

2010



Having Your Say

Regional General Council Meetings Report

This report draws together the findings of the membership of Active Retirement Ireland who participated in eight regional general council meetings run over October and November 2010.

Section 1

Context

Active Retirement Ireland (ARI) is a voluntary organisation for actively retired people with a national membership of 23,000 people and over 508 local Active Retirement Associations (ARAs). The organisation's rate of growth has been spectacular with a membership growth of 38% and a 4% increase in male participation over the last 3 years. Members age range from 50 -100 years and cover a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

The organisation is run by voluntary committees at local, regional and national level giving approximately 3000 volunteers¹ working in the organisation. The organisation is structured regionally through 8 regions whose role is to bring the local associations together for information, seminars and activities. Each region has a voluntary committee and development officer whose role is to assist existing local associations, support the development of new associations and represent the region with agencies. Each of the 508 local associations is run by a committee of volunteers. These are self-organised and independent local groups whose members decide the activities on offer.

The National Executive Committee is voluntary and comprises of 10 elected members and the 8 regional chairs. ARI formed a company limited by guarantee namely Active Retirement Network Ireland in 2008 for clearer financial management and accountability. The Board of the company has the 10 members as directors who are elected every year at the AGM of Active Retirement Ireland.

The organisation completed a review in 2008 and developed a five year strategic plan outlining a clear purpose with definite outcomes to be achieved. The five year plan is a road map for the development of the organisation. The plan was developed in consultation with the members through focus groups and 1:1 interviews.

¹ Each local association has a committee of approximately 6 -8 members and each regional committee has a committee of at least 6 members also.

Active Retirement Ireland- Purpose

The purpose of Active Retirement Ireland is to enable retired people enjoy a full and active life and advocate for them.

Strategic Outcomes 2009-2013

Strategic outcomes are endpoints that support the delivery of our purpose.

The strategic outcomes for 2009-2013 are;

1. Be an organisation that people would be proud to be part of locally, regionally and nationally.
2. Be a recognised voice for retired people on social, health, learning and economic issues in collaboration with other organisations.
3. Develop the database, structures, skills, funding sources and activities of the organisation in a professional manner.

The strategic plan sets out a roadmap of actions to be achieved over the period 2009-2013.

Each year has been themed as follows:

Active Retirement Ireland (ARI) - Horizon Roadmap

Topic	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Overall Theme	Consolidate and Fix	Continue to consolidate with focused growth	Accelerate growth	Consolidate external profile and begin planning for 2014+	Complete current plan and finalise 2014 + plan

One of the actions set out for 2009 was to fix internal communications within the organisation by ensuring that the membership have access to and participate in information provision and delivery.

In 2010 at the AGM it was proposed that instead of having one General Council meeting in October, 8 regional General Council meetings would be held. This change would facilitate greater membership attendance and participation resulting in improved communications within the organisation.

With support from the Atlantic Philanthropies grant for building the capacity of ARI, 8 regional General Council meetings were planned in conjunction with each regional committee. The format for each meeting would be the same with each regional Chair chairing the meetings. (Appendix 1 – Agendas)

These meetings were planned and delivered in October and November 2010.

The meetings were to be attended by:

- The regional committee and relevant board members
- ARI President – Tom O'Mahony / Vice President – Kevin Molloy (*who presided over the South Eastern and North East Meetings*)
- National Treasurer – Nancy Tynan
- Chief Executive Officer – Maureen Kavanagh
- Administration and support was provided by Maria McMullen
 - Office Manager, Helene Boran – Financial Administrator
- Website Information and workshop support provided by Peter Kavanagh – Information and Networking Officer and Susan Shaw – National Development Officer

Each Active Retirement Association (ARA) was invited to send three representatives as a means of ensuring effective feedback of information to each ARA.

Details of the total ARA representation at the Regional meetings can be found in Section 2.

Section 2

Each meeting was opened by the regional chair; this was followed by the address by the President.

Information was then provided on

- Structure of ARI
- Strategic Plan and Outcomes
- Financial income to ARI
- Progress of work to-date

Following the presentation the participants were asked to consider if all the actions named were actually achieving the stated outcomes of the strategic plan. To ensure a lively and interactive response participants were seated at round tables of between 8-10 people, (in the case of one region participants were split into small groups). The purpose of this format was to enable all participants to feel comfortable in having a say on the direction of future actions for the organisation. Small group work is a tried and tested way to encourage greater discussion.

Each group was asked to discuss the following questions:

1. How are these actions benefiting you?'

At ARA level, at regional level, at national level

2. What do you think needs to happen at each level to complete the work on the Strategic Aims?

3. Could any of the work happen without a national network?

90 minutes were set aside for discussion and each group was asked to appoint a note taker. The written feedback was collected on each question and this was then followed by open forum. The feedback forms the main body of this report.

What did you say?

Summary of Feedback

- **Southern Region**
- **Mid Western Region**
- **Eastern Region**
- **Midland Region**
- **North West Region**
- **South Eastern Region**
- **North East Region**
- **Western Region**

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- The information but some members don't listen
- Keeps people fit & active – fun
- Learning new skills
- Reduces loneliness & depression
- There is something in it for everyone
- Organisation should be more local & social
- AP money not benefiting local ARA's
- Central office no impact on local issues apart from insurance and information from mail outs
- Information on Go for life of great benefit
- The PLI is great and we welcome it being part of the membership fee
- The badge is benefiting members
- We take our activities for granted
- Friendships
- Social activities – Physical & Mental
- Care & concern for each other
- Networking is important with members

“We were not aware of the life we could have by joining AR – it has been an eye opener”

“We are now more aware of what is going on nationally”

“ARAs provide a focus for members to interact with each other and enjoy social activities together”

At your Region

- Getting to know other ARAs & sharing information
- Regional Committees
- Provides a forum to come together
- Important for information & communication
- Making personal contacts
- Activity break each year
- Development Officer is very important
- Regional activities good
- Forum for raising regional issues
- Regional IT training
- Good leadership from Region

Nationally

- Keeps ARAs aware of national issues
- Keeps a watch on cuts to our income and to rural transport
- Need more communication from Head Office
- Good co-ordination of plans
- Good information passed on
- Good support & advice
- Promotion of ARAs nationally
- A strong body for voicing national concerns

“We are proud to be members when we see our issues being fought for”

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

- Arrange more cluster meetings
- How do we get more people to take on Committee roles
- Get to know our Regional Committee
- Meet more ARA's
- Need better attendance at ARA meetings
- Share information out
- Need to attend Regional events and meetings

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Have round tables – it is great for hearing each other
- More training
- Our Development Officer is great
- Need to have more contact with committee
- Have more events & competitions
- Organise lists of service people e.g. plumbers etc
- More workshops

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Media training & information to promote benefits of being a member of ARI
- Put up membership to €10 per year
- Could have national coffee mornings
- More ways to meet ARA's
- Continue the raffle

Could any of this happen without having a national organisation?

“People don’t realise how important the central support office is”

- Continue to be a strong voice
- The insurance is very important
- More support on website use
- Visits to our ARA’s

Region: Mid Western Region

Date: 6th October 2010

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- Information assists but renting premises is costly
- Meet new people and activities provide a focus for older people in their lives
- Hard to motivate our members to get more involved
- Having somewhere to go for a chat and activities
- Supporting the ARA is important
- We know now we can get discounts from local suppliers
- Just knowing we have the support and advice should we need it
- Our ARAs are better known locally
- Good tips on local discounts
- Have a better understanding of the structure and funding of the organisation
- National hotel discounts are good
- We are proud of all our ARAs
- Dissatisfied with fundraising raffle
- The workshop format at this meeting very beneficial

“I am living alone but being part of the ARA means I can get to go on breaks”

At your Region

- Training in IT was enjoyed
- Regional activities such as tea dances and events are good
- Not enough information filtering down to ARA members
- Activities bring other groups together from the whole region
- Get new ideas at the regional meetings
- Greater understanding of the strategic plan
- Being able to link with other ARAs on activities
- We were delighted to be able share raffle money with ARA
- Unprofessional to have mobile phone go off

Nationally

- Having someone to speak at National level on our concerns especially in November 2010
- Providing the insurance
- The information provided keeps us informed
- Very positive to know that our voiced issues are being acted on

“Lots of information from National Support Office is very informative and useful. It is beneficial to have these meetings rather than travelling to Dublin”

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

- Would like to know more about the cluster meetings and organise them
- Organise different activities such as creative writing
- Have visits from health professional
- Draw up a list of service people
- Bring new members in with new ideas
- Ask local Gardaí in to talk
- Look up the local Log on and Learn programme
- Be willing to pass our skills on to others
- Encourage members to input into ideas and be open to new ideas
- Have a complete change in activities and general social interests
- Arrange meetings with other ARAs
- Arrange training on mobile phones in ARAs
- Invite in regional officers
- Should be selling the badges more and promoting the posters

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Cluster meetings to happen to encourage ARAs to meet less formally
- Would like to know more about training on committee roles
- More media training
- Regional officers to visit ARAs this would build the connections
- We need more information from the region on what is happening
- Have more interactive meetings
- Continue the events such as health day and Christmas lunch
- Ensure that training workshops e.g. committee training is run professionally

“We get no information from region only from Dublin”

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Would like training in how to promote our ARAs
- Continue to be a strong voice
- Communicate more with ARAs and visits from NEC
- Organise free broadband
- Have a pocket diary for each member that could be sold
- Need training for officers of committees each year
- Cut down on junk from hotels send it to regional committee who can send it on
- Continue information on grants very useful
- Join with Age and Opportunity
- Don't talk down to members

Could any of this happen without a national organisation?

All feedback said no for the following reasons:

- For insurance
- National umbrella organisation for one voice for all on our issues
- Voice at national level and strength in numbers
- Keeping ARAs connected especially the small ARAs
- National activities such as bowls, raffle
- Guidance and information
- Who else will speak on our behalf

***“The national organisation gets funding and acts as a voice for us retired people –
Thank you for all your hard work”***

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- Not many men joining
- ARA hasn't changed activities
- ARA now has older age group
- Lack of good premises hinders work
- Badges are important but some members refuse to wear it
- Newsletters very beneficial
- Training has been good
- PL insurance important
- Not all our members are committed
- Mail outs are helpful
- Find it hard to get new members
- Friendship, meeting new people
- Activities are good and varied
- socialising
- Our activities are boring and have asked for a visit from Region but none yet
“This is a cry for help!”
- Information is not filtering through to members
- Posters for ARAs are excellent
- Membership cards
- Information from office
- Have a great committee with good response from members
- ARA activities have broadened our minds
- Café meeting
- Get people out of the house and less isolated
- No benefits at all as ARA prefer to communicate on a personal level

“We are benefiting from these actions but what happens when AP funding runs out”

At your Region

- Regional Committee meetings should not be held on same days as ARA meeting – Day needs to be varied
- No reply from region yet on when committee will visit
- Need younger retired people joining
- Communicate with other ARAs, share ideas
- Very little connection with region
- Cluster meetings were good but cost is a problem
- Good place to share ideas and interact with other ARAs

Nationally

- Membership – Training – committee, presentation
- New members – very strong
- New ideas for activities
- Lack of participation of members (let committee do everything)
- Passing on Head Office information
- Information being sent is not being passed on to members
- No knowledge of national activities such as bowls, essay competitions in some ARAs
- National activities are great need more of these
- Support from office
- Newsletter and website
- New ARAs not too sure what is on offer
- Great work being done
- Posters are very good idea
- Badge is great

Question 2: “*What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?*”

What can your ARA do?

- Conflict between longer standing members and new members prevents new ideas being worked on
- ARAs could do with leaflet on planned activities
- More help to promote ARA
- ARA should meet more than once a month
- ARA should connect more with GAA clubs
- Increase communications between chairs & secretaries
- Make more use of the ARI website
- Have a suggestion box for new ideas
- Ensure that information from Head Office is read and acted on
- Get to know what ARAs are in our local areas
- Lobby our local TD on our issues
- Develop our own ARA website
- Run IT training in ARAs
- Members need to get more involved in committees
- Keep in touch with the Regional Committee

“This is our first meeting very impressed and will work on everything we heard”

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Information to be sent in time to ARAs
- Train member to become PALS
- ARAs need more support from region – feel disconnected
- Would like more social activities at regional level
- Organise cluster meetings
- Make visits especially to small ARAs and provide support
- Need region to be a strong voice on our issues
- Need support with problems
- Numerous requests to visit ARAs by Regional members
- Have a regional photography competition
- Provide a list of good speakers or get in speakers at regional meetings
- Need an officer to visit the ARAs
- More information to be provided regularly
- Create more networking events
- Provide training for ARA committees
- Provide information on grants
- ARAs should have more say into work of Regional committee

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Would like more copies of the newsletter
- Some work on rent, premises would be good
- Provide training for treasurers
- Continue to lobby government on our behalf
- More visibility at national level – promote positive aging
- National database should have more detail
- More visibility on TV & radio
- Remember we are volunteers
- Keep in touch
- Communication is a problem as letters to secretaries are not being passed on to ARA members
- Promote ARI to encourage new members of 55 – 65 years
- Give region more support including finances
- Encourage retailers to provide more stylish clothes for older people
- Come out and visit ARAs
- Don't raise the membership fee of €5 per person per year

Could any of this happen without having a national organisation?

- National organisation is an important voice for older people's issues
- The structure is important for planning, action and co-ordination
- Would like to see Regional offices being developed
- Gives the membership strength and reaches out to isolated areas
- Keep up good work
- It's good to know we have power behind us in our ARI
- ARI provides comfort through PLI and voice through representation and strategic direction
- The organisation should work for future on:
 - policy
 - IT
 - Communication
- One suggestion is to amalgamate with TUI and ISCP to be one organisation
- Need national organisation to bring all ARAs together, how else could it be done
- Couldn't have afforded insurance or get such information
- Work of national organisation with Government Departments is invaluable
- Good leadership and effect to keep all ARAs informed and connected
- Would like to see regions working together more

“A National organisation gives direction and unifies the various strands of opinions”

“As a new ARA we feel proud to be part of the national organisation with its badge”

“We would be like headless chickens with everyone making decisions. We all need direction but not to be dictated to, our elected committee works the best”

“It is a protection against the Government policy of Divide & Conquer i.e. Divide & ignore”

“A bundle of matches tied together are harder to break”

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- Friendship & meeting new people
- Good information in our ARA's
- Activities & day trips – good for keeping loneliness away
- Getting people together
- Small ARA's feel bit isolated
- Cluster meetings are good for sharing information, meeting other ARA's
- Keeping our minds, bodies alert
- Learn new skills EG Computer
- Committees at ARA level have to work hard for their members – how can we not end up spoon feeding our members
- Members need to attend the ARA meetings not just events

“We are proud to be part of this great organisation; we see it as a voice for older people”

At your Region

- Get good information out – help with grants
- Not enough regional meetings
- ARAs need to get more information especially on how to run clusters
- Regional events e.g. dancing & clusters
- The regional meeting was first to really give information and ask our opinion
- Don't get the information of events on time

Nationally

- Gives us a voice
- Provides information
- Newsletter very helpful
- Hotel offers a help to some members
- Should local ARA's start by being represented on County Councils
- National Bowls Competition to be continued

“Some members never get information from head office & haven't heard of the raffle”

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

- Come up with new ideas
- Need more volunteers
- Age Groups needs to be looked at
- More involvement from members in activities
- Need better premises
- How can we organise the cluster meetings?
- Need to promote our activities in parish letters
- Need to support the region and national levels more
- Would like ARA's to share more information
- Could we have a national highlight of the year from each ARA
- Need to make sure ARA has proper structure & procedures
- Promote our activities more
- Need funding for rent

“Want to promote the idea we are not all on our last legs!!”

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Continue to be a voice on issues
- Organise cluster meetings – urgently
- ARA's need to come together more
- Need to get more information and get it in time
- Need to have a stronger voice
- Have more IT training
- Media training will be welcome
- Ensure our interests are represented to national level
- Promote the benefits of being a member of an ARA more
- Run committee skills training
- Region needs to run more meetings
- Regional committee needs to go out to ARA's
- Regional committee needs to bring information from NEC back

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Continue to advocate on our behalf - ***“NEC doing a great job”***
- Could NEC meet local ARAs
- ARI should be involved in the social inclusion pillars and meet government departments more
- Not yet feeling very connected to NEC – today was a good start
- New badge is great
- Try to get national TV slot to promote ARA
- Run more national activities such as the national bowls that bring all regions together
- Information coming to region is not being passed to ARAs

Could any of this happen without having a national organisation?

- Yes, locally it could, but the advantages of national organisation are:
 - Public liability insurance
 - Information about offers
 - The newsletters
 - Being a voice
- We need a national organisation to keep people informed and provide a voice for our issues. It is good to be part of a national organisation
- Strength in numbers, good leadership
- Guidelines & rules to fall back on
- Being able to work with other organisations
- Need a strong central organisation for support & capacity building
- Insurance
- National level brings ARAs together to share information and ideas.
- This meeting has been a great asset to members
- National events are looked forward to

“It would not be possible to keep momentum in region and local ARAs without the empowerment and backbone of the national organisation and its structures”.

“Long may the organisation continue and long may ARAs flourish”

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- Friendships are developed at ARA and community level
- People are less isolated
- People are in better health and independent
- Communications are better
- Activities are more varied, suitable to all and help maintain mobility and quality of life
- Information on cross border activities has opened new opportunities
- No social barriers as ARAs are open to all
- Social gathering is very beneficial especially for people from rural areas
- Learn new skills
- Hard to motivate members to become involved
- Premises is a problem
- Difficult to get men and younger people involved

“It is comforting to know that we have a shoulder to lean on and share our troubles”

“We have written our own book on the past “

At your Region

- Supporting ARAs within the region
- Developing friendships with other areas
- Builds bridges between ARAs
- Region only meets once every 3 months not much interaction otherwise
- The distance to meetings is a lot when there are no expenses
- Good to have planned activities to get involved in
- Chair meets with the ARAs
- Cluster meetings are a good idea especially for isolated areas like Inishowen
- Regional meetings are a place to get ideas
- Having the chair sit on the NEC gives a direct link
- Regional structure gives a good mechanism for linking to the central office
- Regional training is very useful

Nationally

- Good for getting information and providing leadership
- Queries are answered and information flow is good
- Stronger voice and publically shows there is a huge organisation
- Events such as AGM and national bowling competition
- These regional meetings are a great idea
- The badge is a great idea

- The insurance is very good as well as the special offers
- Website is great
- Collaboration work is excellent

“We now have a better understanding of the organisation as a whole”

“We benefit from information, guidance and problem solving from the central office”

Question 2: *“What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”*

What can your ARA do?

- Improve ARAs profile with statutory bodies
- Promote the ARAs more locally
- Encourage ARAs to set up a repair scheme
- Develop cluster groups within local areas
- Improve the gender balance
- Encourage new members to join especially younger age groups
- Make sure information from regional and national level is passed on to members
- Need to meet at least once a week and during the summer
- Invite people to a once off event to see if they would join
- Listen to what members are saying

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Share information on successful activities and events
- Have improved communications especially about notice of meetings
- Organise seminars on different issues
- Have meetings in other places in the region have them less rushed
- Set up training for committee members on roles
- Would like to see regional representatives come out to ARAs
- Organise a series of cluster meetings to improve communications
- Take in to account transport when organising meetings

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Continue to improve communications
- Provide information especially on grants and positive ageing week
- Encourage members to support the Senior Helpline it is very rewarding
- Keep database up to date
- Raise membership fee to €10
- Provide funds to local groups
- Provide ARAs with discussion topics before meetings
- Keep up the media profile
- Would like to see someone from NEC at the regional AGM

Could any of this happen without a national organisation?

- Yes, but it would be too costly
- The ARAs can run effectively because of the safety of the national support
- Could not do without the Public Liability Insurance it would be too expensive
- No we would have no guidelines, no voice, just isolated groups
- National profile encourages people to join
- The national team are important for their knowledge
- No, leadership is important and there is strength in numbers
- No it would lead to a disjointed organisation
- Yes, ARAs would continue to exist but we would have no voice on issues
- No, the expertise is needed and volunteers could not produce the same level of quality and quantity of work
- It would be impossible to operate without head office for their direction and support
- No, the information and leadership is good
- Being a registered charity helps to access funding

“We need the power of numbers for lobbying and making our voices heard at Government level – the national organisation is what binds us together to fight for a common purpose”

“A national organisation has the strength and status to support the region and local groups”

“Ní neart go chur le chéile”

Region: South Eastern Region

Date: Tuesday 28th October 2010

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- Through being able to run a long list of activities that suits all needs
- Friendship, well being, interaction with people
- Social outlets and being able to learn new skills
- It improves quality of life and reduces loneliness
- Gives health and social inclusions benefits
- Information has improved and we are now conscious of being part of a larger organisation
- It gives us a sense of security being part of an organisation
- Keeps us physically and socially active
- Encouragement to take part in activities
- Good communication now
- Gives older people a say
- Makes our ARAs stronger and gives us a goal to aim for
- These actions are not too beneficial because communication between ARAs is difficult, no listing available

At your Region

- Need more information on activities
- Chairperson of region should be welcomed to all ARAs
- Interaction with other ARAs
- Keeps us in touch with what is happening nationally
- Today was very good for getting to know about other ARAs
- Important information would not be shared
- Activities at regional level bring ARAs together
- Sometimes there is lack of contact from region about events
- Good support in getting ARAs organised

Nationally

- National PL Insurance great
- Representing us on pensions etc
- Communications from Head Office are very important
- Gives us a collective voice
- National social activities will mix groups
- Bringing regions together renew enthusiasm of the members
- National activities such as Bowls, Cruise, website, hotel offers are much appreciated
- Good information and feedback given
- Slow at changing contact details of ARA's
- Good support from Head Office and NEC

“We appreciate the national set up and see it improving”

“Today makes us appreciate the difficulties of running such a large organisation – thank you!”

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

- Need to run more IT training
- Get more men involved & look at what men like to do
- Need to have day time meetings and more often
- Arrange more discussions and social evenings
- Give more time to understand information from central support office
- Have a suggestion box for ideas
- Get feedback from our members more often
- Promote our activities more
- Need better premises
- Connect with other ARAs to share activities
- Arrange ARA meetings so that people get to know each other better
- Encourage new people to come on committee
- Access new funding
- Need members to support the committees more

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Not enough contact with other ARAs
- Need more regional activities
- Should do roll call at meetings to see what ARAs to see what ARAs present
- Could region arrange bus hire to meetings or planned events around free travel
- Regional council should meet more often
- More events to bring ARAs together
- More training
- Have someone from region to visit the ARAs
- What can the region do to help in recruiting new members?
- Put regional activities on the website
- Have regional meetings at local ARA level
- Improve communication and don't have events being organised without telling local ARA
- Make sure information on forthcoming events is sent to all ARAs on time
- This type of regional meeting is a good start in reaching out to ARAs

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Need to get more information to ARAs
- Sometimes the information arrives too late
- Campaign on issues such dental services
- Carry on good work and emphasise need for men to join
- Get more radio & TV publicity
- Keep ARAs up to date
- Look for national sponsorship and do fundraising
- Staff pay should come from members for a nominal fee
- Lobby Government not to cut funding

- Run more committee skills training
- Organise more training that is not a waste of money
- NEC to vary meetings around the country

“Doing a very good job at the moment, newsletters are great”

“Why has no one ever come to us with workshops before?”

Could any of this happen without having a national organisation?

- No, but would like to access the contact details of ARAs - especially telephone
- A national voice
- To liaise and support ARAs
- Keeps ARAs informed
- There would be no continuity, guidance or leadership
- Leadership is required but we are getting top heavy at NEC
- Need an national organisation to deal with big issues

“No, not with what we are getting now. We are pleased with all information we have received at this meeting – a huge improvement”

Region: North East Region

Date: 27th October 2010

Question 1: *“How are these actions benefiting you?”*

In your ARA

- The activities are important, the access to information on Go-for-Life and PAL training
- Having a range of activities to get involved in
- With improved communications from the new office more information is coming through
- Officers can see the part they play in the organisation but not the members
- Friendships are made and can connect with other ARAs
- Learn new skills and hobbies
- Posters and badge are good ideas
- Being able to go to regional meetings like these
- Insurance is a relief for all members
- Have better leadership
- Benefits people who are isolated
- Have more pride and confidence in organisation
- Knowing the structure is very useful

At your Region

- These meetings are good source of information
- The activities run at regional level bring ARAs together especially the dances, training and talks
- The IT training was great
- It is beneficial for ARAs to attend regional meetings
- ARAs are helping each other at this level
- This type of meeting is good as there is more information available
- The development officer is very helpful

“Region is a good place to get to know what other ARAs are doing”

Nationally

- The insurance is very important
- The national activities are good such as essay, bowls and art competitions and extremely well organised
- The membership badge shows solidarity
- Provides leadership, training and communication
- Information provided is useful
- Acts as a voice on issues
- The meetings such as AGMs are important for members
- Speaking out on issues

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

“We went to the local Youth reach to talk about our lives and had a great time sharing experiences”

- Communicate better with each other
- ARAs need to promote their own activities in local media but need training
- ARAs need to communicate better with each other, make sure that ARAs share information on activities
- Encourage new members to join
- ARAs must be outward looking and not get stale
- Make sure we send people to meetings organised by region and national level (Dublin)
- Be willing to try out new activities
- Need to encourage more men to be involved
- Ensure that communications from national level are passed on to all members
- Invite regional officers to ARAs
- Create better connections with groups such as Gardaí, GAA
- Go out and visit other ARAs
- Would like ARA meeting to be more activity based

“We didn’t know about the Log On and Learn or about the poster”

“We have picked up lots of ideas from the other groups here today”

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- Continue training especially on committee roles
- Promote activities that work well
- Arrange some cluster meetings
- Provide information on teachers/instructors and speakers for region
- Continue to keeping information flowing
- Visit ARAs as small ARAs feel isolated
- Provide the ARAs with contact lists so contact can be made with other ARAs
- Regional officers to encourage more ARAs to participate in activities

“Continue to do what they have been doing in keeping ARAs in touch with each other through the activities and advice they give”

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- We need a higher national profile for the ARAs as well as being a strong voice
- Could national level take up local issues such as closing of hospitals
- When AP pulls out what will happen to all the work that needs to be done and is being done?
- AP has changed the structure
- Provide training on mobile phones

“Don’t waste money on courses for mobile phone training as members can teach each other”

- Keep up the pressure on Government
- Raise funding efforts
- Continue to provide the information and support
- Could a Christmas break be organised
- What plans are in place to fill the gap AP funding will leave?

Could any of this happen without a national organisation?

- No we need a central support office for organisation to function properly
- Need our issues to be taken forward
- No but do need more information like what is being provided at this meeting
- Some things would happen but without leadership and representation
- No we need structure, insurance and coordination
- No its gives credibility, recognition and respect, keep listening to the members (as you do)
- A national organisation acts as one voice and knowing we have the insurance gives peace of mind
- No, we need the elected structure we have
- Without the national we would have no high level voice or national profile
- No but we need to be more self-supporting
- No there would be no leadership to challenge our thinking or distribution of information

“Slim down the current structure - do we need all these levels and working groups?”

Region: Western Region

Date: Wed 3rd November 2010

Question 1: “How are these actions benefiting you?”

In your ARA

“Our members are proud to be part of our local ARA. It’s a great social outlet; we are physically active, well informed and more creative”

- Support local charities
- The opportunity to travel with ARA to places we never thought we would go
- Builds our confidence
- Belonging to a group to take holidays
- Better flow of information provided to ARA
- Encourages healthy living provided to ARA
- We are more informed about what is happening
- We are getting new members
- Activities – National bowls, Badges, dances, exercise – go for life
- Writing our book and being able to promote it
- Intergeneration programme is a great success with TY1
- Having a place to voice our concerns
- Didn’t know about badge as we are new ARA – didn’t know about Essay Competition
- Should call badge – the “Togetherness Badge”
- Friendship, a safe place to speak your mind, learning new skills, seeing new places

At your Region

- The regional activities – Bowling, Festivals, Training
- Being able to bring issues to be addressed
- Being able to interact with other ARAs
- Have Representation here
- Information provided

Nationally

- Great to have extra staff to share all the work
- National Bowling – great!
- Good support & information
- Being able to bring 3 people to meeting was great
- Great opportunity to meet at National Activities e.g. Cruise – great idea – highlights the social benefits of ARAs
- Belonging to a network & have structure to lobby through – gives us strength
- Website is great
- Gives solidarity
- Having someone to speak at National level on our concerns

Question 2: “What do you think needs to happen to complete the work on these Aims?”

What can your ARA do?

“As members we do need to support our ARA meetings more”

- Organise a fundraising event each year for ARA
- Would like list of all ARAs in Region
- More connection from Regional Committee as there is little interest at the moment
- Want region to find ARA – more promotion of local ARA
- How do we get new members in a small community?
- Try out new activities – how to motivate people?
- Need to debate issues more
- Ensure members are willing to take on roles
- Put in place a suggestion box
- Report back on all meetings, events to ordinary members not just committee
- Need more men to join
- Organise visits to other ARA's – clusters
- Make use of posters

What do your Regional Committees need to do?

- More support & visits to ARAs from region needed
- Support to promote local ARA
- Cluster meetings to happen
- More literature at Irish level
- Would like to have contacts of other ARAs to organise group – meetings
- We would like format used here again – better interaction
- Training in mobile phones & IT
- Support in getting younger members
- Encourage ARAs to contact each other more
- Keep up good work
- Have 1 Committee member & 1 Ordinary member to attend Regional meetings
- Organise buddy support between ARA's

What can the National Executive/Board do?

- Do not hear from National Level and Collaboration
- Greater input in setting up of new ARA
- Database needs updating
- Be aware of the problems that small ARAs face
- Don't use too many external consultants
- Have one voice for all demands
- Have more of this type of meeting
- Local ARA funds to be used in ARA only

- Keep pushing for pension, medical & free travel
- Run more Meetings like this
- Continue great work
- Raise membership fee
- Information hard to get online – need it sent out
- Activities too Dublin based
- Post is still sent to past secretary as well as current

Could any of this happen without a national organisation?

- No – the national organisation provides cohesion and structure
- Planning and training is provided
- Local ARAs could not do their activities without the insurance being provided
- There is strength in numbers
- Meetings like this would not happen
- National organisation keeps the insurance affordable for ARAs
- National organisation gives ARAs a strong voice and we have good people representing us
- National organisation keeps the ARAs well informed
- ARAs get good support and guidance
- Yes – things would happen without the national organisation – National organisation can be top heavy and needs to work more at regional level

“We shouldn’t go down the political route such getting involved in demonstrations”

“The National Organisation brings the whole country together as one”

“ARAs are well run there is no need for a national organisation”

Summary and conclusion

In relation to the how the ARA benefitted from the actions being carried out under the strategic plan, many identified with the more tangible outcomes such as the badge, the newsletters, website, poster, general information and mail-outs. Participants were vocal on the general benefits of being members of ARAs and expressed great pride in the activities and hard work of the local ARA committees. Friendship, confidence building and learning new skills were flagged as the main benefits of being part of an ARA. All participants claimed to have a much healthier and positive outlook on life.

At regional level the regional activities were appreciated and provided ARAs with opportunities to meet other ARAs. The information received at regional meetings along with the work of Development Officers was highlighted. However it was expressed that some regions were not responding to ARAs needs and this should be looked at with a view to improving linkages and communication.

The national activities especially the national bowls competition were singled out for praise and the provision of the public liability insurance was a great support mechanism and greatly reduced the costs to ARAs by having it provided from the national level.

Many members were reassured that their voices were being heard at national level and that their issues and concerns were being dealt with.

“Today makes us appreciate the difficulties of running such a large organisation – thank you!”

What needs to happen next?

Following lively debate and with encouragement to be honest and open with their opinions, the participants were very forthcoming with ideas on what needs to happen at all levels of the organisation. (See feedback on question 2 from each region).

Areas for more work can be grouped into themes and it is these themes that will form the basis of work for the next phase of the plan.

The main themes emerging were:

Membership; Training; Information and Communication; Support.

What the ARAs need to do:

Membership; Training; Information and Communication; Support.

The main areas identified under these themes were;

Membership Gender balance: ARAs are to look at their activities to see if they suit both men and women. It has been recognised that in order to attract more men then activities should be more task focussed such as sports, trips to the Dáil or Croke Park.

ARAs could link up with the local GAA clubs to share activities.

Promotion of the activities would encourage more men to join.

Age: Many participants expressed concern that their ARAs needed to attract more of the younger age cohort of retired people. Once again the answer lies in the activities and the promotion of these activities.

“Let’s ask ourselves the question – Would I join my ARA if I was younger and if not, what would make me want to join?”

Activities: All participants spoke about the benefits of doing a range of activities but many need assistance in developing these activities. Friendship and companionship were the main benefits along with having a better quality of life. ARAs must be able to voice these benefits when promoting the ARA.

Conflict between newer and longer serving members on committees was raised and identified as a block to encouraging new ideas. New members bring new ideas and feedback mechanisms should be in place such as suggestion boxes or space set aside at meetings to put forward new ideas.

Information and Communication: Passing on the information received from Central Support office and from regional level was seen as very important and that this needs to be done at each meeting.

Run mobile phone training between members.

Participation at regional activities and meetings must be a priority.

Cluster meetings were suggested as a means of learning from other ARAs about activities that worked well.

“We were not aware of the life we could have by joining ARI - It has been an eye opener”

Support; *“Being on a committee is hard work and sometimes thankless”*

Concern about getting new members on to the ARA committee was a common issue raised with many ARA committees feeling burnt out. Suggestions put forward included encouraging members to go forward; Being open to new people with new ideas; Asking members to take on some smaller tasks or join subgroups as a means of taking on more responsibility and finally many suggested that it can be hard for some committee members to step down.

“Some committee members feel that their way of doing things is the only way and this stops others from taking the job”

What can your region do under Membership; Training; Information and Communication; Support?

Training: ARAs would like to see more training being delivered at regional level;
Areas identified for training were;

- Committee skills and roles to include how to get in new members
- Media/promotion of ARA training
- How to deal with problems in the ARAs such as conflict between members
- IT training that would include being able to use internet

Information and Communication:

- Arrange cluster meetings across the regions to improve information flow and communications between ARAs
- ARAs would like to see more visits from regional committee members if possible this would make the regional level more relevant.
- Ensure that regional activities are posted on the ARI website
- Ensure that information on events and meetings are sent out with plenty of notice for ARAs
- Provide information on speakers or activities that work well
- Include literature in Irish
- Use similar format as in the round table/discussion as it encourages better interaction
- Continue to act as a voice for members and feed issues on to NEC, as having their concerns heard at and acted on at national level was of huge importance.

Support

- Continue to run membership activities as these bring members together
- Some regions need to improve their communications and activities as members felt disconnected from the regional level
- ARAs would like to feel they have more of a say into the work at regional level
- Development officers play a key role in connecting ARAs

What does your National level need to do under Membership; Training; Information and Communication; Support?

- Continue the support provided for the regional committees, working groups and Development officers
- Continue the national Public Liability Insurance scheme
- Continue the development of the newsletter and website
- Provide support on how to deal with high rents for local premises
- Provide training for ARAs especially Treasurers

“Remember we are volunteers”

- ARAs expressed a wish to have visits from NEC and staff
- Continue to be a strong voice on the issues that the members raise and lobby when required
- Provide support to the regions including more financial support (1 region)
- Raise the membership fee as a means of the organisation becoming less dependent on government grants (all regions). However one feedback sheet from 1 region asked for no increase).
- The activities, badge, newsletter, offers, website and current support are very much appreciated and would like to see these continued.
- Having good speakers at national level and having good leadership was identified as a major positive

“Continue to improve the lines of communication and meetings such as the ones just held are a great way to do this”

- Promote the wider organisation more through TV and national papers especially on positive ageing

“Today makes us appreciate the difficulties of running such a large organisation-thank you!”

Benefits of being a national organisation:

Each region clearly identified the benefits of being part of a large organisation and appreciated the opportunity to voice these.

The main benefits identified were:

- Support, training and guidelines for setting up and developing the ARAs
- Cohesion and management of the national organisation
- Knowing there is good leadership who will speak out
- Having people to provide a strong lobby on our issues
- Solidarity and strength coming from the large number of members
- Provides continuity, guidance and leadership to ARAs and regions

“We could not do our best without a national organisation, not with the support and activities we are getting now. We are pleased with all the information received at this meeting-a huge improvement”

- One concern voiced was on the current structure and whether it was too top heavy with too many layers
- The security provided by the public liability insurance, voice through representation and strategic direction were highlighted

The message that being part of a national organisation is highly prized was strong but that this will always need development and improvement in consultation with the members.

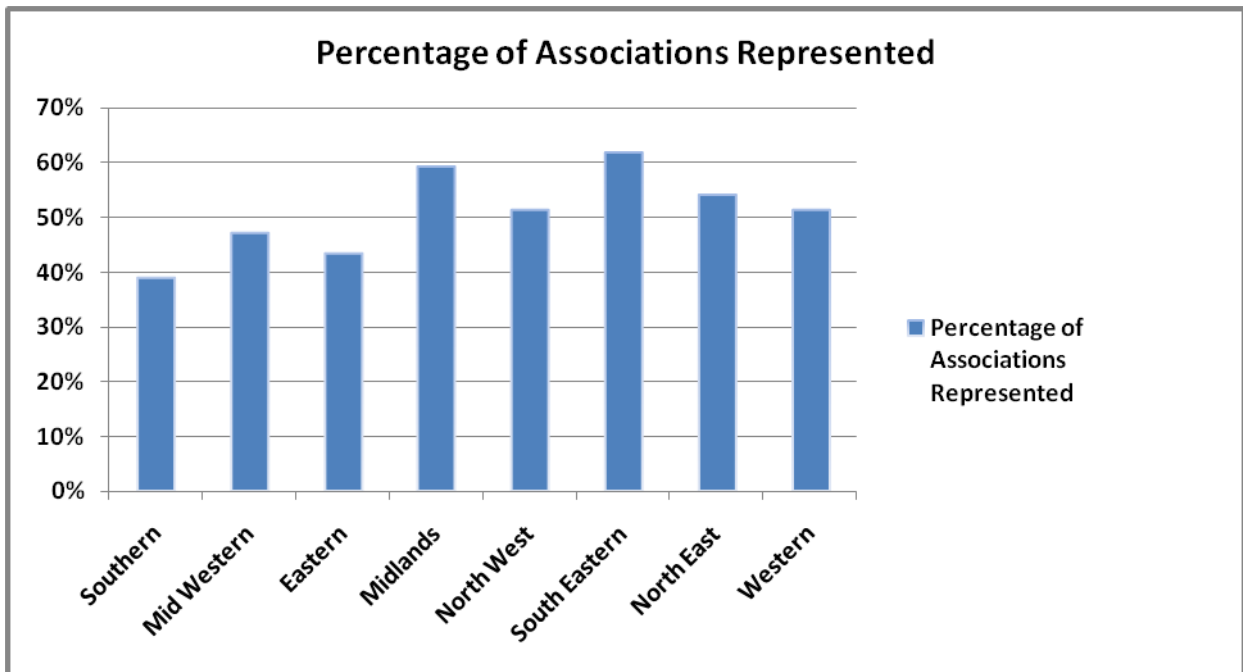
“As a new ARA we feel proud to be part of a national organisation with its badge and support”

“It would not be possible to keep momentum in region and local ARAs without the empowerment and backbone of the national organisation and its structures”.

“Without the national we would have no high level voice or national profile”

Regional General Council Meetings 2010

Region	Date	Venue	Total of Representatives including Regional Committee at meeting	Total Associations Represented at meeting	Total Associations in Region (as database 9/11/10)	Percentage of Associations Represented
Southern	5th October	Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney	81	28	72	39%
Mid Western	6th October	South Court Hotel, Limerick	72	24	51	47%
Eastern	8th October	Ashling Hotel, Dublin	117	45	104	43%
Midlands	19th October	Tullamore Court, Tullamore	92	32	54	59%
North West	21st October	Sligo Southern Hotel	64	22	43	51%
South Eastern	26th October	Treacys (Days) Hotel, Waterford	109	39	63	62%
North East	27th October	Ardboyne Hotel, Navan	74	27	50	54%
Western	3rd November	McWilliam Park Hotel, Claremorris	101	38	74	51%
Totals			710	255		





The purpose of Active Retirement Ireland is to enable retired people enjoy a full and active life and advocate for them.

Strategic Outcomes 2009-2013

1. Be an organisation that people would be proud to be part of locally, regionally and nationally
2. Be a recognized voice for retired people on social, health, learning and economic issues in collaboration with other organisations
3. Develop the database, structures, skills, funding sources and activities of the organisation in a professional manner.



**Appendix:
Presentation made at
Regional General
Council Meetings 2010**

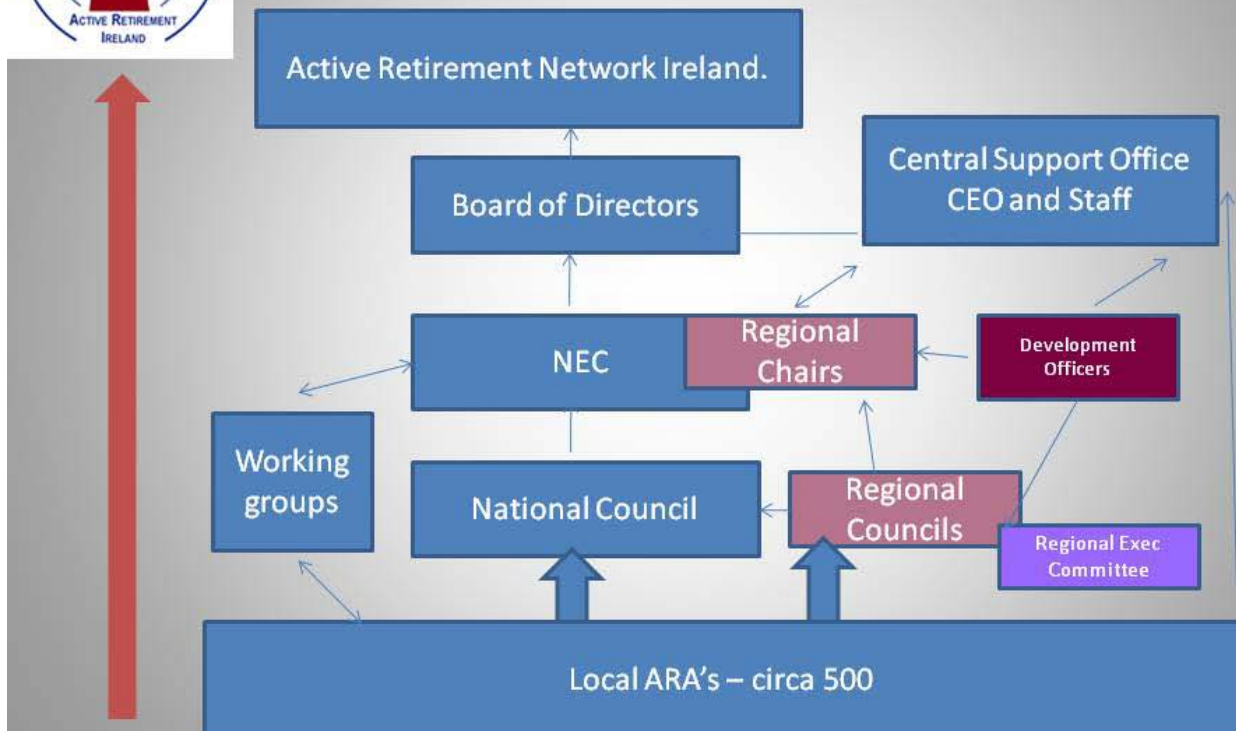


Active Retirement Ireland

Regional General Council Meeting

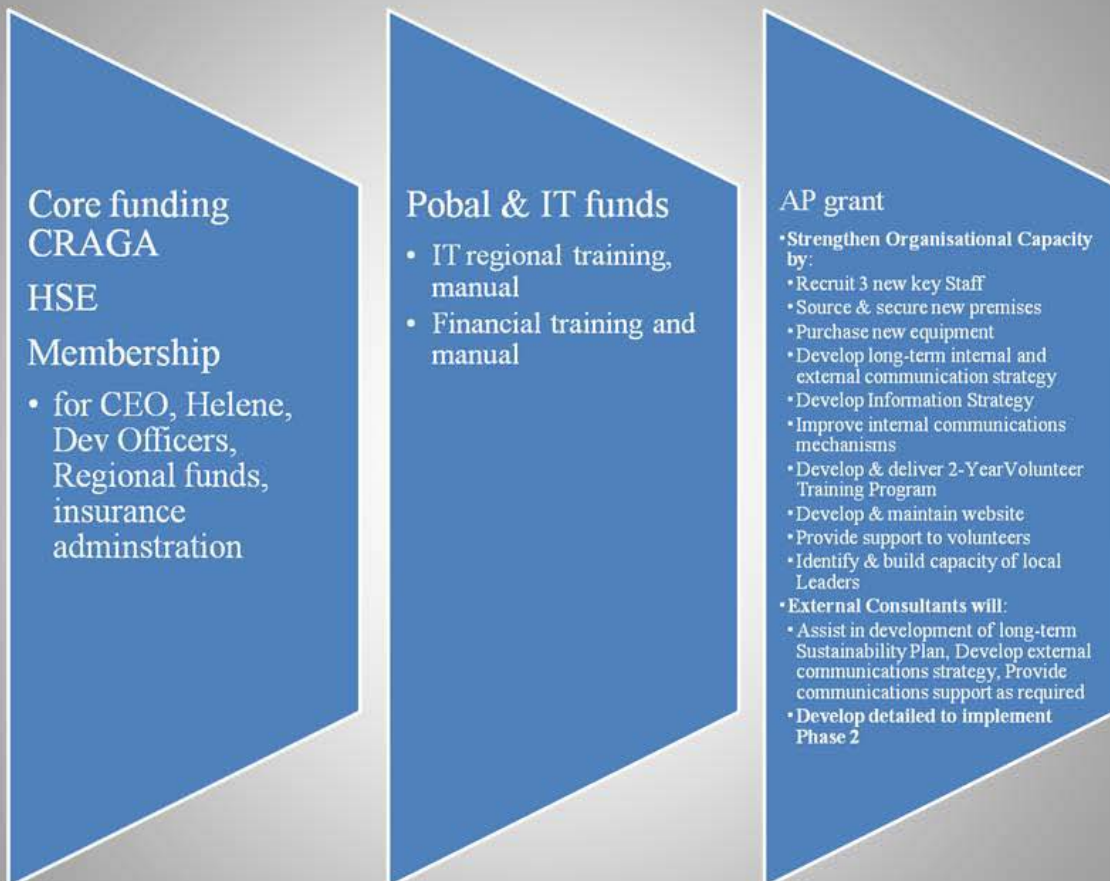


Current Structure





Purpose: To enable retired people enjoy a full and active life and advocate for them



1. Be an organisation that people would be proud to be part of locally, regionally and nationally.

Working Group 1: Nancy Tynan, Eamon Byrne, Bridget Fitzgibbon, Nancy White, Eileen Murray

- Membership Badge
- Pride Survey
- Cluster meetings between ARAs
- Cafe meeting
- National Bowling Competition
- Future training on mobile phone use
- Planned Media training in regions

2. Be a recognised voice for retired people on social, health, learning and economic issues in collaboration with other organisations.

Working group 2 Betty O'Flynn, Ita McTeigue, Jimmy Crehan, Gabriel Rohan, Mary Daly

- National Essay Competition
- National poster for ARAs
- Inspirational Award submission
- Log on and Learn connection for improved IT
- Gender balance GAA alliance- advertisement current gender balance 22% male 78% Female – increase of 4%
- Collaboration work with other organisations
- Encouragement to retired members of other associations to promote ARI - Retired teachers
- Promotion of ARI in various magazines

Working in collaboration with other organisations

ARI works on a range of issues with following:

- **Older & Bolder**
- **AONTAS -The National Adult Learning Organisation**
- **Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament (ISCP)**
- **Age & Opportunity**
- **Ageing Well Network**
- **AGE Platform Europe**
- **Health Service Executive (HSE) Regional Elder Abuse Steering Committees**
- **National University Galway Dept of Gerontology**
- **Collaboration Initiative under Atlantic Philanthropies**
- **Senior Helpline**

Develop the database, structures, skills, funding sources and activities of the organisation in a professional manner.

Working Group 3: Christy O'Carroll, Phyllis O'Halloran, Mary Dunne, Jim Behan

- Input on new office
- Organisation structure template leading to review of Eastern region
- Support on Fundraising strategy and Raffle
- Grant information
- Work on national discount campaign
- Working on manual for committees
- Working on Application form for new ARAs

Development and Communications work

- www.activeirl.ie –A website that provides information on local, regional and national activities.
- Newsletter 3 times a year with local ARA information
- Information updates and discussion at regional meetings, cluster meetings and national meetings
- Letters to ARA secretaries providing updates
- Visits to ARAs by staff and development officers and regional chairs
- Mail-outs on discount deals
- Telephone queries answered
- Public liability insurance provided

Development work

- Regional training on committee roles and responsibilities
- Regional Media training to be run by Susan Shaw and Peter Kavanagh
- Regional IT training
- Support and capacity building with regional committees and development officers
- Financial training for regional committees
- Visits to ARAs

Promotion work

Issues highlighted in press and with Government

- No cut to the pension with Older & Bolder
- Safe Community with Gardaí
- Call on Government to introduce a vouched allowance scheme to offset the carbon tax increases
- Presentation to Joint Committee on Social Protection on the impact of rising fuel prices on the pension
- Highlighted the issue of single supplements leading to Lynch Hotels abolishing the SS for ARI members from Nov- April

Activities

National:

- National cruise 2011, National Bowls Competition and activity break September 2011, National Art and Essay competitions
- AGM and regional meetings
- Health and Lifestyle Guide

Regional:

- Activity breaks, Health days, Christmas lunches, Tea dances, Festivals ARA GO ON and Golden years in Waterford, Quiz, Bowls, etc

Why do we do all this?

- To bring ARA members together to do things for themselves
- To build solidarity and friendship between members
- To improve communications
- To provide information
- To promote the ethos of keeping well and active
- To support the ARAs to continue their local activities that improve the quality of life of members and reduce isolation
- To support the idea of being connected to a large membership organisation
- To highlight issues of our members by acting as a voice at national and regional level.

HOWEVER?

Are all these great actions really achieving the outcomes

1. Be an organisation that people would be proud to be part of locally, regionally and nationally.
2. Be a recognized voice for retired people on social, health, learning and economic issues in collaboration with other organisations.
3. Develop the database, structures, skills, funding sources and activities of the organisation in a professional manner.

