



Community Enterprise Association Ireland

Strategic Plan 2025–2030

Contents

Minister's Foreword Minister Peter Burke TD Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment	4
Foreword Gary O'Meara, Chairperson Community Enterprise Association Ireland	5
Introduction Siobhán Finn, CEO Community Enterprise Association Ireland	7
The Community Enterprise Sector in Ireland	9
- Community Enterprise Association Ireland	11
- Our Expertise	12
- Our Vision	18
- Our Purpose	18
- Our Guiding Principles	19
- Shaping the Future – Our Key Pillars	20
• <i>Performance Excellence</i>	22
• <i>Skills and Talent</i>	24
• <i>Strategic Partnerships</i>	26
• <i>Sustainability and Climate Action</i>	28
• <i>Building Our Future</i>	30

Foreword: Minister Peter Burke TD

*Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and
Employment*

I am delighted to welcome the publication of the Community Enterprise Association Ireland's Strategic Plan 2025 – 2030.

The CEAI has long been an advocate for the community enterprise sector and recognises the contribution hubs play, whether enterprise or community hubs, across all regions of the country. These facilities provide services which support the enterprise ecosystem; importantly they also allow people to live and work in their local communities playing a vital role in supporting enterprise not just in the urban centres but in rural locations too.

My Department has provided significant investment to support enterprise centres and hubs through a number of exchequer funds including the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Border Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme. In addition to the funding already provided, the current Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme supported under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provides for the development of innovative services through local infrastructure, innovation clusters, services to SMEs and early-stage feasibility and priming research.

I look forward to CEAI continuing to support the community enterprise sector in the coming years, as the Association collaborates with stakeholders to maximise regional enterprise strengths focused on balanced and sustained enterprise development and in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy.



Minister Peter Burke TD
Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment



Foreword: Gary O'Meara

*Chairperson
Community Enterprise Association Ireland*

Community Enterprise Association Ireland has been a significant stakeholder in and a committed champion of the community enterprise sector for over twenty years now, and, as Chairperson, I am honoured to lead this Association, which has operated as a national representative organisation since 2008 and a fully incorporated CLG since 2019. The progression of this Association from seven regional networks in the early noughties to its position today as the Expert Voice for the sector is testament to the commitment, ambition, and tenacity of a sector that has continued to grow, despite the many challenges which have arisen over the last two decades.

In support of the Association's ambition, the pursuit of **Performance Excellence** is a cornerstone of our strategy. We recognise the need to continuously improve the effectiveness and impact of our sector through the implementation of best practices, benchmarking, and a culture of performance excellence, building strong foundations for sustainable growth and the future-proofing of the community enterprise sector across Ireland.

Our strategy champions the **Skills and Talent** within our sector. We are committed to seeking out and providing access to opportunities for ongoing professional development, training, and mentorship. We will also pursue opportunities to validate and promote sectoral skills through strategies – including the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the development of credentials (e.g. micro-credentials) – which will support and facilitate the pursuit of excellence by individual personnel and the sector as a whole.

Strategic Partnerships hold the key to unlocking new opportunities and driving collective impact for the sector. Building on the excellent and valued strategic partnerships we have developed to date, CEAI will actively seek collaborative partnerships, both nationally and internationally, with like-minded organisations, government agencies, funders, and industry leaders to reinforce sustainable business models, pool resources and expertise, and ensure optimum impact for the sector and its stakeholders across the regions.



Ireland has a diverse and ambitious community enterprise sector that can play a critical role in influencing enterprises in the achievement of government's ambition to halve the country's emissions by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050. Through the implementation of our **Sustainability and Climate Action** initiatives and supports, we are committed to promoting environmentally friendly practices, social responsibility, and ethical governance across our sector.

Digitalisation has become and will continue to be an integral part of every sector of our society, including the realm of community enterprise. Our strategy emphasises the necessity of embracing digital technologies to reach a wider audience. By harnessing the power of digitalisation and emerging technologies across each of our strategic pillars, we can enable our members across the regions to fulfil their potential, equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary for them to thrive and drive enterprise development in the digital era.

Ultimately, our strategy focuses on building a sustainable future for the community enterprise sector.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation on behalf of the NACEC CLG Board to you, the CEAI community, staff, stakeholders, funders, and strategic partners, for your continued support and commitment to this Association and to the sector.



Gary O'Meara
Chairperson

Introduction

Siobhán Finn

CEO

Community Enterprise Association Ireland



As CEO of CEAI, I am proud to present the next five-year strategy for the Association.

This strategy is both ambitious and visionary, fully reflecting our continued commitment as an Association to delivering ambitious and impactful outcomes which will contribute to sustained regional economic growth for Ireland.

The development of creative and innovative opportunities for the economic and social prosperity of the many rural and urban communities we support across Ireland is at the core of why we exist and, as an Association which has evolved over several decades, we fully understand the importance of anticipating and adapting to emerging trends and challenges. We know that by proactively seeking opportunities, embracing change, and leveraging our collective strengths, we are building the future, positioning the community enterprise sector as a catalyst for continued economic and societal impact across the regions.

This strategy, has an important role to play in delivering on key government policies and priorities including:

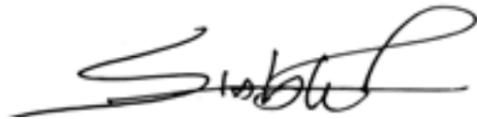
- » The Climate Action Plan 2021
- » The National Remote Working Strategy 2021
- » Our Rural Future 2021–2025
- » The National Skills Strategy 2021–2025
- » The White Paper on Enterprise 2022–2030
- » Regional Enterprise Plans
- » The National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022–2027
- » Delivering for Ireland, Leading Globally 2025–2029
- » The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2024
- » Impact 2030 – Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy

CEAI has developed a detailed road map that sets out a series of time-bound actions, to be undertaken over the lifetime of this strategy, which are reflective of our socially conscious ambition and vision for Ireland's community enterprise sector. This strategic roadmap is grounded in the key pillars which exemplify our commitment to the sector.

- » Performance Excellence
- » Skills and Talent
- » Strategic Partnerships
- » Sustainability and Climate Action
- » Building Our Future

We are committed to developing long-term partnerships based on trust, a willingness to collaborate, and an ambition to succeed. Through collaboration, advocacy, and strategic partnerships, we will ensure that our Association continues to build on its reputation and standing as the Expert Voice for the community enterprise sector in Ireland.

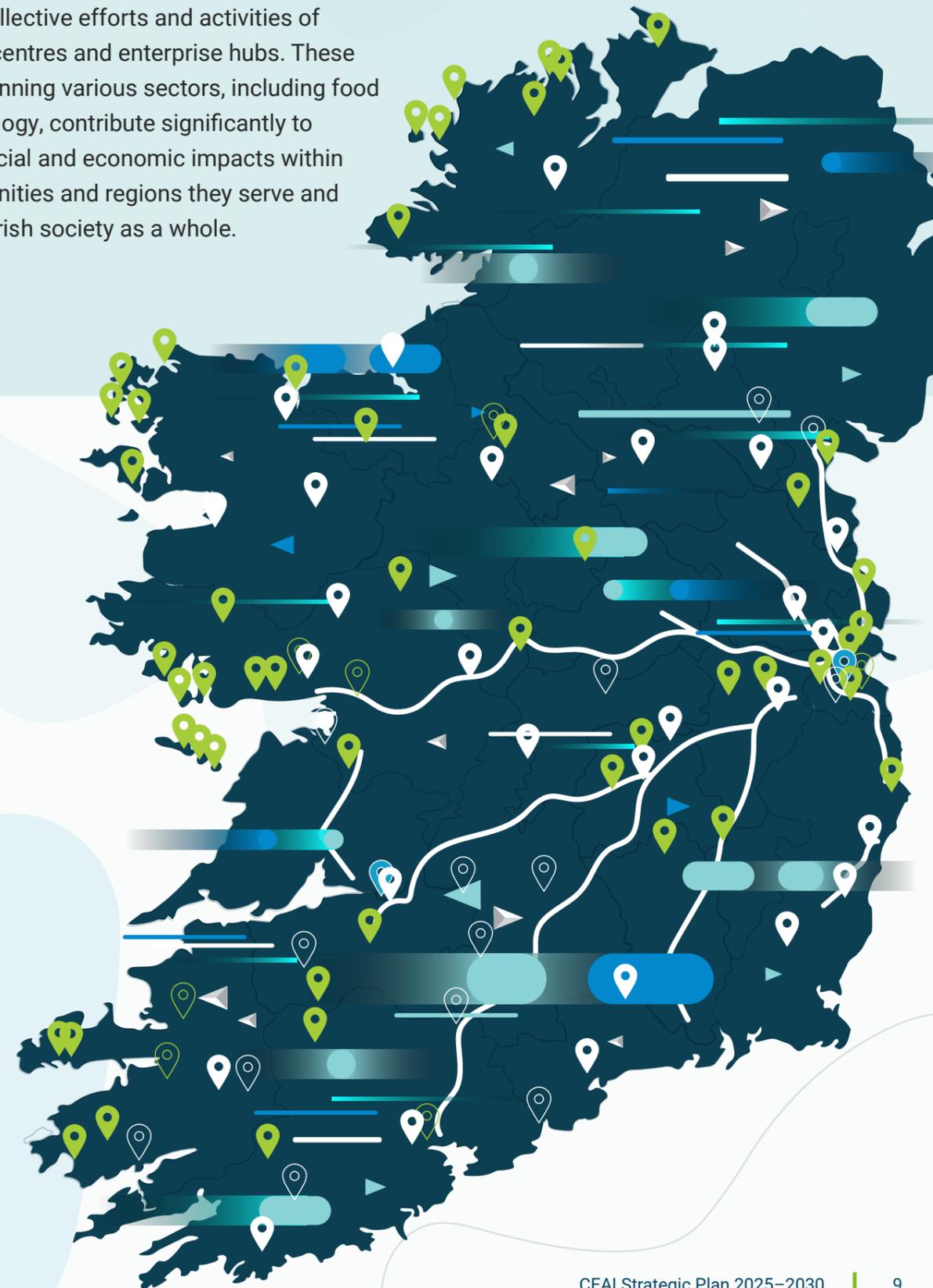
I very much look forward to leading the delivery of this strategy on behalf of the Association, its members, and the wider stakeholder community to achieve government's ambition for the community enterprise sector and regional enterprise development across Ireland.



Siobhán Finn
Chief Executive Officer

The community enterprise sector in Ireland

is defined by CEAI as the broader enterprise development support ecosystem that arises from the collective efforts and activities of enterprise centres and enterprise hubs. These efforts, spanning various sectors, including food and technology, contribute significantly to creating social and economic impacts within the communities and regions they serve and benefiting Irish society as a whole.





Our Vision

An Ireland where a thriving community enterprise sector – powered by exceptional people delivering impactful change – underpins sustained and balanced regional economic growth

Our Purpose

CEAI is the respected Expert Voice for enterprise centres, enterprise hubs, and the wider community enterprise sector across Ireland.

We exist to independently represent, facilitate, and advocate on behalf of the sector, working with people and communities to promote and support enterprise development and to drive job creation, economic growth, and positive social impact across the regions.

To deliver on our Purpose, we:

- » Advocate for and make independent representation on behalf of the sector to influence policy development and to embed the community enterprise sector as a key contributor to regional economic growth
- » Enable excellence and ambition by leading the design, development, and dissemination of best practices for the sector
- » Champion and drive the capacity, capability, and ongoing skills development of the people working in and volunteering across the sector
- » Understand needs, identify solutions for future business sustainability, and create opportunities for the community enterprise sector in Ireland and beyond
- » Build dynamic impactful relationships, networks, and strategic partnerships at regional, national, and international levels to enhance the impact of our sector both nationally and internationally

Our Guiding Principles

Agile and Innovative Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Demonstrate a flexible and adaptive approach » Navigate and conquer complexity » Champion innovation and innovative practices » Maximise new and emerging technologies
Purposeful and Impactful Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create and contribute to sustainable, impactful change which delivers on economic goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) » Champion performance excellence and best practice » Implement capacity-building initiatives across the sector
Collaboration and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Deliver impactful collaborations, strategic partnerships, and networks that add value to the sector » Advocate and represent in an independent and transparent manner to government, agencies, and other key stakeholders
Community-Focused and Socially Conscious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Foster a sense of place » Demonstrate socially conscious decision-making that promotes positive economic and societal impact across communities
Responsible and Sustainable Business Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Drive business practices that ensure the financial sustainability of the sector » Ensure conscious and responsible actions deliver on SDGs as well as economic goals » Model and encourage behaviours that support environmental sustainability and climate action » Champion green value creation and sustainability-led innovation
Lifelong Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Build communities of lifelong learning » Nurture vibrant, and inclusive, learning-focused communities of practice » Recognise and promote the value and wealth of intellectual capital which workplace learning brings

Our Key Pillars

CEAI has a unique role as the Expert Voice for the community enterprise sector, a conduit between national policy and local practice, and a driver of quality and performance excellence.

The sector is key to the delivery of a wide range of local, regional, and national policies which look to enterprise centres and enterprise hubs as key contributors to balanced regional development, digitalisation, smart specialisation, and remote working. These policies also give enterprise centres and enterprise hubs key roles in building thriving local, regional, and national economies.

Pillar One
Performance Excellence

Pillar Two
Skills and Talent

Pillar Three
Strategic Partnerships

Pillar Four
Sustainability and Climate Action

Pillar Five
Building our Future

Our Commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Pillar	SDG	Policy Alignment
Performance Excellence	Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	1 2 3 4 5 7
Strategic Partnerships	Goal 17 Partnership for Goals	3 6 7
Skills and Talent	Goal 4 Quality Education	3 4 5 6 7
Sustainability and Climate Action	Goal 13 Climate Action	2 3 4 6 7
Building Our Future	Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	3 4 6 8

1
The White Paper on Enterprise 2022–2030

2
Regional Enterprise Plans

3
Delivering for Ireland, Leading Globally 2025–2029

4
The National Remote Working Strategy 2021

5
The National Skills Strategy 2021–2025

6
Our Rural Future 2021–2025

7
Impact 2030 – Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy

8
Trading for Impact: National Social Enterprise Policy 2024–2027

Pillar One



Performance Excellence

CEAI plays a vital and dynamic role in mobilising and facilitating performance excellence across a diverse and ambitious community enterprise sector. Over the period of this strategy, through the QHubs Quality and Innovation Management Programme and other performance excellence initiatives, CEAI will work with the community enterprise sector to position Ireland as a world-class destination for start-ups, scale-ups, foreign direct investment, and remote working.

Strategic Actions:



Oversee the ongoing development, progression, and management of the QHubs Programme for the National Hub Network and the community enterprise sector, ensuring performance excellence for the sector and positioning it as a globally recognised asset and route to economic engagement with Ireland



Develop and cultivate dedicated communities of practice for the sector, enabling and supporting knowledge-sharing and collaboration to ensure best-in-class thinking and practice in sectoral and specialist cluster models across the regions



Research, design, develop, and manage a portfolio or framework of shared services which will enable economies of scale, improve financial sustainability, and optimise service delivery across the sector



Support the ambition of enterprise centres and enterprise hubs to contribute to the potential of their regions by developing place-based innovation services that engage targeted domestic and international audiences



Support the promotion of Ireland as a 'great location to do business', with a particular focus on enterprise centres and enterprise hubs, through innovative regional projects

In pursuit of Performance Excellence, the Association will:



Implement the ISO 9001 Standard for CEAI, demonstrating the Association's ability to consistently provide excellence in services and supports which will deliver on government policy, sectoral requirements, and economic opportunities

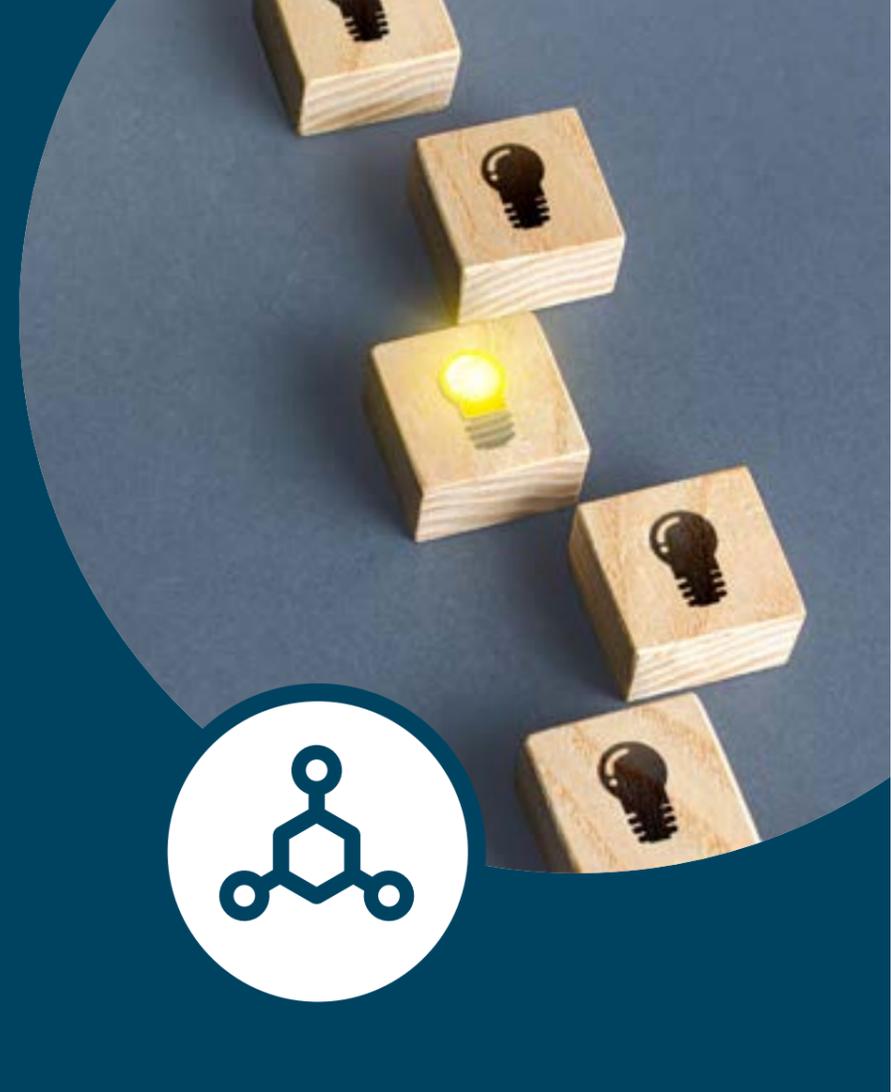


Develop and implement a methodology and ongoing impact measurement process for the Association and the wider sector



Consult annually with the enterprise sector to measure and record impact, identify and exploit opportunities, and understand and mitigate sectoral challenges

Pillar Two



Skills and Talent

CEAI will drive performance excellence across the sector through the rollout of **The CEAI Competency and Career Framework for the National Hub Network** which will be supported by the delivery of suitable learning and development interventions and programmes so as to drive excellence in organisational and workforce design for the National Hub Network and the wider sector.

Strategic Actions:



Build on **The CEAI Competency and Career Framework for the National Hub Network**, working with key government and agency stakeholders to design and oversee the rollout of appropriate learning and development interventions and programmes – including those recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications – so as to support capacity-building and career progression for personnel across the National Hub Network and the wider sector



Invest, through ongoing strategic partnerships, in the further development of **The CEAI Competency and Career Framework** for professionals who work in the community enterprise sector, driving the next phase of the Framework's implementation in individual enterprise centres and enterprise hubs and supporting the development of skills, talent, quality, and performance excellence



Drive the formal recognition of prior learning (RPL), micro-credentials, and continuous professional development (CPD) for the sector



Provide thought leadership in the areas of organisational and workforce design, skills growth, and talent development and retention, for personnel across the National Hub Network and the wider sector

In pursuit of Skills and Talent, the Association will:



Prioritise the growth of the organisation as a Knowledge Association by making effective use of the collective knowledge within the sector, through the development and management of a Knowledge Repository, to ensure access to leadership thinking, best practice, insights, and expertise



Pillar Three



Strategic Partnerships

CEAI will continue to identify and build robust and sustainable strategic partnerships with key agencies and organisations, in Ireland and beyond, that share its values and its commitment to driving positive change in communities.

Our partnerships will be shaped by our commitment to economic impact, social fairness, and financial sustainability, as well as our vision of an Ireland where a thriving community enterprise sector – powered by exceptional people delivering impactful change – underpins sustained and balanced regional economic growth.

Strategic Actions:



Strengthen and build on relationships with key sponsors, funders, and delivery partners to provide interventions such as building international linkages, implementing financial sustainability initiatives, and driving collaborative engagement and partnering



Enhance collaboration with public bodies and civil society organisations to ensure that projects with a key focus on job creation, enterprise development, and regional economic development deliver mutual value for all



Collaborate with higher education and research organisations, and relevant bodies and agencies, to support job creation, skills development, and regional and international innovation partnerships and initiatives



Build strong working relationships with commercial partners to facilitate strategic interventions and alliances which positively impact the sector



Explore, identify, and develop suitable funding partnerships and appropriate governance structures with the capacity to widen financial opportunities for enterprise centres and enterprise hubs, as well as their clients and tenant companies

In pursuit of Strategic Partnerships, the Association will:



Prioritise collaboration and impactful partnerships, driven by innovation and creative thinking, so as to measure and record impact, identify and exploit opportunities, and understand and mitigate challenges facing the sector



Pillar Four



Sustainability and Climate Action

CEAI is committed to supporting and enhancing the contribution that the community enterprise sector can make to the government's Climate 2030 goals, through internal efficiencies, advocacy, and the fostering and dissemination of best practice across the communities it serves. CEAI will also strive to become an exemplar organisation in terms of its own sustainability practices and the priority it gives to consideration of environmental impact.

Strategic Actions:



Strengthen the capacity of enterprise centres and enterprise hubs to maximise climate action opportunities and green value creation for their benefit, and the benefit of the communities they serve, with CEAI building out the development and delivery of relevant programmes, resources, and supports



Advocate for climate action funding supports to be made accessible and available to all enterprise centres and enterprise hubs across the National Hub Network, providing a clear and financially viable path towards the achievement of Climate 2030 goals



Develop and implement awareness campaign(s) to inform enterprise centres and enterprise hubs, and their tenants and clients, of ways in which they can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and green innovation



Create a sustainability toolkit to support enterprise centres and enterprise hubs in their work towards Climate 2030 goals and their efforts to encourage best practice and green innovation in their tenant companies and wider communities



Develop charters for CEAI and its members which map their strategic goals to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

In pursuit of excellence in Sustainability and Climate, the Association will:



Establish, and regularly review, a process through which CEAI can measure and manage its environmental impact



Develop, implement, and review actions to reduce the Association's carbon footprint through the organisation's annual operational plans

Pillar Five



Building our Future

As the Expert Voice for the community enterprise sector across Ireland, CEAI has a clear vision for the potential and long-term sustainability of the sector. The Association has a deep understanding of where the challenges lie, grounded in over two decades of engagement in and support of the sector.

To ensure that CEAI is best equipped and resourced to fully realise opportunities and embrace challenges, the Association acknowledges and is fully committed to a range of organisational priorities around which the following strategic actions are focused.

Strategic Actions:

Governance and Compliance



Conduct an in-depth board and governance review, cognisant of the skills and expertise required for the future, and conduct a recruitment drive to engage additional board members reflective of the expertise required to support the future-proofing of the Association



Develop, adopt, and implement a robust risk management policy at all levels within the Association, with appropriate risk management mitigation measures identified and implemented



Ensure best-in-class compliance and governance by adhering to legislation set out under The Companies Act 2014, and identify and implement appropriate systems to ensure timely and effective board communications and reporting structures



Establish a joint board sub-committee to review existing levels of compliance, identify gaps, and implement the actions necessary to ensure excellence in governance into the future

Management and Operations



Develop, implement, and resource efficient Management Information Systems and processes, introducing appropriate technological resources to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and socio-economic impact measurement



Align management and staff structures with the Association's strategic pillars, undertaking a review of existing skillsets within the Association and identifying and resourcing future expertise and skills needs in anticipation of the growth of the Association

Financial Priorities



Identify appropriate organisational funding sources and establish recurring funding and revenue stream(s) for the Association



Develop and implement annual operational and revenue plans to secure the resources required to deliver on the Association's key pillars and strategic actions

Building the Community



Be visible and accessible



Create trust and cultivate an engaged community



Deepen relationships, streamline processes, and drive growth



Implement and support a range of value proposition models for CEAI which will promote its benefits and support different community engagement opportunities

Communications



Facilitate the review, upgrading, resourcing, and implementation of an integrated communications strategy for CEAI, which will address the needs of separate stakeholder groups, including strategic partners and stakeholders

In pursuit of a sustainable future, the Association will:



Ensure that all strategic decision-making and daily operations result in continuous sustainable growth and impactful delivery for the Association and for the sector

CEAI Registered Office
Unit 18 Meath Enterprise Centre
Trim Road
Navan
Co Meath C15TKX6

 info@ceai.ie

 www.communityenterprise.ie

 [linkedin.com/company/ceaireland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ceaireland)

Funded by



For a full list of funding partners and supporters, please visit our website.