**Minutes of the Civil Society Meeting,**

**Thursday, January 30th,  2014**

**from 5.30pm to 7.30pm**

**TASC’s offices on 14-15 Parliament Street, Dublin 2**

Present: Anne Colgan; Antoin Ó Lachtnain (Digital Rights Ireland); Denis Parfenov (OKFN Ireland/Active Citizen); Donal O’Brolchain; Edward Stephenson; Flora Fleischer (OKFN Ireland); Ingo Keck; Ivan Cooper (The Wheel); Jane Suiter (DCU); John Devitt (Transparency International Ireland ); John J May; Kevin Murphy (Voluntary Arts Ireland); Nat O’Connor (TASC); Nuala Haughey (TASC/TI Ireland); and Vanessa Liston (CiviQ.eu).

Apologies and emailed comments were also received from Jonathan Victory and Mick Byrne.

The meeting took place on Thursday 30th February 2014, There was a round of introductions.

Nat O’Connor gave a potted summary of the OGP process to date, with others contributing comments and additional information.

Vanessa Liston asked about the level of political will across Government for OGP. The group discussed how actions will be chosen. Brendan Howlin’s public statements and lead role was noted. It was noted that DPER will naturally lead out on the policy, and seek other Departments to join in. Denis Parfenov noted the initial role of Minister for State for Innovation, Sean Sherlock, in OGP, but that DPER was the appropriate Department to advance an all-of-Government approach. Antoin Ó Lachnain noted that, although DPER may not be able to impose actions on other Departments, it can impose a ‘style’. Donal O’Brolchain noted that the very existence of the word Reform as part of DPER’s title indicates their mandate.

Edward Stephenson noted that there was nothing stopping individuals and organisations continuing to do work to promote openness and transparency actions, in parallel to the formal OGP process.

Flora Fleischer noted the need for a communication plan for civil society, alongside the process (see Annex 6).

It was suggested that the Forum should meet every two weeks at least, to keep up with the Action Plan process.

In terms of the process from here until the final Action Plan, the question came up about how drafting and responding to draft versions of Ireland’s OGP Action Plan would happen. On the basis of previous communication from DPER, it was suggested that the first joint-committee might agree headers (i.e. a Contents list) for the Action Plan, with discussion of the text to go in each section. It was envisaged that officials would draft text and that civil society (including the Forum) would get a chance to review them and give feedback, before the next committee meeting, discussion, and further revisions.

It was felt that headers in the plan would be fairly intuitive, based on international practice to date and the existing set of OGP action plans. Ivan Cooper suggested that the four OGP pillars (transparency; accountability; technology; and civic participation) would make appropriate headers as ‘buckets’ into which further detail and actions could be added. The group discussed that draft documents should go online for public scrutiny as well as to give civil society time to react between meetings of the joint committee. The group agreed that there is a need for clarity about how this process will work, as well as for Agendas and Minutes to be posted online in a timely fashion.

In terms of choosing actions, Anne Colgan suggested that we create some kind of an evaluation framework: e.g. a matrix with ‘high impact versus low impact’, ‘doable within two years versus longer-term’, etc. This should help identify actions that are SMART and suitable for the first action plan. Ultimately, our goal has to be actions that are best for the Irish people, and the evaluation frame should provide us a way to filter all the lists of existing or proposed actions in order to prioritise among them.

Some discussion was had about whether or not we want to re-prioritise actions, which were prioritised during the consultation.

Vanessa Liston asked whether case studies from other countries provide best practice guidelines for choosing actions to put in an OGP Action Plan. Denis Parfenov noted that OGP internationally collected and documented such experiences. Vanessa also asked about business representation in OGP, especially tech start-ups who wish to re-use public data.

There was a wide-ranging discussion about the likely ambition of the first Ireland OGP Action Plan and the risk of too narrow a focus on data to the detriment of other democratic reform issues. It was noted that current OGP plans tend to be 10-20 pages long, with 9 to 16 commitments, but that there are no hard and fast rules. It was also noted that the less than 2 months remaining was a tight timeline.

Nat O’Connor proposed that the group should constitute a Forum and continue to meet, to strengthen the role of civil society and help organise flows of information. This was discussed and agreed.

Denis Parfenov suggested using the free platform DGROUPS to replace Google email, which some people cannot use. It was agreed to try out this platform and Denis undertook to circulate invitations to it. It was acknowledged that we need to ensure people can get information about Announcements, even if they are not in a position to read all emails discussing OGP issues. This may require two email lists in parallel or careful use of subject lines for emails.

It was discussed and agreed that a smaller number of people from civil society should attend joint-meetings with the Department to keep these manageable. A number of people noted that they were not interested or available in this role. It was suggested that a diversity of organisations should attend, rather than any one organisation. Initially it was suggested that just 3 or 4 people should attend, but there was some suggestion that this could be 5 or 6.

Some volunteers stepped forward to meet with officials to begin the formal process of jointly drafting Ireland’s OGP Action Plan. The first meeting is scheduled for Thursday 6th February at 11.30am. The names put forward were: Anne Colgan; Andrew Jackson (An Taisce); Denis Parfenov (Active Citizen); Flora Fleischer (OKFN Ireland); and Nuala Haughey (TASC).

Ivan Cooper (The Wheel) indicated that he would be available if required, but was constrained for time. Likewise, Antoin Ó Lachtnain (Digital Rights Ireland) noted his availability if required.

The volunteers agreed to meet together in advance of the meeting with DPER, with Nuala Haughey to follow up.

Nat O’Connor indicated that the DPER had responded favourably to a query about resources to support the initiation and development of civil society’s contribution to the drafting of Ireland’s first action plan and that money was available for a temporary, part-time assistant and technical support (see Annex 4). The group agreed to take up this offer and Nat O’Connor agreed to undertake an open process to find someone for this role and to provide line management for this role, which is to support all of civil society in this process (see Annex 5).

The meeting concluded.

**Annex 4: Offer of short-term funding from Evelyn O’Connor at DPER, Government Reform Unit**

**From:** Evelyn O'Connor [mailto:Evelyn.O'Connor@per.gov.ie]

**Sent:** 30 January 2014 15:40

**To:** Nat O'Connor

**Subject:** admin and technical support for civil society reps

Dear Nat,

I refer to our discussion last week and the request for some form of  a bursary (total of €8k) to be provided to give administrative and technical support to civil society representatives to enable civil society representatives to work in partnership with Government over the coming 3 months in developing an OGP National Action Plan.  Specifically I understand that the money would be used as follows:

(1)    to employ someone for 3 months to give administrative support to the civil society reps – someone who would

·      act as a contact point between civil society groups themselves and also with us

·      organise meetings between the different groups as well as with relevant Govt Depts and agencies

·      develop contact lists for everyone so that we can be on a shared emailing system

·      work to support civil society generally – presumably attend meetings, take notes, make copies, follow up on issues etc etc

(2)    In addition someone would need to be employed for the 3 month period to provide technical support

·      refresh the OGP website

·      rewrite parts of it

·      keep it up to date

·      monitor content

·      rebrand if appropriate

The budget sought is €6k for the admin support and c. €2k for the technical support.

In principle it seems that it will be possible for us to provide some form of a grant to provide administrative and technical support to civil society representatives for the period of 3 months as requested.

There will be a number of things to sort out in terms of control requirements and governance arrangements.  It may be the case for example that we would have to give a monthly payment on foot of receipt of reports of the expenditure (activities and outputs delivered) as we will need to be satisfied that funds are spent for the purposes intended and that value for money obtains.  I appreciate that you would likely need payments to be made in advance to engage personnel to provide the supports you outlined.  We would also need to be given bank account details.

We can discuss the matter further in the next few days.  I hope the meeting goes well this evening and we look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards

Evelyn

Government Reform Unit

**Annex 5: Temporary job offer**

Ireland’s Civil Society Open Government Partnership Forum is looking to hire a temporary, part-time assistant to help with administrative and web-based tasks, to help organise civil society’s responses to Ireland’s first OGP Action Plan, which is currently being drafted.

TASC has agreed to co-ordinate the recruitment and management of this three-month part-time post role.

**Deadline for expression of interest is Monday 10th February at 5pm.** If more than one person applies for this role, TASC will undertake a selection process based on work experience, knowledge of OGP and related areas and availability to start as soon as possible.

All inquiries to: Nuala Haughey (nhaughey@tasc.ie)

Role:

·         To provide secretarial/administrative support to the Civil Society OGP Forum, including taking Minutes of meetings and posting them online;

·         To act as a contact point between civil society groups;

·         To act as a contact point between civil society groups and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform;

·         To refresh, update and manage the OGP Ireland website, working with the developer of the site, including repurposing it as the repository of information about the Forum and the process of drafting Ireland’s first OGP Action Plan;

·         To co-ordinate diaries and arrange meetings between different groups as well as with relevant Government Departments and agencies;

·         To develop contact lists for everyone and to assist the migration of people from diverse existing email lists to one shared emailing system;

·         To compile a list of all projects involving civil society that are relevant to OGP;

·         To work to support civil society generally, including *inter alia* attending meetings, taking notes, making copies, following up on issues, etc.

**Annex 6: Forum Communication Plan**

Flora Fleischer suggested that we should have a Communication Plan, about how we share basic information about meetings with officials and the evolution of Ireland’s OGP Action Plan in the coming weeks.

What follows are some suggestions, which are open to discussion:

·         The initial list of civil society volunteers for the joint-committee meetings with DPER provide a ‘point of contact’ for DPER;

·         This will be supplemented by the administrator, when someone is appointed to that role, and the DGROUPS email list;

·         The administrator will put information on the OGP Ireland website, including Agenda, Minutes and other updates, so that the broader public can follow what is going on.

·         Everyone following OGP to date is invited to give the DGROUPS email list a go, to consolidate the various lists that currently exist;

·         Please use the word Announcement in the subject line, whenever there is a big piece of news, such as a meeting date, new draft material to be commented on, etc.

·         We will try to hold a Forum meeting every two weeks between now and the publication of Ireland’s plan at the Europe Regional Meeting to be held in Dublin on 8-9 May 2014;

·         The volunteers attending the joint-meeting with officials at DPER are expected to attend Forum meetings to exchange information and ideas with other civil society activities and interested individuals;

·         The Forum also provides a space for individuals and groups with specific interests to come along and share their views, even if they cannot commit to attending all meetings;

·         Announcements of Forum meetings, as well as Agendas and Minutes, will be circulated by email and posted on the OGP Ireland website