



Northern  
Ireland  
Office

# ENGAGEMENT FOR CHANGE FUND

**Application guidance**

**April 2026**

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# 1. Introduction

1. The Engagement for Change Fund provides £100,000 over the course of 3 years for the provision of support for the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, focusing on leadership skills and advocacy development.
2. Northern Ireland's community and voluntary sector is defined by an extensive and diverse range of expertise, developed through decades of first-hand experience in the delivery of interventions, solutions and support for the communities of Northern Ireland. There is much to be learned from the sector at the heart of delivering on behalf of local communities.
3. Through the Engagement for Change Fund, we want to connect community and voluntary sector organisations with the support and upskilling opportunities required to enable organisations to lead, promote and advocate for their work and the communities which they support, promoting a stronger, more inclusive democracy and bolstering their ability to effectively influence policy-makers at the strategic Governmental level.
4. The Engagement for Change Fund will initially run for three years and provide £100,000 to a single delivery organisation for programming which will support community leaders to develop leadership and advocacy skills and to better understand how to engage with and inform decision makers, with specific focus on supporting more women into the public forum. Applicants are welcome to include in their application their intention to work with other organisations in the delivery of their programming, should this collaboration extend reach, depth or impact of delivery.
5. This document is a call for applications and sets out:
  - a. objectives for the fund; and
  - b. the criteria against which applications will be assessed.

## 2. Overview of the Engagement for Change Fund

### Programme objectives

The Engagement for Change Fund awards £100,000 over the course of 3 years for the provision of support for the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, focusing on the development and enhancement of the leadership and advocacy skills necessary to promote and advocate for the critical work delivered, and the communities supported by these organisations. The Engagement for Change Fund will promote stronger, more inclusive democracy and bolster the ability of community and voluntary sector organisations to effectively inform policy-makers. The Fund will have a particular focus on supporting more women into the forums of public debate, empowering and supporting women to feel confident and effective in engagement with strategic Government policy-making processes.

This grant is designed to complement existing provision, not duplicate programming already delivered in Northern Ireland. Applicants are welcome to propose a new programme which does not currently reflect programming available, or to propose programming which will enhance or add to current programming delivered in Northern Ireland. Where projects build on existing provision, applications must demonstrate how their proposed programme will enhance the reach, depth and/or impact of current provision, and sit alongside other support opportunities. All applicants are required to set out the benefits which will arise for individuals and organisations in the community and voluntary sector as a result of their proposed programming, with reference to how the proposal will fill a gap in support.

Applications must include a three-year delivery plan, detailing the methods, topics, and design of support. At a minimum, applications must detail proposals which will deliver on six key areas of support:

- **Supporting Women into the Public Forum:** Programming to upskill, empower and support women to feel confident and effective in engagement

with strategic Government policy-making processes, delivering a demonstrable, measurable increase in the representation of women from the community and voluntary sector engaging with the forums of public debate. This may be an independent stream of support, or may be built into all support streams offered.

- **Understanding the Policy Landscape:** Training on how Government policy at the UK, and specifically Northern Ireland, level is made, key Government policy priorities, the roles of different policy-makers (local, regional, national), and how to identify key decision points.
- **Effective Communication and Advocacy:** Skill development focused on crafting clear, concise policy positions, writing compelling submissions, and delivering persuasive presentations to officials and policy makers. This should include responding to requests for consultation.
- **Networking and Coalition Building:** Support for the creation of strategic alliances and partnerships with other community groups and stakeholders to amplify their collective voice and influence. This should include a focus on the importance of investment in local sector-level relationships. It is expected that the delivery organisation will create opportunities for connection between the community and voluntary sector organisations who access support, and facilitate strategic introductions to a selection of Governmental officials.
- **Media and Digital Engagement:** Training on the use of traditional and social media to effectively raise awareness of specific issues, monitor public sentiment, and create momentum.
- **Evidence and Data Collection:** Training on how to collect and use robust data, case studies, and evidence to support advocacy positions and demonstrate the need for change.

## Applicant Eligibility

Applications are welcome from the voluntary and community sector, civic society and national representative bodies in Northern Ireland. Applicants must be formally established for public benefit and not-for-profit organisations. Applicants intending to work with other organisations must ensure these organisations also meet the above criteria.

We cannot accept applications from: individuals or sole traders, organisations based outside of Northern Ireland, or companies who pay profits to directors, shareholders or members, including companies limited by shares. Please note this list is not exhaustive.

Organisations already involved in the provision of support to the community and voluntary sector are eligible to apply, but must demonstrate that funding will be specific to activities conducted for the purpose of the Engagement for Change Fund. Funding will not be provided for programming which is already resourced through alternative funding sources, though will be considered in circumstances where this support would be expanded in terms of reach, depth and/or impact. Applicants must demonstrate the requisite level of experience and expertise in supporting the community and voluntary sector to be eligible for grant funding.

## Programme Eligibility

The Engagement for Change Fund has stipulated objectives which must be fulfilled by applicant proposals. Organisations are welcome to design programme delivery and the specific details of support which will be provided based on their expertise and experience. Successful applicants will have the opportunity to update their delivery plans for Years 2 and 3, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Office.

Capital costs will not be eligible for funding under the Fund. A fixed cost of no more than 10% in Years 1 and 2 and 5% in Year 3 can be dedicated to core organisational operating costs including rent, electricity, heat, internet provision etc. Organisations wishing to avail of funding for core operating costs must demonstrate that duplicate funding is not being received from other sources. Both Programme Management and Staffing Costs are eligible where directly ascribable to the delivery of the programme. All costs must be inclusive of the maximum value of funding available per year.

Further programme eligibility criteria includes:

- Proposals must demonstrate that the activities directly benefit Northern Ireland's community and voluntary sector. Activities must be delivered within the United Kingdom, and should be flexible to support the access needs of community and voluntary sector organisations across Northern Ireland.
- Whilst support provided through programming should be open to people of all genders, proposals must include a dedicated workstream or module focused specifically on addressing the specific barriers and challenges women face in accessing and thriving within the public forum. Alternatively, applicants can illustrate how these considerations will be built into all modules or topics of support provided.
- Proposals can include requests for funding to hire subject matter experts as contractors to support the delivery of programming.
- Proposals must adhere to the Travel & Subsistence Guidance (see Annex A).
- Applications are not eligible from networks or organisational partnerships and must be submitted on behalf of a singular organisation. Applicants are welcome to include in their application their intention to work with other organisations in the delivery of their programming, should this collaboration extend reach, depth or impact of delivery.
- Organisations already in receipt of UKG funding **are** eligible to apply.
- Applicant organisations must have a governing document (e.g. constitution or memorandum and articles of association) which includes appropriate statements on members, Directors or Trustees not benefiting financially from the organisation or its dissolution, a minimum of 3 unrelated people on the committee, this will be unrelated trustees for charities and unrelated directors for companies limited by guarantee, and have their own bank account (which requires 2 signatories).

We retain the right to review and revise eligibility and criteria ahead of any potential future rounds of funding.

## Funding

The Engagement for Change Fund provides £100,000 over the course of 3 years for the provision of support for the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland,

focusing on the development and enhancement of the leadership and advocacy skills necessary to effectively inform policy-makers at the Government level.

Funding will be provided in line with the following schedule. Applicants should consider the funding breakdown in the design of their proposed programme:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>
Year 1: 2026 / 27 (Development Year)	£25,000
Year 2: 2027 / 28	£25,000
Year 3: 2028 / 29	£50,000

Funding cannot be carried across Financial Years. Funding received in Year 1 must be fully drawn down and spent during 2026/27 and so forth. Delivery commencement of the Development Year is expected by 1st July 2026. Whilst it is not a requirement to utilise the Development Year, applicants will be required to share and discuss their finalised delivery plan with the Northern Ireland Office, ahead of programme delivery commencement.

## 3. Applying to the Engagement for Change Fund

### How to apply

To apply, you must submit an application form, budget/delivery plan tool (as provided on gov.uk), and accounts to [community.projects@nio.gov.uk](mailto:community.projects@nio.gov.uk) by **5pm Friday 22 May 2026**. Applications submitted after this deadline will not be accepted.

Please refer to the FAQs document for any questions. If not answered, you can email the team at [community.projects@nio.gov.uk](mailto:community.projects@nio.gov.uk). Please allow 5 working days for a response. Please ensure all queries are submitted by 5pm on Friday 15 May 2026; the Engagement for Change Team cannot guarantee response after this date.

### Criteria and assessment

The Engagement for Change Fund will provide £100,000 over the course of 3 years to a single delivery organisation.

Applications will be assessed on the demonstration of the below criteria. Applicants must score a minimum of 50/75 to be eligible for funding and meet the minimum scoring value set per criterion. **Funding will be allocated to the highest scoring applicant and to a single lead delivery organisation.**

Criteria	Detail	Max Score
<b>[1] Capability and Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A minimum of 5 years experience in delivering support directly to the community and voluntary sector;</li><li>• Depth of experience and subject matter expertise;</li><li>• Applicant's existing internal structure and capacity to deliver and manage a grant funded programme.</li></ul>	15 (Min for award = 10)
<b>[2] Programme Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strength of programme design including a 3 year delivery plan and timeline, noting the stipulated increase in funding in Year 3;</li><li>• The methods and topics of support, to include the six key areas of</li></ul>	25 (Min for award = 20)

	<p>support stipulated;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity across programme's aims, activities, timeline and intended outcomes.</li> <li>• Identification of delivery risks and how the same will be mitigated.</li> </ul>	
<b>[3] Reach and Inclusivity of Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of plan to ensure activities benefit community and voluntary sector organisations across Northern Ireland, regardless of urban or rural setting;</li> <li>• Number of individuals applicant proposes to support per year;</li> <li>• Specific strategy and commitment to supporting more women into the public forum, including details on how delivery will be adapted to meet the needs of diverse cohorts of women (e.g., age, geographic location, sectoral focus).</li> </ul>	15
<b>[4] Impact and Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of indicators of success and methods for monitoring e.g., the number of individuals/organisations participating, geographic reach, benefits gained, beneficiary satisfaction.</li> <li>• Evidence of an agile approach to delivery which allows for continuous improvement across successive years of delivery.</li> <li>• Sustainability of improvements to the community and voluntary sector's capacity, capability, and ability to influence change beyond the immediate delivery period.</li> </ul>	10
<b>[5] Value for Money</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstration that the budget is appropriate, well justified and represents good value for the scale and impact of programming offered.</li> <li>• Adherence to the financial schedule,</li> </ul>	10 (Min. for award = 8)

	and compliance with eligibility rules. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear demonstration of how funding will be utilised to deliver against the aim of the programme.</li></ul>	
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Following application assessment, applicant organisations who achieve the required minimum score of 50/75 will be invited to participate in an interview. **It is anticipated that interviews will be held in June 2026.**

# ANNEX A: TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE POLICY

Any requested travel and subsistence must meet the following conditions. It is possible to provide provisional quotes in your application, granted the final costs are no higher than the following:

## AIR TRAVEL

First class travel and business class travel is not permitted. Air miles and similar benefits earned through official travel should not be used for private purposes.

## ACCOMODATION

As far as possible, you should try to prioritise day trips. If that is not possible, you must ensure your overnight accommodation meets the following rates:

		Green	Amber
<b>Overnight Accomodation</b>	London	£125.00	£250.00
	Elsewhere	£87.00	£110.00

*You are encouraged to find accommodation within the green rate but may use the amber rate if absolutely necessary, keeping value for money in mind. If you use the amber rating, your application value for money score will be unable to score above an 8.*

## SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE

Subsistence allowances	Period of absence	Limit
Day (not to be claimed when a meal is provided)	Over 5 hours, up to and including 10 hours	£4.25
Day (limit reduces by £4.25 when a meal is provided, not to be claimed when two meals are provided)	Over 10 hours, up to and including 12 hours	£9.30
Day (start prior to 7.30am) (limited reduced by £4.25 when a meal is provided, £9.30 when two meals are provided and not to be claimed when three meals are provided)	Over 12 hours, up to and including 15 hours	£13.55
24 hour (Daily rate) (limit reduces by £4.25 where lunch is provided and £13.55 is evening meal is provided and is not to be claimed when three meals are provided)	24 hours	£25.00