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The Advocacy Guide:

Empowering Women in Rural Ireland for Local Democracy

PRESENTED BY:



WITH THANKS TO:



SUPPORTED BY:



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
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Contents



Intro

The Advocacy Guide: Empowering Women in Rural Ireland for Local Democracy is a comprehensive **resource designed to promote and enhance the participation of women in local governance and decision-making processes.**

This guide recognises the critical role that women play in building vibrant and inclusive communities, specifically in the context of rural Ireland.

By addressing the unique challenges faced by women in these areas, the guide aims to **foster gender equality, strengthen democratic representation, and promote sustainable development.**



THE GLOBAL GOALS



Importance of Women's Participation in Local Democracy

Women's participation in local democracy is of paramount importance to ensure a fair and inclusive society.

In rural Ireland, where women have historically faced numerous barriers, their active involvement in decision-making processes is vital for achieving equitable and sustainable development.

Recognising the immense potential and perspectives that women bring to the table, this advocacy guide seeks to empower and support them in taking on leadership roles, engaging with local authorities, and shaping policies that directly impact their lives and communities.



Scope of this Guide



The Advocacy Guide addresses a range of issues and challenges faced by women in rural Ireland, focusing on enhancing their participation in local democracy.

It provides practical advice, strategies, and tools for advocating for gender equality, raising awareness about women's rights, and influencing policy changes.

The guide covers topics such as:

- leadership development,
- community organising,
- networking,
- overcoming barriers,
- accessing resources, and
- leveraging technology for enhanced engagement.

By equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills, this guide aims to strengthen their influence, amplify their voices, and drive positive change in their localities.



*Understanding
Local Democracy
in Ireland*

Local democracy in Ireland refers to the system of governance that empowers local communities to make decisions and take actions that directly impact their lives.

It operates through elected local government bodies, such as county councils and city councils, which have the responsibility of representing and serving the interests of their respective localities.

Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government Officials in Ireland: Local government officials in Ireland play crucial roles in ensuring effective governance and the well-being of their communities. They are responsible for a wide range of functions, including:

Policy Making



Local government officials formulate policies and strategies that address the specific needs and priorities of their areas, ranging from housing and infrastructure development to environmental protection and social services.

Service Delivery



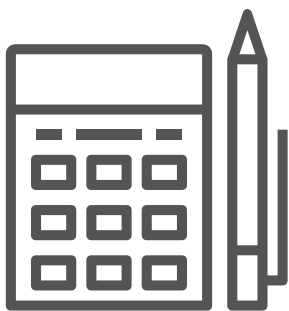
They oversee the provision of essential services such as waste management, water supply, transportation, education, and healthcare, ensuring that these services meet the needs of the local population.

Planning and Development

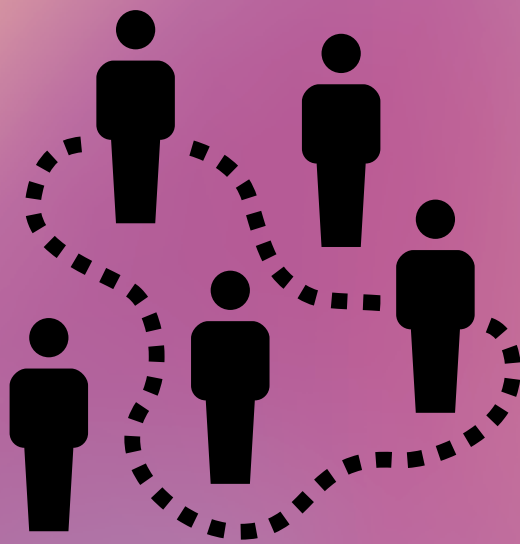


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Financial Management



They are responsible for managing local government budgets, ensuring efficient allocation of resources, and providing transparent financial accountability to the local community.



*Importance of
Citizen Engagement
in Local Decision-
making in Ireland*

Citizen engagement is crucial in local decision-making processes in Ireland for several reasons:

Representation

Active citizen engagement ensures that the diverse voices and perspectives of the local community are considered when making decisions that affect their lives. It helps to avoid biases and create more inclusive policies and services.

Citizen participation holds local government officials accountable for their actions and decisions. By actively engaging with local authorities, citizens can monitor and influence the decision-making process, fostering transparency and accountability in local governance.

Accountability

Local Knowledge

Citizens possess valuable local knowledge, lived experiences, and insights about their communities. By involving them in decision-making, local governments can tap into this expertise to develop more informed and context-specific policies and initiatives.

Citizen engagement empowers individuals and communities by giving them a sense of ownership and agency in shaping their local environments. It encourages active citizenship, fosters community cohesion, and strengthens social capital.



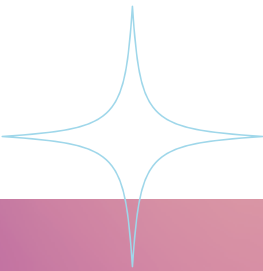
Empowerment



In Ireland, citizen engagement mechanisms include:

- **public consultations,**
- **participatory budgeting,**
- **community forums,**
- **and local elections,** among others.

These avenues provide opportunities for individuals and community organizations to actively participate in local democracy, contribute to decision-making, and collaborate with local government officials to create positive and inclusive change at the grassroots level.





*Building
Partnerships in
Ireland*



Building effective partnerships with various organisations and stakeholders, including community-based groups, civil society organizations, and local government officials, is essential for advancing local democracy and achieving meaningful change in Ireland.

Here is a brief overview of building partnerships with a number of key entities:

Community-Based Groups:

Community-based groups are the backbone of local activism and engagement. They are formed by individuals with shared interests and goals, working together to address specific community needs. Building partnerships with community-based groups involves:

- **Networking and Relationship Building:** Actively engage with community-based groups by attending their meetings, events, and activities. Establish relationships, listen to their concerns, and identify areas of collaboration.
- **Shared Goals and Objectives:** Identify common goals and objectives between your organization and community-based groups. Collaborate on projects, initiatives, or campaigns that align with shared interests to maximise impact.

- **Capacity Building:** Offer support and resources to enhance the capacity of community-based groups. This can include providing training, mentorship, or access to funding opportunities to strengthen their effectiveness.

Civil Society Organisations:

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in advocating for social justice, human rights, and community development.

To build partnerships with CSOs:

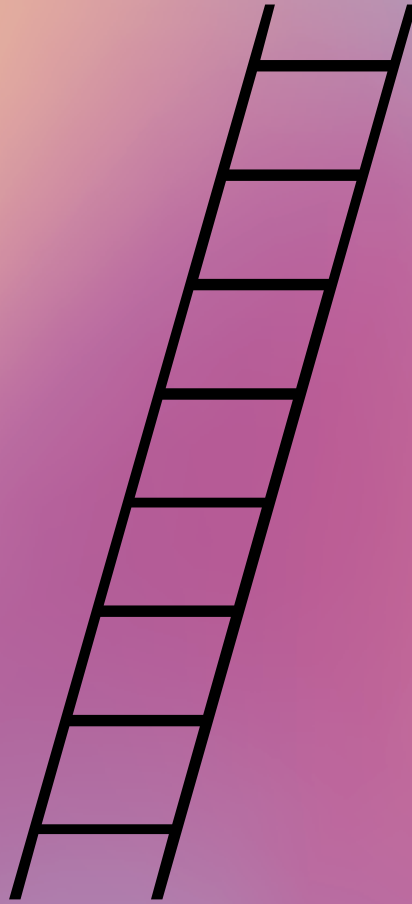
- **Alignment of Missions:** Identify CSOs that share similar values and missions with your organization. Collaborate on initiatives that advance shared goals, such as policy advocacy, awareness campaigns, or service provision.
- **Information Sharing and Collaboration:** Exchange knowledge, expertise, and resources with CSOs. Share research findings, best practices, and lessons learned to strengthen collective efforts and avoid duplication of work.
- **Joint Projects and Funding:** Explore opportunities for joint projects or grant applications. By pooling resources and expertise, partnerships with CSOs can increase the scope and impact of initiatives.

Local Government Officials (PPNs and Co. Councils):

Local government officials, such as Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and County Councils, are key stakeholders in local decision-making and governance. To build effective partnerships with local government officials:

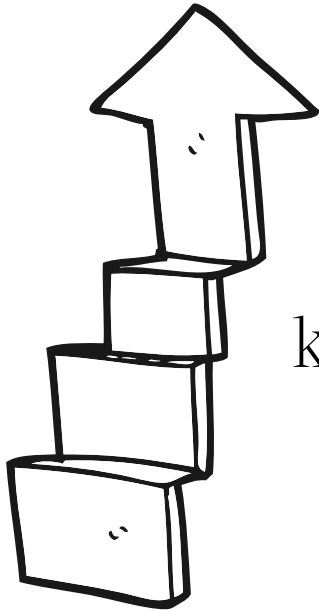
- **Participate in PPNs:** Join PPNs, which act as representative bodies for community and voluntary groups, social inclusion organisations, and environmental groups. Engage in PPN activities, attend meetings, and contribute to policy discussions to influence local decision-making.
- **Collaboration on Local Initiatives:** Seek opportunities to collaborate with County Councils and local government officials on community-driven initiatives. This can include joint projects, consultations, or policy development to address local needs.
- **Engage in Consultations:** Actively participate in public consultations organized by County Councils or other local government bodies. Provide feedback, share perspectives, and propose solutions to shape local policies and plans.

Building partnerships with these organisations and stakeholders in Ireland requires open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to improving local democracy. By working together, organisations and stakeholders can leverage their strengths, resources, and expertise to create positive and sustainable change at the local level, promoting inclusive and participatory decision-making processes.

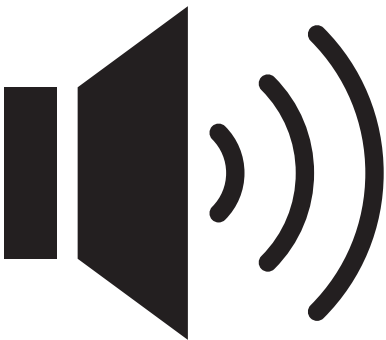


Capacity Building in Ireland

Capacity building plays a crucial role in empowering individuals and organizations to effectively participate in local democracy and drive positive change.



In the context of Ireland, capacity building initiatives can focus on various areas to enhance skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Here is a brief overview of capacity building topics relevant to Ireland:



Leadership Development:

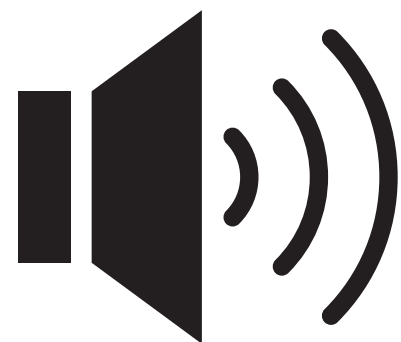
Leadership development programs aim to cultivate individuals' leadership skills and qualities, enabling them to effectively lead and influence others in the pursuit of common goals.

In Ireland, capacity building initiatives on leadership development may include:



- **Workshops and Training:** Conduct workshops and training sessions that focus on leadership styles, decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. These programs can equip individuals with the necessary skills to become effective leaders within their communities.

- **Mentorship and Coaching:** Facilitate mentorship and coaching programs that pair emerging leaders with experienced individuals who can provide guidance, support, and advice. This can help foster leadership growth and empower individuals to take on leadership roles in local democracy.



Communication Skills:

Effective communication is vital for conveying messages, building relationships, and mobilising support.

Capacity building initiatives in Ireland can focus on improving communication skills through:



- **Public Speaking and Presentation Skills:** Offer training sessions on public speaking, presentation techniques, and effective storytelling. These skills can help individuals confidently articulate their ideas, engage audiences, and advocate for their causes.

- **Effective Writing:** Provide training on effective writing skills, including crafting persuasive messages, writing impactful proposals, and creating compelling content for various platforms. These skills can enhance individuals' ability to communicate their ideas and influence decision-makers.



Building networks and fostering collaborations are essential for amplifying voices, sharing resources, and creating synergies among stakeholders.

Capacity building initiatives in Ireland can emphasise:



- **Networking Events:** Organize networking events where individuals and organizations can connect, exchange ideas, and explore potential partnerships. These events can facilitate collaborations, knowledge sharing, and the formation of alliances.

- **Relationship-Building Skills:** Provide training on relationship-building techniques, such as active listening, building trust, and effective negotiation. These skills can enhance individuals' ability to establish meaningful connections and partnerships with stakeholders.



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Advocacy skills are crucial for individuals and organizations seeking to influence policies, raise awareness, and drive social change.

Capacity building initiatives in Ireland can focus on:



- **Policy Awareness and Analysis:** Conduct workshops and training sessions to increase individuals' understanding of local policies, their analysis, and the impact on communities. This knowledge can empower individuals to advocate for policy changes that benefit their communities.

- **Advocacy Strategies and Techniques:** Provide training on advocacy strategies, including campaign planning, messaging, media engagement, and lobbying. These skills can help individuals effectively advocate for their causes and engage with decision-makers.

BY EQUIPPING THEM WITH THE NECESSARY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE, CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS CAN STRENGTHEN THEIR ABILITY TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, ADVOCATE FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES, AND CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE INCLUSIVE AND VIBRANT LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN IRELAND.

CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES IN IRELAND SHOULD BE TAILORED TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY.

**CASE
STUDY**

*Successful Advocacy
Campaigns by
Grassroots
Women's
Organizations in
Ireland*



SHE

See Her Elected

SHE (SEE HER ELECTED) at Longford Women's Link implemented the SEE HER ELECTED project to promote women's political participation and representation at the local level.

The award winning project aims to address the underrepresentation of women in local government and empower them to take on leadership roles.

STRATEGIES



Awareness and Education:

Longford Women's Link conducted awareness campaigns and educational workshops to highlight the importance of women's political participation and the barriers they face. They provided information on the electoral process, political structures, and the benefits of diverse representation.

Leadership Development:

The organisation offered training and mentorship programs specifically tailored to women interested in politics. These programs focused on leadership skills, campaign strategies, public speaking, and navigating the political landscape.

Advocacy and Networking:

Longford Women's Link collaborated with other women's organizations, community groups, and political networks to advocate for gender equality in politics. They formed alliances, organised forums, and engaged in dialogue with political parties and policymakers to drive change.

Candidate Support:

The campaign provided support and guidance to women interested in running for local office, including assistance with campaign planning, fundraising, and connecting them with relevant resources.



Cultural Shift:

SEE HER ELECTED played a role in shifting societal attitudes and perceptions regarding women's political leadership, fostering a more inclusive political culture that values women's contributions and perspectives.

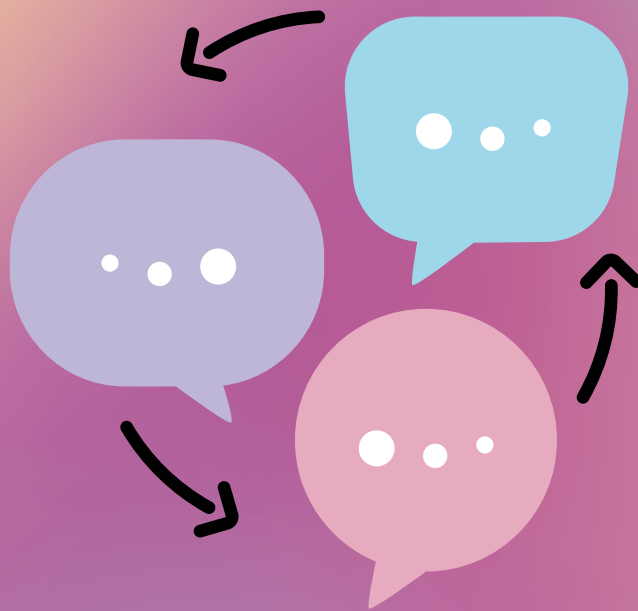
The SEE HER ELECTED campaign by Longford Women's Link serves as an inspiring example of grassroots advocacy and empowerment to increase women's political representation at the local level.

By addressing barriers and providing support, the campaign played a pivotal role in advancing gender equality in Irish politics.

The **Grassroots to Government Project** with Longford Women's Link and the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network also serves as an example of successful advocacy collaboration between grassroots women's organizations in both jurisdictions.

This initiative focused on amplifying the voices of rural women and influencing policy changes that address their specific needs.

These case studies illustrate the impact of grassroots women's organisations in driving change at the local level through effective advocacy.



*Agencies and
organisations*



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

Irish Rural Link is a national network that supports and advocates for the development of rural communities in Ireland. They work on issues such as rural development, social inclusion, and sustainable rural living.

Women's  Aid

Women's Aid is a leading organization in Ireland working to support women and children experiencing domestic violence. They provide a range of services including helpline support, refuge accommodation, and advocacy.

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The Irish Traveller Movement is an organization that works to promote the rights and equality of the Irish Traveller community. They focus on issues such as education, accommodation, and combating discrimination.

FOCUS Ireland

Focus Ireland is a leading homelessness charity that works to prevent and address homelessness in Ireland. They provide support services, accommodation, and advocacy to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Women's Aid



FEDERATION
NORTHERN IRELAND

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland is a network of organizations that support women and children affected by domestic and sexual violence. They provide helpline support, refuge accommodation, counselling, and advocacy services.

The Community Foundation

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland is a philanthropic organisation that supports community development and social change initiatives. They provide funding, resources, and expertise to grassroots organizations across various sectors.

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Rural Community Network

The Rural Community Network is a network organization that supports and empowers rural communities in Northern Ireland. They provide training, capacity building, and advocacy support to community groups working on rural development and social issues.



PPR is a human rights organization based in Northern Ireland that works with marginalized communities to address social injustices and promote social change. They use human rights-based approaches, community organizing, and advocacy to tackle issues such as housing rights, health inequalities, and social exclusion.

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Longford Women's Link is a local organisation based in County Longford, Ireland. It is a women-led organisation that works to empower women and promote gender equality at the local level. They provide a range of services and programs aimed at supporting women's personal development, well-being, and social inclusion.

Longford Women's Link offers various initiatives and services, including:

Support Services: They provide a helpline, counselling, and support services for women facing domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Training and Education:

Longford Women's Link offers training and education programs to enhance women's skills, employability, and leadership capabilities. They provide courses and workshops on topics such as personal development, computer skills, and entrepreneurship.

Advocacy and Policy Work:

The organisation advocates for gender equality and women's rights through policy development, research, and advocacy campaigns. They work to influence local, national, and international policies to address issues affecting women and promote social change.

Community Development:

Longford Women's Link engages in community development initiatives to address the needs of women and promote social inclusion. They collaborate with local community groups, government agencies, and other stakeholders to create a supportive environment for women in County Longford.

Longford Women's Link has been involved in various cross-border initiatives and partnerships, including collaborations with the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network and other organisations working on women's empowerment and rural development.

Through their comprehensive range of services and initiatives, Longford Women's Link plays a crucial role in supporting women's rights, fostering gender equality, and empowering women in the local community.





The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

is an organization that works to empower and support rural women in Northern Ireland. NIRWN aims to improve the quality of life for rural women and address the unique challenges they face.

NIRWN offers various programs and initiatives, including:

Networking and Support:

NIRWN provides a platform for rural women to connect, share experiences, and support each other. They facilitate networking events, workshops, and training sessions to enhance skills, build confidence, and foster a sense of community among rural women.

Advocacy and Representation:

The organisation advocates for the rights and needs of rural women at local, regional, and national levels. They work to raise awareness of issues affecting rural women, influence policies, and promote equal opportunities in rural areas.

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Capacity Building:

NIRWN offers training and capacity building programs to equip rural women with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their personal and professional development. They provide training on topics such as leadership, communication, business development, and rural entrepreneurship.

Research and Information:

NIRWN conducts research on issues relevant to rural women, including access to services, healthcare, education, and rural development. They disseminate information, resources, and best practices to empower rural women and inform decision-making processes.

Through their initiatives, NIRWN aims to create a supportive and inclusive environment for rural women, enabling them to have a voice, access resources, and actively participate in decision-making processes.

They also collaborate with organisations like Longford Women's Link to foster cross-border partnerships and address common challenges faced by rural women in both jurisdictions.



Longford Community Safety Partnership is a collaborative initiative that aims to promote community safety, prevent crime, and improve the quality of life for residents in County Longford, Ireland. The partnership brings together various stakeholders, including community organizations, local government agencies, law enforcement, and residents, to work collectively on addressing safety concerns and implementing proactive measures.

The key objectives of the Longford Community Safety Partnership include:

Crime Prevention: The partnership focuses on preventing crime and reducing the fear of crime within the community. They develop and implement initiatives that aim to enhance community safety, such as public awareness campaigns, neighbourhood watch programs, and targeted interventions in areas with higher crime rates.

Community Engagement:

The partnership encourages active participation and engagement from the local community. They facilitate dialogue, consultations, and community forums to gather input from residents, understand their safety concerns, and involve them in shaping and implementing safety strategies.

Collaboration and Coordination:

The partnership fosters collaboration among various stakeholders, including local government agencies, law enforcement, community organisations, and residents. By working together, they enhance communication, share resources, and coordinate efforts to address community safety issues more effectively.

Education and Awareness:

Longford Community Safety Partnership focuses on raising awareness and educating the community about safety-related issues. They provide information, resources, and training programs on topics such as personal safety, crime prevention, cyber safety, and emergency preparedness.

Public Participation Networks



The Public Participation Network

(PPN) is a national framework in Ireland that aims to facilitate and strengthen public engagement and participation in local decision-making processes. PPNs operate at the local level and are established in each local authority area across the country.

The key objectives of the PPN are as follows:

Enhancing Public Participation:

The PPN aims to increase and enhance public participation in local decision-making. It provides a structured mechanism for individuals, community groups, and voluntary organizations to engage with local government and have a voice in shaping policies and plans that affect their communities.



Networking and Capacity Building:

The PPN facilitates networking among community and voluntary groups, allowing them to connect, share information, and collaborate on common issues. It also provides opportunities for capacity building, training, and support to enhance the effectiveness of community and voluntary organisations.

Representation and Linkage:

The PPN acts as a representative structure, ensuring that the voices of community and voluntary groups are heard at various levels of decision-making. It establishes linkages between the local community and local authorities, as well as other relevant bodies, enabling effective communication and collaboration.

Information Sharing and Consultation:

The PPN disseminates information, updates, and consultation opportunities to its members, ensuring transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes. It provides a platform for public consultation, allowing community and voluntary groups to contribute their perspectives on issues of local importance.

The PPN operates through a structure comprising three main elements:

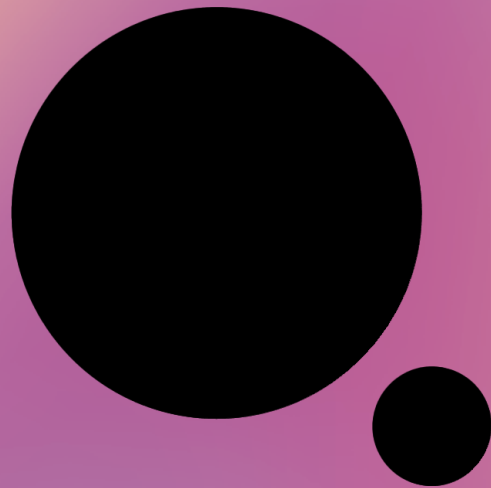
1. The Plenary, which consists of representatives from member groups and meets regularly;
2. The Secretariat, responsible for day-to-day operations and coordination; and
3. The thematic working groups, which focus on specific areas of interest or concern.



The Public Participation Network plays a vital role in promoting public engagement, empowering local communities, and fostering collaborative decision-making in Ireland.



It acts as a bridge between citizens and local government, facilitating meaningful participation and ensuring that community voices are heard in shaping local policies and plans.



Over to you...

The Advocacy Guide: ✨
**Empowering Women in Rural
Ireland for Local Democracy** is a
valuable resource that aims to
bridge the gender gap in local
governance.

By fostering women's active
participation, it seeks to transform
rural communities into inclusive,
equitable, and thriving spaces.

By utilising this guide, individuals,
community organisations,
policymakers, and stakeholders
can contribute to **building a
society where women's voices
are heard, their rights are
respected, and their invaluable
contributions are acknowledged
in shaping the future of rural
Ireland.** ✨