



The Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund

Guidance Notes



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This document is also available from our website at: www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Ministerial Foreword

As Minister for Communities, it is my privilege to introduce the Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund, a new and vital investment in the everyday spaces that sustain and strengthen our communities.

This programme represents more than just an investment in buildings, it is an investment in people, places and potential.

Across Northern Ireland, community halls, centres and hubs have long been the beating heart of our local communities.

I have seen the challenges that some of these community buildings face: ageing infrastructure, limited accessibility, and rising costs. But I have also seen the determination of the people who use them, care for them, and go above and beyond to keep their doors open.

That is why I acted with urgency to establish this £4.3 million investment for our communities; a practical and ambitious step to support those who support others. This reflects my deep appreciation for the voluntary and community sector, whose dedication sustains so much of our lives. I want this Fund to support and empower you in the work you do every day.

The Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund will support the halls, centres and hubs that quietly hold our communities together.

Over one hundred organisations will benefit with grants of up to £40,000, helping to improve the condition, accessibility, energy efficiency and usage of local community facilities. Co-operation Ireland will work in close partnership with my officials to deliver this Fund.

This is your opportunity. Your chance to improve and strengthen your space. I encourage you to apply and to help build a sustainable future for our community buildings.

Together, we're not just improving buildings, we're strengthening the core of community infrastructure across Northern Ireland.



Gordon Lyons
Minister for Communities

Who is administering this fund?

The Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund is being administered by Co-operation Ireland, in partnership with Department for Communities.

Co-operation Ireland is an all-island peace-building organisation. Co-operation Ireland work to build a shared and cohesive society by addressing legacy issues of the conflict and facilitating contact and collaboration between people from different backgrounds across these islands.

Co-operation Ireland believe that change at a community level is best achieved when driven by local people, passionate about improving their area and the lives of those who live there. For over 45 years Co-operation Ireland have worked alongside grass roots communities, providing grant funding, capacity building, networking and learning opportunities as well as celebrating success through our Pride of Place Awards.

Co-operation Ireland is delighted to once again partner with the Department of Communities to administer funding to improve community buildings across Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities will set the overall policy direction, with Co-operation Ireland working in partnership to deliver the end-to-end grant process and will administer the Fund.

In doing so, it will ensure that public funds are managed efficiently, effectively, and economically, with the aim of maximising benefits to communities and wider society throughout the grant lifecycle.

Co-operation Ireland requires applicants to provide whatever information may be necessary to safeguard public funds. You should therefore ensure that the details that you provide are correct.

Application support and queries

This guidance may be updated which will always be available on the DfC website <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/nicif>. It is your responsibility to ensure that the guidance you are using is the most up to date version.

Applicants can book a place at one of the in-person or online Grant Information Sessions for an overview of the fund, eligibility and the application process. For further information please visit:
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/nicif>.

Co-operation Ireland will record and publish all relevant clarifications submitted by potential applicants via a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) log on the Co-operation Ireland's website.

The FAQ log will be updated as clarifications are sought by potential applicants. All clarification requests should be forwarded via the dedicated funding email address **nicif@cooperationireland.org** or by telephoning Co-operation Ireland on **028 9032 1462**.

Important dates

- **1 October 2025:** Scheme opens for Expressions of Interest (Stage One)
- **29 October 2025:** Deadline for Submission of Expressions of Interest
- **27 November 2025:** Notification of outcome of Expression of Interest stage and Invitation to complete Stage Two - Application
- **1 December 2025:** Stage Two - Application Opens
- **23 January 2026:** Stage Two - Applications Close
- **20 April 2026:** Notification of Application Outcome
- **1 May 2026:** Delivery Period Starts
- **31 March 2027:** Delivery Period Ends
- **31 July 2027:** Project evaluation

What is the Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund?

The NICIF is a £4.32 million grant scheme to support voluntary and community sector organisations to improve the internal or external fabric of their existing community buildings.

The aim is to enable community organisations to better meet the **needs of their community** and/or improve the **quality and range of activities** delivered in community buildings

The scheme will provide funding towards:

- Repairs to existing community buildings (for example, refurbishment or structural repairs, roof work, repairs to meet health and safety or building regulations).
- Small scale refurbishment or renovation works to improve communal facilities, for example kitchen and toilets or changes to enable multi-use of premises.
- Capital works for accessibility improvements (upgrades such as ramps or lifts)
- Energy efficiency measures (such as boiler replacement, window upgrades, insulation, heating systems, solar panels).

The total costs of your capital project must be a minimum of £10,000, up to a maximum of £50,000.

Funding is available for up to 95% of the total project cost or a maximum grant award of £40,000. The minimum grant award is £9,500.

All projects must contribute to one or more of the following objectives:

- Improve the physical condition of community buildings
- Increase energy efficiency and reduce maintenance costs of community buildings
- Increased accessibility of community buildings
- Increase usage of community buildings

All projects are required to provide a monetary contribution of at least 5% towards the total cost of their project. This should be from reserves, loans or fundraising.”

The scheme will open for Expressions of Interest on **1 October 2025** and close on **29 October 2025** for projects to be delivered between **1 May 2026** and **31 March 2027**.

Projects that pass the Expression of Interest stage will be invited to complete a full application.

The full application must be submitted by **23 January 2026**.

It is anticipated that funding decisions will be made by **20 April 2026**.

The NICIF is a competitive discretionary grant fund. We cannot guarantee that every potentially fundable application will be funded. We anticipate that the Programme will be oversubscribed and do not expect to have sufficient funds to cover all fundable applications.

Who can apply?

- The organisation applying must be a non-for-profit voluntary and community organisation.
- It must have a recognised legal and constitutional status and be governed by a constitution or set of rules.
- The organisation must be able to evidence this by providing a copy of its Constitution or Memorandum and Articles of Association or Trust Deed. These must be dated and signed as adopted by the Chair, or other senior office holder on behalf of the Board.
- The organisation's committee or board must have at least three board members, at least two of which must be unrelated.
- The organisation applying must have a bank or credit union account, that accepts electronic payments, in the name of the organisation applying for funding.
- The organisation applying must have in place the following policies:
 - i. Conflicts of Interest
 - ii. Child Protection
 - iii. Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
 - iv. Equality
 - v. Fraud
 - vi. Data Protection
- The organisation must have completed at least one set of annual accounts.
- Organisations applying cannot make more than one application to the Fund.
- The organisation applying must commit to funding a minimum of 5% of the total project cost.

What types of organisations cannot apply?

- Statutory bodies (including local councils).
- Private commercial companies.
- For-profit organisations including sole traders.
- Schools/ Private Trusts or Foundations.

What buildings can be funded?

For the purpose of the NICIF, eligible community buildings include community halls, community centres and other facilities which are used by, and accessible to the wider community for social, educational and recreational purposes.

The building may be owned or operated by a single purpose organisation; however, the applicant organisation must be able to demonstrate that the building is available to and used by the wider community.

For example, community buildings operated by sporting organisations which are available as community venues for non-sporting activities

The community building must be located in Northern Ireland.

The community building must be at least 20 years old before 1 October 2025.

- The community building must be owned by the applicant organisation or leased to the organisation for at least 10 years from 1 October 2025. Ownership may be freehold, held in Trust or leasehold. In the case of leasehold ownership you must have at least 10 years remaining on the lease from 1 October 2025.
- If your community building is leased/rented or held in trust, you must also provide written agreement from the owner or Trustees that they agree to the proposed works.
- The community building must be operated by the applicant organisation.

- The community building must have current buildings insurance and public liability insurance. This will be a condition of Letter of Offer.
- The community building may be owned or operated by a single-purpose organisation; however, the applicant organisation must be able to clearly demonstrate that the building is accessible to and used by the wider community.

What types of community buildings cannot be funded?

- Community buildings owned by local councils.
- Community buildings owned by statutory bodies.
- Voluntary organisations offices or buildings used primarily for administrative purposes.
- Buildings used exclusively for worship.
- Buildings used exclusively for sports or sporting activities.
- Temporary buildings or mobiles.

What can be funded?

- The NICIF will fund up to 95% of costs for works to the internal or external fabric of an existing community building including:
 - Repairs to existing community buildings (e.g. refurbishment or structural repairs, roof work, repairs to meet health and safety or building regulations).
 - Small scale refurbishment or renovation works to improve or upgrade communal facilities, for example kitchen and toilets or structural changes to internal layout.
- Capital works for accessibility improvements (e.g., upgrades such as ramps or lifts).
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g. boiler replacement, window upgrades, insulation, heating systems, solar panel installation).

Important to note

- If your proposed works require planning permission, you must already have these in place prior to 1 October 2025.
- All works must be completed in accordance with relevant statutory consents and regulations, including planning and building control regulations.
- The total eligible project costs must be at least £10,000.
- The total project costs must not exceed £50,000.
- Applicants must provide a minimum 5% monetary contribution towards the total eligible cost of the project. This contribution cannot be grant aided. In kind contributions will not be accepted.
- Must be delivered between 1 May 2026 and 31 March 2027. No time extensions will be granted.

What types of projects cannot be funded?

- Routine maintenance which is part of the day-to-day upkeep of the building; for example, gutter cleaning, grounds maintenance, boiler servicing etc.
- Construction of new buildings or extensions to existing buildings.
- Works to temporary buildings or mobiles.
- Works to sporting infrastructure including changing rooms or pitches.
- Shortfall in funding for a major refurbishment or renovation project.
- Projects which have already started.
- General equipment e.g. tables / chairs
- Car parks
- External play areas or landscaping

Eligible and ineligible costs

All costs must be incurred, and all work must take place, during the delivery period to be considered eligible. The delivery period must be between 1 May 2026 and 31 March 2027.

Below are lists of eligible and ineligible costs. The lists are not exhaustive.

Eligible costs

- Costs associated with building and refurbishment works (materials for refurbishment or repair work, modernisation, roofing, flooring, electrical or plumbing).

- Costs associated with painting and decorating where these are directly linked to a refurbishment project.
- Costs associated with acquisition, installation or replacement of equipment which forms an integral part of the building (kitchen units, worktops, sinks, bathroom fittings). This includes purchase costs of equipment directly linked to the project, such as an oven or other kitchen appliances for a kitchen renovation project.
- Costs associated with improving the energy efficiency of the building, such as insulation or upgrading of windows, boiler replacement or installation of solar panels.

- Professional fees, such as quantity surveyors, architects, or building control fees, up to a maximum of 12.5% of the total project costs incurred during delivery period.
- Labour costs.
- Improvements to facilities which are necessary to meet health and safety or building regulations, such as wiring, sockets, electrical switches and distribution boards, heating systems and appliances.
- Costs associated with improving accessibility to the building.
- Professional fees, planning application or building control fees incurred before Letter of Offer issue date.
- Works that do not comply with relevant planning, building control, listed buildings and other relevant statutory regulations.
- Costs not directly related to the project.
- Costs incurred before the date of Letter of Offer.
- Purchase of land or buildings.
- VAT, where applicants are registered for VAT.
- Charges including bank interest or legal dispute costs.
- Depreciation.
- In-kind contributions.
- Transport.
- Insurance.

Ineligible costs

- Staff or employee costs.
- Rent and Rates.
- Running costs, such as energy bills.
- Feasibility studies.

Application process

Registration

All applicants to the NICIF must register on the NICIF online portal to apply to the scheme. You will find a link to this portal on Co-operation Ireland's website from 1 October 2025:

<https://cooperationireland.org/nicif/>

You will require a valid email address to be able to register on the portal.

Once registered you will be asked to confirm you meet the eligibility requirements through a series of eligibility questions.

This automated screening process will ensure the NICIF is right for your organisation and your project.

Please read the questions carefully as each registered user will only be able to respond to these questions once.

Projects that successfully pass the automated eligibility screening will then be able to access the Stage One - Expression of Interest Form.

The system will also enable you to save and return to your form later, to invite collaborators and track the progress of your application.

If you have difficulty registering on the Portal support is available on the portal registration page from 1 October 2025. Further support is available from:

nicif@cooperationireland.org or by telephoning Co-operation Ireland on **028 9032 1462**.

Expression of Interest form

All applicants to the NICIF will be required to complete an Expression of Interest form via the NICIF Online Application Portal. The Expression of Interest stage is intended to prevent organisations whose applications who are ineligible from committing valuable resources towards developing a full application.

You may only submit one Expression of Interest form.

In this form you will be asked to provide basic information about your organisation, your community building and your proposed project and to upload relevant supporting documents.

1. **About your organisation:** You will be asked to provide your organisation's legal name, organisation type, Charity, Company or VAT registration number (if applicable) and primary purpose.
2. **About your building:** You will be asked to provide the building address, type of tenure and year of construction.

3. **About your project:** You will be asked to provide a brief description of your project, the type of works you wish to undertake, the estimated total project cost, the estimated grant required and provide details of planning approvals if applicable.

The Stage One Expressions of Interest portal will open at 9.00am on Monday 1 October 2025 and close at 11.59pm on Wednesday 29 October 2025.

Required documentation in support of your Expression of Interest

- d. A copy of your Constitution or Memorandum and Articles of Association or Trust Deed. These must be dated and signed as adopted by the Chair, or other senior office holder, on behalf of the Board or the Trustees
- e. A list of office bearers or committee members, signed by the Chair or other senior office holder
- f. A bank or credit union statement or other evidence showing the applicant organisation has a bank account in its name
- g. Your most recent annual accounts or financial statement
- h. A copy of your title documents or other evidence of security of tenure for at least 10 years from 29th October 2025
- i. Evidence that your building is available for wider community use. Relevant evidence may include, but is not limited to, clauses in your constitution or governing document, your hire or booking policies or

conditions of use or records of bookings/ usage by the wider community.

You will not be able to submit an Expressions of Interest after the closing date of 29 October 2025.

Expressions of Interest and the supporting documentation will be checked following submission. Those applications that have demonstrated they meet the eligibility criteria will be invited to complete the Stage Two: Full Application via the NICIF Application portal.

We hope to notify organisations of the outcome of your Expression of Interest by 19 November 2025, and if successful, you will be invited to complete the Stage Two: Full Application.

Expressions of Interest received before the closing date, but which are either incomplete, or do not have the required supporting documentation attached, will not be progressed.

You will be advised via email if your application has met the eligibility criteria. If your project is deemed ineligible there is no right to appeal.

Please note an invitation to submit a full application is not a final confirmation of scheme eligibility. This will be further tested during the assessment of your submitted application.

Stage Two: Full Application

Stage Two will be a longer application form that will capture more detailed information about your proposed project, its impact and how it will be delivered.

The closing date for submission of Stage Two application forms will be 12 noon on Friday 23 January 2026.

Stage Two Full Application forms received before the closing date, but which are either incomplete, or do not have the required supporting documentation attached, will not be progressed.

- **About your organisation:** You will be asked to provide further information about your organisation, the work you do and the people you work with.
- **About your building:** You will be asked to provide further information about your community building, its current condition, the activities that take place within it, who uses it and how often it is used.
- **About your project:** You will be asked to provide further detail about the works you would like to undertake, why they are needed, the difference the works will make to your organisation and the communities you serve, the costs associated with the project, statutory consents and how the project will be managed.

Required documentation in support of your application.

- a. Quotes for works (see further guidance below)
- b. Documents to evidence the current condition of the building such as surveyors reports, technical surveys and condition reports, Energy Performance Certificates, photos and videos.
- c. Documents to support need and demand such as booking records, usage plans, community surveys, research or letters of support.

- d. Evidence of match funding via a bank statement in the organisation’s name showing the required funds are available.
- e. Statutory consents if required such as listed building consent or evidence that a Full Plans Building Control application has been submitted.. This is not an exhaustive list and you should seek professional advice to ensure you comply with all relevant approvals.
- f. Where applicable, evidence of landlord permission or trustee consent for proposed works.

Assessment and decision-making process

Approach to procuring works

We expect all projects to show they are costed appropriately and that all project costs are within an appropriate cost range for the type of works proposed. We will require evidence of quotes during the appraisal of a full application. Any works necessary for the delivery of a project must be properly procured and care must be taken to ensure that all contracting exercises are fair, open and transparent, providing value for money given the use of public funds. Further guidance will be provided to applicants proceeding to Stage Two: Full Applications.

Assessment criteria

Each project will be assessed using only information contained within the application form. All applications will be assessed against the scheme criteria as outlined:

Evidence of Need:	35%
Impact and Sustainability:	35%
Capacity and Readiness:	20%
Value for Money:	10%

Assessment and moderation of applications will be undertaken by Co-operation Ireland. An advisory Review Panel, which will include independent members, will then quality-assure the assessment and moderation processes. This is to ensure compliance with published guidance and criteria, and consistency and transparency of scoring. The Review Panel will recommend a list of projects to receive funding to the Director of the Regional Development Office within the Department for Communities. This recommendation may include proposals to adjust the level of any individual grant award to ensure the programme remains within its allocated funding envelope.

The provision allowing the Review Panel to allocate, reallocate or redistribute projects across sectors or regions in exceptional circumstances has been removed. Analysis of Expression of Interest and Application patterns indicate a balanced distribution across regions, sectors and within urban and rural settings. Therefore, this mechanism is not required and will not be exercised. All

funding decisions will be made in merit Order. Sectoral or geographical factors will be applied only in case of a tiebreaker where the available budget cannot support all tied bids.

You must submit an expression of interest prior to completing a full application

Only those projects that evidence eligibility at Expression of Interest Stage will progress to Full Application Stage.

Successful applicants will be issued with a Letter of Offer outlining the total grant awarded, grant rate, eligible works and grant conditions.

A reserve list of projects will be retained. If you are unsuccessful, you will be notified by email. Feedback on your application will be provided on request.

Appeals

Appeals can only be made where an applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in these Guidance Notes.

The appeal must clearly state the grounds for an appeal. No new information, other than the information contained within the original application will be considered by the appeals panel.

The appeals panel will review that the assessment process has been applied fairly and in accordance with the guidance notes. The decision of the independent appeals panel is final and binding.

How to request a grant appeal

Appeals can be submitted 15 business days from the date of decision notification. You must submit a grant appeal in writing at: nicif@cooperationireland.org

Post Award Stage

If successful you will be issued with a Letter of Offer outlining the total grant award, grant rate, approved expenditure items, project start and end date and any project specific pre-conditions.

You must accept this Letter of Offer within one month of Letter of Offer issue date.

Grant is usually paid retrospectively. Claims for drawdown of grant funding will be made via the Co-operation Ireland Portal.

Further guidance will be provided to successful applicants on the claim submission process.

We reserve the right to withhold any or all of the payments and/or require the Grant Recipient to repay part or all of the Grant if we deem there to be a substantial or material change in the nature, scale or timing of the Project, or if the Grant is used for purposes other than those specified in the application or agreed variations.

Supporting documentation required will be as follows:

- Invoices to the applicant organisation.
- Bank statement to verify payment to suppliers
- Photos evidencing completion of works

- Depending on the scope of works you may also be asked to supply an Architect's Certificate, and/or evidence of compliance with relevant building regulations (e.g. Building Control, Electrical and Gas Installation Certificates). This requirement will be clearly detailed in your Letter of Offer.
- Post Project Evaluation (Final claim only)

All projects will be required to provide regular progress updates. A claim drawdown and reporting schedule will be agreed once you have accepted your Letter of Offer.

Monitoring and reporting

If your project receives grant support, you will be in receipt of public funding, and this must be accountable. Monitoring and reporting are an essential requirement for you in delivering your project. Your project may also be subject to a Verification Visit.

If any information in the application, monitoring or supporting information is found to be untrue or misleading, we reserve the right to withdraw any grant. If we have already paid part of a grant to your organisation, you could be asked to repay it.

All projects must provide an end of project report within three months of project completion. The final grant payment will not be released until this report has been submitted.

The End of Project Report will outline how the funding has improved the physical condition of the building and how it has enabled your

organisation to better meet community needs and may include:

- Details of beneficiary numbers (audiences, participants, etc.)
- Indicators of the impact of the project.

Further information on monitoring and reporting will be provided to successful grant applications. All projects must be completed by 31 March 2027. Costs incurred after this date are not eligible.

Information you share with us

Co-operation Ireland is managing this grant programme and will need to retain the grant applications for records, including the personal contact details listed on the application forms. For information on how Co-operation Ireland manages and stores personal information, please visit www.cooperationireland.org/terms-conditions/

Information in relation to application forms and monitoring may be shared with the Department. Please visit the Department for Communities Privacy statement on how it manages and stores personal information: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/your-privacy-communities

We may also discuss your application with other funders. Information about successful applications will also be used in publicity.

The Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund is a competitive scheme designed to support voluntary and community organisations and maximise the impact of public resources.

Thank you for your interest in the scheme.

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We invest in people Standard

Available in alternative formats.

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Communities
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