



Coimisiún  
na Meán

# Guidelines for Aspirant Community Groups operating pilot community services

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## 1. Introduction

Part 6 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 (“the 2009 Act”) makes provision for the award of sound broadcasting contracts for commercial and community radio services on a temporary and full-term<sup>1</sup> basis.

Coimisiún na Meán (An Coimisiún) can award temporary sound broadcasting contracts for up to 30 days in a 12-month period (“a regular temporary radio service”). These contracts are typically awarded to community groups commencing their first community service, educational, institutional, and/or student groups, and others for special events.

In addition, An Coimisiún can award a temporary sound broadcasting contract to an applicant group that is representative of and accountable to a community in a particular area or a community of interest<sup>2</sup> in an area for a period of up to 100 days in a 12-month period, (“a pilot community radio service”). These contracts are awarded on a pilot basis to community groups in a particular franchise area who may be interested in establishing a full-time community radio service in the future. When the proposed service will act as a pilot for a full community service, the application will be expected to comply with An Coimisiún’s policies, including the [Community Media Policy](#) and [Social Benefit Framework](#).

Applicants can apply for such contracts at any time, and the relevant guidelines and application forms for each of the above types of temporary service are available at [www.cnam.ie](http://www.cnam.ie).

## 2. Purpose of these Guidelines

It is expected that community groups who have operated pilot community radio services will aspire to apply for a full-term<sup>3</sup> community sound broadcasting contract. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist aspirant community groups in understanding the milestones that should be achieved and the requirements that must be met before entering into discussions with the Commission in relation to the advertisement of a sound broadcasting contract for a community in a specified area or a community of interest.

The Guidelines also explain the provisions of the 2009 Act that will be applied in an application process for a full-term community broadcasting contract.

An Coimisiún’s mission is to regulate, support, and develop a media landscape that underpins fundamental rights and fosters an open, democratic, and pluralistic society. An Coimisiún acknowledges that the operation of community media enhances diversity and plurality in broadcasting, develops and empowers Irish communities, and builds capacity within the community

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<sup>1</sup> Full-term means a contract awarded under section 66 or section 67 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, up to a maximum period of 10 years.

<sup>2</sup> A community who shares an interest and the community does not necessarily live within the same geographical area.

<sup>3</sup> In these Guidelines a “full-term community radio contract” or “full-term contract” refers to a sound broadcasting contract typically awarded for a period of 5-10 years in accordance with the provisions of section 65 and 66 of the 2009 Act.

broadcasting sector. The community sector is a key contributor to a media landscape that supports democracy and democratic values, is sustainable, pluralistic and participative, and reflects and shapes who we are as a society.

The Irish experience has shown that realising the potential to operate a full-term contract requires substantial ongoing commitment and support from the communities served over a longer term. Community radio services have encountered significant challenges, and in some cases, they have led to closure when the necessary longer-term commitments and support still need to be put in place. This experience underpins the importance of operating a pilot community radio service over a number of years. During this ‘pilot’ period, the service can, through the support and participation of the community, build its capacity to continuously evolve and expand on the programming and social benefits it provides and become embedded in the community.

In these Guidelines “An Coimisiún” refers to the organisation Coimisiún na Meán and “the Commission” refers to the decision-making organ of Coimisiún na Meán comprising a multi-person Commission led by four Commissioners, the Broadcasting and Video-on-Demand, Media Development, Digital Services and Online Safety Commissioners and the Executive Chairperson.

In addition to these Guidelines aspirant community groups should read An Coimisiún’s published licensing documentation and procedures, including its Licensing Guides and Application Forms, Indicative Community Sound Broadcasting Contract, [Community Media Policy](#), [AMARC Community Radio Charter](#) and [Social Benefit Framework](#).

### 3. Community Media

As set out in its Community Media Policy, An Coimisiún has adopted the following definition of community media in an Irish context:

*“A community media organisation is characterised by its ownership structures, content production and/or dissemination activities, and relationship with the community it is licenced to serve. It is owned and controlled by a not-for-profit organisation whose structure primarily provides membership, management, and operation for community members. Its content production and/or dissemination activities are based on community members’ access and participation and reflect that community’s special interests and needs. Its relationship with the community seeks to reinforce other organisations and activities aiming to empower and develop that community.”*

The 2009 Act requires that community media provide a social benefit to their communities. The definition of social benefit included in An Coimisiún’s Social Benefit Framework, arrived at through a process of consultation, is: *“Benefits to individuals or collective actors in the community that enhance their lives socially, culturally or economically, or in terms of development, empowerment and/or well-being, that otherwise would not have come about.”*



Six types of social benefits associated with community media are identified in the Framework:

1. Growth in confidence, creativity, and a sense of belonging for individuals, especially those from minorities and marginalised groups.
2. Enhancement of employment prospects for individuals through skills development reinforcing community identity.
3. Informing and promoting awareness among the community of what is happening around their community.
4. Enabling the community to respond more effectively to local and global issues through access to diverse viewpoints and to more and better information.
5. Enabling and reinforcing the capacity of collective actors to achieve their goals.
6. Enhancement of the community's sense of identity and cohesiveness through interaction and collective action.

The Framework is accompanied by a detailed methodology that community media organisations can apply to assess the level and nature of social benefits generated. An Coimisiún will use this social benefit concept to determine the value created by community media organisations in their communities.

## 4. Community Radio Licencing Process

This section explains the community radio licensing process as set out in Part 6 (sections 64 – 67) of the 2009 Act. Aspirant community groups are expected to have read and be familiar with the statutory provisions.

In accordance with section 64, the Commission may enter into a community radio contract with members of a local community or a community of interest if it is satisfied that (a) those members are representative of, and accountable to, the community concerned, and (b) the programming of the service will specifically address the interests of the community and provide a social benefit to the community and (c) the service will be operated on a not-for-profit basis.

As outlined in section 65 of the 2009 Act, the Commission, having regard to an FM frequency allocation plan as agreed with ComReg, the Commission for Communications Regulation, may invite expressions of interest for sound broadcasting contracts for a specified area or areas. The Commission may also undertake one or both of the following studies to support its decision to advertise a contract for a specified area:

- (a) a study in the area to ascertain the interests and wishes of that area concerning the sound broadcasting service, and/or
- (b) a study on the sectoral impact of an additional sound broadcasting service in the area.

This is in addition to other considerations, including the Commission's strategic objectives in relation to democracy, plurality and diversity in broadcasting and developing a sustainability Irish media sector.

Where the Commission seeks expressions of interest, these are not regarded as applications for a contract. They are invited for the purposes of indicating in general terms the type of service proposed, the definition of the community to be served and the community nature of the relevant group. Therefore, expressions of interest in community services should clearly define the community to be served and outline the current and expected participation level by that community in the station. Groups should also comment on the type of programming service envisaged and how it will meet the communication needs of the community served.

The Commission may also proceed to advertise a community sound broadcasting contract for a community in a specified area without seeking expressions of interest. If such a decision is made, and following the necessary consultation with ComReg, an application to establish a community service in a specific area or for a community of interest will be invited by public notice.

A *Guide to Submissions* outlining the process and the statutory criteria to which the Commission will have regard when assessing an application for a full-term sound broadcasting contract will be published. This Guide will include an application form specifying the information that must be submitted by an applicant.

The statutory assessment criteria are detailed in section 66(2) and include the following:

- the character, expertise and experience of the applicant.
- the adequacy of financial resources and the extent to which the application accords with sound business and economic principles.
- the quality, range and type of programmes proposed.
- the quality, range and type of programmes in the Irish language and the extent of programmes relating to Irish culture.
- the extent to which there will be new opportunities for talent in music, drama, and entertainment, particularly concerning Irish culture.
- the diversity of services caters to various tastes, including minority interests.
- the extent to which the proposed service serves the local communities and is supported by various interests in the communities or serves communities of interest.
- any other matter which the Commission considers to be necessary to secure the orderly development of broadcasting services (i.e. studios and transmission).

Section 66(3) provides that if the service is in an area that includes a Gaeltacht,<sup>4</sup> the Commission shall have regard to the continuance and advancement of the Irish language as a spoken language. Section 66(4) requires that the Commission has regard to the overall quality of the applicant's performance under a previous broadcasting contract, if applicable.

The Commission groups the above statutory criteria under the headings of: (a) Ownership, Governance and Management; (b) Programming and Social Benefit; (c) Finances; (d) Operations (Staffing and Training); (e) Studios and Transmission; and (f) Track Record.

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<sup>4</sup> [Gaeltacht areas](#)

The application submitted by an applicant will be evaluated using the statutory criteria and An Coimisiún's policies as applicable. An evaluation report will be prepared by An Coimisiún's staff for the application. Following this, the Commission will consider and assign a score to each criterion or to a combination of criteria.<sup>5</sup> An application must achieve a score of over 50% under each statutory criterion to be considered eligible for the award a contract.

Where the application achieves the required scores, the Commission will approve the award of a contract subject to the successful conclusion of contract negotiations. The standard contract term is 5-10 years.

## 5. Community Radio Licencing Plans

To inform its decision on whether to invite expressions of interest or advertise for community sound broadcasting contracts for a specified area or for a community of interest, An Coimisiún may enter into discussions with a community group. It is expected that a community group interested in providing a full-term radio service will be ready to meet the licensing requirements set out in section 66 of the 2009 Act. An Coimisiún will assess the capacity of the group to meet these requirements through a two-staged assessment process: 1) a self-assessment by the community group; and 2) a performance review by An Coimisiún. The final stage is the Commission's decision. This process is explained below:

### **Stage One: Self-Assessment**

As a first step, the community group should assess their performance and progression through their operation of pilot community services to determine whether they have the capacity and are ready to make an application for a full-term broadcasting contract. In [Annex 1](#) of these Guidelines, An Coimisiún has provided a list of questions and accompanying explanatory notes to enable aspirant community groups to complete the self-assessment. The questions relate to: (a) Ownership, Governance and Management; (b) Programming and Social Benefit; (c) Finances (d) Operations (staffing and training); (e) Studios and Transmission; and (f) Track Record. These headings correspond to the mandatory licensing criteria in section 66 of the 2009 Act.

The purpose of the Self-Assessment is twofold. It assists aspirant community groups in understanding the requirements of the licensing process and to assess their capacity and readiness to meet these requirements. It also enables such groups to identify and address matters requiring progression and improvement.

An Coimisiún considers it appropriate that aspirant community groups operate the service as a pilot community service for at least three years before undertaking this Self-Assessment. An aspirant community group interested in applying for a full-term service must be able to answer 'yes' to each of the questions. Where it satisfies this requirement, it may contact An Coimisiún's licensing staff to

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<sup>5</sup> Full details on the weightings of the various criterion will be made available in the relevant Guide to Submissions that will be published for applicants.

submit the completed Self-Assessment and to request a Performance Review of the community radio service.

To pass Stage One, An Coimisiún's licensing staff must be satisfied:

- that the applicant has operated the community service under a minimum of three temporary (100-day) sound broadcasting contracts as a pilot for a full-term community radio service;
- that the applicant remains representative of and accountable to a community in a particular area or a community of interest;
- that the service offers and will continue to offer a social benefit to a community in a particular area or a community of interest; and
- that the Self-Assessment has been completed and the applicant has confirmed that a 'yes' response is appropriate for all the questions.

### **Stage Two: Performance Review**

An Coimisiún's Licensing Staff will conduct a review of the performance of the community service operated under pilot community sound broadcasting contracts and the group's capacity to meet or progress to meet the licensing criteria set out in section 66 of the 2009 Act. This Stage Two Review will be based on the performance and progression achieved over the relevant period and will encompass the completion of a Performance Report by the group<sup>6</sup> and a meeting with An Coimisiún's Licensing Staff.

The Review will examine performance under the same headings contained in the Self-Assessment: (a) Ownership, Governance and Management; (b) Programming and Social Benefit; (c) Finances (d) Operations (Staffing and Training); (e) Studios and Transmission; and (f) Track Record.

While the Self-Assessment asks questions that require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, this Stage 2 Review will examine how the service has achieved this progress and the evidence to support the answers provided. For example, under (a) Ownership and Control, Governance and Management, the Self-Assessment Questionnaire asks, 'Are the members of the community service representative of, and accountable to, the community concerned?' The Stage 2 Review will examine how this representation and accountability is, in practice, achieved and the evidence available to demonstrate this.

An Coimisiún's Licensing Staff will also meet with the Board of Directors and may request additional information and documentation after this meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to review the Performance Report completed by the community group and to discuss and document their plans and capacity for further development before applying for a full-term community sound broadcasting contract, should a contract be advertised. The meeting and subsequent report will also assist an aspirant community group in identifying areas for further development and improvement as applicable.

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<sup>6</sup> In a format requested by An Coimisiún. This format will be provided to the Board of Directors.





On foot of this Review, the community service will be assigned a Pass or Fail mark under each of the headings outlined above. Where the Performance Review is assigned a Pass mark under each heading, it will be presented to the Commission as explained under Stage Three below. Where a Fail mark is assigned to one or more headings, the aspirant community group will be given reasons for the failure under the relevant heading. A further performance review will be undertaken once the community group can demonstrate that it has addressed the matters highlighted. During this period, the community group can apply for a further pilot community sound broadcasting contract subject to a successful application process.

### **Stage Three: Decision-Making Process**

When the aspirant community group successfully completes Stage Two, An Coimisiún's staff will recommend that the Commission includes the advertisement of a community sound broadcasting contract for the community in the area or community of interest in a future licensing plan. The Commission's consideration will be informed by:

1. The Evaluation Report prepared by An Coimisiún's staff. This Report will be structured using the headings outlined above.
2. If the Commission considers that a matter requires further clarification or information from the aspirant community group, it will seek such information in writing and/or through meetings with An Coimisiún's staff.
3. Following any necessary meeting(s) and/or response(s) to requests for further information, the Commission will make its decision on whether to:
  - (a) commission a study in the area to ascertain the interests and wishes of the community concerning the radio service, or
  - (b) proceed to invite an application for a community sound broadcasting contract for the community in that area or a community of interest as applicable.

Where the Commission decides to undertake (a), the outcomes of this study will support its decision on whether to proceed to invite an application for a community sound broadcasting contract.



## Annex 1: Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The following questions and explanatory notes have been prepared to assist aspirant community groups in assessing their performance and progression over the period of their operation of a pilot community service. By undertaking this assessment, aspirant community groups can determine their capacity to meet, or progress to meet, the requirements for the award of a sound broadcasting contract.

Before completing this self-assessment, an aspirant community group is advised to read An Coimisiún's published licensing documentation and procedures, including its Licensing Guides and Application Forms, Indicative Community Sound Broadcasting Contract, Community Media Policy, AMARC Community Radio Charter, and Social Benefit Framework. These documents are available at [www.cnam.ie](http://www.cnam.ie) or on request from An Coimisiún.

### Section One: Ownership, Governance & Management

This section addresses the defining criteria for a community sound broadcasting service and the requirement that it be representative of and accountable to the community served.

#### 1.1 Community Representation

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Have you clearly defined the community to be served (i.e. geographical, interest-based community, etc.)		
2	Is the community service owned and controlled by a not-for-profit legal entity?		
3	Does the legal entity have a Constitution (Memorandum and Articles of Association)?		
4	Does the Constitution set out clear rules in relation to membership and provide that membership is open to the community at large?		
5	Where the Constitution provides for different membership categories, do these categories represent a broad cross-section of the community?		
6	Do all members have voting rights?		
7	Have you increased your membership across all categories over the terms of the pilot community radio contracts?		
8	Have you strategies for engaging with the community to promote and encourage their joining as members?		
9	Does the community support an application for a full-term sound broadcasting contract?		



### Explanatory Notes

- At the outset, an aspirant community group should clearly define the relevant community to be served (i.e., geographical, community of interest, etc.). Aspirant community groups should be able to demonstrate that the service meets the defining criteria of a community service as set out in An Coimisiún's *Community Media Policy*.
- A community service is usually owned and controlled by a not-for-profit legal entity ("company") and led by a Board of Directors or equivalent governing body. The legal entity's membership structure should facilitate community ownership of, and participation in, all levels and aspects of the management and operation of the community service.
- A community service should ensure that the membership of the legal entity is open to the community at large (i.e. not limited to a particular group or part of the geographical area served). The Register of Members should, therefore, represent a broad cross-section of the community or communities to be served. A company Constitution can support this by identifying membership categories by geographical area/parishes, representative community groups, organisations representing community interests, sports and business organisations, etc. The membership of the Board of Directors may also reflect this membership structure.
- All members should have equal voting and other rights, including the right to nominate and elect the directors and vote on decisions taken at meetings.
- Over the operation of pilot community radio services, the number of members is expected to increase across all membership categories (as applicable). However, there is no ideal maximum number as the representation of a community must be assessed individually, having regard to the definition and composition of the community in question. Where the community is defined by area, relevant considerations may include the involvement of members in other community groups serving the community, the population served, and community interests within the area.



## 1.2 Board of Directors<sup>7</sup> and Governance

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Are there defined rules in the Constitution related to the operation of the Board of Directors and directors' nomination, election and rotation?		
2	Has the legal entity held at least one annual general meeting at which the members elected the Board of Directors?		
3	Does the Board have appropriate expertise and experience, including broadcasting, community liaison, and financial and governance experience and knowledge?		
4	Does the membership of the Board of Directors have a minimum 40% male or female membership resulting in a gender balance of either 60:40 or 50:50?		
5	Where applicable, does the membership of the Board of Directors also reflect the broader membership categories (among the community)?		
6	Has the Board established governance structures, policies and procedures relating to transparency and accountability of decision making?		
7	Have all of the Directors read and understand the statutory duties applicable to broadcasters and An Coimisiún's related policies?		
8	Does each Director meet the requirements of An Coimisiún's 'Character' test? <sup>8</sup>		
9	Where the Board of Directors has established subcommittees, has it developed policies and procedures regarding decision-making, delegation to subcommittees, reporting, communication with subcommittees (as applicable), station management, and volunteers?		

### Explanatory Notes

- The Board of Directors is expected to collectively have a broad range of relevant expertise and experience to ensure the successful operation of the service. Ideally the Board membership would have a 50:50 gender balance but the minimum requirement is 40% female or male membership.
- The Constitution (which incorporates the Memorandum and Articles of Association) of the company is the core governance document of the company. The company's accountability to its members and the community is ensured by clear rules about the nomination, election,

<sup>7</sup> Board of Directors or equivalent Governing Body.

<sup>8</sup> The Character Test is set out in the Commission's *Ownership and Control Policy*.

rotation, and proceedings of directors, as well as regulations relating to membership and the rights of members and their involvement in the decision-making structures of the company.

- As referenced in the *Community Media Policy*, community services must be supported by robust operational and governance practices and structures. During the operation of pilot community radio services, it is expected that the Board will establish appropriate structures, policies and procedures to support robust operational and governance practices. By way of guidance, these could include rules of procedure for Board and Committee nominations, proceedings, conflicts of interest policy, etc.
- Where a Board of Directors has established subcommittees, formal reporting structures should be in place to ensure appropriate oversight and accountability. Examples include Terms of Reference for each subcommittee, review by the Board of Directors of the minutes of meetings of the subcommittees, reports from the subcommittees, etc.

## Section Two: Programming

### 2.1 Programme Schedule

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Does the programme schedule provide a broad range of speech and music programming that caters to the diverse needs and interests of the community or communities of interest?		
2	Does the programming add to the diversity of programming already available to the community by other media?		
3	Is the focus of programming on community related affairs and/or address the specific interests of the community or communities of interest?		
4	Has the programme schedule been, or will it be developed, to broaden the range, quality and type of programming that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promotes Irish talent;</li> <li>• provides Irish language programmes;</li> <li>• promotes and reflects Irish culture;</li> <li>• provides community and other news and current affairs coverage;</li> <li>• provides local sports coverage?</li> </ul>		
5	Is the programme content also provided on digital platforms, or are there plans to extend the programme output / new content to digital platforms?		



### Explanatory Notes

- Community services provide a new and unique forum for communication between individuals and groups within the community served. They tell the stories of the community and reflect and celebrate its diversity. Community radio services are expected to add to the diversity of the programming available to a community and respond to specific community needs rather than replicating the format and content of existing services.
- A pilot community service should be able to demonstrate an incremental and sustainable expansion of the type and range (diversity) of programming that is responsive to changes in the community.
- It is also important to note that full-term contracts do not require a full-time 24-hour schedule. Plans to extend broadcasting hours should be informed by capacity and a realistic assessment of the additional resources required to operate an extended service.
- Community radio services may share content to provide a culturally and linguistically diverse schedule while community capacity is being developed. Community services should promote and protect cultural diversity and inform their listeners based on information drawn from diverse sources, an approach endorsed by [CRAOL](#) and the Community Radio Charter for Europe (AMARC Charter).
- A community radio service should have regard to digital strategies to enhance the potential of community media content and extend access to such content in a platform-neutral environment.

## 2.2 Community Participation

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Is the community/community of interest involved in programme research, production, and broadcast?		
2	Have you developed and employed strategies/initiatives to increase the community's active participation in programming development, production, and broadcast?		
3	Have you partnered with other community groups in programme production/presentation or in the organisation of other (off-air) community initiatives?		
4	Have you undertaken a qualitative evaluation of how programming serves the community's diverse interests or could better serve these interests?		

### Explanatory Notes

- A pilot community radio service should be able to demonstrate an increase in active community involvement in programming over the operation of the service. This can be achieved by community outreach programmes, broadcast training programmes that are open to the wider community or collaboration with community groups to produce special interest

programmes (e.g. arts programming with local arts theatre, local drama groups producing radio drama, students of schools and colleges producing programming etc.).

- It is expected that an aspirant community group will have undertaken at least one qualitative survey among the community in the area or community of interest to ascertain (and ensure that the service being operated serves) the needs and interests of the community.
- Engagement with other community groups in off-air initiatives and partnership approaches to community events can enhance community access to, and participation in, the service.

### 2.3 Compliance Arrangements

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Have you nominated a member of the Board as the compliance officer or point of contact for Coimisiún na Meán?		
2	Are adequate arrangements/procedures in place to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements and contractual obligations regarding programme content?		
3	Does the service have a complaints-handling process for programming-related complaints?		
4	Is training provided to all volunteers in relation to compliance with the applicable statutory requirements?		

#### Explanatory Notes

- Licensed radio broadcasters are subject to the duties set out in Part 3B of the 2009 Act and the Commission's *Media Service Code and Rules applicable to Broadcasters*.
- Licensed radio broadcasters must have a nominated Compliance Officer and ensure adequate compliance arrangements (including IT and human resources) to ensure compliance with all statutory duties and the terms of a broadcasting contract.
- Licensed radio broadcasters must have a Code of Practice on Complaints to ensure complaints about programming can be received and responded to.

## Section Three: Social Benefit

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Have you measured the social benefits provided by the station by reference to the different indicators in the Social Benefit Framework?		
2	Can you provide examples where you scored strongly in 3 of the 6 Social Benefits in the framework?		
3	Under the 6 Social Benefits where you achieved a low score, are these areas you will be developing in the short, medium and long term to benefit the community you serve?		
4	Have you considered a longer-term approach to social benefit evaluation to enhance your social benefit role, and the methodologies and the frequency with which these will be applied?		
5	<p>In the report 'Assessing the Social Benefit Toolkit <a href="#">for Community Media</a>', Table 1 (pages 7-9) gives detailed examples of sources of evidence that can be used.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you give examples of sources of evidence that can be used?</li> <li>• Have you determined which may be best suited to your service under the different Social Benefit examples?</li> </ul>		

### Explanatory Notes

- Evaluating the relationship between a station and the audience is an essential part of any assessment of the performance of a pilot community service. Measuring the social benefit value (via active community participation, impact on the community, etc.) and listenership are equally relevant when assessing a community station's relationship with the community served.
- Aspirant community groups should consider how best to assess their relationship with the community qualitatively and should evaluate the social benefit offered by the pilot community service at least once. This can be done in various ways, including a community survey, online data, workshops with reference to the social benefit indicators etc.
- Aspirant community groups should also consider their longer-term approach to social benefit evaluation, including the methodologies and the frequency with which these will be applied. This evaluation will support community services in creating more diverse broadcast content and enable community members to understand better and participate in the production and dissemination of broadcast content through their engagement with community broadcasters.



## Section Four: Finances

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Is the operation of the pilot community service funded from a diversity of sources?		
2	Is the company debt and loan-free?		
3	In circumstances where the company has taken out loans or incurred debt/s, have these been repaid in full or otherwise cleared (e.g. waived in full by a creditor)?		
4	Has the Board of Directors engaged the services of an accountant/auditor to prepare the end-of-year financial statements?		
5	Has the company filed its financial statements in the Companies Registration Office (CRO)?		
6	Can you confirm that all CRO filings are up to date?		
7	Has the Board of Directors considered the following in preparation for making an application for a full-term community radio service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial strategy for the operation of the radio service;</li> <li>• capital and other investment requirements;</li> <li>• sources of funding and expenditure;</li> <li>• financial projections; and</li> <li>• the strategies and supports to achieve these projections?</li> </ul>		

### Explanatory Notes

- Applicants applying for a full-term sound broadcasting contract will be required to:
  - detail the proposed financial strategy for the operation of the service;
  - provide projections for the first three-year period of operation demonstrating how all pre-operational and subsequent funding requirements can be met and support these projections with evidence-based assumptions;
  - identify the various sources of revenue (e.g. advertising, sponsorship, fundraising, grants, etc.) and expenditure by the area of operation or activity (staffing, programming, etc); and
  - set out the measures that will be taken if the financial projections are not achieved (e.g. to address a deficit or borrowings over the contract term).
- Operating a pilot community service over a number of years enables aspirant community groups to develop a cost-effective operating and funding model that can inform their

consideration of the type of service (in terms of broadcasting hours, staffing, and capital base) that is sustainable in the longer term.

- Community media organisations should be funded from a diversity of sources and it is expected that the community served will take responsibility for supporting the operation of their service. The *Community Media Policy* notes that various approaches to enabling financial support from the community served have been developed, including membership fees, sale of services, collections, general fundraising, and on-air commercial activity (the mix deployed will vary depending on individual circumstances of the service).
- The Irish experience demonstrates that securing funding is an ongoing challenge for community groups and the communities served, particularly in the start-up period. For this reason, it is a pre-requisite that an applicant must be debt-free before applying for a pilot or full-term community sound broadcasting contract.
- It is essential that, from the outset, the volunteer base is sufficient to support funding for the ongoing operations of the community to support capacity to progress in other areas of the service, such as outreach, training and development, recruitment, and retention of volunteers and other social benefit objectives.
- Aspirant community groups are encouraged to research the range of Government and European grants available and the funding schemes of An Coimisiún.
- The Board of Directors should have, or procure, the appropriate financial expertise to ensure adherence to best governance practice in financial management and all company law requirements.



## Section Five: Operations (Staffing and Training)

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Have you increased the number of volunteers over the operation of the pilot community service (from year-to-year, etc.)?		
2	Can volunteers become involved in all levels of the operation of the service (e.g. programming planning, research and production, fundraising, community outreach) and the leadership and management of the service (e.g. membership of the Board and subcommittees)?		
3	Have you established structures for the 1) recruitment, 2) training, 3) rotation, and 4) retention of volunteers?		
4	Have you devised a volunteer/staffing structure for a full-term community radio service? If not, have you agreed on strategies for increasing the volunteer base (if required) to support its operation?		
5	Have you identified the proposed salary levels, recruitment procedures, and funding sources if paid staff are envisaged? <sup>9</sup>		
6	Have you developed policies and procedures (e.g., a Code of Conduct, Grievance Procedure, etc.) for volunteers involved in operating the service?		

### Explanatory Notes

- The extent to which members of the community served are willing to give of their own time, in a voluntary capacity, to support their station is seen as a critical indicator of the success of that station. Pilot community services should be able to demonstrate increases in volunteer numbers and capacity to build on the structures in place to support such increases, e.g. through training, rotation and retention programmes.
- Volunteers must be facilitated to participate at all levels of the service's management and operation.
- Appropriate procedures and policies should be in place for all volunteers working at the station.
- The provision of suitable training on a formal and informal level has proved critical to progress and aspirant community radio groups should provide measurable commitments about training with an associated annual budget.
- The Board of Directors and station management should develop procedures and structures that facilitate and promote direct and transparent reporting and communication lines between the Board of Directors, station management, and volunteers.

<sup>9</sup> These can include Government employment schemes.

## Section Six: Studios and Transmission

### 6.1 Studio design

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Has a suitable studio building been identified in a central location that meets An Coimisiún's accessibility requirements?		
2	Have An Coimisiún's Disability Access Guidelines been read and understood?		
3	Do you have expertise or access to expertise in designing and constructing studios with adequate soundproofing?		
4	Do you have expertise in the set-up of audio and related equipment in the studio?		
5	Do you have expertise in the technical connectivity between the studio and transmission site(s)?		

#### Explanatory Notes

- Temporary services do not have to provide fully accessible studio buildings due to the nature of these services. However, pilot community radio services are designed to give aspirant groups the experience of longer-term services with greater community involvement. They, therefore, must provide fully accessible studio buildings in the same manner as community radio services.
- The studio building for community and pilot community radio services should be in such a place that it is easily reachable by most of the community. The building and studio design should allow access by all community members, whether on foot, in a wheelchair or otherwise. This includes entry to the building, circulation with the building, access to upper floors, access to accessible toilets and circulation within the studio rooms.
- Studio buildings must conform to the [Disability Access Guidelines for Community and Pilot Community Radio](#) stations as detailed on Coimisiún na Meán's website.
- The studios should also be built with adequate soundproofing to ensure that only the audio from the studio is carried on the broadcast

## 6.2 Transmission Network

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Do you have expertise in purchasing, setting up, installing, and testing FM transmitters or identifying interference issues?		
2	Do you know of companies that can provide the above expertise?		
3	Do you know of FM transmitter sites that would be suitable for coverage within the franchise area?		

### Explanatory Notes

- Pilot community and commercial radio services cover defined areas. The area served by the community service must be agreed with An Coimisiún before the service's commencement to take account of the area's geography, suitable transmission site availability, and frequencies for such services.
- An Coimisiún works closely with ComReg, the Commission for Communications Regulation, to identify frequencies that will provide the desired level of coverage while not interfering with existing or planned services.

