



Living Better Using Less:

*a Sustainable Communities toolkit for
community and voluntary organisations*

A resource to host conversations within your community

Introduction to this Toolkit

This toolkit aims to support local communities across Ireland to awaken an awareness and encourage participation in sustainable development with a view to living better by using less. Through the reach of The Wheel's network across civil society organisations in Ireland, this toolkit has been informed by, and thereby hopes to inform, local communities on how they can become more sustainable.

This resource is designed to accompany the online toolkit for Sustainable Communities where you can find further links and examples from across Ireland of communities demonstrating innovation for sustainability.



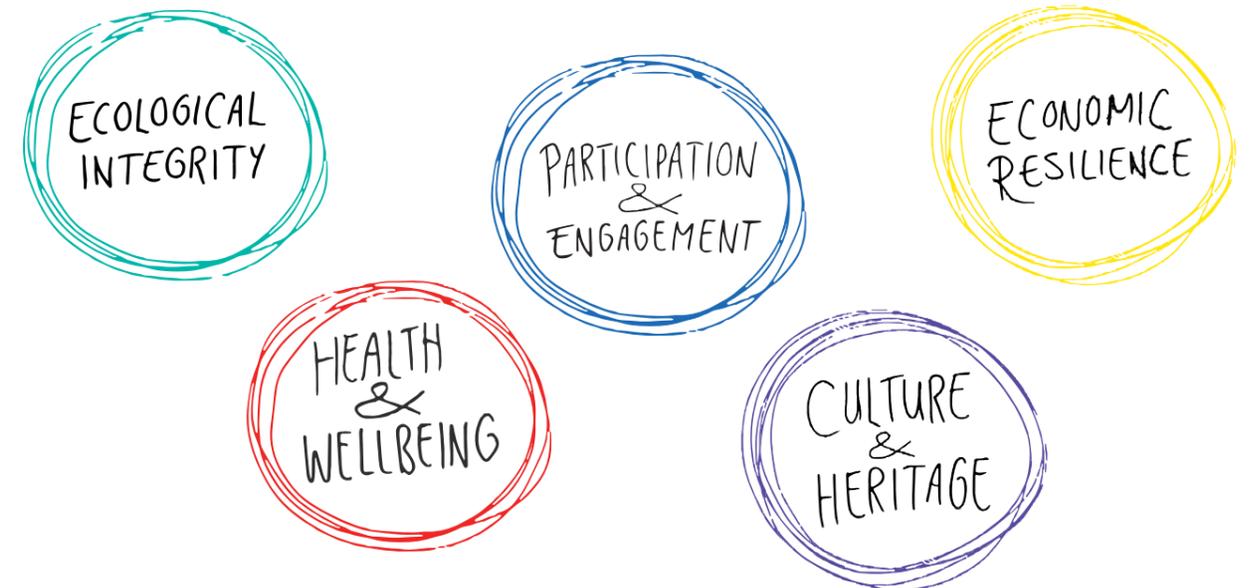
Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful to the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) for providing additional support for updating and printing the sustainable communities toolkit booklet - for further information about IDEA, visit www.ideaonline.ie.

The toolkit is framed around 5 main themes:



A note on language

When we use the word community, we not only refer to a community of place, such as a village, we also include a community of interest: that is, people who may live in different parts of the country but who share a common interest, such as protecting birdlife. We use the words group and organisation interchangeably.

Sustainable Development Goals



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of international agreed goals that invite all people to ‘think globally and act locally’ to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and take action on climate change. There is enormous potential for communities to drive this agenda at a local level, by nurturing what is working already and growing new ideas through innovation. The Wheel is actively committed to working with, and through, our members and the wider sector to achieving the SDGs.



The Wheel is a member of Coalition 2030, an alliance of over 60 civil society organisations working together to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to achieve the SDGs.

The coalition is made up of a broad range of organisations, including domestic charities, international NGOs, environmental groups, academics and trade unions. This diverse partnership has come together in the belief that Agenda 2030 - the global development plan agreed in September 2015 at the United Nations - must be fully implemented and its promises kept. To learn more about the work of the coalition, visit www.ireland2030.org

National Implementation Plan

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) leads the implementation of the SDGs in Ireland. It has created a National Implementation Plan for the SDGs which sets out how Ireland will work to achieve the Goals, both domestically and internationally. Effective implementation of the Plan will require continued engagement by a range of stakeholders including civil society, business, local government and communities. Read the Plan at www.dcca.gov.ie/documents/DCCA-National-Implement-Plan.pdf.

SDGs Activity

Make a list of the activities your organisation carries out or that you are involved with in your local community. Discuss how these activities link to the 17 SDGs. You may find that your work focuses on one goal or links to a number of them. Who else in the communities you work or volunteer in is working to achieve these goals? The National Youth Council of Ireland has produced an excellent resource for exploring the SDGs and activism www.youth.ie/documents/activism-the-sdgs-and-youth. For a list of the 17 SDGs, visit www.globalgoals.org



The earth is experiencing changes like never before, such as loss of biodiversity, climate change, species going extinct and environmental crises, and the impact is being felt at a local and global level. There is an opportunity right now for communities to be at the forefront of a movement of change towards a sustainable future through behaviour change, role modelling and inspiring innovative solutions.

Visioning Question

How are we planning for our community in a world affected by climate change with depleting resources, threatened food security and loss of biodiversity?

Visioning Activity

Take a walk in your local area with members of the community, along with any staff and volunteers who will be involved in driving this Sustainable Communities work forward in your community. Notice nature... notice the air, the green spaces, the trees, the plants... notice how the birds and

animals interact with nature... notice the feeling of peace that comes when spending time in nature... notice how sacred and delicate nature is and feel the responsibility of humans to look after her. Host a conversation outside on the importance of protecting nature now and for future generations. What are the benefits we see for our community if we were to operate more closely in line with nature? What changes could we make in the short term and the long term, and what support would we need? Are there people within the community who could join with you in this journey?

Ideas Ranking

Develop ethical purchasing and travel policies for your organisation to help reduce your impact on the environment	Organise a workshop on how to create water harvesters for homes locally	Organise a monthly birdwatch or wildflower walk
Encourage people in the local community to sign up to an ‘Eco-Pledge’	Facilitate a process of working towards becoming a Transition Town	Set up a community garden
Apply to become a Tidy Town	Develop a biodiversity plan for the local area including measures to encourage pollinating insects	Invite your supermarket to host an information day on packaging and to offer recycling points for packaging waste



When you have ranked the ideas, use the Action Planning template to make a plan for one idea you will try in the coming weeks or months.



What would our community look like if everyone was able to flourish and thrive, that they felt connected, satisfied with services and able to cope with whatever knocks they encounter? This section will take a justice approach to reflecting on health and wellbeing and propose ways for people to thrive - not just survive - as members of Sustainable Communities now and for future generations.

Visioning Question

In order to achieve a vision of a community supporting all its members to flourish as a result of positive health and wellbeing, what would need to change:

- within our natural environment?
- in public spaces?
- at policy level?

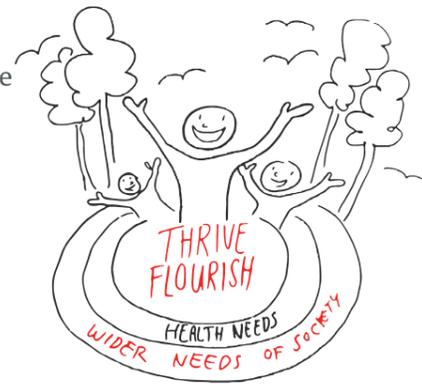
Bring the findings from the maps together, and together draw one big map of the area, harnessing all the ideas together. Display this somewhere prominent in the community, e.g. community centre or the local health centre.



Visioning Activity

In small groups of 3 - 4 people, go into the community and draw a map of the area - identify and draw on the map the spaces in your area where:

- people feel safe
- people feel relaxed
- people connect with others
- busy spaces



Ideas Ranking

Get members of the community trained as Community Walk Leaders	Organise an activity or event for National Bike Week (June)	Create a Wellbeing Statement for your community or organisation
Set up your own Slí na Sláinte route	Practice self-care and introduce mindfulness activities into group meetings	Set up a community garden
Read the wellbeing statement developed by your local Public Participation Network	Campaign for more safe cycle routes locally	Encourage local workplaces to use the Healthy Workplaces framework

When you have ranked the ideas, use the Action Planning template to make a plan for one idea you will try in the coming weeks or months.



A sustainable community is one that puts its most vulnerable members at its centre. How are we planning for the most vulnerable in our community? What is being missed when these people are not represented at the decision-making table and when services within the community are not accessible?

Visioning Question

Who are the most vulnerable in our community? What would we do differently if we had the most vulnerable groups at the core of what we do? If this is already our focus, who else in our community needs to take this on board so that everyone can participate?



Visioning Activity

Host a public meeting with as many members of the community as possible to gather views and ideas on a topic that has emerged within the theme of Participation and Engagement. Reach out to diverse groups to attend. Possible topics could include: rural depopulation, access to services, the representation of voices in the community or child friendly spaces. Through this wider engagement, encourage the community to focus on actions that everyone can see themselves as having ownership of.



Ideas Ranking

Make your materials and resources accessible by following accessibility guidelines	Set up a Library of Things for people to share tools and equipment that they use occasionally	Do an accessibility audit of local shops and services and encourage the service providers to make improvements
Find out who is not being reached in the community and reach out to them	Nurture initiatives that promote intergenerational engagement	Set up a local timebank of skills
Train staff in issues of diversity and inclusion	Campaign for better transport infrastructure locally and nationally	Host a Citizens Assembly on a burning issue, e.g. rural depopulation



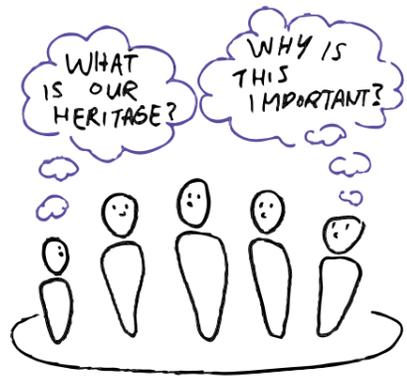
When you have ranked the ideas, use the Action Planning template to make a plan for one idea you will try in the coming weeks or months.



Each community is unique in their own special way. But have we taken the time to have a conversation about what we understand by our culture and heritage and why this is important? This section will look at ways to explore the integrity of what is special about your place, so that when faced with difficult decisions, that your community will know what you are willing to accept.

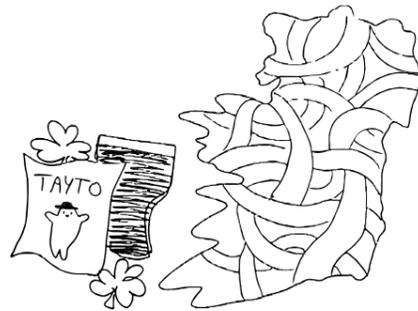
Visioning Question

What is unique and special about our community?
 What local heritage is there? Are there significant moments in the history of our community?



Visioning Activity

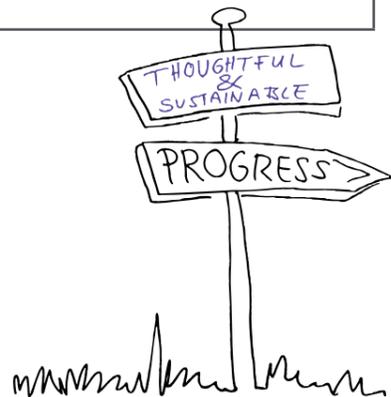
Investigate (along with staff, volunteers and service users) what is unique about your particular area (e.g. history, culture, heritage). Find out if there are any local historical or cultural events happening locally or regionally. Make plans of how you can link to these activities or organise a new initiative.



Ideas Ranking

Visit your local library and find out about your local history	Celebrate your local heritage by having an exhibition or running a festival	Research local street names and create wall plaques for ones of significant local interest
Sign up to the Citizen Science Initiative	Contact the heritage officer in your local authority to find out about upcoming events and initiatives	Bring vacant spaces in your community to life
Sign up to Street Feast	Support campaigns against unsustainable development	Identify disused buildings in your community and investigate if they could be repurposed as community spaces

When you have ranked the ideas, use the Action Planning template to make a plan for one idea you will try in the coming weeks or months.



How can we make our communities more financially sustainable? And what are the deeper issues of the economy that affect the sustainability of communities? This section will look at alternative economies, drawing on innovative examples of communities who are walking out of unsustainable economic models and into models of economic resilience that are good for people and good for the planet.

Visioning Question

What are ways we can sustain ourselves as individuals, families, as a community group and as a wider community - economically, socially and environmentally?



Visioning Activity

Form small groups and research some alternative economies. How can we integrate some of these approaches or ideas into our community? Examples of alternative economies include green economy, circular economy, blue economy, solidarity economy and sharing economy. Are there communities with alternative economies near you that you could link to?



Ideas Ranking

If your group or organisation receives income, explore ways to diversify your sources of income	Support, validate and celebrate your volunteers	Buy local from small producers or Fairtrade.
Ensure your organisation is a living wage employer	Support your local Credit Union	Join a Community Supported Agriculture scheme
Establish alternative local currencies	Campaign to increase the community sector budget	Purchase from Zero Waste shops and bring your own containers



When you have ranked the ideas, use the Action Planning template to make a plan for one idea you will try in the coming weeks or months.

Action Planning Template

Theme	Activity	Intention (what are we trying to achieve?)	Resources Needed	Who will be involved?	Date we will do this by	How will we know we have been successful?
Ecological Integrity	Carry out a Waste Audit for our organisation	To understand how much waste we create, how much this costs us and also to have a baseline from which to compare	Waste Audit template Examples of other community groups who have made positive changes to their waste management	At staff meeting invite 3 staff members to get on board to support this	28/02/2018	We will have a waste audit complete; share results at staff meeting and have this somewhere publicly displayed in our community centre

Further Resources and Links

The online toolkit, www.sustainabletoolkit.ie, contains lots of links for taking action. Here are a just a few to get you started.

SDGs

The National Youth Council of Ireland has produced an excellent resource for exploring the SDGs and activism www.youth.ie/documents/activism-the-sdgs-and-youth

Ecological Integrity

Food Waste Charter for Ireland - www.galway.ie/en/services/environment/wasteandlitter/foodwastecharterforireland/
Energy Efficient Community Projects - www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants/
Community Gardens - www.giy.ie/get-involved/grow-in-the-community/

Health and Wellbeing

Check out the emerging wellbeing work from the EPA - www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/environmentandwellbeing
Find out how you can be trained as a community walk leader on the Irish Heart Foundation's website - www.tinyurl.com/y47akmfn
Organise a local event for National Bike Week- www.bikeweek.ie

Participation and Engagement

How accessible is your community centre, office or facility to people with disabilities?
Read this Accessibility toolkit - www.nda.ie/Resources/Accessibility-toolkit
Create opportunities for individuals to engage with one another through activities that nurture sustainability - www.localprevention.ie

Culture and Heritage

Bring vacant spaces in your community to life - www.upstart.ie
Contact your County Heritage Officer to find out about upcoming events - www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/county-heritage-officers
Campaign for sustainable development - www.uplift.ie

Economic Resilience

Read The Wheel's Sustainable Funding Handbook - www.tinyurl.com/y3uzb7r5
Forge stronger links with the people who grow your food - www.communitysupportedagriculture.ie

Check out some great examples of how communities across Ireland are taking action to become more sustainable - www.sparkchange.ie/success-stories/



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The Wheel is Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. We are a representative voice and a supportive resource that offers advice, training, leadership, influence and advocacy for the sector. Visit www.wheel.ie for more information.