

The Strategic Framework of the Irish Environmental Network

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1. Introduction to the Irish Environmental Network

IEN is a network of individual environmental Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) that work individually and, as appropriate, jointly to protect and enhance the environment, and to place environmental issues centre stage in Ireland and internationally. IEN works to promote the interlinked principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability. In representing the environment its Members represent a common good and not self interest.

As a network IEN is greater than the sum of its parts, with synergies developing from working together and sharing knowledge, skills, strengths and experience. The Network acts on behalf of its Members to secure core and other funding for their activities.

2. Introduction to the Strategic Framework

This strategic framework for IEN was developed through a participatory strategic review process over the months from September 2008 until September 2009 and approved by the Members at the AGM on 25th November and the EGM on 14th January 2010. The framework document describes the vision, mission and values of IEN. It continues by outlining the aims and objectives that follow from them and then describes the structures and mechanisms that enable the Network to work to fulfil the aims and objectives. This framework supports the future development of strategic plans.

3. Vision

A world where everyone recognises, and acts on the basis that, the economy is but one component of society and that society exists within the environment of our one planet, Earth, on which we depend.

4. Mission Statement

IEN's mission is to facilitate its Members in working individually and jointly to protect and enhance the environment and to promote the interlinked principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

5. Values

In working both with others and within the Network, the Members of IEN believe in the importance of taking long-term independent perspectives, both individually and cooperatively, whilst taking urgent action where necessary. The Network's shared values and diversity together with respect and mutual learning and understanding are what make it strong. The Network will work through participation, trust, transparency, innovation, and a respect for diversity of perspectives and inclusion and justice in decision-making.

6. Aims

Recognising that the environment is the foundation of social and economic sustainability, the Irish Environmental Network aims to be a robust and active network that:

1. supports its Members in achieving their aims and objectives;
2. advances the conservation, wise use and improvement of the environment;
3. advances education, understanding and awareness of, and responsibility for the environment.

7. Objectives

In order to achieve its aims, the IEN will

1. Raise and distribute predictable, secure, adequate, multi-annual funding for its Members from a variety of sources
2. Amplify its Members' voices by providing a platform, facilitating conversation as well as being a point of contact
3. Assist the Members in developing their capacity to fulfil their individual objectives through the sourcing, provision, and distribution of funding, training, networking, and communications services and other resources to its members
4. Provide excellent services to its members to enable them to fulfil their goals
5. facilitate and promote Members working together, creating opportunities for:
 1. Advocacy
 2. Practical projects
 3. Policy input and coordination
 4. Education for sustainability
 5. Leadership in creating a sustainable society, thinking and planning ahead.

8. Membership

Application

Any application by an organisation for Membership of the Irish Environmental Network will be considered by the Board of Directors in accordance with the Membership Eligibility Criteria (see Appendix I). Each application will be assessed by at least two Directors who will make a reasoned recommendation to the Board as to whether the organisation should be invited to become a Member.

Review of Membership

Each organisation's continuing Membership of the Irish Environmental Network will be reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the Membership Eligibility Criteria (see Appendix I). The annual review will be concurrent with the annual funding application. Where an organisation is at any time considered to no longer meet the criteria, the issue will be referred by the Board of Directors to a General Meeting of the Network, which is the only body which can revoke Membership.

Opportunities, roles and responsibilities

Being a Member of the Network entitles Members to apply for funding as described in Section 9 below. Members are encouraged to play an active, constructive and fully participative role in IEN.

Members are expected to serve on the Board of Directors on the basis of rotation. Efforts will be made to support and facilitate that participation.

Decision-Making

Decision-making is as far as is possible by consensus. The detailed guidelines for decision-making are outlined in Appendix III. These guidelines are intended to provide for effective decision-making, whilst reducing unnecessary conflict.

9. How the Network is organised

IEN's structure and systems aim to ensure that the Network is well governed and managed, so that its resources are used wisely and members and staff can be actively involved in the pursuit of IEN's aims and objectives (as stated in Sections 6 & 7).

The Network acts as facilitator for its Members, to enable them to better fulfil their individual and shared aims and objectives. It does this by:

1. Securing core funding for its Members, as well as funding to enable Members to carry out activities such as:
 1. programmes of education;
 2. research and conservation;
 3. meet with government;
 4. make submissions;
 5. develop policy;
 6. attend international NGO meetings;
 7. attend inter-governmental meetings; etc.
2. Enabling Members to build their capacity to fulfil their own individual aims
3. Providing a communications platform for the Members
4. Supporting the Members in developing relationships with the officials and politicians relevant to their particular activities
5. Acting as the secretariat for the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership

IEN is a member-led network. Members are encouraged to take an active role in creating a vision for the Network and setting its direction, providing resources and expertise, and implementing activities to enable the achievement of agreed objectives. IEN Members, using the strategic framework and the AGM, set objectives for the Network and take collective responsibility for their achievement.

As a member-led network IEN:

1. Ensures that opportunities are created for the voices of all Members to be heard and for them to contribute to decision-making on key network issues.
2. Encourages Board membership that is representative of Member organisation diversity.
3. Encourages Member organisations to support and enable existing Board members to carry out their responsibilities.
4. Entrusts the Board to take a leadership role on behalf of the Membership in overseeing the implementation of this strategic framework.
5. Builds capacity to take difficult decisions and acknowledges the role of the Board in ensuring that the Members hold each other accountable for their implementation.

6. Strengthens the delegated management authority of the staff to ensure that Board decisions are implemented, whilst holding all those responsible to account for their role in the timely execution of agreed decisions taken by or on behalf of the Membership.

The General Meeting

The general meeting is the ruling body of IEN which elects the board and approves the strategic framework within which the Network operates.

The Board

The role of the Board is to ensure that the mandate of the Members as agreed at General Meetings is carried out and that the activities of the Network promote the mission, aims and objectives as laid out in the Memorandum and Articles, and strategic framework. The Board sets the implementation priorities for the staff in order to ensure the fulfilment of the objectives set by the Members.

With regard to the Secretariat the Board will:

1. Make the most efficient use of staff time by providing clear guidance about their priorities and their delegated authority to act.
2. Seek the advice and guidance of staff concerning the Network's capacities and agreed priorities when considering proposals for new initiatives.
3. Ensure that all IEN staff work to realistic, agreed individual work plans that reflect IEN's strategic priorities and have individual staff development plans, involving training, regular supervision and annual appraisal.
4. Fulfil all the requirements of the relevant employment legislation and provide for the well-being of all staff

Appointment of Directors

The Board will be made up of nine directors each serving for three years. Each year at the AGM the three longest serving Directors will step down. Two new Directors will be rotated on and one will be elected. [For the transitional year of 2009, the two longest standing of the eight directors will step down and three will be elected. The elected Directors will be ranked according to their election returns. The person with the highest vote will remain a Director for three years, the person with the second highest vote will be a Director for two years and the third for one year.] Where an elected Director retires between AGMs, the Board will replace that Director by means of an email election for the inter regnum.

Where a director, appointed as part of the rotation of Members, retires then the Member Group that nominated that Director may substitute that person with another. Where this does not take place within a month of notification by the secretariat then the next Member on the rotation will be invited to nominate a person to be a Director. That person will serve until the next AGM and then for the normal three year term.

No person may represent more than one Member on the Board. No Member may be represented by more than one person on the board. No person may serve for more than 6 years without a break of at least one year.

Where a Director fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the Board or at least half the meetings in twelve months, the Director concerned will be deemed to have resigned and will be replaced.

Newly appointed Directors will be mentored, as appropriate, by the 3 longest-serving Directors.

As they deem it necessary, the board may invite persons with particular expertise to attend board meetings in an advisory capacity.

Directors are required to notify the Board of any conflict of interest.

Secretariat

The secretariat, under the direction of the Board, is responsible for the management of the day-to-day activities of the Network, and for the implementation of the strategic plans as mandated by the Members at General Meetings.

The appointment of staff will be the responsibility of the Board.

Funding and distribution thereof

The Network acts on behalf of its Members to secure adequate and predictable core funding as well as funding for other activities. The Network will strive to broaden this funding base, and to increase the amount of funding made available to its Members.

Independent assessors will decide as to how the total core funding is divided up amongst the Members, based on agreed criteria as established by the Network.

10. Communications

In order to promote the development of a creative and democratic Network every opportunity will be taken to include Members in decision-making and participation within the Network. To this end:

1. A communications strategy will be developed.
2. All meeting reports will be distributed as soon as possible after meetings along with the draft agenda for the next meeting.
3. Members have the right to request issues be considered at meetings of the Board by notifying the secretariat.
4. The Network website will be responsive to the Members' needs and kept up to date.

5. Any Member may use the Members' and public pages of the IEN website to
 1. raise issues for discussion
 2. lodge documents
 3. advertise events, etc.

11. Services provided to Members

Through the secretariat, the Network seeks to provide assistance in areas such as:

1. Collaboration – providing meeting spaces and facilities for use by Members, independently or in groups;
2. Facilitation – the secretariat maintains a database of facilitators
3. Mentoring and training – in the areas of capacity building, technology, fundraising, communications, marketing.
4. Communicating their messages to public bodies and other stakeholders. The emphasis will be on the member groups and not the Network itself i.e. IEN will not have a position on any policy. However a news release could be sent using IEN as a public relations service.

The secretariat will maintain an online database of Irish environmental groups, official consultation calls and submissions and reports made by IEN members.

The Network encourages inclusion and accessibility. To this end, IEN will use minority languages where practicable, and endeavour to make its communications, facilities and meetings accessible to people with disabilities.

Appendix I Criteria for Membership of IEN

Eligibility criteria for an organisation seeking or renewing Membership of the Irish Environmental Network

1. The primary objectives and activities of the organisation must be environmental (i.e. ecological) protection and / or environmental sustainability.
2. The organisation must be a not for profit organisation.
3. The organisation must have a demonstrable national remit. Qualifying characteristics include: national influence; specialist activity covering the country; convincing geographic spread of active membership; outreach activity.
4. The organisation must be a registered company, or have charitable status, or be a registered friendly society with a registered constitution. The organisation must have been incorporated, registered or have enjoyed charitable status for a period of at least 12 months prior to an application for membership.
5. The organisation must be an independent and legally discrete body, not a subgroup or activity of another organisation, nor an organisation managing a project with a limited life span.

6. The board of the organisation should not share more than fifty percent of its directors with another organisation.
7. The organisation must have audited accounts (from at least one of the previous two years) and / or be able to present a certifiable balance sheet for the previous year. The organisation must also be able to produce a current tax clearance certificate or official exemption.
8. The organisation must be able to demonstrate a substantial level of activity in promoting its aims and objectives over a period of at least 18 months prior to application for membership.
9. The organisation must demonstrate what unique contribution it can bring to the Network.
10. No organisation whose executive board contains a representative or representatives appointed by any government department or local authority shall be admitted to membership. However, this does not exclude individuals from sitting on the board in a personal capacity.

Appendix II Election of Directors

Elections

Elected directors

In order to stand as a director, someone must be nominated by at least three Members. The nominees of the Members shall be elected to serve as Directors on the Board in priority order by single transferable vote. Vacancies will be filled by the same priority order.

Any Member can nominate as many people as it wants, subject to a limit of one from its own organisation.

Nominees must declare if they are a member of a political party and are expected to state any potential conflicts of interest. Anyone elected to or running for public office may not be a Director.

Each Member has one vote in each election.

Nominations for the Elections

Members nominating people should check that the person concerned is willing to be put forward before submitting a nomination.

Nominations must be accompanied by a statement outlining what this person has to offer as a Board Member, and a mini CV. In total this should occupy 1 page of A4 using a 11 pt Arial font, and include in the page a passport type photo.

Appendix III Decision-Making Guidelines

Decision-making within the Network is governed by the following statements:

1. Mutual respect for individual organisations' cultures and structures
2. Every organisation agrees to balance individual/organisational rights with the merits of co-operation and compromise.
3. Organisations agree that individual rights exist in a context of coalition building – we benefit most when we engage collectively.
4. An organisation choosing to progress a controversial agenda item acknowledges that this decision may affect levels of solidarity.
5. The Network should operate as much as possible without voting – using consensus, with the understanding that a consensual approach does not necessarily imply unanimity.
6. If an organisation considers that an agenda item is impacting on the capacity of the Network to conduct its business, this issue will be named.
7. Problem solving could consist of:
 1. Bilaterals
 2. Drop agenda item
 3. Pursue issue elsewhere
 4. Agree that it does not impact negatively
 5. Refocus
 6. Go ahead with a majority view
8. An organisation is free to progress an issue outside the Network structure/process and is asked to bear that in mind in terms of enabling the overall effectiveness of the Network.
9. If decisions are required between meetings:
 1. The secretariat will contact the agreed person in each organisation by email and outline a suggested way forward plus a time-span for responses from members.
 2. Each Member is free to comment before the deadline and input to the decision-making process. It is proposed that a grid of responses be used to track respondents comments/views along the following lines:

Gradient of Agreement	What it means
i Endorsement	"I like it"
ii Endorsement with a Minor point of contention	"Basically I like it"
iii Agreement with Reservations	"I can live with it"
iv Abstain	"I have no opinion"
v Stand Aside	"I don't like this, but I don't want to hold up the group"
vi Formal Disagreement but willing to go with majority	"I want my disagreement noted in writing but I'll support the decision"
vii Formal Disagreement with request to be absolved of responsibility for implementation	"I don't want to stop anyone else but I don't want to be involved in implementing it"

3. If a Member chooses to use the veto it means that the decision is postponed until the next Network meeting.
4. In the case where a decision is absolutely necessary before the next Network meeting, the secretariat will gather the above responses and progress accordingly, using the agreed 'problem solving' techniques as outlined in (7) above.

Appendix IV – IEN history

The Irish Environmental Network was founded in 2001. The need for the network was highlighted by a growing recognition in the late 1990s of the extreme funding difficulties facing Irish environmental NGOs, compared with those in other European countries. A survey of European environmental NGOs by the European Environmental Bureau in 1999 revealed that Ireland had the lowest level of governmental support in the EU.

In December 1999, a small group of environmental organisations approached the Minister for Environment seeking core funding and a secretariat for environmental NGOs. Over a series of meetings in 2000 and 2001, issues were teased out, such as likely membership criteria, funding structures and strategies, and whether the proposed secretariat should assume the role of an umbrella organisation. Capacity building within the organisations was felt to be an important objective, and there was a concern about the creation of a funded, staffed secretariat, which, in the absence of real capacity building within organisations, would be charged with working for a sector which did not have the capacity to respond.

The Network formalised in November 2001, as Environmental (Ecological) NGOS Core Funding Limited (EENGOCF), reflecting the urgency of funding issues. For ease of use this title was shortened to the Irish Environmental Network in 2008, but the need for increased core funding remained.

In the years that followed, the Network sought increases in this core funding, responded to calls for funded activities sponsored by the Department of the Environment, and lobbied for funding for particular activities highlighted by its members. During most of this time the secretariat consisted of a lone coordinator, who was joined by a communications officer in 2008. Meanwhile the Membership grew from the initial 23 to more than 32 national NGOs.

In the early part of 2008 the Board of Directors initiated a strategic review of the Network.