

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

3- 5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Contents

- I. Background to the Plan
- II. Marriage Equality's Vision Mission and Aims
- III Strategic Objectives
- IV. Programme of Activities
- V. Operations
- VI. Finance

I Background to the Plan

The strategic planning process that led to this document has taken place as Marriage Equality is transitioning into the third phase of its organisational development.

Marriage Equality is a not for profit, National single issue grassroots advocacy organisation whose goal is to achieve equality for lesbian and gay people in Ireland through the extension of civil marriage rights to same-sex couples. Marriage Equality began life as the KAL Advocacy Initiative to support Drs Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan with their legal case to have their Canadian marriage recognised here in Ireland. Despite losing the case in the High Court, the case was widely seen as an enormous success, raising awareness about the need for marriage equality for same-sex couples in the media, legal and political spheres as well as winning hearts and minds amongst the general public. The case is currently on appeal to the Supreme Court and an announcement regarding a hearing date is imminent. Following on from this learning, the initiative developed a multi strategy approach (Communications, Political, Legal, Mobilisation and Fundraising) and Marriage Equality was launched as a new campaign in February 2008.

Since its launch in early 2008 Marriage Equality's development has been characterised by the achievement of a number of its intermediate objectives and a general recognition that the organisation is now a viable "player" within the LGBT communities on the one hand and the civil liberties – human rights sector on the other.

It is anticipated that the next phase of Marriage Equality's development will involve the consolidation of its success to date and the direction of the campaign to achieve the goal of enabling same-sex couples to marry in Ireland.

In August 2010 Marriage Equality established a Working Group to manage the strategic planning process to underpin the organisation's next phase of development. In September 2010 ME retained Smith Everett & Associates and TSA Consultancy to advise and assist the Working Group in this process. To date the Consultants have reviewed an extensive body of written documents and interviewed directors, staff members and a number of key volunteers as well as various persons who represent organisations that act as strategic allies and funders.

The issues arising from the review and consultations have been discussed in depth by the Consultants and the Working Group and those discussions have formed the basis for the preparation of the strategic plan. Those issues include -

The capacity of the board, staff and volunteers to indefinitely deal with the volume of work activities required to achieve Marriage Equality's current four strategies in an effective and timely manner is questionable

The organisation's primary funder has indicated that it will cease further financial support subsequent to December 31, 2011

While Marriage Equality believes that the Supreme Court will accept the arguments of the KAL Case legal team, it also recognises that in the event that

the Supreme Court does not accept these arguments, a full scale campaign to pass a referendum may be required to achieve Marriage Equality's goal and in that event the nature and extent of its full-time staff may require adjustment and expansion

Some elements of the context within which Marriage Equality is working are beyond the organisation's direct influence.

II Marriage Equality's Vision, Mission and Aims

Marriage Equality's Vision is of an Ireland in which same sex couples, our families and our children enjoy equality

In order to realise its vision, Marriage Equality's mission is to achieve equal access to civil marriage for same sex couples in Ireland.

In order to accomplish its mission, Marriage Equality has identified three key aims -

to educate the general public, the legal community, opinion makers and legislators about the need for equal rights for same sex couples

to mobilise support for legislation that will enable same sex couples to marry and establish legal recognition of children in LGBT families

to monitor and encourage legal actions at national and European levels which support the granting to same sex couples the equality of status in Ireland that they already enjoy in a number of other European Union member states and globally

III. Strategic Objectives

In order to realise its aim of **educating the general public, the legal community, opinion makers and legislators**, Marriage Equality will achieve four strategic objectives during the life of this plan -

i Maintain the current level of support for marriage equality for same sex couples among the general public

ii Obtain and promote compelling legal arguments and opinions regarding equal access to civil marriage for same sex couples

iii Maintain the current level of positive media coverage of its positions and messages

iv Engage directly with legislators in order to ensure that a majority support the necessary legislation framework and to encourage pro-active efforts to enact it.

In order to realise its aim of **leading a successful campaign to achieve legislation granting same sex couples equal civil marriage rights**, Marriage Equality will achieve two strategic objectives during the life of this plan -

v Organise a formal platform of allies and organisations to engage with the new Government, the Constitutional Convention looking at the 'provision of same-sex marriage' and if necessary, to work with Government allies in referendum campaign

vi revise its own organisational structure and focus to enable it to take part in the campaign

In order to **monitor and encourage legal actions at the national and European level**, Marriage Equality will achieve three strategic objectives during the life of this plan -

vii Monitor and as appropriate contribute to developments in Europe

viii Promote legal analysis and research in Ireland

xi Encourage couples wishing to take legal actions to assert their equal rights under European and Irish legislation.

IV. Programme of Activities

Marriage Equality will engage in a number of activities to achieve the nine strategic objectives set out above. It will -

continue its communications activities to promote its positions in the context of the formation of a new government, the KAL case and continuing developments in Ireland and Europe

complete and then disseminate the findings of the marriage audit of rights not provided by current civil partnership legislation

periodically measure the level of general public support and level of understanding for its positions

identify and participate in forums at which supportive legal arguments and opinions can be presented to and considered with members of the legal profession/other relevant publics

promote the Out to Your TD programme

prepare a proposal for the operation of a formal platform to campaign for achieving marriage equality through *inter alia* the engagement with the Constitutional Convention and if necessary, a referendum campaign

identify potential members of the platform and convene an initial organisational meeting

monitor and publicise the work of IGLA-Europe and other international and global organisations and human rights bodies promoting marriage equality

V. Operations

In order to achieve the nine strategic objectives set out in Section III, Marriage Equality will put in place an operational structure that will enable it to -

secure additional staff resources to identify, access and generate future streams of income

re-consider the priority of the current staff's responsibilities and activities in light of the strategic plan and adjust them as and if appropriate.

continue to evaluate the effectiveness of its operational structure and programme of activities using internal evaluation processes which track the agreed milestones of the plan

update its operational plans on an ongoing basis.

VI. Finance

Marriage Equality faces a significant challenge to the successful achievement of its mission in terms of its future financial sustainability.

Its work to date has been primarily funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, who have indicated that it will cease funding Marriage Equality after 2011. As a consequence, unless the organisation can access adequate funding beyond that date, it may not be able to continue its activities and operations

In order to finance the organisation beyond 2011, an immediate investment will be allocated from existing resources to fund additional staff resources to manage the identification of and successful access to new income streams.

The objective of the finance effort will be to secure adequate finance from various sources by July 2012 to enable the organisation to continue its work.

In the interim and once a detailed finance plan has been agreed Marriage Equality will seek an extension of the funding deadline from Atlantic Philanthropies to June 30th 2012.