees that in terms of effectiveness, Community and Voluntary organisations get a rating of three out of five for their advocacy.
- Community and Voluntary organisations see public campaigning as being an important mechanism to get their issues onto the policy making agenda. Some policy makers tend to prefer quiet diplomacy.
- There appear to be large variations in the levels of understanding among Community and Voluntary organisations as to how the policy making system

works in Ireland – in particular how the needs and wants of elected representatives and full-time officials should be best addressed.

- Policy makers and observers agree that there is an over-emphasis on critique and an under-emphasis on acknowledging progress and providing solutions by Community and Voluntary organisations. Some of this critique is seen as being carried out for the purposes of organisational profile building.
- On the other hand, critique is seen as a key part of holding the State to account which is perceived as being a key function of Community and Voluntary organisations. However, there is some acceptance that more sophistication is required in how this critique is delivered.
- The issue of respect is a major bone of contention between policy makers and advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations. Policy makers talk about the need for advocates to be more respectful of the mandates and responsibilities that they have and more understanding of the constraints they work under. On the other hand those working with the Community and Voluntary organisations talk about a lack of respect for their role and some talked about threats even being made to funding because of advocacy.
- The need for advocates to become more strategic and proactive was widely accepted. Policy makers also felt that advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations need to become more 'realistic' about what is achievable in the context of the current economic climate.

2. Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Current Challenges

Perhaps the area where the qualitative research contributed most was in identifying some of the challenging facing Community and Voluntary organisations in looking to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy.

In this context, one of the major difficulties facing the 'sector' is that that very few of the policy makers we interviewed had developed a clear and considered view on the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in a democratic society. In addition, a range of other challenges were identified including:

- Among Community and Voluntary organisation advocates themselves, the need was expressed for more debate and discussion on advocacy as well as for the development of a shared definition of advocacy.
- When asked to consider the role of advocacy, policy makers and observers tended to view it in terms of how such advocacy could contribute to keeping policy makers better informed. In this context, a high premium was placed on the views of organisations involved in service provision.
- Some organisations are seen by policy makers as more credible and legitimate than others – the considerations involved here include how many members or service users organisations have, how well-researched their advocacy materials are and how they go about their advocacy work.

- The need to for Community and Voluntary organisations to remain ‘connected’ to the communities whom represent was seen as being of paramount importance.

Another series of challenges facing Community and Voluntary organisations arise from the state’s funding of such organisations. In this regard, the following were identified through the qualitative research:

- It was accepted almost universally by the interviewees that state funding of Community and Voluntary organisations does impose some element of constraint on such organisations in terms of how they approach their advocacy work. However, differing view were expressed on the extent of the constraints involved and how they actually impact on advocacy.
- There were differing perspectives as to whether it is appropriate or prudent for the State to fund the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations.
- Community and Voluntary organisations would seem to welcome the idea of a formal Code of Conduct or a Framework of Understanding for managing the relationship between the State and such organisations. Policy makers don’t seem to have engaged much with this concept yet.

In relation to meeting some of the challenges mentioned above, a number of suggestions were made by the interviewees including:

- Policy makers and observers believe that there is a need for greater coordination amongst Community and Voluntary organisations, possibly along the lines of what the trade union movement and employers’ bodies do. While the need for greater coordination is accepted amongst advocates, the notion of one overarching organisation for Community and Voluntary organisations is seen as misguided.
- The use of more alliance working resonated with policy makers and advocates, although with some reservations.
- The need for greater consolidation amongst Community and Voluntary organisations was strongly expressed by policy makers and observers. There wasn’t as much enthusiasm amongst advocates for consolidation and alternatives like cost sharing and mentoring were suggested.
- More training and support to improve the quality of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations was seen by advocates as a good idea.

3. Contributing to Informed Debate within the Sector and with the State

The qualitative research has helped to contribute to better informed debate within the ‘sector’ by providing much of the data that was presented for consideration and

discussion at the Forum and the conference. In addition, it has helped to start the process of more clearly defining the nature of the challenges facing the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations and some identifying some of the possible solutions to these challenges.



Section Six: The Advocacy Forum

The Advocacy Initiative's half-day Forum was held on Thursday, 25 March 2010 in All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin and was attended by nearly 50 participants. All of the 170 organisations that took part in the online survey were invited to nominate one of the people with responsibility for advocacy within their organisation to take part in the Forum (demand was such that the number of requests to take part exceeded the number of places).

The purpose of the Forum was to deepen the Initiative's exploration of the Community and Voluntary sector's experiences of advocacy in Ireland and to provide a platform for advocates to propose ways to improve the conduct of advocacy. It also served as a reference point relative to the information that at that time was emerging from the quantitative and qualitative research and augmented our understanding of the current state of advocacy as perceived by the sector.

Methodology

A workshop facilitated by Michael Donnelly – again based on the Café Workshop model – was used so the Forum was highly participative. The agenda consisted of three rounds of discussions and two plenary sessions focusing on the following three questions:

- Question 1: Why is advocacy important to your organisation and the wider sector;
- Question 2: Agree three words to describe the state of NGO advocacy at the moment;
- Question 3: Agree three things that could make advocacy better.

Feedback

The feedback from the Forum participants is set out below under each relevant question.

Why is Advocacy Important?

Each group was asked to canvass the views of its members on why advocacy is important to their organisation and the wider sector. The paragraphs below set out the views of the different groups as collated from their respective flipchart pages.

Advocacy provides a **voice** for those without or on the margins and can play a key role in addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality. It provides a mechanism through which citizens can take back their own power and hold Government to account.

For some organisations it provides a means for **representing** or **leading** the members of that organisation. Advocacy can open up space to debate and make progress in policy terms on new issues.

Advocacy is about equality, **empowerment**, participation and rights and is inseparable from the work of achieving lasting change. However, it needs to be accepted that advocacy is not important for all Community and Voluntary organisations.

Current State of Advocacy

Participants in each group were asked to give their perspective on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations and to agree on three key points. The following paragraphs contain the key points gathered during the first plenary session.

Advocacy was described as being somewhat **underdeveloped** and fragmented at the moment. It is still in the process of **evolving** so, as such, advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is somewhat uncertain and its effectiveness is being tested. Consequently, the nature of much of the current advocacy work being carried out by Community and Voluntary organisations was characterised as being ad hoc and non strategic as well as being short-term and reactionary.

Community and Voluntary organisations were described as being caught in a 'grief-cycle' over the **lack of respect** shown towards much of their advocacy work by elements of the state. Despite this, there was a strong view expressed that there are lots of opportunities for Community and Voluntary organisations to advocate effectively.

Some of those present at the Forum said that their organisations felt **threatened** as a result of their advocacy work, particularly by some specific Government departments, because of this sense of threat, the advocacy work of some Community and Voluntary organisations has become somewhat defensive. Some of

those present at the Forum also described their own advocacy as being prioritised and controlled.

Warnings were issued by some of the attendees about the danger of Community and Voluntary organisations becoming **co-opted** by government as well as approaching their advocacy work on a clientelist ‘case by case’ basis. In addition, because of the contested nature of organisations’ relationship with the state, some of the Forum attendees expressed concerns about the risk of **self-censorship** in their advocacy work.

Finally, the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations was characterised by some as being carried out on a collective and **collaborative** yet **competitive** basis.

Looking Forward

In the final section of the Forum, participants were asked in their groups to agree on three things that could make the conduct of advocacy in Ireland better. Below the key points made by the various groups are set out.

The ‘sector’ needs to urgently and creatively use the opportunity presented by the current climate to **improve** the overall state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations through:

1. A collective response – organisations need to work together to overcome current difficulties;
2. Persuade government to see Community and Voluntary organisations as ‘real’ partners;
3. Focusing on what Community and Voluntary organisations are advocating for rather than what they’re against.

A number of other key points were made during this session.

Advocacy needs to become a key part of community development. However, there needs to be a **collective understanding** within the sector of what advocacy actually means. In addition, there needs to be an ‘honest’ talk within the sector about the effectiveness of its advocacy work.

Community and Voluntary organisations need to get buy-in from funders into their long-term visions and advocacy strategies. The ‘sector’ needs to create a debate about getting **adequate resources** including core-funding of which advocacy would be a part. In addition, Community and Voluntary organisations need to find more resources for advocacy that are independent and do not have strings attached. In

this regard, it was felt that more alliances should be built between Community and Voluntary organisations in order to maximise impact.

Advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations needs to be premised on the philosophical premise that as **citizens**, advocates have the right to participate in how policy decisions are made. Likewise, there needs to be **meaningful participation** in the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations by those who are socially excluded and their **voice** needs to be a key part of such work. Community and Voluntary organisations, through their advocacy work, have to look at ways through which they can empower those they serve or on whose interests they act.

Advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations has to seek to win the battle of ideas amongst the **general public**. The 'sector's' advocacy needs to be well-informed and **evidence-based** as well as being creative and innovative. Community and Voluntary organisations need to celebrate their successes by drawing attention to the impact they are making and in this context they need to look at ways of measuring impact.

Community and Voluntary organisations should be **providing solutions** to Government and policy makers in their advocacy work. In addition, with regard to the 'sector's' relationship with Government, a debate needs to be initiated – in the first instance within the sector itself – about defining possible **Terms of Engagement** with Government. Once agreement has been reached on such Terms of Engagement between Community and Voluntary organisations, then there should be a dialogue with Government on the matter.

Finally, attendees at the Forum suggested that Community and Voluntary organisations should consider taking more **legal challenges** against the State to vindicate citizen's rights and that the 'sector' needs to create a space for **shared learning** about advocacy.

How the Advocacy Forum Contributes to the Advocacy Initiative's Goals

1. Advancing Knowledge on the Current State of Advocacy in Ireland

The Forum provided a platform for a wider and more in-depth participation by advocates involved with Community and Voluntary organisations in the research process. Among the key findings to emerge on the current state of advocacy in Ireland were:



- Advocacy is seen as being critical for those Community and Voluntary organisations working for lasting change, however, it is not important for the missions of all Community and Voluntary organisations.
- At present many shortcomings in the conduct of advocacy were identified – it is seen as ad hoc, non-strategic, short term and reactionary. Some of these deficiencies could be put down to the reality that advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is somewhat underdeveloped and is still evolving.

The issue as to whether threats are being experienced by Community and Voluntary organisations due to their advocacy work was one of the key drivers behind the Advocacy Initiative. A number of the Forum attendees did refer to experiencing threats and also talked about finding a lack of respect in their dealings with some parts of the state. As a result, some Forum attendees expressed the view that Community and Voluntary organisations are becoming defensive and engaging in self-censorship as a result. Despite these concerns, there was a strong sense that there are lots of opportunities for Community and Voluntary organisations to advocate effectively.

2. Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Challenges

The Forum spent much of its time looking at the challenges Community and Voluntary organisations need to take on in order to become more effective in their advocacy including:

- There was a strong consensus at the Forum that Community and Voluntary organisations need to improve how they conduct their advocacy through increasing the resources applied to advocacy, more alliance working with like-minded organisations, sharing learning with each other and by having an honest assessment of the effectiveness of their advocacy work.
- In improving their advocacy work, Community and Voluntary organisations need to look at how they empower and provide a voice for those people experiencing exclusion as well as engaging more effectively with the wider public.
- Community and Voluntary organisations will have to become more focused on providing more innovative and well-researched solutions in their advocacy work.
- A dialogue is needed on defining possible terms of engagement with government.

3. Contributing to Informed Debate with the Sector and with the State

The Forum provided a unique opportunity for a range of advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations to look at the state of their own advocacy and to examine ways in which this advocacy could be improved. The fact that almost 50 such advocates devoted a half day to getting involved in such discussions was a useful contribution to stimulating debate within the 'sector'. This debate can be widened due to the fact that the perspectives of the Forum participants was captured and can be passed on to a wider audience through this report.

Section Seven: The Advocacy Initiative Conference

On 10 June 2010, The Advocacy Initiative hosted a conference in the Ashling Hotel Dublin. The purpose of the conference – which was attended by 130 delegates – was to:

1. Present the outcomes of the research on the current state of NGO advocacy conducted by Montague Communications Ltd and Middlequarter Ltd;
2. Consider the implications of this research for the conduct of advocacy;
3. Discuss the next steps that need to be taken to enhance the effectiveness of NGO advocacy.

The conference agenda is attached as Appendix 4 to this report.

Presentations

The opening session comprised presentations on the research findings and their implications for the sector. This was followed by three perspectives on the implications of the research findings from three members of the Initiative's Steering Group – Catherine Joyce (Advocacy Manager, Barnardos), Mike Allen (Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland), and Frances Byrne (CEO, One Parent Exchange Network). The following is a brief summary of their presentations the full text of which may be found at Appendix 5.

Drawing on the messages from the research undertaken for the Advocacy Initiative, **Catherine Joyce** differentiated between individual and policy advocacy, which she suggested grows out of the former as a recognition that fundamental change often requires action at a political and policy level rather than trying to apply a band-aid solution to individual problems. Consequently, she claimed, service providing organisations need to identify longer-term solutions to the challenges they encounter daily. Stating that advocacy is a tool for speaking up and out, and for hammering home hard truths about our society, Catherine contended that NGO advocacy should be recognised as a key ingredient in a democracy but that this needs to be championed as its role, legitimacy and value are contested. And she suggested several ways in which this might be done which included:

- Providing examples of actual lived experience to illustrate the need for change – including the voices of real people, possibly through new media;
- Ensuring that advocacy demands are realistic, reasonable, targeted and achievable – “the voice of reason, like the voice of experience, is harder to ignore, harder to dismiss and harder to argue with”;
- Proposing solutions – advocacy should not only be about highlighting problems but also putting forward tangible solutions;

- Avoiding antagonistic and adversarial relationships with those we need to persuade – a culture of mistrust, hostility and mutual disrespect is not conducive to effective advocacy. While passionately making the case for change we should seek to praise what we can and criticise what we have to – not just hard to ignore but easy to listen to.

Emphasising that advocacy seeks to redress imbalances and injustices for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities across Ireland, Catherine called for it to rise above the “us and them” mentality sometimes entrenched both within the sector and among policy makers. And she ended with a plea for our democracy to evolve to recognise the vital role that advocacy can play in making Ireland a better, fairer country in everyone’s best interest.

Mike Allen defined advocacy as the “process of making a case, setting out a claim or set of claims to influence public policy on behalf of a particular group or interest”, and that these are claims for resources, life chances or rights. He suggested that advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is essentially remedial in that it seeks to remedy the fact that people and communities are “not just poor because they have a smaller slice of the cake but because they were not present when the cake was sliced up or, indeed, when the recipe was agreed”. Recognising this power imbalance is useful in avoiding pointless complaints about the relative powerlessness of Community and Voluntary organisations in the interests of focusing on how they can be as effective as possible – and he claimed that there is a lot that can be achieved within the current realities. Mike also challenged the narrative by some organisations that the Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ is under threat because it is outspoken, suggesting other reasons and perspectives – including that the current cutbacks are not about the ‘sector’ at all but rather reflect the value that society in general places upon the communities and people that we seek to represent. This, he suggested, makes the case for better, rather than necessarily more, advocacy – and certainly not silencing. And he argued that our current predicament might be due to our being overly focused on the ‘sector’ and the institutions we have built, rather than defending the people Community and Voluntary organisations exist to defend. He concluded with three suggestions for the renewal of Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ advocacy:

1. A firm appreciation of the power relationships in which we operate, and of both the limitations and potential of what we can achieve;
2. A new sharing of ideas, analysis, experience and skills; and
3. A profound reconnection with our original purpose, so that our advocacy is driven by renewed understanding of the interests and aspirations of the communities we set out to serve.

Frances Byrne commenced her presentation with the example of OPEN’s recent advocacy experience in working with the Department of Social Protection over the past four years on the proposed changes to the main social welfare payment for

one-parent families. Having worked collaboratively and constructively on this reform – which OPEN had evaluated as positive for lone parents, for children and for society – the Department had unilaterally and without notice issued a press release on the proposed changes that was pointless and confusing, led to inaccurate and misleading reporting in the media and caused great distress and concern among lone parents. This caused great frustration and perplexity and raised a series of questions, she contended, for OPEN and the other lone-parent NGOs that had sought to work with a Government department on a significant policy development. In particular, the experience demonstrated the chasm that exists between the advocacy expectations of Community and Voluntary organisations and the ‘system’ that, on this occasion, excluded the NGOs and wasted or ignored their capacity to communicate with lone parents, prompting the suspicion that lone parents and/or the organisations that represent them are not valued. Recalling the origins of the Advocacy Initiative in 2008, i.e. before the era of unprecedented cuts, Frances pointed out that the need to interrogate the space between the Community and Voluntary sectors’ perceptions of its role and those of the elected and unelected it seeks to influence has long been recognised. It requires honest examination by the sector and may involve facilitated dialogue with policy actors – and is a prerequisite for defining rules of engagement or principles of effective practice to deliver the optimal advocacy outcomes.

Discussion Session 1: Response to the Research

The first discussion session focused on delegates’ response to the following three questions:

1. What do the results say about the current state of advocacy within the Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ and the effectiveness of advocacy within the ‘sector’?
2. What conclusions can be drawn from the results which identify a gap between the perspectives on the role of advocacy between policy makers and Community and Voluntary organisations?
3. What issues need to be considered in order to improve the effectiveness of advocacy activity by organisations in the Community and Voluntary ‘sector’?

The feedback is set out under each question below.

What do the results say about the current state of advocacy within the Community and Voluntary 'sector' and the effectiveness of advocacy within the 'sector'?

There was an overall sense that the delegates engaged well with the research results, despite some people finding certain aspects of the research uncomfortable. The view that the Community and Voluntary 'sector' should use the research as a basis for moving forward was strongly expressed and there was an acceptance that the majority of organisations are not being 'persecuted' for their advocacy. On the other hand, the fact that some say that they have received threats is an important issue for those organisations and the 'sector' as a whole and requires some additional research as a matter of urgency. However, the conference delegates expressed the view that Community and Voluntary organisations need to focus on the needs of the people that they seek to represent and in that sense the 'sector' needs to persevere with advocacy despite the lack of respect it sometimes receives from some of those to whom it advocates.

The effectiveness of the 'sector's' advocacy work was a key issue for those at the conference as it was felt that advocacy is not just about building organisational profile, it's about delivering results for those whom the sector seeks to represent or act for. Despite the consensus that Community and Voluntary organisations could be more effective in their advocacy, it was acknowledged that the 'sector' is performing reasonably well given the resources it has at its disposal and in comparison to the business sector and the trade union movement. The need to develop ways of defining advocacy more clearly was agreed across the board as well as the requirement to measure and assess effectiveness. In this context it was felt that:

- There is confusion over the definition of advocacy and this means that it is hard to assess its effectiveness;
- It would be important to go beyond perceptions of effectiveness and look at ways of assessing actual effectiveness in terms of the delivery of policy or legislative change – the need to distinguish between visibility and efficacy was expressed strongly;
- Any methods for the assessment of effectiveness need to be weighted for resources/size of organisations.

Conference delegates felt that it was clear from the research findings that many Community and Voluntary organisations do not understand the policymaking process. Delegates also expressed the view that the sector needs to look at how service users can input their experience and perspectives into organisations' advocacy.

What conclusions can be drawn from the results which identify a gap between the perspectives on the role of advocacy between policy makers and Community and Voluntary organisations?

There was a consensus that the Community and Voluntary 'sector' needs to strike a balance between building relationships with key policymakers while at the same time powerfully making the case for their constituents or service users. However in doing so, it was agreed that Community and Voluntary organisations must be careful not to focus their advocacy in a way that is 'personal' to individual policy makers.

It was felt that the Community and Voluntary sector needs to acknowledge that some policy makers, as well as some advocates from other sectors, do raise questions about the legitimacy of some organisations' advocacy work. However, the consensus view was that the 'sector' should not let these questions distract it from the important work it has to undertake. The need for a more strategic approach to advocacy by NGOs was accepted and it was felt that such an approach is particularly required in terms of the selection of targets and tactics. In this context, there was agreement that more detailed research is required into the advocacy work that is being undertaken in different sub-sectors of the Community and Voluntary 'sector'.

There was quite a bit of discussion at the conference around the notion of a 'gap' between policymakers and Community and Voluntary organisations and it yielded the following points:

- Some questioned whether there is a 'gap' at all but the consensus view is that such a 'gap' exists;
- There is a strong sense that the 'gap' is widest between public officials and the 'sector' as distinct from elected representatives and the 'sector';
- Some delegates felt that there is a need to look at ways of bridging this 'gap';
- Others said that the 'gap' should be ignored and that the Community and Voluntary 'sector' should get on with its job of fearlessly advocating for its constituents.

Finally, one of the strong views to emerge in response to this question is that it is not incompatible for Community and Voluntary organisations to be both constructive and critical in terms of their advocacy.

What issues need to be considered in order to improve the effectiveness of advocacy activity by organisations in the Community and Voluntary 'sector'?

There was discussion among some of the delegates as to whether the term advocacy should be retained or dropped and there was a certain degree of contention on the

matter. Other delegates focused their attention on the need to agree a common definition of advocacy.

In looking to the future, some delegates argued for a switch in emphasis in Community and Voluntary 'sector' advocacy with a greater emphasis being placed by organisations on finding common ground with policy makers and positioning themselves as solution providers. Many conference attendees said that the 'sector' needs to look at how it can better harness public opinion and a wider alliance of supporting organisations around its campaigns.

There was a very strong focus on the need to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding levels in the 'sector'. In this regard, a number of specific issues were raised:

- Community and Voluntary organisations need to better understand the processes through which policy is made – it was felt that there was huge scope to learn here;
- A better and wider range of advocacy tools needs to be developed;
- New channels of communication – many mentions were made of social media in this regard – between Community and Voluntary organisations and the wider public need to be developed;
- The 'sector' needs to create ways in which the experience of service users can be heard;
- There is a need to capture and pass on the institutional memory that has been developed within the 'sector' – in this context, the need for training to develop advocacy skills was mentioned;
- There is a requirement to look at research which will tell us what advocacy techniques work the best;
- Community and Voluntary organisations need to learn more about the appropriate use of different tactics, for example, when should discreet lobbying be used as distinct from public campaigning;
- Strategic planning skills need to be enhanced in the 'sector'.

Some conference attendees also said that the 'sector' should look at addressing wider issues that could impinge on advocacy like the Electoral and Charities Acts and the broadcasting legislation. The need for greater sharing and mutual support within the sector was strongly endorsed.

Discussion Session 2: Next Steps

The second discussion held in the afternoon session of the conference focused on identifying possible next steps that the Advocacy Initiative could take and a wide range of suggestions emerged.



One of the steps identified was the need to create a **common definition** and understanding of advocacy. In this context, it was felt that it might be useful to publish a pamphlet on advocacy in Ireland, the rationale for it and its significance – some delegates argued that such a pamphlet could help build confidence within the ‘sector’ too.

The creation of a **network** for Community and Voluntary ‘sector’ advocates was suggested in order to share resources because it was recognised that due to the disparate nature of the ‘sector’, the considerable resources within it are spread unevenly and this contributes to the underperformance of the ‘sector’. Some of the practical actions that such a network could take include hosting an annual conference and publishing a regular e-newsletter on advocacy.

Another area of work that the conference delegates felt that such a network could engage in included providing professional **support and training** in advocacy skills, strategic planning, etc, through:

- The development of an online resource;
- Organising encounters with civil/public servants;
- Developing and delivering an integrated training programme – the sector should develop a proposal and pitch it to funders;
- The provision of mentoring by experienced advocates;
- Development of a training manual.

Conference delegates proposed that more **research** be undertaken into a number of areas including how the advocacy of Community and Voluntary organisations compares with that of business groupings as well as the development of case studies of successful advocacy – both national and international – that are relevant to a range of sub-sectors within the ‘sector’. In addition, delegates suggested that a common **evaluation** tool – that could be available online – be developed.

In terms of next steps one very specific and concrete proposal that emerged was the need for the ‘sector’ to look at the recently enacted Charities **legislation** and the Electoral Acts in terms of their impacts on advocacy. Some posed the question whether Community and Voluntary organisations should seek to get this legislation amended to remove any unreasonable inhibitions on advocacy.

The notion of developing **Rules of Engagement** around how best dialogue between Community and Voluntary organisations sector and policymakers should be conducted was suggested. In this context delegates said that the ‘sector’ should look to international experience in terms of what constitutes best practice overseas and what would be appropriate for Ireland. It was argued that such Rules needed to be framed in the context of the new ‘post-partnership’ era. Another suggestion that emerged in the context of improving dialogue between the ‘sector’ and State was

the proposal that – in the context of the debate on constitutional reform – Community and Voluntary organisations should look for representation in the Seanad.

There was clear understanding that considerable **resources** would be needed to undertake such a comprehensive programme of work and the following were suggested by the conference participants:

- The expertise of the existing advocates within the ‘sector’ should be pooled through the creation of a network with an individual or organisation taking responsibility for it;
- There is a clear need for financial support to deliver these actions and a proposal should be developed and pitched to the philanthropic funders in this regard;
- A dedicated website needs to be put in place on which an online toolkit could be published;
- A top quality training programme needs to be developed and delivered.

As to who should take **responsibility** for undertaking these ‘next steps’, a range of proposals emanated from the conference participants. Some delegates suggested The Wheel or a ‘son/daughter’ of The Wheel, a third-level college or a collection of individuals with strong advocacy experience. However, there was a strong body of opinion that the Advocacy Initiative should continue with this work. The rationale behind this proposal was that the Advocacy Initiative can afford to be ‘brave’ in advocating for advocacy due to its tight remit and that there is clearly already strong support for its work – as evidenced by the participation in the Initiative’s activities – and that it should continue in some shape or form. Other attendees suggested that if the Initiative is to continue, it needs to be renamed and more formally constituted.

How the Conference Contributes to the Advocacy Initiative’s Goals

1. Advancing Knowledge on the Current State of Advocacy in Ireland

Due to its large and widespread attendance, the conference provided the Advocacy Initiative with an opportunity to ‘road-test’ its initial research findings on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations. While some of the conference delegates were uncomfortable with parts of the research findings, there was a strong consensus that the research provided a basis for the ‘sector’ moving forward.

The conference did, however, provide an opportunity to add some additional flavour to the research conducted in the earlier parts of this process. Some of these

perspectives on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations included:

- While organisations could be more effective in their advocacy, they are performing reasonably well given the resources at their disposal;
- The deficits in understanding of the policy making system are real and need to be addressed;
- There was an acceptance that the majority of Community and Voluntary organisations are not being 'persecuted' due to their advocacy – however some organisations are experiencing difficulties in their relations with some parts of the state;
- However, while lack of respect from some state institutions is a real and pressing issue, Community and Voluntary organisations have to persevere in their advocacy work.

2. Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Challenges

The conference was perhaps most useful in getting a clear sense from advocates working with Community and Voluntary organisations of the challenges they face in becoming more effective advocates as well as providing a platform to consider possible mechanisms for overcoming these challenges. Amongst the challenges identified were:

- The need to define more clearly and precisely the nature and the extent of threats being received by Community and Voluntary organisations as a result of their advocacy work. In particular, to examine whether there is any sectoral pattern to this experience;
- Developing a clear definition of advocacy was identified by conference delegates as a key priority as well as developing agreed mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of such work;
- Finding ways through which service users or people experiencing exclusion can have their voices heard through the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations;
- One of the key challenges identified was how Community and Voluntary organisations can strike an appropriate balance between strongly making the case for their constituents and developing good relations with policy makers – in this context conference delegates emphasised the importance of advocates becoming solution providers;
- How do Community and Voluntary organisations address the question of the legitimacy of their advocacy work;
- Developing a more strategic and proactive approach to advocacy amongst Community and Voluntary organisations;

- In this context, Community and Voluntary organisations need to look at how they can better harness wider opinion within society;
- The need to address the wide range of skills and knowledge deficits.

In seeking to overcome these challenges, the conference delegates suggested a wide range of possible solutions which will be expanded upon in the recommendations contained towards the rear of this report. Some of these suggestions included:

- Publication of a pamphlet on advocacy;
- Creation of a resource sharing network;
- Provision of training and support;
- Need for more research;
- Development of a common evaluation tool;
- Initiation of a discussion on rules of engagement between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state;
- Need for more resourcing of advocacy work;
- Putting in place of a dedicated body or bodies to progress these suggestions.

3. Contributing to Informed Debate with the Sector and with the State

Through the participation of nearly 130 delegates, the conference provided a good opportunity to engage with key advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations about the current state of NGO advocacy. Usefully, there seems to have been a broad acceptance of the veracity of the research. This enabled an extremely important discussion on identifying the challenges that face Community and Voluntary organisations in improving their advocacy as well as facilitating an intense debate about how these challenges can best be overcome.

In addition, due to the way in which the conference was organised – with facilitators and note takers at each table, the Advocacy Initiative was able to capture the rich tapestry of perspectives offered at the conference and is able to share them with the wider ‘sector’ and beyond through this report.



Section Eight: What We Have Learned from the Advocacy Initiative Phase 1

This section seeks to tie together the learning collected from each aspect of the Advocacy Initiative and reflect on how each part has contributed in achieving the Initiative's goals.

Advancing Knowledge on the Current State of Advocacy in Ireland

The leadership of the Advocacy Initiative shared an interest in exploring the experience, practice and principles of advocacy and sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on the current status of advocacy in Ireland, beginning with a simple question: *What is your experience of being an advocate and doing advocacy?* From this starting point, they hoped to build up a picture of advocacy at this point in time.

The Quantitative Survey makes a significant contribution towards this aspiration in capturing important contemporaneous data from 170 organisations currently engaged in advocacy out of a total sample of 362 (representing a response rate of 47%). This data tells us, *inter alia*, that:

- 93% of participating organisations stated that they do engage in advocacy
- Most organisations are currently doing more advocacy than they have in the past: three quarters are doing more than 5 years ago; over two-thirds are doing more advocacy than 3 years ago; while almost one half are doing more advocacy than 1 year ago
- When asked to rate the effectiveness of their own advocacy, most organisations awarded themselves a score of 3 out of 5; however, almost as many rated their advocacy at 4 out of 5, or better
- Successes achieved through advocacy include
 - Policy development;
 - Protecting existing resources;
 - Minimising a reduction in resources;
 - Developing a new service;
 - Changing a policy decision; and
 - Achieving an administrative change in the way a policy or service is delivered.
- In spite of the high proportion of organisations that state that they engage in advocacy, almost three out of 10 respondents do not have a dedicated advocacy budget; at the other end of the scale, 1 in 20 respondents have an advocacy budget between €0.5m and €1m.

- Overwhelmingly, 86% of respondents believe the environment for advocacy is becoming more challenging
- In spite of this more challenging environment, more than 4 in every 5 respondents state that they have not had to reduce their advocacy in the past two years
- Of the minority of organisations that have had to reduce their advocacy, almost three-quarters attributed the reduction to internal factors while close to two-thirds cited external factors
- When asked to pick one nonprofit organisation that they consider effective in its advocacy respondents nominated a diverse range of organisations yet with a clear consensus on the “leader” (Barnardos)

The profile of organisations participating in the survey both confirms and draws attention to several common features of the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. For example (see Appendix Two):

- The diversity of the sector is illustrated by
 - The range of “sub-sectors” represented by respondents
 - The widely differing scale of budgets
 - The correspondingly wide range in size of staffing complement
 - The diversity of sources of funding
- Yet there are very common features as represented by
 - The proportion of respondents located in Dublin
 - In spite of funding being received from a wide range of Government Departments and agencies, the overwhelming significance of the Departments of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and Health and Children (including the HSE) in terms of scale and scope of funding.

The qualitative interviews have also provided a considerable amount of data that reinforces some of the conclusions from the quantitative research and adds some new perspectives. Among the key findings on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations are:

- A consensus across most interviewees that in terms of effectiveness, Community and Voluntary organisations get a rating of three out of five for their advocacy.
- Community and Voluntary organisations see public campaigning as being an important mechanism to get their issues onto the policy making agenda. Some policy makers tend to prefer quiet diplomacy.
- There appear to be large variations in the levels of understanding among Community and Voluntary organisations as to how the policy making system

works in Ireland – in particular how the needs and wants of elected representatives and full-time officials should be best addressed.

- Policy makers and observers agree that there is an over-emphasis on critique and an under-emphasis on acknowledging progress and providing solutions by Community and Voluntary organisations. Some of this critique is seen as being carried out for the purposes of organisational profile building.
- On the other hand, critique is seen as a key part of holding the State to account, which is perceived as being a key function of Community and Voluntary organisations. However, there is some acceptance that more sophistication is required in how this critique is delivered.
- The issue of respect is a major bone of contention between policy makers and advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations. Policy makers talk about the need for advocates to be more respectful of the mandates and responsibilities that they have and more understanding of the constraints they work under. On the other hand those working with the Community and Voluntary organisations talk about a lack of respect for their role and some talked about threats even being made to funding because of advocacy.
- The need for advocates to become more strategic and proactive was widely accepted. Policy makers also felt that advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations need to become more 'realistic' about what is achievable in the context of the current economic climate.

The Forum provided a platform for a wider and more in-depth participation by advocates involved with Community and Voluntary organisations in the research process. Among the key findings to emerge on the current state of advocacy in Ireland were:

- Advocacy is seen as being critical for those Community and Voluntary organisations working for lasting change, however, it is not important for the missions of all Community and Voluntary organisations.
- At present many shortcomings in the conduct of advocacy were identified – it is seen as ad hoc, non-strategic, short term and reactionary. Some of these deficiencies could be put down to the reality that advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is somewhat underdeveloped and is still evolving.

The issue as to whether threats are being experienced by Community and Voluntary organisations due to their advocacy work was one of the key drivers behind the Advocacy Initiative. A number of the Forum attendees did refer to experiencing threats and also talked about finding a lack of respect in their dealings with some parts of the state. As a result, some Forum attendees expressed the view that Community and Voluntary organisations are becoming defensive and engaging in self-censorship as a result. Despite these concerns, there was a strong sense that there are lots of opportunities for Community and Voluntary organisations to advocate effectively.

Due to its large and widespread attendance, the conference provided the Advocacy Initiative with an opportunity to 'road-test' its initial research findings on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations. While some of the conference delegates were uncomfortable with parts of the research findings, there was a strong consensus that the research provided a basis for the 'sector' moving forward. The conference also provided an opportunity to add some additional flavour to the research conducted in the earlier parts of this process. Some of these perspectives on the current state of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations included:

- While organisations could be more effective in their advocacy, they are performing reasonably well given the resources at their disposal;
- The deficits in understanding of the policy making system are real and need to be addressed;
- There was an acceptance that the majority of Community and Voluntary organisations are not being 'persecuted' due to their advocacy; however some organisations are experiencing difficulties in their relations with some parts of the state;
- Although lack of respect from some state institutions is a real and pressing issue, Community and Voluntary organisations have to persevere in their advocacy work.

Providing a Perspective on the Sector's Current Challenges

The literature review does provide some limited insights into the nature of some of the challenges facing Community and Voluntary organisations in their advocacy work such as, unlike some other countries, the Irish Government's still largely unstructured relationship with Community and Voluntary organisations. It also noted that while Social Partnership did provide a formal route into policy making for some Community and Voluntary organisations, the future of the process being currently uncertain, poses significant questions and challenges for such organisations in their advocacy work.

The origins of the Initiative owe much to a growing view within the sector that government and senior civil servants were becoming increasingly hostile to advocacy. Yet, since this was a view that was not shared by everyone, the Initiative's establishment was prompted by an interest in exploring the concern that there is a threat to advocacy.

In the event, more than 56% of respondents stated that they have not experienced any real or threatened (implicit or explicit) loss of funding or opportunity arising

from their advocacy activity. However, up to 44% of respondents have had this experience, with some organisations experiencing more than one such loss or threat. This finding offers a somewhat more nuanced perspective on the question of whether the sector, as a whole, is operating within the context of Government and public agency hostility towards advocacy. While this challenges some current perceptions, it warrants further investigation, not least to examine how consistent it is across specific policy and sub-sectoral areas.

Perhaps the area where the qualitative research contributed most was in identifying some of the challenges facing Community and Voluntary organisations in looking to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy. In this context, one of the major difficulties facing the 'sector' is that very few of the policy makers interviewed had developed a clear and considered view on the role of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in a democratic society. In addition, a range of other challenges were identified including:

- Among Community and Voluntary organisation advocates themselves, the need was expressed for more debate and discussion on advocacy as well as for the development of a shared definition of advocacy.
- When asked to consider the role of advocacy, policy makers and observers tended to view it in terms of how such advocacy could contribute to keeping policy makers better informed. In this context, a high premium was placed on the views of organisations involved in service provision.
- Some organisations are seen by policy makers as more credible and legitimate than others – the considerations involved here include how many members or service users organisations have, how well-researched their advocacy materials are and how they go about their advocacy work.
- The need for Community and Voluntary organisations to remain 'connected' to the communities whom they represent was seen as being of paramount importance.

Another series of challenges facing Community and Voluntary organisations arise from the state's funding of such organisations. In this regard, the following were identified through the qualitative research:

- It was accepted almost universally by the interviewees that state funding of Community and Voluntary organisations does impose some element of constraint on such organisations in terms of how they approach their advocacy work. However, differing views were expressed on the extent of the constraints involved and how they actually impact on advocacy.
- There were differing perspectives as to whether it is appropriate or prudent for the State to fund the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations.

- Community and Voluntary organisations would seem to welcome the idea of a formal Code of Conduct or a Framework of Understanding for managing the relationship between the State and such organisations. Policy makers do not seem to have engaged much with this concept yet.

In relation to meeting some of the challenges mentioned above, a number of suggestions were made by the interviewees including:

- Policy makers and observers believe that there is a need for greater coordination amongst Community and Voluntary organisations, possibly along the lines of what the trade union movement and employers' bodies do. While the need for greater coordination is accepted amongst advocates, the notion of one overarching organisation for Community and Voluntary organisations is seen as misguided.
- The use of more alliance working resonated with policy makers and advocates, although with some reservations.
- The need for greater consolidation amongst Community and Voluntary organisations was strongly expressed by policy makers and observers. There wasn't as much enthusiasm amongst advocates for consolidation and alternatives like cost sharing and mentoring were suggested.
- More training and support to improve the quality of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations was seen by advocates as a good idea.

The Forum spent much of its time looking at the challenges Community and Voluntary organisations need to take on in order to become more effective in their advocacy including:

- The need to improve how organisations conduct their advocacy through increasing the resources applied to advocacy, more alliance working with like-minded organisations, sharing learning with each other and by having an honest assessment of the effectiveness of their advocacy work.
- In improving their advocacy work, Community and Voluntary organisations need to look at how they empower and provide a voice for those people experiencing exclusion as well as engaging more effectively with the wider public.
- Community and Voluntary organisations will have to become more focused on providing more innovative and well-researched solutions in their advocacy work.
- A dialogue is needed on defining possible terms of engagement with government.

The conference was perhaps most useful in getting a clear sense from advocates working with Community and Voluntary organisations of the challenges they face in becoming more effective advocates as well as providing a platform to consider

possible mechanisms for overcoming these challenges. Amongst the challenges identified were:

- The need to define more clearly and precisely the nature and the extent of threats being received by Community and Voluntary organisations as a result of their advocacy work. In particular, to examine whether there is any sectoral pattern to this experience;
- Developing a clear definition of advocacy was identified by conference delegates as a key priority as well as developing agreed mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of such work;
- One of the key challenges identified was how Community and Voluntary organisations can strike an appropriate balance between strongly making the case for their constituents and developing good relations with policy makers – in this context conference delegates emphasised the importance of advocates becoming solution providers;
- How do Community and Voluntary organisations address the question of the legitimacy of their advocacy work;
- Developing a more strategic and proactive approach to advocacy amongst Community and Voluntary organisations;
- In this context, Community and Voluntary organisations need to look at how they can better harness wider opinion within society;
- The need to address the wide range of skills and knowledge deficits.

In seeking to overcome these challenges, the conference delegates suggested a wide range of possible solutions which will be expanded upon in the recommendations contained towards the rear of this report. Some of these suggestions included:

- Publication of a pamphlet on advocacy;
- Creation of a resource sharing network;
- Provision of training and support;
- Need for more research;
- Development of a common evaluation tool;
- Initiation of a discussion on rules of engagement between Community and Voluntary organisations and the state;
- Need for more resourcing of advocacy work;
- Putting in place of a dedicated body or bodies to progress these suggestions.

Contributing to Informed Debate within the Sector and with the State

Perhaps the area where the literature review contributes most to the Advocacy Initiative's goals will be in creating a clear sense among Community and Voluntary organisations that many of the challenges confronting them in their advocacy work

are shared by similar organisations right around the world. The literature review clearly shows that:

- While Community and Voluntary organisations often have adversarial relations with Governments, their right to advocate is guaranteed (in a formal legal sense) once the law has not been breached;
- Governments tend to seek out certain types of advocacy work as it contributes expertise and insights that Government does not necessarily have;
- Because advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is likely to be critical of those in power, such organisations may find themselves denied access to this power and, as a result, may find that their capacity to advocate has been constrained;
- Service providers tend to have more collegiate relationships with the State, although they can also be seen as being subservient;
- Social movement organisations are more independent of Government and this gives them more power in their dealings with Government;
- Relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the State are managed in many different ways around the world;
- There is an increasing prevalence for more formal and contractual relations between Community and Voluntary organisations and the State which tend to be more regulated – in this context, advocacy is rarely seen as an activity that attracts state funding;
- A number of countries have agreed compacts or formal collective agreements with their Community and Voluntary sectors including the UK, Australia, Canada and Switzerland.

The literature review provides some assistance in meeting the need, as identified by Community and Voluntary organisations, of arriving at an agreed definition of the term advocacy:

- Advocacy is defined as the pursuit of influencing outcomes that directly affect people's lives;
- A wide diversity of strategies and techniques are grounded in the premise that social change occurs through politics.

Arriving at a consensus amongst policy makers and advocates in relation to the role of advocacy in a democracy and its legitimacy is another area where the literature has proved useful, showing that:

- The legitimacy of advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations is based on the twin democratic rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech;

- Advocacy organisations help to address some of the democratic deficits that are created by the representative model of democracy – they are indispensable intermediaries;
- Community and Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy provide mechanisms through which those affected by particular political decisions can be part of the production of those decisions.

The qualitative research has helped to contribute to better informed debate within the ‘sector’ by providing much of the data that was presented for consideration and discussion at the Forum and the conference. In addition, it has helped to start the process of more clearly defining the nature of the challenges facing the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations and in identifying some of the possible solutions to these challenges.

The Forum provided a unique opportunity for a range of advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations to look at the state of their own advocacy and to examine ways in which this advocacy could be improved. The fact that almost 50 such advocates devoted a half-day to getting involved in such discussions was a useful contribution to stimulating debate within the ‘sector’. The debate has been broadened by the perspectives of the Forum participants being captured and passed on to a wider audience through this report.

Through the participation of nearly 130 delegates, the conference provided a good opportunity to engage with key advocates from Community and Voluntary organisations about the current state of NGO advocacy. Usefully, there seems to have been a broad acceptance of the veracity of the research. This enabled an extremely important discussion on identifying the challenges that face Community and Voluntary organisations in improving their advocacy as well as facilitating an intense debate about how these challenges can best be overcome.

In addition, due to the way in which the conference was organised – with facilitators and note takers at each table, the Advocacy Initiative was able to capture the rich tapestry of perspectives offered at the conference and is able to share them with the wider ‘sector’ and beyond through this report.

Section Nine: Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Key Challenges

In the previous section of this report we have pulled together the key findings emerging from the different parts of the research process in this phase of the Advocacy Initiative. Here we try to distil this material down further into a number of key challenges that need to be taken on if advocacy by Community and Voluntary organisations in Ireland is to become more effective.

These key challenges include:

- A clear desire to arrive at a common and shared definition of advocacy emerged as a key priority for Community and Voluntary organisations through the qualitative research, Forum and Conference.
- While 56% of respondents to the online survey said that they had not experienced any implicit or explicit threats due to their advocacy work, 44% did say that they had experienced such threats. The issue of threats was also referred to in a generic way in the qualitative interviews as well as at the Forum and the Conference. It's clear that this issue remains an important one for the sector and requires further exploration and investigation.
- While it's clear from the Literature Review that relations between the state and those Community and Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy are contested, there does appear to be an important issue in Ireland around the legitimacy and role of such advocacy and there appears to be a need to forge more respectful relationships between the parties.
- State funding of Community and Voluntary organisations does seem to impose some element of constraint on organisations' advocacy work. In order to help manage this situation better – as well as other aspects of the relationship between the state and such organisations – there does seem to be an interest in exploring the notion of a Compact that operates in other jurisdictions as shown in the Literature Review section of this report.
- How Community and Voluntary organisations can bring greater coherence around their advocacy work was one of the key challenges emerging from the research – various ideas were suggested to achieve more coherence including more coordination, alliance working and actual consolidation of organisations.
- Major skill and knowledge deficits were identified in terms of how the policy making system works, strategic planning as well as in advocacy techniques – including how Community and Voluntary organisations can bring the voice of their members and service users to the fore in their advocacy.

- Putting adequate resources in place to address these deficits and to ensure that skilled personnel and finances are available to Community and Voluntary organisations so that they can advocate effectively.
- Another challenge identified through the research is the need to develop some mechanisms that will help to more accurately measure and assess the effectiveness of Community and Voluntary organisations' advocacy work.
- Finally, at the Conference some of the delegates mentioned the possible constraining impact of some legislative provisions – like the Electoral Act and the Charities Act – on the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed based on our consideration of what the research seems to be telling us, and the feedback from the Forum, Reference Group and Conference:

1. Defining Advocacy

There is a clearly identified need to develop a common and agreed definition of advocacy. This definition would need to be situated in the context of democratic theory in order to demonstrate clearly the legitimacy of, and necessity for, NGO advocacy in a modern developed democracy. Such a definition would need to specify and define the main components of advocacy including lobbying, public campaigning and media relations. In carrying out this exercise, the sector should be open to exploring the use of new terms – instead of advocacy – if they receive widespread support.

2. Research

The requirement for more research on a number of fronts was clearly identified during Phase One of the Advocacy Initiative and we are recommending that the following pieces of research be undertaken in a possible Phase Two:

(a) While 56% of organisations said that they had not experienced threats, clearly a substantial number of NGOs have reported being threatened – or feeling threatened – because of their advocacy. We believe it is necessary to undertake a more sophisticated and in-depth analysis of this issue. For example, such an analysis would need to examine if such threats are experienced across the board or in particular sub-sectors and try and establish why this might or might not be the case.

(b) Further research is required in order to develop common tools and processes for evaluating the effectiveness or otherwise of NGO advocacy. Indeed, developing common and agreed definitions of what constitutes effectiveness will be required.

(c) Having settled on what constitutes effectiveness, research is also needed into which advocacy methods and approaches are proving to be effective and the correlation between the level of resources being invested and real or perceived outcomes. This research should also look at how the sector compares in terms of effectiveness with other sectors like business and trade unions. A tangible outcome of this research should be the development of a suite of case studies of 'effective' advocacy.

(d) To enable the research to maximise its reach into the sector it will be necessary to develop and maintain a comprehensive electronic database of Community & Voluntary organisations that engage in advocacy.

3. Resources/Knowledge/Skills

The need to improve the knowledge and skill levels of NGO advocates was acknowledged by virtually all who took part in the Advocacy Initiative. The following are some of the areas that require reasonably immediate action:

(a) Development of an up-to-date information resource (for example a book or online toolkit) on how the process of policymaking actually works in Ireland and the provision of information/training courses in this area.

(b) Development and delivery of training in campaigning and advocacy skills, including the development of a manual. This training programme should include the use of new media and the role that service users or clients should play in advocacy. It should also focus on the examples or case studies of effective campaigns developed under Recommendation 2.c above.

(c) The notion of greater coordination of the advocacy work of Community and Voluntary organisations has gained some momentum during this phase of the Advocacy Initiative. However, there is no consensus as to what shape such coordination should take. As a first step towards providing such greater coordination and with a view to stimulating wider discussion on what shape such coordination should take, we are recommending the creation of a repository or shared space where the network of NGO advocates can provide mutual support to each other. Some specific ideas that emerged from the Conference that are worth exploring are the development of mentoring relationships, an online portal for sharing resources and ideas, an annual conference on advocacy and a regular e-newsletter.

4. Building Relationships

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the research was the strong sense of a lack of respect experienced by both NGOs and policy makers in their relationships with each other:

(a) Much of this arises from a lack of understanding of the pressures that both sides are working under. In order to create more understanding we are recommending that a series of informal and 'off the record' encounters be created between groups of NGO advocates and senior policy makers.

(b) In addition, we are recommending that a sector-wide dialogue be undertaken to identify and agree on what constitutes principles of good advocacy practice with a view to developing a Code of Conduct in this area that would be promoted within the sector which would in turn help shape the sector's relationship with the State.

5. Legislative/Policy Issues

A number of interviewees and participants at the Forum and Conference raised questions about the constraints being placed upon NGO advocacy by the service level agreements with the public sector as well as the Electoral and Charities Acts. We are recommending that legal expertise should be retained to look at these issues and to make recommendations for policy or legislative change that the NGO sector can then seek action on.

6. Taking Ownership

In order for these recommendations to be acted upon, ownership needs to be taken of this process. It is clear from the conference feedback that there is a strong consensus that the Advocacy Initiative should continue in some shape or form. This view is strengthened by the high levels of participation in all of the Initiative's activities – including by senior leaders within the sector. On these bases, we are recommending that the Initiative continue and take the lead in implementing these recommendations.

APPENDICES



Appendix 1: Online Survey Questionnaire

Advocacy Initiative 2010

1. Welcome to the Advocacy Initiative Survey

For the purposes of this Survey, our focus is on advocacy to influence policy, legislation and the provision of resources and/or services - rather than advocacy on behalf of individuals.

Examples of advocacy in this context include lobbying, campaigning, making submissions, influencing politicians & officials, public information & raising public awareness, press releases, press conferences, media interviews, demonstrating, petitioning, etc.

1. Does your organisation engage in advocacy?

Yes

No

Advocacy Initiative 2010

2. Your organisation's advocacy activity

2. Has your organisation always engaged in advocacy?

- Yes
 No

If your answer is No, when did it begin its advocacy?

3. Are you currently doing more, or less, advocacy than

	More	Less	The Same
One year ago	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Three years ago	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Five years ago	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How often does your organisation engage in the following forms of advocacy?

Please rate according to the frequency that you use each form of advocacy

	Daily	At least once a week	At least once a month	5 to 9 times a year	1 to 4 times a year	Never
Making submissions to Government (national and/or local) and EU	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lobbying politicians, advisors and parties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lobbying public officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Representation on public bodies or working groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing public information/Raising awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Issuing press releases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holding media events - press conferences, photo calls etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using advertising in advocacy campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lobbying key opinion formers and other civil society organisations (e.g. unions, employers' organisations)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving media interviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holding public meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using parliamentary or local authority processes (e.g. tabling questions)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organising public demonstrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organising petitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Running web-based campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered Other, please specify

Advocacy Initiative 2010

5. Does your organisation usually make a pre-Budget submission?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Advocacy Initiative 2010

3. Your organisation's experience of advocacy

6. Please rate the effectiveness of your organisation's advocacy work. Please use the numbers 1 to 5 where 1 = Not very effective and 5 = very effective

	1	2	3	4	5
Not very effective - Very Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please indicate advocacy success or successes that you feel your organisation has achieved or made a significant contribution towards:

- Constitutional change
- Legislative change
- Amendments to draft legislation
- Changing a policy decision
- Achieving administrative change in way policy or service is delivered
- Policy development
- Developing a new service
- Increasing resources
- Protecting existing resources
- Minimising reduction in resources
- Improving standards of provision
- Other

Other (please specify)

8. Please indicate the personnel resources your organisation applies to its advocacy work. Please tick all appropriate categories.

- Full-time staff
- Part-time staff
- External consultants
- Board members
- Members/volunteers/supporters
- Clients/customers/service-users
- None

Advocacy Initiative 2010

9. What is your organisation's budget allocation for advocacy in 2010?

- None
- €1-10,000
- €10,001-30,000
- €30,001-50,000
- €50,001-100,000
- €100,001-200,000
- €200,001-300,000
- €300,001-400,000
- €400,001-500,000
- €500,001-1 million
- More than €1 million

10. Do you think that the environment for advocacy by nonprofit organisations is becoming more, or less, challenging?

- More
- Less
- Unchanged

Please give a reason for your answer

11. Has your organisation had to reduce its advocacy activity within the past two years?

- Yes
- No

12. If you answered "Yes" to Question 11 please indicate whether this was for internal or external reasons, or both? Please tick both if appropriate.

- Internal
- External

Please specify, if possible

Advocacy Initiative 2010

13. Has your organisation experienced any of the following, as a result of its advocacy activity. Please tick all that are relevant.

- Actual funding cut
- Explicit threat of funding cut
- Implicit threat of funding cut
- Limiting advocacy for fear of funding cut
- Service Level Agreement which disbars advocacy
- Loss of service development opportunity(ies)
- Other
- None

It would be helpful if you could expand on your answer, if possible

4. Advocacy collaborations and perspectives

14. Is your organisation a member of any policy coalitions, alliances or networks that are engaged in advocacy at local, regional, national, European Union, or international levels? Please tick all that are relevant.

- Local
- Regional
- National
- European Union
- International
- None

Please specify each group of which your organisation is a member, if applicable

15. If you were to pick one nonprofit organisation that you consider to be effective in its advocacy, which one would you choose? Please give a reason for your answer.

5. Your Organisation

16. Please indicate the sector in which your organisation is mainly involved

Sectoral Area

Please choose one option from the drop-down menu

Other (please specify)

17. How do you describe the scope of your organisation?

	Yes
Local	<input type="radio"/>
Regional	<input type="radio"/>
Republic of Ireland	<input type="radio"/>
All-Ireland	<input type="radio"/>
European Union	<input type="radio"/>
International	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

18. Is your organisation the Irish branch of an international organisation?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify country in which the head office is located

19. In which county in Ireland is your main office based?

County

County

6. Your organisation's staff and financial information

20. How many staff do you currently employ?

- None
- 5 or less
- 6 to 15
- 16 to 50
- 51 to 100
- 101 to 200
- 201 to 500
- 501 to 1,000
- 1,001 to 2,000
- More than 2,000
- Other

Other (please specify)

21. What is your organisation's budget for 2010?

- €0 - €20,000
- €20,001 - €100,000
- €100,001 - €250,000
- €250,001 - €500,000
- €500,001 - €1,000,000
- €1,000,001 - €5,000,000
- €5,000,001 - €10,000,000
- €10,000,001 - €20,000,000
- €20,000,001 - €50,000,000
- €50,000,001 - €100,000,000
- More than €100m
- Not available

Advocacy Initiative 2010

22. Approximately what proportion of your funding do you receive from the following sources?

	0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
Central Government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State Agencies (e.g. HSE, local authorities, semi-state bodies, Pobal etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
European Union	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Philanthropic foundations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wealthy individuals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Corporate sector	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General public	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Charity shops	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fundraising events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fees and charges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sales/trading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Membership fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deposit income	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

23. If your organisation is in receipt of central Government funding, please indicate the Department(s) from which it is received

- Arts, Sport & Tourism
- Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (incl. Pobal)
- Education & Science
- Enterprise, Trade & Employment (incl. F&S)
- Environment, Heritage & Local Government
- Foreign Affairs (incl. Irish Aid)
- Health & Children (incl. HSE)
- Justice, Equality & Law Reform
- Social & Family Affairs
- Taoiseach
- Other

Other (please specify)

7. Finally...

24. Are you interested in learning about other aspects of the Advocacy Initiative over the coming months?

- Yes
- No

Do you have a comment to make about advocacy in general or about the Advocacy Initiative?

Appendix 2: Profile of Organisations Participating in Quantitative Survey

Respondents were asked to state the specific part of the sector in which their organisation is primarily involved. The responses indicate the diversity of the sector. (N=140)

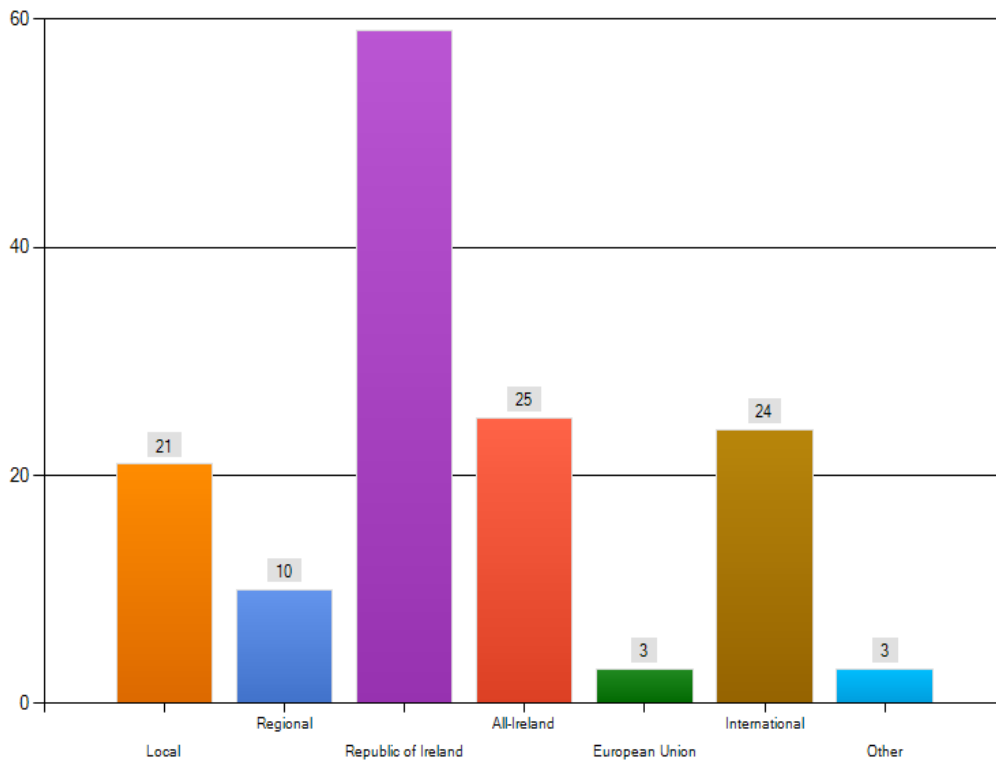
Please indicate the sector in which your organisation is mainly involved (140 replies)

Sector	Number	%
Anti-Poverty	7	5%
Arts & Culture	3	2.1%
Children	6	4.3%
Community Development	7	5.0%
Counselling	4	2.9%
Disability	14	10%
Education	7	5%
Employment	1	0.7%
Environment	2	1.4%
Ethnic Minorities	2	1.4%
Family	1	0.7%
Gay Lesbian Bisexual & Transgender	2	1.4%
Health	12	8.6%
Housing & Homelessness	6	0.7%
Human Rights	3	2.1%
Lone Parents	2	1.4%
Mental Health	2	1.4%
Migrants	4	2.9%
Older People	9	6.4%
Overseas Development	12	8.6%
Philanthropy	1	0.7%
Social Inclusion	6	4.3%
Travellers	3	2.1%
Voluntarism	1	0.7%
Youth	4	2.9%
Other	19	13.6%

In order to achieve a fuller understanding of the nature of the organisations taking part in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate the territorial scope of their organisation. (N=145)

Just over two-fifth of respondents described their scope as being the Republic of Ireland; a little over one-sixth stated they are all-Ireland organisations while a similar proportion are international; one in seven are local organisations; approximately one in fourteen are regional organisations; while only 2% describe their scope as the European Union.

How do you describe the scope of your organisation?



Similarly, we sought to establish if respondents' organisations are the Irish branch of an international organisation. (N=143).

Proportionately, a little less than three out of every twenty organisations that responded to the survey are the Irish branch of an international organisation.

Not surprisingly, Dublin featured most prominently as the base for almost three quarters of the organisations participating in the survey. Next came Galway (7.8%), Cork (5.0%) and Kildare (2.1%). There were no respondents from the counties missing from the list below.

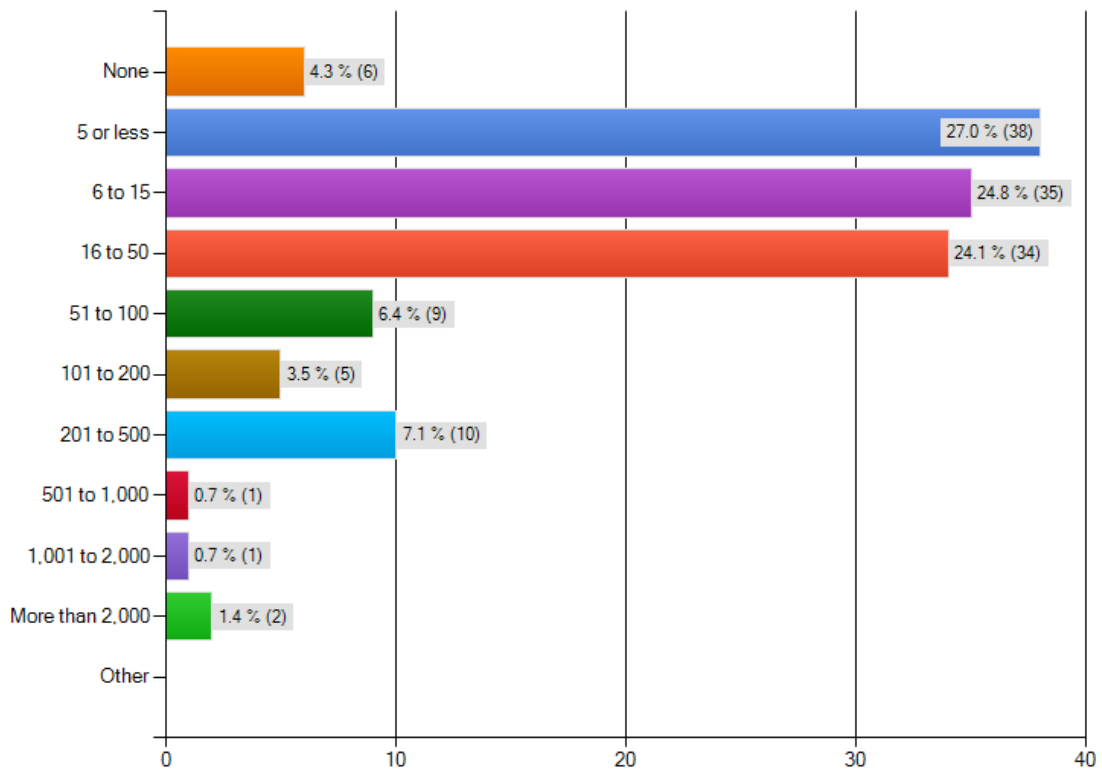
In which county in Ireland is your main office based?

County	Number	%
Clare	1	0.7%
Cork	7	5.0%
Derry	1	0.7%
Dublin	105	74.5%
Galway	11	7.8%
Kildare	3	2.1%
Kilkenny	1	0.7%
Leitrim	1	0.7%
Louth	2	1.4%
Meath	1	0.7%
Monaghan	1	0.7%
Offaly	2	1.4%
Roscommon	1	0.7%
Tipperary N.R.	1	0.7%
Waterford	1	0.7%
Wexford	1	0.7%
Wicklow	1	0.7%

Respondents were also asked to provide information on their current staff complement (N=141).

27% of respondents employ five or fewer staff; just under a quarter have between 6 and 15 staff and a similar proportion have between 16 and 50 staff; one in fourteen organisations has between 201 and 500 staff; 6.4% have between 51 and 100; but 4.3% have no staff; at the other end of the scale, two organisations report that they have more than 2,000 staff.

How many staff do you currently employ?

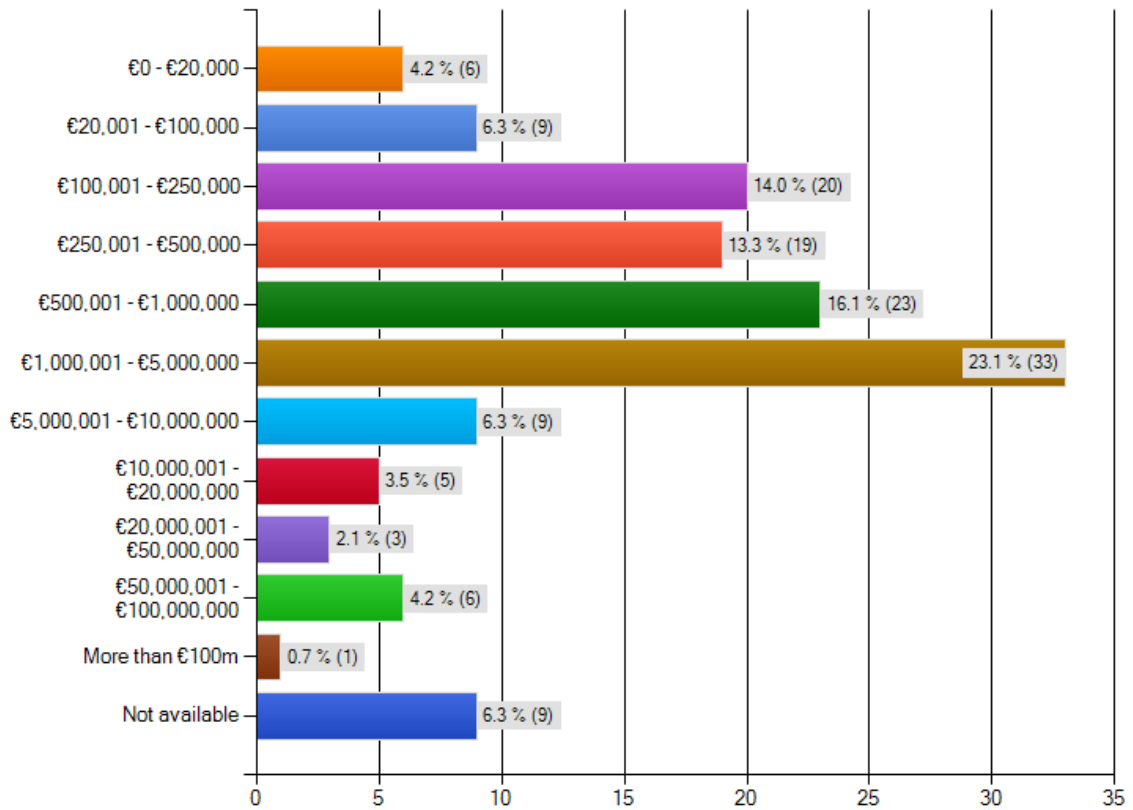


Respondents were requested to provide details of their organisations' budgets for 2010 (N=143).

This revealed that

- Close to a quarter of all respondents (23.1%) have budgets between €1m and €5m;
- a little under one-sixth have budgets between €0.5m and €1m;
- 13.3% have budgets between €250k and €500k;
- 14% have budgets between €100k and €250k
- 6.3% have budgets between €20k and €100k while 4.2% have budgets less than €20k
- In contrast, 6.3% have budgets between €5m and €10m; 3.5% have budgets between €10m and €20m; 2.1% of organisations have budgets between €20m and €50m; 4.2% have budgets between €50m and €100m; while one organisation (0.7%) reports a budget of more than €100m.

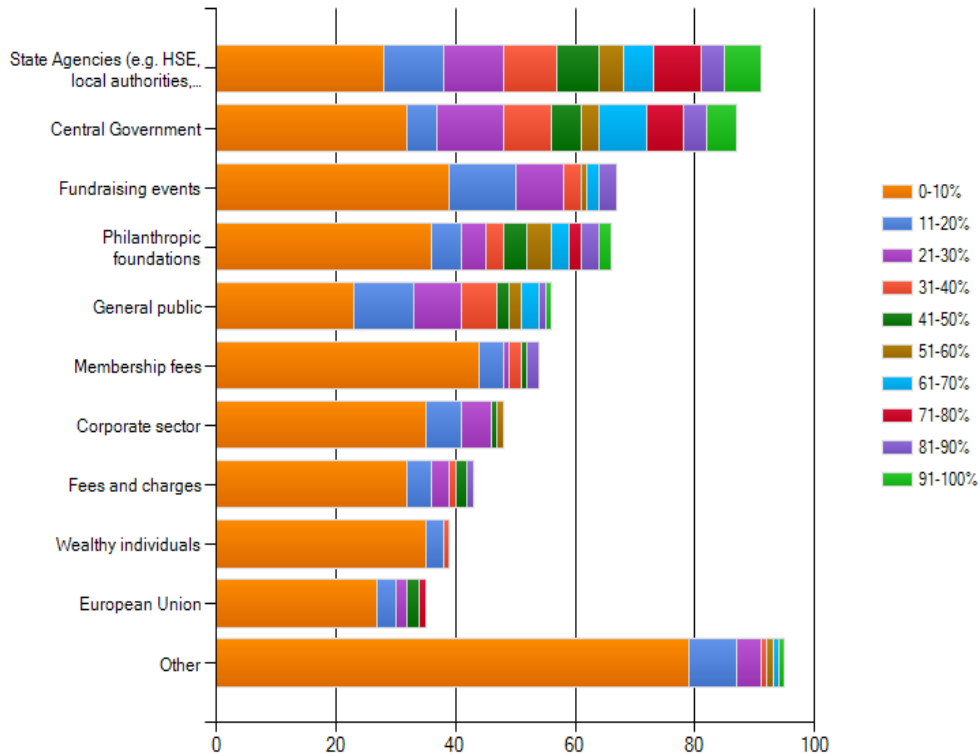
What is your organisation's budget for 2010?



To obtain a fuller picture of the funding status of respondents, respondents were asked to provide information on their funding sources.

The information provided requires detailed consideration in terms of the diversity and scale of funding (N=138). Overall it illustrates the extent to which organisations are typically funded through a range of relatively small amounts (i.e. less than 10%) of funding involving a correspondingly complex mix of sources and relationships to be managed. Nevertheless, it is interesting in the context of advocacy to note the small, but significant proportion of organisations that are substantially funded by Central Government or State Agencies to the tune of 91% to 100%.

Approximately what proportion of your funding do you receive from the following sources?

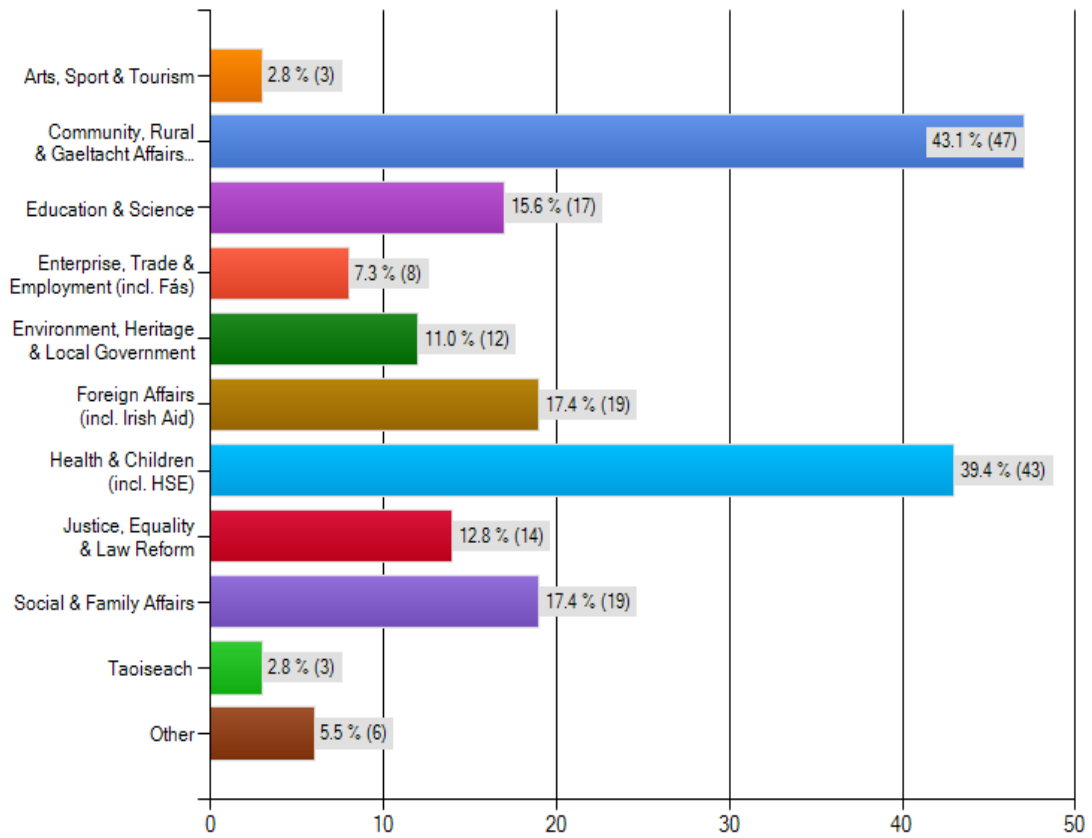


To explore further the sources of public funding to organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector, respondents in receipt of public funding were asked to specify the areas of Government and its agencies from which they receive funding. (N=109).

The response to this question reveals the significance of funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and from the Department of Health and Children (including the Health Service Executive) to the Community and Voluntary sector. More than 80% of respondents receive funding from one or both of these sources. Other significant sources of funding include the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Education and Science, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform⁴.

⁴ Note that these were the names of the relevant Government Departments at the time of the completion of the survey in February and March 2010.

If your organisation is in receipt of central Government funding, please indicate the Department (s) from which it is received



Finally, respondents were asked, in completing the survey, to register their interest in continuing to be informed of other activities and developments in relation to the Advocacy Initiative over the coming months (N=140). Almost 96% of respondents indicated their interest in continuing to be informed of activities and developments as the Advocacy Initiative progresses.

Appendix 3: Discussion Guide for Qualitative Interviews

Discussion Guide for In-Depth External Interviews

In the context of democratic policy making and public discourse, what do you see as the role of advocacy by NGOs?

In your experience, are there limits to this role?

In your opinion should there be?

Have you any views as to how the relationship between NGO advocates and the State should be regulated or governed?

What do you think about agencies receiving State money advocating?

How do you respond to being the target of advocacy?

In your experience, how effective is NGO advocacy?

What do NGOs do well?

Are there things they do that they shouldn't?

What do they not do well and how can they improve?

What organisations would you rate highly as effective advocates and why?

Who would not rate and why?

Could you cite any examples of successful campaigns and why they worked?

Could you cite any examples of unsuccessful campaigns and why they didn't work?

Appendix 4: Conference Agenda

Agenda for Advocacy Initiative Conference Thursday, 10 June 2010 Ashling Hotel, Parkgate Street, Dublin 8

- 10.30 am Registration
- 11.00 am Conference introduction – Kieran Murphy, Advocacy Initiative Chairperson
- 11.10 am Research presentation – Owen Keenan (Middlequarter Ltd) and Pat Montague (Montague Communications Ltd)
- 11.45 am Questions and answers
- 12 noon Three responses to research findings:

Catherine Joyce, Barnardos
Mike Allen, Focus Ireland
Frances Byrne, OPEN
- 12.30 pm Discussion groups on research findings
- 1.30 pm Lunch
- 2.30 pm Feedback from groups – presentation by Caroline Fahey, St Vincent de Paul Society
- 2.45 pm Next steps for NGOs – introduction by Patrick Burke, Simon Communities of Ireland
- 2.55 pm Next steps – discussion groups
- 3.45 pm Open Forum
- 4.15 pm Feedback from groups
- 4.30 pm Wrap up address – Kathleen O’Meara, Irish Cancer Society
- 4.45 pm Conference close

Appendix 5: Conference Presentations

Presentation by Catherine Joyce, Advocacy Manager, Barnardos

I would like to congratulate Owen and Pat on the completion of this research into advocacy in Ireland; it is a significant and original piece of work that will inform the crucial ongoing debate about the role and function of advocacy in our society.

The results of the research point to an increased recognition of the importance of advocacy within the Community and Voluntary sector over the past five years. More organisations are engaging in advocacy although many have a limited budget for their advocacy activities. This, I think, reflects the promise and importance of advocacy and the difficulties in its implementation.

One of the ongoing difficulties in any discussion about advocacy is the definition of the term and what we mean by it in practice. Barnardos established its advocacy team in 2005 to take what it had learned from its experiences and to translate that into the changes in policy, law and practice required to implement those lessons at a national level. Yet, in Barnardos, two kinds of advocacy are a constant. Case advocacy undertaken by services on behalf of the children and families they work with continues at a local and regional level while the national advocacy team focuses on national issues and the potential for national change that will improve children's lives. Many organisations in the sector work at two levels of advocacy but when we talk globally about advocacy, it is the systemic, political and policy influencing advocacy that we usually focus on.

The increased focus on advocacy shown in the research reflects perhaps a growing recognition within the sector of the need for fundamental change across a range of issues at a political and policy level rather than trying only to apply a band-aid solution to individual problems in isolation from each another. This has grown as NGOs have changed and developed over time; an organic mix born out of missionary styled charity, grass roots community and political activism, and modern concepts of service delivery. For those organisations engaged in long-term service delivery, advocacy is a natural evolutionary step – some things can't and won't change without serious commitment at a political level. Policies and laws that keep the marginalised marginal must change for people's lives to change. It's that simple – if you can call it simple. Services, while crucially important in individual lives and therefore essential in society, are often plugging the hole in a dam that's under constant threat of cracking. While it's vital that they are there, they cannot alone address the underlying, ongoing issues that cause difficulties in the first place. It is natural, then, that those organisations trying to hold the dam together should look to longer term solutions to the challenges they see on a daily basis. It is also natural that those working in or with a community of people who have been marginalised

and ignored should look to ways of getting their voice heard at the table with those who can make the changes that need to be made.

Advocacy is a tool – a tool for speaking up and out, a tool for hammering home hard truths about our society and most significantly a tool for making a real difference on the ground. The significance of this appears to be increasingly relevant within the NGO sector despite the ongoing resource difficulties associated with advocacy work. This must be celebrated; NGO advocacy is and should be recognised as a key ingredient in any democracy. It is a forum for discussion, debate and prioritisation of the issues that should really matter in society. It is a lobby for people – their rights, their needs, their voices. We must continue to prioritise it in our work, despite the challenges, the threats to its success or the time it takes to reach a goal. We must continue to champion its importance in a society where it's not always seen as relevant and a political system that has a limited appreciation of its value.

The research shows that there is a substantial gap in the perspective of advocacy between the political/ policy establishment and the NGO sector. Raise your hand if you're shocked at these findings! It probably doesn't come as a shock to most that the role of advocacy is contested and its legitimacy and credibility questioned by policy makers. This raises a number of significant issues for NGOs engaged in advocacy: how do we, as advocates, get past the initial resistance of policy makers? What contribution to the debate can we make to change these perceptions? What do we need to do to increase the recognition of the significant role that advocacy can play in our society?

Significantly, the research demonstrates that a higher premium is placed by policy makers on advocacy by service providers because they are seen to represent the voice of "on-the-ground" experience. This is important because it provides an insight into what's relevant to policy makers. While on one hand they question the credibility and legitimacy of NGO advocacy in general, this is tempered where organisations represent the front line experience. Extrapolating the point, it is clear that being able to provide real lived experiences as part of advocacy work carries weight with policy makers. You could also say it's much harder to argue with someone about the state of play on the ground if they see on a daily basis what's actually happening or not happening on the ground. In Barnardos' experience, being able to provide insight into the real experiences of the children we work with has given our advocacy work leverage. It provides a certain amount of credibility that gets your toe in the door. In the clamour of the political arena, advocacy must be underpinned by something that's hard to ignore. Otherwise it's just too easy for policy makers to ignore what they often don't want to hear in the first place.

Many organisations surveyed for the research highlighted a perceived threat to advocacy work in the sector through funding cuts associated with advocacy. I think that this goes hand in hand with the perceived lack of respect for NGO advocacy and the limited value placed on it at a policy level. Mike will explore the threat to

advocacy more fully next but I think that there are some practical points to be raised on this. There is a fundamental difficulty regarding the funding of NGO advocacy work. If the work is done well, it is challenging something it thinks needs to be fixed at a political and policy level. It outlines a particular issue at hand and the actions required to repair this at a national level. From a policy maker perspective, it highlights, often very publically, a gap in their system implying failure on their part and demanding action from them to right it. On a very human level, it follows that they would be reluctant to fund work that fundamentally challenges them and adds more work to their inbox. This is a significant challenge that can't be ignored and that won't change overnight – a delicate balance must be struck. As advocates we must assess how best to contribute to the debate on relevant issues in a way that properly represents our constituent community, that makes a strong call for the change needed but that also does this in a way that supports rather than alienates policy makers.

Advocacy work takes place in an adversarial environment, yet we must find a way to build trust in our work. As I just mentioned, using “on-the-ground” voices, whether they come directly from the community or from service provision staff is one way to do this. In an era of increased use of “citizen journalism” and twitter as a news source, engaging communities directly in advocacy work is crucial – the voices of real people really affected by political and policy decisions has a powerful leverage. Added to this, advocacy work must be realistic to be credible. If advocacy asks are targeted and achievable they have more chance of being taken on board. This doesn't mean avoiding any lobbying for big change, but rather breaking it down into actions that are more concrete and achievable. It's revolution by degrees – maybe not as immediately satisfying as deploring situations and calling for an all out coup but a better contribution to the democratic State process in the long run!

Building trust and respect for advocacy and increasing the awareness of its valuable role in society means being consistent and reasonable in the outcomes we look for and the arguments we make. The voice of reason, like the voice of experience, is harder to ignore, harder to dismiss and harder to argue with.

Advocacy needs to solve problems. Some of the perceptions of NGO advocacy uncovered by the research point to serious issues – a perceived lack of strategy, overly idealistic goals and a lack of recognition of its value towards policy development in Ireland. While it would be easy to dismiss these perceptions as simple hostility to advocacy from the policy establishment, we must look at what we can learn about our advocacy work from these findings. In addition to my previous points about using experienced voices and setting realistic goals, advocacy that offers tangible solutions to the often difficult decisions facing policy makers is needed. Setting out the issues, making an evidenced case for change and then establishing the very practical ways in which policy makers can begin to make that change is fundamental to both challenging issues that disadvantage the people we work for and earning the respect we need within the political system.

Lack of respect was consistently highlighted by both NGOs and policy makers during the research. This isn't overly surprising to those of us working in the sector but it is worrying. A culture of mistrust, hostility and mutual disrespect is not conducive to effective advocacy. If we are to build effective systems of advocacy within our sector, we must take on board this learning and seek ways of developing our advocacy work to address these issues. We cannot change perceptions of advocacy overnight, but we can start to address how we do it as a sector. We can increase our focus on solutions as well as highlighting problems. We can be passionate voices of reason - not just hard to ignore, but easy to listen to. We can include the voices of those affected by the issues, getting past statistics and policy to the human face of the issues we talk about. Most importantly we can try to avoid falling into an antagonistic, adversarial role against those we must work with to achieve our goals. In our advocacy work we have to praise what we can and criticise what we have to, but only ever in a way that is constructive, solution-oriented and never personal.

Advocacy is about change – it is about achieving change to redress imbalances and injustices for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities across Ireland. It must rise above the “us and them” mentality sometimes entrenched both within the sector and among policy makers. We all have a duty and responsibility to build an effective system of advocacy that works towards long term change in our society no matter how small the steps or how slow the change. Our democracy must evolve to recognise the vital role that advocacy can play in making Ireland a better, fairer country in everyone's best interest.

Presentation by Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland

The stories we tell ourselves about what is happening and how it came to happen are important. At the very least, they suggest what we should do next.

The Advocacy Initiative has its roots in a deeply held feeling that advocacy in the community and voluntary sector was under attack, and that this was happening because our critical voice was a threat to Government. And we were thus being silenced both by threats to our state funding and by our own anxiety. It is worth remembering that these fears did not arise in the recession as such but earlier, from a time which can now be understood as ‘after the boom’ but still within its echo.

We have now all participated in quite extensive research and the information we have at the end tells us a somewhat different story. Yes, many organisations in the sector feel they have been threatened as a result of their advocacy work, but there is nothing like that pervasive sense that engagement in advocacy threatens our very existence. Only one-in-every-nine organisations has reduced its advocacy due to

'external factors', but 56% of organisations say they have experienced no threatening reaction to their advocacy at all. More bleakly, however, there is the uncomfortable message that the State whose policies we have sought to challenge does not think we understand its political process, and seems more likely to see us as a nuisance than a threat.

What do we mean by Advocacy?

For much of what I have to say to stand any chance of making sense I need to spend a minute talking about what I mean by advocacy. I am using the term in a very specific sense.

Advocacy means the process of making a case, setting out a claim or set of claims to influence public policy on behalf of a particular group or interest. In the sense we use it here, these are claims for resources, life chances or rights. And we are seeking to make these claims in the context of other voices, also making claims. The sections of society which the Community and Voluntary sector seeks to represent do not have the resources to participate in that struggle in anything like an equal manner, and those we compete against represent groups or interests who have already captured a larger proportion of resources than we have, and so can deploy these resources and power in their own advocacy.

The existence of Community and Voluntary sector advocacy is then in a sense 'remedial', it seeks to remedy exclusion not just from the holding of resources, but also from the allocation of resources and, at our most radical reach, exclusion from decisions about how resources were generated.

People and communities are not just poor because they have a smaller slice of the cake, they are poor because they were not present when the cake was sliced up or indeed when the recipe was agreed.

But because we recognise the fundamental nature of this power imbalance does not mean we are stuck in an ideological *cul de sac* of believing that the only progress that can be made is through revolutionary transformation. Sure that would be a good thing, but the disadvantaged and powerless cannot wait for the arrival of a just society before they get a decent meal, disability access or medical attention. Nor need they. There is a great deal that we can achieve from where we are and within the current system.

There are benefits to recognising the reality of the power imbalance we face, and one of them is to help us recognise the difficulties which are worth complaining about and those which are intrinsic to the task we have undertaken. For instance, the demand for 'equal respect' might have some tactical value from time to time, but to complain about it endlessly (as we seem to do) betrays a misunderstanding: 'respect' is a possible outcome of what do, but not a precondition.

There is no point in complaining that you have less power than the other social partners or the government. That is what happens when you choose to work for the powerless. If we were already all equal there would no struggle. And that is where the question of effectiveness comes in, of knowing how the system works, of grasping every shred of fact, argument, notion of fairness, solidarity, public opinion and whatever else can be combined to progress the interests of those who otherwise would be powerless.

Let's not beat ourselves up too much either about not being good at advocacy. If IBEC or ICTU or the farmers or the political parties or the civil servants were to employ Pat or Owen to do a survey of our attitudes on their effectiveness there would be no shortage of critical insights to be shared.

What is to be done?

I want to suggest an alternative way of looking at the predicament we are in.

The Community and Voluntary sector is indeed under serious threat – the closures in the CDPs, the reviews of funding for national networks, cuts to the Women's Strategy and HSE funding all tell the same story. But this does not necessarily or even mostly arise in reaction to the advocacy work we do.

While it serves a certain purpose for us to shout 'we have suffered cuts because we are so outspoken', it is not the whole truth. It may also serve to confuse ourselves about what is going on. First, when the economy has shrunk by around 15%, it lacks realism to claim we are being picked on where we face cuts of the same magnitude. Second, it makes us feel good about ourselves. We are noble and brave. But there are a dozen other reprehensible reasons why good projects have been closed down. And no doubt good reasons why reprehensible projects have been closed.

Thirdly, it reinforces the message that those who will survive will be the silent ones.

Most importantly, it obscures the realisation that the cutbacks being targeted at the poorest and most vulnerable are not really about 'the sector' at all, but more about the value that society in general places upon the communities and people that we seek to represent. Because they are indeed under a very particular threat. One of the reasons they are not valued is, of course, the very reason we started on our work in the first place: they are poor, disadvantaged and powerless. They are unprotected from cuts.

As the economy shrinks, different groups are engaged in bitter battles to hold onto the slice of the cake they managed to grasp when the cake was – or seemed –

bigger. In these conflicts, in the absence of profound social solidarity – and there is not such solidarity in Ireland - the poorest and most vulnerable tend to end up as the losers. Of course they do – that is what it means in the first place to be poor and powerless.

But if the reason that the poorest and most marginalised communities are suffering most is that their interests are not seen as important, then the answer must be - not necessarily more - but certainly better advocacy. And certainly not a silencing.

But look what has happened here. I am talking not about defending ‘the sector’ and ‘advocating for the sector’ but of advocating for communities and individuals who are poor, marginalised, disempowered. Perhaps, we have been too concerned about defending the ‘sector’ and the institutions we have built and not sufficiently concerned about defending the people the sector exists to defend. And perhaps it is this, rather than our advocacy, which has got us into trouble.

In conclusion, I suggest that a renewal of community and voluntary sector advocacy must be built upon three things

First, a firm appreciation of the power relationships in which we operate, and therefore both the limitations and potential of what we can achieve.

Second a new sharing of ideas, analysis, experience and skills.

Third a profound reconnection with our original purpose, so that our advocacy is driven by a renewed understanding of the interests and aspirations of the communities and people we set out to serve.

Input by Frances Byrne

Presentation by Frances Byrne, CEO, One Parent Exchange Network

As steering group colleagues from Barnardos and Focus have looked at other angles, OPEN has considered the research and the questions posed for this session from the perspective of a recent advocacy experience: work leading up to and associated with the publication of the Social Welfare (Misc Provisions) Bill 2010.

As it happens, it is our contention that this experience actually ‘stands up’ the apparently somewhat mixed and very challenging findings of the research undertaken by Middlequarter and Montague Communications.

First, please allow me to set the scene.....

OPEN has been playing a constructive role with the Department of Social Protection, and the four Ministers who have been at its helm, on the proposed changes to the main social welfare payment for one-parent families since April 2006.

We have, among other actions:

- Provided feedback on our consultations with members (i.e. lone parent groups) and others in various parts of Ireland;
- Co-operated with FÁS to hold focus groups with lone parents and we are involved in rolling out their pilot social inclusion model;
- Met with the Senior Officials Group which reports into the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion;
- When Minister Brennan tweaked the Rent Supplement scheme in 2007, (we) praised him highly and publicly;
- We are practically the poster girls (and boys) for the Department's Rental Accommodation Scheme;
- Tailored our submissions to Budgets and other processes based on what we knew was coming down the tracks.

Why? Because our analysis is that what is being attempted by the Department is good for lone parents, good for our children and in social policy terms good for our society.

Forward to May 2010.....

The relevant Minister met, for the second time, with a small assembly (of his making) of assorted NGOs on May 27th. At the meeting, no mention was made of the imminent release of the Bill to the Houses of the Oireachtas. Twenty four hours later the media started to get in touch – mostly for clarification, somewhat in disbelief: if the Department was actually knocking lone parents off social welfare, where was the uproar? We issued a release seeking to reassure lone parents but also calling on the Department to do likewise. By Monday two further clarification releases had been issued by the Department. A journalist praised our efforts, *"You really moved the story on"* we were told. The "story", from our perspective was one of frustration and perplexity.

The Department, which has in its midst some of the most able and experienced public servants we in OPEN have dealt with, had issued a pointless and confusing statement at 5pm on a Friday evening about changes that had been in the offing for 4 years. (I am not referring to the proposed changes to Jobseekers which of themselves deserve a separate response). The message that was put out led to headlines in two national newspapers which were inaccurate and misleading. By Wednesday of the following week, we had briefed 18 print journalists and others;

and done more than 10 local and national broadcast media interviews and appearances.

In looking at the questions, posed to OPEN as a member of the steering group, through the lens of this recent experience, what arises?

1. Someone outside OPEN, perhaps in the Department of Social Protection (?) needs to evaluate the effectiveness of our advocacy! And I should point that out our organisation has not been alone among those which support one-parent families, in working with, as opposed to against, the Department on the progression of its proposals.
2. This brief case study offered here demonstrates the chasm (or gap as the research gently describes it) between the advocacy expectations of us NGOs and the 'system'. Breaking down just one aspect: here is OPEN, an organisation that is philosophically on board with the reform agenda and has access to the relevant Minister – as colleagues will know partner organisations in other jurisdictions look on with envy at the access offered by our clientelist system – but on this occasion, could we immodestly claim this access as a sign of effective advocacy? Yet we were left out of the loop, as were others, and furthermore our ability to communicate with the people who really matter in this equation, i.e. one-parent families was at best wasted by the Department. Or simply ignored? Because we (lone parents and our organisations) aren't valued?
3. As with all good research, we unsurprisingly discover that we need more research and I'm not being facetious. This was a first attempt and I think it's important to remind ourselves of its genesis: in June 2008 at the annual Centre for Non-profit Management summer school – the call to arms on advocacy which was put out to us all by Sheila Nordon has led us here. So before the era of unprecedented cuts we were aware of a need to do something about this hugely significant and complex subject. In the current climate we now face huge challenges and what feels like reduced opportunities; but even in 2008 and long before, we needed to interrogate further the space between *our* perceptions of our role and those of the elected and unelected we seek to influence. It is in OPEN's opinion the area which most requires an unflinching and honest examination by the sector in the first instance and we may also need to facilitate a dialogue with a sample of 'policy actors'? We submit that only then can we begin the process of defining, never mind agreeing, rules of engagement or principles of effective practice which could deliver as suggested by the researchers the very best advocacy outcomes for our constituents.

Appendix 6: Bibliography

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