THE NORTHERN IRELAND
COMMUNITY
INFRASTRUCTURE
FUND

Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund Programme Information for Applicants

Competitive Grant Call to Identify
an Intermediary Funding Body

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Regional Development Office
Department for Communities
Level 7
Causeway Exchange 1-7 Bedford St,
Belfast BT2 7EG
or email: **NICIF@communities-ni.gov.uk**

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

Important notice

This competitive grant process is being undertaken at risk and in advance of formal approval of the longer-term NICIF business case. The process is intended to identify a preferred Intermediary Funding Body only. No appointment, grant award or financial commitment will be made unless and until the business case, affordability and all related approvals are secured. Participation in this process creates no entitlement to appointment, grant award, future funding or reimbursement of costs.

Specification

This document should be read in conjunction with the Application form.

Background

The Department for Communities is developing proposals for a longer-term Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund. As part of that work, the Department is inviting applications from Voluntary and Community organisations to act as the Intermediary Funding Body for the Fund.

The Community Infrastructure Fund is a capital grant intervention intended to support voluntary and community organisations to improve existing community buildings and facilities across Northern Ireland. The pilot Community Infrastructure Fund scheme was launched in 2025 with an initial capital allocation of £4.32 million. This was subsequently increased to £8.32 million, enabling support for 243 facilities across Northern Ireland.

Information on the pilot scheme, including its purpose, scope, guidance notes and Stage Two application outcomes, is available on the Department's website at: **NI Community Infrastructure Fund**.

The aim of the Fund is to help community organisations better meet the needs of their communities and improve the quality and range of activities that can be delivered through community buildings. The scheme supports works such as repairs to existing buildings, small-scale refurbishment or renovation, accessibility improvements, energy efficiency measures and other eligible minor capital works that improve community use.

The appointed Intermediary Funding Body will be responsible for administering competitive grant calls on behalf of the Department. This will include applicant support, grant application management, assessment processes, award recommendations, monitoring, reporting, assurance, grant payment and post-award grant management.

The Department is seeking an organisation with the governance, capacity, experience and systems required to manage public funding in a fair, transparent, proportionate and accountable manner. The Intermediary Funding Body would operate within the Department's policy direction, broad outcomes, governance, accountability and assurance requirements, while applying its own grant administration model, systems and expertise to the applicant-facing process.

The purpose of this competitive grant process is to identify the organisation best placed to act as the Intermediary Funding Body for the longer-term Community Infrastructure Fund. Any appointment will remain subject to funding approval, final scheme design and completion of any necessary due diligence.

Fund Objectives

The objectives of the proposed Fund include delivering the following outputs and outcomes:

Outputs

- Repairs, refurbishment, accessibility and energy efficiency improvements delivered in existing community buildings.
- Community buildings and facilities improved across Northern Ireland through a fair, accessible and transparent capital grant programme.
- A proportionate two-stage application, assessment and award process delivered for the voluntary and community sector.
- Appropriate assurance, monitoring, evaluation and value for money arrangements put in place.
- Partnership funding secured from applicant organisations, supporting local ownership and commitment.
- Learning from the Community Infrastructure Fund pilot used to inform the longer-term programme design.

Outcomes

- Improved condition, quality, safety, accessibility and functionality of community facilities.
- Voluntary and community organisations are better able to serve local communities.
- More people can access and use safe, welcoming and inclusive community spaces.
- A wider range of community, wellbeing, educational and recreational activities can be delivered.
- Reduced impact of underinvestment in voluntary and community sector premises.
- Valued local assets are protected and improved for community benefit.
- Stronger capacity, ownership and sustainability within voluntary and community organisations.
- Increased participation, social connection and community cohesion.
- Stronger, more resilient communities.

Outline Business Case for the Community Infrastructure Fund

A Business Case is currently being developed for the Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund. For planning purposes, the business case assumes that the Community Infrastructure Fund would operate as a programme with a total capital fund of up to £15 million, delivered through three funding calls of up to £5 million each.

The proposed minimum capital project value is £15,000 and the proposed maximum capital project value is £65,000. Maximum Grant funding available for individual projects is capped at £45,000 and applicant organisations must provide match funding of minimum 10% of total project value.

Worked example 1

Total Project Value = £50,000
Max Grant Available = £45,000
Match Funding Requirement = £5,000 (10%)

Worked example 2

Total Project Value = £65,000
Max Grant Available = £45,000
Match Funding Requirement = £20,000 (30.7%)

On this basis, the business case anticipates that the programme could support a **minimum** of 333 minor works projects across Northern Ireland, subject to Departmental approval.

Demand is expected to exceed available funding. The pilot phase demonstrated significant interest, with 835 Expressions of Interest, 521 full applications and 311 fundable applications. This programme is therefore expected to require an Intermediary Funding Body with the capacity, systems and expertise to administer a high-volume competitive grant process.

The Department's intention is that the Community Infrastructure Fund will build on the evidence and learning gathered through the pilot. The focus is expected to remain on minor capital works to existing community infrastructure.

Applicant organisations seeking to act as Intermediary Funding Body should prepare their financial proposals on the basis of administering up to three competitive calls, each with an indicative capital value up to£5 million. Proposals should take account of the potential for high application volumes at both Expression of Interest and full application stages.

The Department retains the right to revise eligibility criteria and process before launch and during delivery, subject to approvals, programme requirements and budget availability.

Subject to budget availability, the Community Infrastructure Fund is expected to operate as a recurring programme with up to three Calls across the financial years 2026/27 to 2031/32

Timing of Competitive Grant Process

The Department is seeking to identify a preferred Intermediary Funding Body at this stage to preserve sufficient mobilisation time for a proposed January 2027 launch. This competitive grant process is being undertaken at risk and in advance of formal approval of the programme business case. It will identify a preferred Intermediary Funding Body only. No appointment, grant award or financial commitment will be made unless and until the business case, affordability position and all related approvals are secured. Future Calls will remain subject to approved budgets and funding availability.

Role of the Intermediary Funding Body

Within the framework set by the Department, the Intermediary Funding Body will be responsible for the operational delivery and grant administration of the Fund. The intended model is that the Department sets the framework and retains oversight and approval, while the Intermediary Funding Body brings its own grant administration expertise, systems, sector knowledge and operational capacity to deliver the programme in practice.

The role will require strong grant administration experience, sound governance and controls, a clear understanding of the voluntary and community sector, and the ability to mobilise for a planned January 2027 launch, subject to approvals. The Intermediary Funding Body will be expected to manage the end-to-end grant administration process for each call. This is expected to include promoting funding opportunities, receiving and processing applications, providing applicant guidance and support, administering assessment and moderation processes, producing funding recommendations for Departmental consideration, issuing and managing Letters of Offer, monitoring funded projects, verifying expenditure and grant claims, maintaining records and audit trails, managing project changes and reporting performance, risks and assurance information to the Department.

The Intermediary Funding Body will be expected to mobilise promptly following appointment. Mobilisation is expected to include putting in place the necessary internal arrangements, systems, staffing, governance, application materials, guidance, communications, reporting arrangements and grant administration processes. The Intermediary Funding Body will be expected to work closely with the Department during this period.

Applicant support will be an important part of the role. The Intermediary Funding Body will be expected to provide accessible and proportionate guidance, communication and clarification routes. This should take account of the voluntary and community sector context in Northern Ireland and the varying levels of capacity among potential applicants, including smaller, grassroots and volunteer-led organisations. Applicant support must be balanced with the need to maintain fairness, transparency and consistency across the competitive grant process.

The Intermediary Funding Body will also be expected to administer funded projects in accordance with the grant conditions agreed for each call. This will include monitoring, evidence requirements, payment verification, record keeping, risk management, management of non-compliance and reporting

Application Process

Consistent with the grant nature of the arrangement, this application process focuses on programme outcomes, delivery capability, grant assurance, governance, applicant support, value for money and the reasonableness of proposed costs. It does not prescribe a detailed service specification or require applicants to submit fixed-price bids for a defined schedule of services. Applicants will be expected to seek full recovery of reasonable and justified costs associated with delivery of the role. Cost will form one element of the overall assessment, but will not be the sole determining factor.

The selected Intermediary Funding Body will be required to enter into a formal grant funding agreement with the Department if, and only if, the programme proceeds to award following all required approvals. That agreement is expected to cover programme outcomes and delivery expectations, reporting and assurance requirements, document retention and record access, financial monitoring and payment arrangements, performance review, grant compliance, value for money, conflict of interest management, data handling, information governance, termination, variation and clawback.

The Intermediary Funding Body will also be expected to participate in wider programme governance arrangements. These may include operational meetings, accountability meetings, performance reporting, risk reporting and contribution to programme monitoring and evaluation.

Requests for Clarification

Requests for clarification must be submitted by email to nicif@communities-ni.gov.uk and must be received no later than 5pm on 19 August 2026. This deadline is to ensure that any clarification responses can be prepared and shared with all applicants. Responses to clarification requests will be circulated to registered applicants using the email addresses provided during registration.

The Department will not provide tailored advice to individual applicants on how to complete their application.

Eligible applicants

This competitive grant call is restricted to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations operating in Northern Ireland.

Consortium applications are welcome. Where an application is submitted by a consortium, all consortium members must be Voluntary and Community Sector organisations operating in Northern Ireland. The lead organisation will be accountable to the Department for delivery of the Intermediary Funding Body role and for compliance with any grant funding agreement.

Applicants should be able to demonstrate relevant experience of grant administration, sound financial and governance controls, strong knowledge of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, and the ability to administer funding fairly, transparently and consistently.

Applicants with infrastructure, representative, support or advisory roles within the Voluntary and Community Sector may apply. However, they must be able to identify, declare and manage any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest that could arise from acting as Intermediary Funding Body. Selection as preferred applicant will not, in itself, create any entitlement to appointment, grant award or future funding.

Administration of Funding to Faith-Based Organisations

The Community Infrastructure Fund will be open to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, including faith-based organisations. This reflects the role that many faith-based organisations play in owning, managing or operating community buildings that are used by wider local communities for social, recreational, educational, wellbeing and other community-based activities.

Any organisation appointed as Intermediary Funding Body must be able to assess, award, administer and monitor grants involving faith-based organisations where they meet the relevant programme requirements. Applicants, including all members of any consortium, must therefore have no constitutional, governance or policy restrictions that would prevent them from fulfilling this role. Confirmation of this position is included as a pass/fail requirement in the application form.

Proposed programme timetable

The following timetable reflects current planning assumptions. It is indicative and subject to approvals, affordability and final programme decisions.

Stage	Indicative timing
Online information session	10am, 27 July 2026
Launch competitive grant call	29 July 2026
Application window	29 July 2026 to 5pm on 26 August 2026
Clarifications	During application window until 5pm on Wednesday 19 August
Assessment period	26 August to mid-September 2026
Due diligence	Mid-end September 2026
Appointment / grant award	October 2026
Mobilisation and co-design	October to December 2026
First NI Community Infrastructure Fund call launch	End January 2027

Indicative three-call programme profile

Subject to approval, the Department currently expects the programme to be structured around up to three planned calls. This is intended to provide certainty to the sector, support planning, and allow learning from each call to inform the next.

The indicative funding period is expected to run from 2026/27 to 2031/32. This reflects appointment and mobilisation activity, delivery of up to three capital calls across 2027/28 to 2030/31, and post-project reporting and programme evaluation into 2031/32.

Any grant funding agreement may cover the broad funding period. However, individual calls will remain subject to budget availability, approved business case assumptions, affordability and Departmental decisions. The Department reserves the right to cease, vary or reduce activity in line with approvals and available budgets.

Call	Information and application phase	Award / start of delivery	Delivery period	Reporting / evaluation
Call 1	January to September 2027	Autumn 2027	October 2027 to September 2028	Post-project reporting by March 2029
Call 2	January to September 2028	Autumn 2028	October 2028 to September 2029	Post-project reporting by March 2030
Call 3	January to September 2029	Autumn 2029	October 2029 to September 2030	Post-project reporting by March 2031

Selection Process and Criteria

The criteria are intended to ensure that the preferred delivery partner is suitably structured and qualified to deliver DfC's policy objectives and manage the risks associated with the funding model.

The Department reserves the right to seek further information or evidence as part of assessment, clarification or due diligence.

The Department also reserves the right not to select a preferred Intermediary Funding Body where no application demonstrates sufficient capability, capacity and assurance to fulfil the role of Intermediary Funding Body, and further reserves the right to terminate any appointment where performance is found to be unsatisfactory or where the appointed body fails to meet the required standards of delivery, governance or assurance.

If you are interested in this opportunity, please complete the Application Form and email it to **nicif@communities-ni.gov.uk** by **5pm on Wednesday 26 August 2026**. Applicant organisations are asked to note that there is no pre-development investment support available.

Due to the tight programme timetable and the need to maintain delivery momentum, the Department will not be able to accommodate requests for extensions. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that complete applications and all required supporting information are submitted by the stated deadline.

Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Overview of the application process

Applicants are asked to complete all relevant sections of the application form. The form is structured to allow the Department to assess eligibility, delivery capability, financial credibility and value for money in a clear and proportionate way.

The application form has four sections:

1. **Applicant details**
   This section asks for basic information about the applicant organisation. Where the application is submitted by a consortium, applicants must identify all consortium partners and confirm which organisation will act as the lead partner.

2. **Pass/fail requirements**
   This section asks applicants to confirm that they meet the minimum requirements needed to be considered for appointment as the Intermediary Funding Body. The pass/fail requirements are not scored. Applicants must satisfy each requirement before their application can proceed to quality and financial assessment.

   Applications that pass the requirements will be assessed against the published quality and financial criteria.

3. **Quality assessment**
   This section asks applicants to explain how they would deliver the Intermediary Funding Body role. The quality assessment will account for 60% of the overall application score and will assess organisational capacity, programme delivery, capital grant management and mobilisation readiness.

4. **Financial proposal**
   This section asks applicants to set out the proposed costs of delivering the Intermediary Funding Body role. The financial assessment will account for 40% of the overall application score and will assess both comparative percentage cost and the credibility, reasonableness and alignment of the financial proposal.

Applicants should note that this process is being undertaken at risk and in advance of formal approval of the long-term Community Infrastructure Fund business case. Participation in this process does not create any entitlement to appointment, grant award, reimbursement of costs or future funding.

Tie-break

If two or more applicants receive the same final overall score and are ranked joint first, their scores will be compared in the following order:

1. Criterion 1
2. Criterion 3
3. Criterion 2
4. Criterion 4

The application with the higher score at the first point of difference will be ranked higher. If two or more applicants remain tied at this stage, the preferred Intermediary Funding Body will be chosen by random selection by the Chair of the Assessment Panel.

Consortium applications

Consortium applications should clearly explain how the consortium would operate in practice. This should include the role and responsibilities of each partner, the arrangements for leadership and accountability, how decisions would be made, and how performance issues, delivery risks or disagreements between partners would be managed.

The Department will need to be satisfied that any proposed consortium has clear, robust and workable arrangements for delivering the Intermediary Funding Body role.

Next ranked applicant

If the Department does not proceed with the preferred applicant the Department reserves the right to approach the next ranked applicant.

This will only happen where the Department is satisfied that:

- the application remains valid;
- all required approvals are in place; and
- it is appropriate to do so.

If this is not possible, the Department may launch a further competitive grant call.

Completing the application

Applicants must complete all relevant sections of the application form. Applicants should note that:

- responses to each criterion should be standalone;
- the assessment panel will not take account of information provided elsewhere unless specifically requested;
- word limits must be followed;
- text beyond the stated word limit will not be considered;
- all information provided must be accurate and up to date.

The Department reserves the right to seek clarification from applicants on their application, including supporting information submitted with the application form.

Any clarification request will be limited to understanding, verifying or clarifying the information submitted by the closing date. It will not allow applicants to submit a new application or revise their application.

Applicants must respond to clarification requests within the timescale specified by the Department. Failure to provide a satisfactory response may result in the application being assessed on the basis of the information already submitted, or may result in exclusion from further consideration where the Department cannot complete its assessment.

Due diligence requirements

Before appointment, the Department may require the preferred applicant to:

1. Complete a Financial Systems and Controls Assessment, where required by the Department.
2. Achieve a satisfactory Financial Systems and Controls Assessment outcome, or complete any actions required by the Department before appointment or release of funding.
3. Provide access to relevant records, systems, staff and premises for audit, inspection, monitoring, assurance and verification purposes.
4. Ensure that the same due diligence requirements can be met by consortium members.
5. Provide any further accounts, policies, procedures, financial systems information or supporting evidence requested by the Department as part of due diligence.

To reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, detailed evidence for these requirements will not be requested from all applicants at the application stage. The Department may request this information from the preferred applicant where necessary before appointment. Failure to satisfy due diligence requirements may result in the Department deciding not to proceed with appointment.

False or misleading information

Applicants must ensure that all information submitted is accurate, complete and not misleading.

False or misleading information may result in exclusion from the process. If false or misleading information comes to light after preferred status has been granted, or after a grant funding agreement has been entered into, it may lead to withdrawal of preferred status or termination of the grant funding agreement.

Costs of applying

Applicants are responsible for their own costs in preparing and submitting an application.

The Department will not reimburse application costs, whether or not the process proceeds to appointment or grant award.

Award position

If the business case and all related approvals are secured, the Department may enter into a formal grant funding agreement with the appointed Intermediary Funding Body.

The grant funding agreement is expected to cover:

- programme purpose and outcomes;
- funding period;
- eligible Intermediary Funding Body costs;
- payment arrangements;
- reporting and management information;
- audit and record keeping;
- grant conditions;
- downstream grant administration requirements;
- conflict management;
- data handling;
- monitoring and assurance;
- termination and clawback.

The Department reserves the right to vary the arrangements to reflect final approvals, affordability, grant conditions and programme decisions.

Contact details

All communications about this grant call must be submitted through the official route by email to: **nicif@communities-ni.gov.uk**

Applicants must not contact assessment panel members or other Departmental officials outside the stated process.

Direct contact outside the stated process may result in exclusion from the process.

Section 1: Applicant Details

Section 1 asks for basic details about the organisation applying to act as Intermediary Funding Body for the Community Infrastructure Fund.

Applications may be submitted by a single eligible voluntary and community sector organisation, or by a consortium led by an eligible voluntary and community sector organisation. Where an application is submitted by a consortium, applicants must identify all partner organisations and clearly state which organisation will act as the lead partner.

The lead partner will be the Department's main point of contact during the application process. If the application is successful, the lead partner would also be expected to accept overall responsibility for the delivery of the Intermediary Funding Body role, subject to completion of due diligence, approval and agreement of grant conditions.

Applicants should provide the name, role and contact details of one lead contact. This person should be authorised to respond to clarification requests and act as the main contact for communications about the application.

Section 2: Pass/ Fail Criteria

Section 2 assesses whether your organisation meets the minimum requirements necessary to be considered for appointment as the Intermediary Funding Body for the Community Infrastructure Fund.

The purpose of the pass/fail stage is to confirm that applicants meet the minimum requirements needed to be considered for appointment as the Intermediary Funding Body for the Community Infrastructure Fund. These requirements relate to eligibility, legal status, authority to enter into a grant agreement, relevant grant administration experience, financial standing, information governance, statutory compliance, conflicts of interest and acceptance of the at-risk nature of the process.

The pass/fail stage is not scored. Applicants must satisfy each requirement before their application can proceed to the quality and financial assessment stages. Where an applicant does not meet a pass/fail requirement, the application will not be progressed.

Applicants should answer each question clearly and provide the information requested. Where a tick-box confirmation is required, applicants should only tick the box if they can make the confirmation on behalf of the applicant organisation. Where the application is submitted by a consortium, the lead organisation must ensure that the relevant confirmations cover the lead organisation and all consortium partners, unless the question states otherwise.

Failure to meet any pass/fail requirement will result in the application being excluded from further consideration.

1. Legal Status, Eligibility and Authority

The Department must be satisfied that the applicant has the legal standing, organisational status and authority needed to receive and administer public grant funding. The applicant must also be able to operate lawfully in Northern Ireland and enter into a grant funding agreement with the Department for Communities, should it be selected and all approvals be secured.

Applicants should confirm each statement and provide the details requested. This should include the name and role of the individual authorised to sign a grant funding agreement on behalf of the organisation.

For consortium applications, applicants should explain the proposed consortium arrangements. This should include the identity of the lead organisation, the role of each consortium member, and how authority to enter into and comply with a grant funding agreement would be secured.

Departmental Oversight, Audit and Assurance

The Intermediary Funding Body would administer public funding on behalf of the Department. The Department must therefore be able to seek assurance that funding is being managed properly, that programme requirements are being met, and that appropriate records are available for monitoring, audit and verification.

Applicants must be willing to provide access to relevant records, systems, staff and premises where required. This may include Departmental checks, site visits, internal audit, external audit, Northern Ireland Audit Office review, or other authorised assurance activity.

Applicants must also retain programme and grant records for the period specified by the Department. This requirement applies to records held by the lead organisation and, where relevant, consortium members.

2. Previous Grant Administration Experience

The Department requires assurance that the applicant has direct and relevant experience of administering a competitive grant programme at a scale and complexity comparable to the Community Infrastructure Fund. This includes managing a high volume of applications, applying a fair and consistent assessment process, administering significant public funding, and maintaining appropriate governance, financial control and audit arrangements.

Applicants must demonstrate that they have administered at least one competitive grant programme which met both of the following requirements:

- more than 100 applications were received and processed in a single competitive grant process in one year; and
- the total value of grant funding administered through that programme was more than £3 million.

Applicants should provide enough information to allow the Department to assess whether the threshold has been met. This should include the name of the programme, the funder or commissioning body, the year of delivery, the number of applications received and processed, the total value of grant funding administered, and the applicant's role in administering the programme.

For consortium applications, these thresholds may be met through the combined experience of consortium members. Where this applies, the application must clearly explain the relevant experience of each organisation, the role each organisation played, and which organisation would be accountable for delivery of the Community Infrastructure Fund.

3. Financial Standing

The Department must be satisfied that the applicant has the financial standing needed to administer public funding and deliver the proposed role. Applicants must confirm that there are no material going concern issues, insolvency proceedings, significant cashflow problems, unresolved audit findings, financial irregularities or regulatory matters that would prevent delivery.

Applicants must also confirm that they have arrangements in place to prevent, detect and respond to fraud, bribery, corruption, whistleblowing concerns, financial irregularity and grant misuse.

For consortium applications, the lead organisation must provide the confirmation on behalf of the consortium. The confirmation must cover the lead organisation and each consortium member.

4. Information Governance and Records Management

Applicants must confirm that they have appropriate policies and procedures for handling information and records.

The Intermediary Funding Body would handle sensitive applicant, financial, assessment, monitoring and grant recipient information. The Department must therefore be satisfied that the applicant has suitable arrangements for data protection, information security, confidentiality and records management.

Applicants should provide copies of relevant policies or a clear summary of the arrangements in place. The response should explain how information would be protected, who would have access to it, how records would be stored and retained, and how information risks would be managed.

For consortium applications, the response should explain how information would be managed and protected across the consortium.

5. Administration of Funding to Faith-Based Organisations

The Community Infrastructure Fund is open to voluntary and community organisations, including faith-based organisations.

Applicants must confirm that they are willing and able to administer funding to faith-based organisations. Applicants must also confirm that there are no constitutional, governance or policy restrictions that would prevent them, or any consortium partner, from assessing, awarding, administering or monitoring grants to faith-based organisations.

Applicants must treat all applicants fairly and consistently. Assessment and decision-making must be based on the published eligibility criteria, programme requirements and assessment process.

6. Equality and Statutory Compliance

The Department must be satisfied that the applicant can administer the Community Infrastructure Fund in a fair, equitable and non-discriminatory manner. Applicants must also confirm that they have no constitutional, governance or policy restrictions that would prevent them from administering the Fund fairly to all applicants.

Applicants should ensure that their approach to programme publicity, applicant support, assessment, decision-making, monitoring and communications is accessible and consistent.

7. Conflicts of Interest

Applicants must have arrangements in place to identify, declare, manage and record actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest.

This is important because the Intermediary Funding Body may be required to assess applications from organisations it knows, works with, funds, supports or has a prior relationship with. The Department must be satisfied that any conflicts can be managed transparently and fairly.

Applicants should briefly explain their conflict-of-interest arrangements. This should include how conflicts would be identified, declared, assessed, recorded, managed and escalated where necessary.

For consortium applications, the response should explain how conflicts would be managed across the consortium, including conflicts involving staff, board members, volunteers, advisers, delivery partners or consortium members.

8. At-Risk Process Acknowledgement

Applicants must acknowledge that this competitive grant process is being undertaken at risk and in advance of formal approval of the long-term Community Infrastructure Fund business case.

Participation in this process does not create any entitlement to appointment, grant award, reimbursement of costs or future funding. The Department may pause, amend or stop the process if approvals are not secured or if circumstances change.

Applicants are responsible for their own costs in preparing and applying.

Section 3: Quality Assessment

This section explains how the quality part of the application will be assessed.

The quality assessment will consider the applicant's ability to fulfil the role of Intermediary Funding Body for the Community Infrastructure Fund. It will assess whether the applicant has the organisational capability, relevant experience, systems, governance arrangements, applicant support model, capital grant expertise and mobilisation capacity needed to administer a public capital grant programme effectively and in accordance with the Department's requirements. This reflects the DfC Grant Standards requirement for transparent, proportionate assessment against clearly defined criteria and scoring mechanisms.

Applications will be assessed against four quality criteria. Together, the quality criteria account for 60% of the overall application score.

Applicants should provide clear, concise and evidence-based responses. Responses should draw on relevant organisational experience, existing arrangements and previous delivery, while explaining how that capability would be applied to the delivery of the Community Infrastructure Fund.

Applicants should not assume that previous experience alone will secure a high score. The assessment panel will consider the quality, relevance and credibility of the proposed approach, and the level of confidence it provides that the applicant can fulfil the Intermediary Funding Body role successfully.

The Community Infrastructure Fund is a capital grant programme supporting improvements to community buildings, premises, infrastructure and physical assets. Applicants should therefore ensure that their responses demonstrate both general grant administration capability and an understanding of the governance, assurance and project management requirements associated with capital funding.

Where an application is submitted by a consortium, responses should clearly explain the role of each consortium partner, how accountability would be maintained by the lead organisation, how decisions would be made, and how delivery risks, performance issues or disputes between consortium partners would be managed.

Quality criteria and weightings

Criterion	Quality criterion	Weighting
Criterion 1	Organisational capacity, governance and control environment	20%
Criterion 2	Programme delivery, accessibility and applicant support	15%
Criterion 3	Capital grant management and project assurance	15%
Criterion 4	Mobilisation and operational readiness	10%
	Total quality score	**60%**

Scoring scale

Each quality criterion will be scored from 0 to 5.

Score	Indicator
0	Unacceptable. No relevant response, or the response fails to address the criterion. The information provided gives no confidence that the requirement can be met.
1	Very weak. Addresses the criterion only minimally. Significant weaknesses, omissions or concerns remain. Very limited confidence in the applicant's ability to meet the requirement.
2	Weak. Addresses some aspects of the criterion but contains notable gaps, limited evidence or insufficient detail. Confidence in delivery capability is limited.
3	Satisfactory. Addresses the core requirements of the criterion and provides a reasonable level of confidence that the applicant can meet the requirement. The response is adequate, but may contain some minor weaknesses, limited detail or areas where further assurance would be beneficial.
4	Good. Addresses the criterion well and provides good confidence that the applicant can meet the requirement. The response is clear, credible and supported by relevant evidence. Any weaknesses are minor and do not give rise to significant concern.
5	Excellent. Addresses the criterion comprehensively and provides a very high level of confidence that the applicant can meet or exceed the requirement. The response is detailed, well evidenced and directly relevant. No material weaknesses or concerns are identified.

Quality assessment weightings

The quality assessment will account for 60% of the overall application score.

There are four quality criteria. Each quality response will first be assessed using a raw score from 0 to 5. The raw score will then be converted into a weighted score for that criterion.

The weighted score for each criterion will be calculated as follows:

Weighted score = raw score ÷ 5 × criterion weighting

The weighted scores for all four criteria will then be added together to produce the total quality score out of **60%**.

Minimum quality thresholds

Minimum quality thresholds will apply.

These thresholds are intended to ensure that only applicants with sufficient capability, governance, assurance and delivery confidence are considered for appointment.

The following thresholds will apply:

- Any application receiving a score of 0 or 1 under any quality criterion will be excluded from further consideration.
- Applicants must achieve a minimum raw score of 3 under each of the following criteria:
    - Criterion 1: Organisational capacity, governance and control environment.
    - Criterion 3: Capital grant management and project assurance.
- Applicants must achieve a minimum total quality score of 36 out of 60.

Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 are subject to specific minimum thresholds because they are fundamental to the successful administration of a public capital grant programme. They test whether the applicant can demonstrate the governance, financial controls, assurance arrangements and capital grant management expertise needed to protect public funds and support effective delivery.

The minimum total quality score is intended to ensure that applicants demonstrate an acceptable level of capability, governance, assurance and delivery confidence across the quality assessment.

Meeting the minimum total quality score will not override the requirement to meet the minimum threshold for Criterion 1 and Criterion 3. Similarly, meeting the minimum thresholds for Criterion 1 and Criterion 3 will not override the requirement to achieve the minimum total quality score.

A strong financial proposal cannot compensate for failure to meet the minimum quality thresholds.

The Department reserves the right not to appoint any applicant where no application demonstrates sufficient capability, capacity, assurance or value for money to fulfil the Intermediary Funding Body role.

Criterion 1: Organisational capacity, governance and control environment

Weighting: 20%

Describe how your organisation, or consortium, would provide the organisational capacity, governance arrangements, financial controls and accountability needed to administer the Community Infrastructure Fund on behalf of the Department.

Your response should explain how your organisation would manage public funds in a controlled, transparent and compliant way, and how it would provide the Department with assurance throughout delivery.

Your response should cover:

- governance structure, leadership and accountability;
- key roles, responsibilities and decision-making arrangements;
- financial management and internal control arrangements;
- fraud, bribery, corruption and whistleblowing controls;
- risk management, audit, compliance and assurance arrangements;
- experience of managing public, charitable or other significant grant funding;
- records management and management information;
- how consortium arrangements would be governed, if relevant;
- how Departmental oversight, approval points and reporting requirements would be supported.

Maximum 1250 words

Criterion 2: Programme delivery, accessibility and applicant support

Weighting: 15%

Describe how your organisation, or consortium, would deliver a fair, accessible and well-managed applicant-facing grant process for the Community Infrastructure Fund.

Your response should explain how you would support potential applicants and grant recipients while maintaining fairness, consistency, transparency and compliance with programme requirements.

Your response should cover:

- understanding of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland;
- approach to communication, outreach and awareness raising;
- how grassroots, volunteer-led, rural and underrepresented organisations would be supported;
- how enquiries, clarification requests, complaints and feedback would be handled;
- how application receipt, eligibility checks and assessment administration would be managed consistently;
- how applicants and grant recipients would be treated fairly and equally;
- how outcomes, decisions and feedback would be communicated;
- how ongoing grant recipient support would be provided during delivery;
- how applicant support would avoid giving any applicant an unfair advantage.

Maximum 1000 words

Criterion 3: Capital grant management and project assurance

Weighting: 15%

Describe how your organisation, or consortium, would administer and assure a capital grant programme involving community buildings, premises, infrastructure or physical assets.

Your response should explain how you would manage the specific risks associated with capital projects, including project appraisal, permissions, procurement, expenditure verification, payment controls, asset protection and post-completion monitoring.

Your response should cover:

- relevant experience of administering capital grants or comparable capital projects;
- approach to project appraisal and assessment;
- checks on ownership, lease arrangements or rights to carry out works;
- approach to planning, building control and statutory approvals;
- procurement and tendering assurance;
- VAT, match funding and other project finance issues;
- staged payments, eligible expenditure and defrayed expenditure checks;
- monitoring of project delivery, risks, changes, delays and cost increases;
- asset management, retention, recovery and clawback arrangements;
- post-completion monitoring and compliance with asset conditions;
- access to technical, property, construction or legal expertise where required.

Maximum 1000 words

Criterion 4: Mobilisation and operational readiness

Weighting: 10%

Describe how your organisation, or consortium, would mobilise following appointment and achieve operational readiness to open and administer the Community Infrastructure Fund within the required timescales.

Your response should explain the practical steps, resources, systems, dependencies and controls needed to move from appointment to a functioning grant process.

Your response should cover:

- mobilisation plan and key milestones;
- activities required between appointment and launch;
- staffing, management capacity and governance during mobilisation;
- development of systems, processes, templates and guidance;
- arrangements for working with the Department to finalise programme documentation;
- readiness for application handling, assessment administration, monitoring, payment verification and reporting;
- key risks, dependencies and mitigations;
- communications and launch planning;
- how operational readiness would be tested before launch;
- contingency arrangements if approval, launch or call timing changes.

Maximum 1000 words

Section 4: Financial assessment

The financial assessment will consider whether the applicant's proposed costs for delivering the Intermediary Funding Body role are affordable, proportionate, reasonable, based on full cost recovery, and provide value for money.

The Department will assess whether the proposed costs are sufficient to support the applicant's proposed delivery model, while also representing the minimum funding required to deliver the required outcomes. This reflects the DfC Grant Standards, which require grant processes to be transparent, proportionate, value for money focused, and based on clearly defined criteria and scoring mechanisms.

Applicants must provide enough financial information to allow the Department to assess the credibility, value for money and deliverability of the proposed costs.

Financial assessment weighting

The financial assessment will account for 40% of the overall application score.

The financial assessment will be split into two parts.

Part	Financial criterion	Weighting
Part A	Comparative cost and value for money score	20%
Part B	Financial credibility, reasonableness and alignment with the quality proposal	20%
	Total financial score	**40%**

Assumptions for financial proposals

For assessment purposes, applicants should assume up to three indicative calls, each with an assumed capital value of up to £5 million. The total assumed programme value for assessment purposes is therefore £15 million.

The actual number, timing and value of calls will remain subject to business case approval, budget availability and Departmental decision. No appointment, grant award or financial commitment will be made unless all required approvals are secured.

Applicants should provide their proposed Intermediary Funding Body delivery costs for each indicative call and as a total across all three indicative calls.

Financial clarification

Any financial clarification will be handled in line with the general clarification provisions set out above. It will be limited to understanding, verifying or clarifying the proposal submitted and will not allow an applicant to revise, improve or change its financial proposal after the closing date.

Where, following clarification, the Department is not satisfied that the proposed costs are complete, reliable, credible or deliverable, the proposal may be excluded from the comparative cost calculation, or this may be reflected in the financial narrative score.

Part A: Comparative cost and value for money score

Weighting: 20%

The Community Infrastructure Fund is intended to operate on the basis that the appointed Intermediary Funding Body will receive a delivery payment calculated as a percentage of the final approved value of each funding call.

Applicants are required to provide:

- a high-level breakdown of the costs included within their proposal;
- the proposed percentage delivery cost for each indicative call; and
- an overall proposed delivery percentage.

The estimated monetary costs are requested to support the Department's assessment of affordability, reasonableness, full cost recovery, value for money and alignment with the proposed delivery model.

The high-level cost breakdown will not be scored.

The Part A comparative cost score will be based on the **overall proposed delivery percentage** set out in the application form. The call-specific percentages will not be scored separately. They will be used to establish the proposed payment profile across the calls.

Calculating the overall proposed delivery percentage

The overall proposed delivery percentage should be calculated using the total estimated Intermediary Funding Body delivery cost across all three calls and the total assumed programme value of £15 million.

Overall proposed delivery percentage = total estimated Intermediary Funding Body delivery cost across all three calls ÷ £15,000,000 × 100

The comparative cost score will compare each applicant's overall proposed delivery percentage against the lowest compliant overall proposed delivery percentage submitted.

Comparative cost score = lowest compliant overall proposed delivery percentage ÷ applicant's overall proposed delivery percentage × 100

The weighted comparative cost score will be calculated as follows:

Weighted comparative cost score = comparative cost score ÷ 100 × 20

Example

Applicant	Total estimated IFB delivery cost across three indicative calls	Overall proposed delivery percentage	Comparative cost score	Weighted score out of 20
Applicant A	£1,800,000	12.00%	100.00	20.00
Applicant B	£2,025,000	13.50%	88.89	17.78
Applicant C	£2,250,000	15.00%	80.00	16.00

This example is provided only to show how the comparative cost score will be calculated. The costs and percentages used are illustrative. They are not intended to indicate the level of cost the Department expects applicants to submit, or the level of cost that is likely to be considered acceptable, proportionate or reasonable.

The lowest compliant overall proposed delivery percentage will receive the full 20 marks for Part A. However, the applicant proposing the lowest percentage will not automatically receive the highest total financial score or be recommended for appointment.

Call-specific percentages and payment profile

The call-specific percentages will not be scored. They will be used to determine the proposed payment profile across calls.

Applicants must calculate a proposed delivery percentage for each indicative call.

Call-specific proposed percentage = estimated delivery cost for the call ÷ £5,000,000 × 100

Payments to an appointed Intermediary Funding Body will be calculated by applying the relevant call-specific percentage to the final approved value of each actual funding call.

High-level cost breakdown

The high-level cost breakdown will not be scored.

This information will be used to help the Department understand the main cost components within the applicant's proposed Intermediary Funding Body delivery costs. It will help assess whether the proposal is complete, reasonable, proportionate, based on full cost recovery and aligned with the applicant's proposed delivery model.

Applicants should ensure that the estimated delivery costs include all costs associated with delivering the role of Intermediary Funding Body. This includes mobilisation, staffing, governance, assurance, applicant support, monitoring, reporting, systems, data management and administration.

The total value shown in the high-level cost breakdown should reconcile to the total estimated Intermediary Funding Body delivery percentage cost set out in the summary financial proposal.

Where the breakdown is unclear or inconsistent with the wider financial proposal, the Department may seek clarification in line with the clarification provisions set out in this document. Clarification will not be used to permit applicants to revise or improve their financial proposal after the closing date.

Part B: Financial credibility, reasonableness and alignment with the quality proposal

Part B will assess the quality, credibility and consistency of the applicant's financial proposal.

The Department will consider whether the proposed Intermediary Funding Body delivery percentage is affordable, proportionate, reasonable, based on full cost recovery, and aligned with the applicant's proposed delivery model.

The assessment will also consider whether the proposed percentage provides sufficient confidence that the applicant can deliver the Intermediary Funding Body role without relying on unfunded capacity, unsupported assumptions, duplicated costs or ineligible expenditure.

Applicants should ensure that the financial narrative is consistent with the estimated cost tables, proposed percentage delivery costs, high-level cost breakdown and quality responses

Minimum scoring threshold for Part B

Applicants must achieve a minimum raw score of 3 out of 5 for Part B.

An application that scores below 3 out of 5 for Part B will not meet the minimum financial credibility threshold. It will not be considered further for appointment, regardless of its Part A score or overall weighted score.

The Part B threshold will be applied before the weighted Part B score is added to the final application score.

Part B: Financial credibility, reasonableness and alignment with the quality proposal

Weighting: 20%
Maximum 1,250 words

Please explain how your proposed costs have been calculated and why it is affordable, proportionate, reasonable, based on full cost recovery, and aligned with your proposed delivery model.

Your response should explain:

- the main assumptions used to calculate your proposed delivery costs and proposed delivery percentages;
- how the proposed percentage represents full cost recovery;
- how staff, systems, governance, assurance, applicant support, monitoring and reporting requirements have been reflected in the proposed percentage;
- how mobilisation and set-up costs have been treated within the proposed percentage;
- why the proposal is affordable and proportionate to the assumed programme scale and the indicative value of each call;
- how the proposed Intermediary Funding Body delivery percentage remains proportionate while maintaining appropriate governance, assurance and applicant support;
- how the financial proposal supports the approach set out in your quality responses;
- any expected efficiencies across Calls 2 and 3, and how these have been reflected in the proposed percentages;
- any use of existing capacity, shared services, in-kind support or internal resources, and how these been treated in the proposed percentage;
- how the proposal is limited to eligible Intermediary Funding Body delivery costs;
- how the proposal avoids duplicated, unsupported, ineligible or separately funded costs.

Scoring guide for Part B

Part B will be scored from 0 to 5.

Score	Indicator
0	Unacceptable. No meaningful financial explanation is provided, or the response fails to address the financial criterion.
1	Very weak. The financial proposal is poorly explained, unrealistic, unsupported or inconsistent with the quality proposal. Very limited confidence is provided.
2	Weak. Some financial explanation is provided, but there are notable gaps, inconsistencies or unsupported assumptions. Confidence is limited.
3	Satisfactory. The proposed delivery costs are broadly reasonable and credible. The response provides a reasonable level of confidence that the costs can support the proposed delivery model. However, some weaknesses, limited detail or areas requiring further assurance remain.
4	Good. The proposed delivery costs are well explained, credible, proportionate and based on full cost recovery. They align clearly with the delivery model and quality responses. Any weaknesses are minor and not of significant concern.
5	Excellent. The proposed delivery costs are robust, transparent and strongly evidenced. They demonstrate full cost recovery, realistic resourcing, clear treatment of eligible costs, strong value for money and clear alignment with the quality proposal. No material weaknesses or concerns are identified.

The weighted financial narrative score will be calculated as follows:

Weighted financial narrative score = raw score ÷ 5 × 20

Combined financial score

The total financial score will be calculated by adding together:

- the weighted comparative cost score out of 20; and
- the weighted financial narrative score out of 20.

Total financial score = weighted comparative cost score + weighted financial narrative score

Eligible and ineligible Intermediary Funding Body costs

Applicants should include only costs that are necessary to deliver the Intermediary Funding Body role. The proposed Intermediary Funding Body delivery percentage should be calculated by reference to eligible delivery costs only. Applicants should ensure that the percentage does not include ineligible, duplicated, unsupported or separately funded costs.

Eligible costs may include:

- staff costs directly related to delivery of the role;
- reasonable overheads or shared service costs, where properly apportioned;
- mobilisation and set-up costs;
- systems, data management and reporting costs;
- governance, assurance and audit costs;
- applicant support, communication and outreach costs;
- monitoring, payment verification and reporting costs;
- external specialist advice, where necessary and justified;
- irrecoverable VAT, where applicable.

Ineligible costs include:

- costs incurred before the agreed start date, unless expressly approved by the Department;
- costs funded from another source;
- duplicated costs;
- fines, penalties or interest charges;
- notional costs that will not be incurred;
- unsupported or unexplained costs;
- costs not related to the Intermediary Funding Body role;
- costs outside the agreed eligible expenditure framework.

The Department may seek clarification where it is unclear whether a cost is eligible, necessary, reasonable or properly apportioned.
Any clarification will be handled in line with the general clarification provisions set out above.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard

Available in alternative formats.

Department for Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

9 781911 771241