Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Annual Funding Programme 2027/28

Application Guidance Notes

Deadline for Applications: 12 noon, 21 December 2026

Decisions: April 2027

Applications must be submitted online at www.artscouncil-ni.org/funding

Please read these guidance notes carefully before beginning an online application as there have been a number of changes to the programme.

arts council of Northern Ireland

Awarding funds from The National Lottery®

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Annual Funding Programme.

These notes give information on the Programme's objectives, eligible costs, how to apply to the programme, and how to submit an application. It also describes how your application will be assessed and what you will be asked to do if you are awarded a grant.

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on our website at Arts Council of Northern Ireland Annual Funding Programme 2027/28 | Arts Council NI (opens in a new window). They may also be requested in large print or other accessible formats if required. Please contact us at artgrants@artscouncil-ni.org if you need further assistance in this regard, including alternative language versions. You can also contact us at that address if you have any queries about any aspect of the programme or its application requirements. Further contact details for all our Artform staff can be found on the Arts Council Website Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us (opens in a new window).

In promoting these award schemes, the Arts Council particularly welcomes applications from groups referenced in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Aims of the 2027/28 Annual Funding Programme

The aim of the Annual Funding Programme (AFP) is to support Northern Ireland's arts infrastructure through grants to organisations in all artforms and practices for their core and programming costs. AFP organisations will be key to helping us achieve the outcomes set out in our 10 year strategic plan[1] for developing the arts and we expect all awardees to support us in delivering those outcomes.

How much funding is available?

The Northern Ireland arts sector continues to face significant challenges in an environment of increasing operating costs. If the Arts Council itself receives a reduction in budget or a standstill budget - which is a cut in real terms - we may have to make cuts to our grant programmes, including AFP. Please keep in mind also that, as with all our schemes, there is no guarantee of funding for any applicant.

[1] https://artscouncil-ni.org/what-we-do/our-strategy

- **If you are applying as a 2026/27 AFP recipient**

  If you would like to request more than the 2026/27 provisional AFP award level **as notified in our 17 April 2026 decision email**, you may do so, however, you must use that provisional standstill figure[2] as the basis of the ACNI contribution to the budget enclosure included in your application.

  An opportunity to request an increased level of investment and to tell us what this increased investment would deliver is provided within the application form. For 2026/27 AFP clients, your total request for this application will be your provisional standstill figure[3] plus this additional funding request. It is important for us to understand your needs in order to inform Government of the baseline required to support the sector, so where additional costs are justified, they should be included in the *Additional AFP Funding Request* section of the application form.

- **If you are applying as a New Applicant[4]**

  Your budget should reflect the totality of your request. Do not complete the *Additional AFP Funding Request* section of the application form.

  Only organisations who have received and fully completed an award of at least £10,001 from the Arts Council since 1 April 2024 are eligible to apply to the Annual Funding Programme. Please note that this minimum amount must be in relation to a single award: an organisation that has received 2 awards totaling over £10,001 would not be eligible. **New applicants must contact the relevant art form officer by 5pm on Friday 11 December 2026 at the latest to discuss a possible application**. Please note this is a criterion for eligibility.

As we face into another challenging financial year, all applicants should consider their needs carefully and be realistic in their request.

Programme Funding

To help fund our Annual Funding Programme we will use money from our share of the National Lottery, as well as from our direct grant from the Government. Our funding for some organisations will be from Exchequer (our Government grant) and for others from Lottery revenue. We will decide how to use these different sources of revenue, **but we will**

[2] As contained in the decision notification email sent by ACNI on 17/04/2026.
[3] As contained in the decision notification email sent by ACNI on 17/04/2026.
[4] If you are not a 2026/27 AFP recipient, then you are a New Applicant – even if your organisation has received AFP funding in the years prior to 2026/27.

assess and treat all organisations exactly the same, wherever their funding investment comes from.

Who can apply?

- Non-profit distributing organisations which can demonstrate they require a year-round resource to deliver arts programming.
- Commercial organisations can only apply for support if the proposed programme is primarily for the benefit of the public and where there are plans to re-invest any surplus into a similar programme.
- New applicants to the Annual Funding Programme must have been in receipt of and fully completed a single award of at least £10,001 from ACNI since 1 April 2024 in order to be eligible for the scheme and must contact the appropriate ACNI arts officer* to discuss their application prior to submission and **by 5pm on Friday 11 December 2026 at the latest**. Failure to make prior contact with the Arts Council before submitting an application will render your application ineligible**.**

***Important**: Previous discussions that may have taken place with an Arts Development Officer prior to the opening of the AFP programme do not constitute the required contact. You must make contact with the relevant officer once these guidance notes have been published and **before the stated deadline of 5pm on Friday 11 December 2026**.

Who cannot apply?

- Local Authorities
- Statutory bodies for activities which fall within their statutory remit
- Individuals
- Broadcasters
- Central Government Departments
- Organisations which have not received and completed an award of at least £10,001 from ACNI since 1 April 2024[5]
- Applications from parent companies and subsidiary organisations of the same company are not eligible for funding within a single funding round.
- Organisations who have broken the terms of a previous Arts Council letter of offer in the previous 4 years or who remain in breach of previous terms.

[5] This must be from a single award, not two awards or more totaling over £10k. E.g. if you received 2 awards for £6k over the period, you are not eligible. If you received one award for £12k – or one award for £12k and any other number of awards at any other value, you would be eligible to apply.

What you can apply for

You can apply for one year funding only. Eligible costs include the following:

- **Core costs:** For example -

  Salaries
  Rent and Rates
  Light and Heat
  Maintenance, security, etc.
  Telephone and Fax
  Printing, postage, stationery
  Financial costs
  Insurance

- **Programming costs:** For example -

  Artists' costs
  Volunteer expenses
  Audience Development plans
  Access/Participation Plans
  Publicity/Marketing (excluding catering/merchandising)
  Transportation
  Travel, Accommodation, (where integral to programme delivery)
  Materials

- **Accessibility Costs:**
  These are additional costs associated with the delivery of programming for people with particular needs as defined under Section 75 of The Northern Ireland Act 1998. Accessibility Costs are paid retrospectively on submission of evidence of demonstrated use of the services. You should also note:

  - Requested accessibility costs must be related to the activity covered by your AFP application.
  - Accessibility costs must be included in the overall total request; they are not additional to it.
  - Applicants may choose to request the full value of accessibility costs, however, keep in mind that there is no guarantee of funding.

How to apply

Help with your application

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on our website at Arts Council of Northern Ireland Annual Funding Programme 2027/28 | Arts Council NI (opens in a new window). They may also be requested in large print or other accessible formats if required. Please contact us at artgrants@artscouncil-ni.org if you need further assistance in this regard, including alternative language versions. You can also contact us at that address if you have any queries about any aspect of the programme or its application requirements. Further contact details for all our Artform staff can be found on the Arts Council Website Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us (opens in a new window).

Making an online application

You must apply using our online system. We will not accept applications in hard copy or by email.

- If you do not already have one, you will be required to go through a simple process to set up an application account requiring an email address and a password (which you will choose yourself). You can then use this account to view your application for this or any other Arts Council scheme to which you apply.
- If you have not already done so, your organisation will need to register on the Government Funding Database (GFD) website[6] (this applies to NI-based orgs only - see page 9 below). Please note that registration can take several days[7]. It is your responsibility to ensure that your organisation's account is set up, and the appropriate documents uploaded by the time you make your application to us. If you are not registered on the GFD by the closing deadline of this programme, your application will not be eligible.
- Online applications may be edited, saved and returned up to the closing deadline**.**
- You must submit all mandatory enclosures associated with the application at the same time as your application, i.e. they must be uploaded to your online application prior to its submission. These enclosures are listed on the *Attachments* page within the online application and are detailed below.
- **Please ensure that you allow yourself sufficient time to upload all documents to the system. Uploading can take longer as the closing deadline approaches and the**

[6] Organisations based outside Northern Ireland do not have to register on the GFD.
[7] Please note that the GFD website is not administered by ACNI. Queries regarding GFD accounts, or the website's content or functionality should be sent to the relevant GFD contacts provided on the website itself.

system will shut down at 12 noon precisely on the closing date, Monday, 21 December 2026. If your completed application is not **fully** uploaded when the system closes, your application will not be accepted.

- If you submit your application by the closing deadline, you will receive an automated email advising that your application has been successfully submitted to the system. **If you do not receive this email, your application has not been submitted.**

Remember: It is your responsibility to ensure that we receive the application form and uploaded mandatory enclosures by the closing time and date.

Mandatory enclosures

These are the documents which you must provide in conjunction with your application[8]. Some of these must be uploaded to your online application via the Attachments page; others must be uploaded to the Government Funding Database (GFD - see notes below). **If you do not provide all required mandatory enclosures in conjunction with your application by the given deadline, your application will be ineligible and will not be assessed**. **Remember: once the programme deadline has passed, you will not be given additional time to submit any missing enclosures.**

Please keep in mind the following important points:

- All mandatory enclosures must be in **Word, Excel or pdf format**. We cannot accept documents in other formats.
- **The total size of all your uploaded documents should not exceed 25 Mb.**
- **You must submit all necessary enclosures by the programme deadline. If any enclosures are missing, your application will be ineligible.**
- You must upload **all** the necessary enclosures prior to submitting your online application. **If any enclosures are missing, your application will be ineligible**.
- If you upload an enclosure in a format which we do not accept or which is corrupted or which we cannot open, the enclosure will be considered missing, **and your application will be ineligible**.
- Do not compress files into one zip file. Files must be uploaded as individual documents. If you provide zip folders, the enclosures will be considered missing, **and your application will be ineligible**.
- **All data and file formats must be PC compatible**. If an enclosure in a non-PC compatible file is supplied, the enclosure will be considered missing, **and your application will be ineligible**. For example, if using a MAC, it is the applicant's

[8] The Mandatory Enclosures listed above must be submitted with your application and your application will be ineligible if you fail to do so. In addition, should we require it, we may seek further documentation or information in relation to the financial operations or structures of any given applicant at any stage of the assessment process.

responsibility to ensure that any enclosures uploaded to the online application are PC compatible.

- The submission of weblinks or website addresses in lieu of enclosure documents is not acceptable and **will result in your application being made ineligible.**

You **must** upload the following to your AFP application before submission (**read on** for detailed guidance and information on the additional documents that you must upload to the **Government Funding Database** - page 9 onwards):

- **Detailed budget for 2027/28 core costs**[9]. This must include forecast income *and* expenditure and must clearly indicate how much of the Arts Council's grant you would apply to each budget line. All budget lines above £1,000 must be broken down into component parts, where possible.
- **Detailed 2027/28 budget for programming costs**: This must include forecast income *and* expenditure and must clearly indicate how much of the Arts Council's grant you would apply to each budget line. All budget lines above £1,000 must be broken down into component parts, where possible.
- **Detailed description of your planned 2027/28 arts programme[10]. ** This must include a total cost for each element of your programming.
- **Your most recent Management Accounts.** These must be at least to 30 September 2026**.** Provide more up-to-date Management Accounts if you have them. (**NB**: you must also ensure that your organisation's Annual Accounts for 2025/26 have been uploaded to the GFD website.)
- **NB: if** the accounts uploaded to the Government Funding Database are not for 2025/26 (see additional notes below), you must also provide **Management Accounts up to the period 31 March 2026.**
- **Governance + Staffing Details Paper**
- **IF** you are a 2026/27 AFP client and it has changed since your 2026/27 application**,** provide your organisation's **Financial Procedures Document[11]**
- **Outcomes Template.** This is a spreadsheet template which you must download from our website and complete.
- **IF** you are a new applicant to the programme**,** you must provide your organisation's **Financial Procedures Document.**

[9] If you are a 2026/27 AFP client, the level of ACNI funding included *in total* across both your 2027/28 budget enclosures must not exceed your 2026/27 provisional AFP award level as notified in our 17 April 2026 decision email to you. See pages 2 and 3 of this guidance, *How Much Funding Is Available*. Therefore, the total amount of ACNI contribution must be as per the amount of your 2026/27 provisional notification amount, *though you may choose to profile it differently across selected budget lines*.

[10] If you are a sectoral support organisation, this would be a description of your planned 2027/28 programme of activities.

[11] Do not provide unasked for policy documents. If you are a 2026/27 AFP client and do not provide your Financial Procedures document, we will assume that it has not changed since the document was last provided.

- **IF** you are a new applicant to the programme**,** you must provide a detailed description of your organisation's **2026/27 programme of arts activity.**

If available and relevant, you should also upload the following:

- Details of accessibility costs if these are being requested
- Copies of letters of offer from partnership funders or sponsors

Government Funding Database

As part of Government's Reducing Bureaucracy programme, you are required to upload a number of master documents to the Government Funding Database (GFD). Many organisations in receipt of ACNI funds are already registered with this database; others need to register prior to submission of their application. Once uploaded, these documents will exist for all applications you make to any Government department and you will not be required to submit them with individual applications, including future applications to the Arts Council.

If you are based in Northern Ireland, the following documents **MUST** be uploaded to the Government Funding Database at Government Funding Database (opens in new window)

- Constitution and/or Memorandum and Articles of Association
- **Annual Accounts for the period up to 31 March 2026** (or up to 31 December 2025 if your accounts are completed on a calendar year basis)
- Organisation Chart
- Rental Agreement/Lease/Evidence of ownership

If you are based outside Northern Ireland, you **MUST** still provide the documents listed above, but you should upload the 4 documents to your online application and submit them along with all the mandatory enclosures listed on page 8 above at the time of submitting your online application.

If you are not currently on the Database, you will be required to register at Government Funding Database (opens in new window). Full instructions for uploading documents to the Government Funding Database are available for download from the Arts Council's website.

Please note that registration can take several days. It is your responsibility to ensure that your organisation's account is set up, and the appropriate documents uploaded by the time you make your application to us. If you are not registered on the GFD by the closing deadline of this programme, your application will not be eligible .

It is important to note that the GFD website is not administered by ACNI. Queries regarding GFD accounts, or the website's content or functionality should be sent to the relevant GFD contacts provided on the website itself.

Detailed guidance on mandatory enclosures

Further information on all mandatory enclosures is detailed below. If you have any queries about any of the documents, please contact the relevant Arts Council Officer. Staff contact details are available on the Arts Council website at Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us (opens in a new window).

Please Note: it is <u>your responsibility</u> to ensure that you upload all the requested mandatory enclosures to your application prior to submission. If <u>any</u> enclosures are missing, <u>your application will be ineligible</u>.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Detailed budget for 2027/28 core costs	Online Application	• **This must include income *and* expenditure.** All budget lines above £1,000 must be broken down into component parts, where appropriate. This breakdown must also indicate how much of the Arts Council's grant you would apply to each budget line. • You must itemize expenditure wherever possible (example: "Annual rent £12,000" is acceptable but "Salaries £100,000" must be broken down to give specific details). You should also include details of how you have calculated any fees you are paying, e.g. hourly/daily/weekly rates. • If you do not present a balanced budget, this may impact the assessment of your application.
Detailed budget for 2027/28 programming costs	Online Application	• **This must include income *and* expenditure.** All budget lines above £1,000 must be broken down into component parts, where appropriate. This breakdown must also indicate how much of the Arts Council's grant you would apply to each budget line. You should also include details of premium payments costs, where applicable. • You must itemize expenditure wherever possible and also include details of how you have calculated any fees you are paying in relation to programming costs, e.g. hourly/daily/weekly rates. • If you do not present a balanced budget, this may impact the assessment of your application.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Detailed description of your planned 2027/28 arts programme[12]	Online Application	You should describe the programming you intend to deliver. You should include the following information where possible: • The total cost for each element of programming • Schedule planned activities/events • Intended audiences[13], how you will engage them and estimates of their numbers • Where relevant, details of programme partnership organisations • Names of artists, tutors, facilitators (if known). • For organisations whose programme includes the production of artistic material (journals, magazines, books, film, CD, or other media) a list of titles with print run and projected sales. Such organisations should also document promotional events associated with these materials (launches, readings, viewings, etc.) **How much should you write?** Please note that the word levels indicated below are <u>maximums only</u>: • If you are applying for £200,000 or more your detailed project description should be no more than 3,000 words[14]. Any additional words will be discounted. • If you are applying for between £50,000 and £199,999, your detailed project description should be no more than 2,000 words. Any additional words will be discounted. • If you are applying for up to £49,999 your detailed project description should be no more than 1,000 words. Any additional words will be discounted.

[12] If you are a sectoral support organisation, this would be your planned 2027/28 programme of activities.
[13] By "audiences" we mean all types of audiences, including participants, visitors, readers, content viewers.
[14] Please note: <u>this does not mean that your description *must be 3,000 words*</u>.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Your most recent Management Accounts – these must be at least to 30 September 2026**.**	Online Application	You must upload your most recent set of management accounts. These must at least cover the period 1 April 2026 to 30 September 2026 (or the 1 January 2026 to the 30 September 2026 if your organisation operates a calendar year period of accounts). If you have a more up-to-date set of management accounts, e.g. 1 April 2026 to 30 November 2026, provide them. Management accounts should include a clearly identifiable start and end date. **NB**: In addition to these management accounts, applicants must also provide a copy of their organisation's 2025/26 Annual Accounts via the Government Funding Database – i.e. your Annual Accounts up to the period 31 March 2026 (or if your organisation operates a calendar year period of accounts, Annual Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2025). If you do not provide both financial documents, your application will be ineligible.
Governance + Staffing Details Paper	Online Application	• A list of your organisation's current board members, specifying office bearers, which details any relevant specialism each brings to the role **and provides the date on which each member joined the board.** • A list of the dates on which your board has met in the period 1 January 2026 to 30 November 2026. • A list of your organisation's current sub-committees, detailing who is on each sub-committee. • A list of the dates on which the sub-committees met in the period 1 January 2026 to 30 November 2026. • Dates of any governance training delivered to Board members since they were appointed. • **IF your organisation has 15 permanent members of staff or less** (as opposed to 15 FTEs), provide a list of job titles and indicate whether the post is currently filled. **OR** **IF your organisation has more than 15 permanent members of staff**, provide a list of senior management job titles; indicate

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		whether each post is currently filled; and provide a summary of other roles/numbers (for example, *Administrative Assistants : 5*)
Your Organisation's Financial Procedures Document	Online Application	**If you are a 2026/27 AFP recipient, only provide this document if it has changed since your 2026/27 AFP application. <u>If you are a new applicant, you must provide this document.</u>** This is the document which sets out your financial policies and systems. Indicate when the procedures were approved by your board.
Outcomes Template	Online Application	Download this spreadsheet from the AFP webpage and use it to tell us about the intended outcomes of specific 2027/28 events and programming as they relate to the following priorities: o The creation and facilitation of innovative, high quality arts activity and artistic risk-taking. o Delivering projects and programming which will deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants for the Arts in NI. For example, by: - Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage in creative practice - Improving access and experiences within the arts sector for people who are D/deaf/disabled and neurodiverse. - Increasing greater participation, equality of access and opportunity in the arts across all socioeconomic and Section 75 groups. o Delivering projects and programming that address contemporary societal challenges. For example, by: - Facilitating local communities to engage in high quality arts experiences particularly in areas of low engagement (inc rural areas) and areas of social deprivation. o Creating opportunities to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce in Northern Ireland. Including by building resilience and capacity in the wider arts sector through training and mentoring of artists and other organisations.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		○ Delivering projects and programming that are inclusive and reflect society in Northern Ireland. It is important to note that we do not expect applicants to cover all 5 of the priorities listed above.
Detailed Description of your Organisation's 2026/27 Arts Programming	Online application	**IF YOU ARE A NEW APPLICANT,** you should describe the arts programming you have already delivered in 2026/27 and any scheduled for the remainder of this financial year. You should include the following information where possible: ○ Dates of activities/events ○ Participant or audience numbers (indicate if these are estimated) ○ Where relevant, details of programme partnership organisations ○ Names of artists, tutors, facilitators who delivered the programming
Details of Accessibility Costs	Online Application	**IF RELEVANT** : If Accessibility Costs are an element of your request, you must detail exactly what these funds will be used to support. For example, sign language interpretation, Braille paperwork, transport costs, provision of crèche facilities. Remember that you will not receive these funds in advance and, in order to claim the funds, you will have to demonstrate the number of people who used the Premium-Payment-related services.
Copies of LOOs from Other Funders	Online Application	**IF AVAILABLE:** If you have any letters from sponsors or other funders you should include them with your application as demonstration of support.
Management Accounts up to the period 31 March 2026	Online Application Form	Applicants are required to upload a copy of their organisation's most recent accounts to the Government Funding Database. If the accounts uploaded to the GFD are not for the year 2025/26 (i.e. if your most recent accounts are for the 2024/25 financial year), we require a set of management accounts covering the intervening period up to March 2026. We require these accounts to assess the

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		overall financial wellbeing of your organisation and to judge whether there is a need for Arts Council funding.
Constitution and/or Memorandum and Articles of Association	GFD	Please note: The name of your organisation as given in your constitution document should be the same name as that given in the application, and on your organisation's bank account, details of which we will request if you receive an award.
2025/26 Annual Accounts	GFD	You must upload a copy of your organisation's 2025/26 Annual Accounts to the Government Funding Database – i.e. your Annual Accounts up to the period 31 March 2026. If your organisation operates a calendar year period of accounts, Annual Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2025 must be provided. **NB:** You must also provide management accounts – see page 12 above.
Organisation Chart	GFD	This is a diagram showing us the structure of your organisation, in terms of staff, board and committees.
Rental Agreement / Lease / Evidence of Ownership	GFD	These documents are in relation to the premises from which your organisation operates and must agree with the address as detailed within the application form.

After you submit your application

- The Arts Council will acknowledge receipt of the application form.
- The Arts Council will undertake an eligibility check on your application. In the event of missing information, your application will be deemed ineligible and will not proceed to assessment. If ineligible, the Arts Council will issue an email advising reasons for ineligibility.
- During the eligibility checking process, the Arts Council will publish a monitoring form to your application account and issue an email notification advising of same. Completion of the monitoring form is not mandatory and will not affect the eligibility and/or assessment of your application. **However**, we would strongly encourage all applicants to complete and submit the monitoring form as monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements.
- Eligible applications will primarily be assessed by an Arts Development Officer or the relevant Head of Department, with input on finance and governance matters from the relevant Assistant Arts Development Officer.
- Officer assessments will be subject to a moderation process.
- Moderation recommendations will be presented to the Arts Council Board who will make the final decision in relation to your application.
- The Arts Council will contact you with the final decision via email. If your application is rejected, the Council will provide you with the reasons for the rejection. You may ask for a copy of your assessment.

If you receive an award

Letter of Offer

Following the decision, successful applicants will be issued with a contract outlining the conditions attached to the award and the specific budget lines against which the award has been allocated.

- It is important that you read the letter of offer and enclosed conditions carefully before signing and returning it. The letter of offer will set out what you may spend the grant on and by what date the project must be completed.

- If after reading the letter of offer and enclosed conditions and you decide to accept the Arts Council's offer, please note the following:
    - Electronic signatures are acceptable on MS Word or PDF letter of offer documentation.
    - The Arts Council will also accept scanned copies of signed letters of offer.
    - However, photographs of signed letters of offer are not acceptable.

- **If there are any changes to your project from the original application, the Arts Council must be informed immediately in writing before any project expenditure is incurred.** If you don't tell us about changes you may have to repay the award and this will affect decisions on any future applications, you might make.

Failing to meet your Letter of Offer requirements

If your organisation is not meeting the requirements set out in your letter of offer, our first step will be to give you appropriate feedback (usually through your allocated Arts Development Officer or Head of Artform) and discuss this with you, so we can all understand and agree what the problems may be.

We expect your organisation's board to be informed about any concerns we express, either in discussion at a meeting or in writing. We also expect that the board, working with your organisation's executive officers, will deal with the relevant issues and provide prompt and constructive advice on how you can meet the requirements set out in your funding agreement.

If your organisation breaks any terms of the funding agreement (including your obligations concerning branding and publicity), we may take further action including, where appropriate, clawback of funds.

How payments will be made

Payments will be made in stages as set out in your letter of offer - depending on the level of risk associated with your organisation; this payment profile may be altered in keeping with the need for additional financial monitoring.

Each stage will have specific monitoring conditions attached to it; your letter of offer will set out these specific conditions, and you must comply with them prior to the drawdown of each tranche of funding. Payments will be made by BACS transfer only. You will need to complete and return the BACS form issued with your letter of offer.

Monitoring

The aims of the monitoring process are to:

- Gather sufficient information to determine whether you are delivering the programme and outcomes as set out in your application in response to which we have agreed to fund you.
- Use the information to make decisions on future funding and at what level.
- Use the information to make the case for the arts to Government.

The nature of delivery will of course differ between arts sectors and individual organisations. However, there are a number of elements in all organisations which are so significant they will be monitored in all cases.

- Delivery of programming
- Quality of product and/or activity
- Organisational Governance
- Financial Management

At the conclusion of your project, you will have to complete and submit the Arts Council's Annual Funding Survey. Failure to submit this report on time may impact the assessment of your future grant submissions.

MONITORING – Verification Visits

Your project may also be subject to a Verification Visit by a member of ACNI staff or the NIAO to ensure that the project grant has been spent as agreed in your letter of offer and that all processes (e.g. procurement, recruitment, processing of payments within your organisation) related to project delivery were in compliance with letter of offer conditions and your own stated financial procedures. It is therefore important that you retain all the

project documentation which evidences this and maintain it in good order for inspection on request.

Children / Young People / Adults at risk

You must complete the Access NI section of the online application form. If you do not complete the Access NI section, your application form will be deemed ineligible. Organisations that work with children, young people and adults at risk need to ensure that their safeguarding systems and procedures adhere to best practice. Please see the information below to consider in relation to your own organisation's procedures and note that you must agree a protection policy statement as part of your application form.

It is a requirement of our funding that any organisation which comes into contact with children, young people and adults at risk, either directly through its programmes or indirectly through its services, must commit to a Safeguarding Policy which must have been formally agreed by your organisation.

If your Safeguarding Policy and Procedures are older than 3 years, please review and update them to ensure your policy and procedures are in line with best practice and legislation relating to protection issues. If you are successful in obtaining a grant, the Arts Council may, as part of its monitoring processes, ask to see these documents during the incoming year.

Equality of opportunity

It is a requirement of our funding that your organisation commits to equality of opportunity and good relations duty.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has a statutory duty under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between all Section 75 groups and you will note that you must agree an Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations policy statement as part of your application form.

How we will make our decision

Assessing Officers will consider applications using their professional judgement, based on the information provided within the application, knowledge of your organisation's track record (in relation to both arts delivery and its previous management of ACNI funding), knowledge of the wider arts landscape, and the competitive context in which all applications are evaluated. The assessment process detailed below results in an assessment report for each application.

The assessment process

Programme Criteria Assessment

Eligible applications will be assessed against the following criteria and rated **Outstanding, Strong, Met or Not Met** in relation to each criterion[15].

AFP Programme Criteria	
Artistic excellence and creative innovation	**O / S / M / NM**
Contribution to Sectoral Development	**O / S / M / NM**
Public Benefit and Engagement	**O / S / M / NM**
Organisational Capacity and Governance	**O / S / M / NM**

An overall rating of **Not Met** against any of the 4 criteria will mean that an application cannot be recommended for funding and will not advance past the first stage of moderation.

Rating	Description
Outstanding	The application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion[16] comprehensively and in an exemplary manner. There are no shortcomings whatsoever.
Strong	The application addresses the criterion very well. It gives clear, convincing information on the evidence needed. Any concerns or areas of weakness are minor.

[15] Further detail on the assessment of these criteria can be found at Appendix 1, p 24.

[16] Each of the 4 main criteria will include a number of sub-criteria, which are set out in Appendix 1.

Met	The application addresses the criterion to a sufficient degree, although some improvements could be made. It gives information on nearly all of the evidence needed, although there are some gaps.
Not Met	The application provides insufficient evidence or relevant information in the context of the criterion and is not compelling or persuasive in a competitive funding context.

Risk assessment

A risk assessment will be carried out on the application, which will then be rated **Minor, Moderate or Major** in relation to risk. The assessment will consider the applicant's ability to deliver the programme of work as set out in the application and the associated risk to ACNI's funding investment, both in terms of the applicant's capacity/governance and its financial stability. Any issues raised as a result of previous verification visits can also impact this rating.

The decision process

Assessing Officers' assessments and recommendations are subject to a moderation process, which involves a number of discussion stages.

Stage 1 Moderation

Arts Development Officers will present and discuss their assessment reports and risk ratings within their teams. This stage considers whether an individual application meets the minimum quality requirements across the 4 criteria and can proceed to the remaining assessment and financial recommendation stages. Applications which have achieved a rating of **Not Met** against any criterion will be rejected at this stage.

Stage 2 Moderation

Arts Development Officers will present and discuss applications within the wider strategic context of their artform within their teams, and the Assessing Officer will present their financial recommendations.

Stage 3 Moderation

All assessments and financial recommendations from the previous stages are considered by the Heads of artform teams. Heads of consider the recommendations in relation to the budgetary provision and in the context of the range of artforms, types of organisation, geographical spread and risk to ensure balance across the entire AFP portfolio.

Stage 4 Moderation

Heads of artform teams present their financial recommendations as agreed at their Stage 3 meeting to the Senior Management Team. Final discussion in the context of the budgetary provision and risk (including equality impacts) to ensure balance across the entire AFP portfolio.

Final decision

Financial recommendations resulting from Stage 4 Moderation and their equality impacts are considered by the Board, which makes the final decision. Where necessary the Board will reserve the right to use its discretion in reaching award decisions, based on the need to maintain a balanced portfolio within the funds at its disposal.

Is the Arts Council decision final?

There is a review procedure, which is available on the website and will be sent out to any unsuccessful applicants.

Other information

Email Notifications

The online application system has been tested and is sending out relevant notifications. We are, however, aware that some applicants to online grants programmes may experience issues such as the account holder not receiving links to reset passwords, not receiving notifications of when applications are edited and saved, nor when applications have been submitted. These issues relate to those account holders with email addresses from the following email providers – btinternet, yahoo and virgin – and customised email addresses.

The potential issues lie with those email providers and are beyond the control of the Arts Council; if encountered they need to be addressed by the relevant email provider.

To avoid any such email problems, we would recommend that accounts are set up using Gmail or Outlook email addresses and that these are used as your contact email. Where applicants may have previous accounts with other email addresses, we will be able to transfer historical information to new accounts if required. The Arts Council is not responsible for any issues arising or communications missed due to your email provider or your computer/browser/network settings.

In addition, to avoid the blocking of any application-related emails or information, you should ensure that the addresses mail@grantapplication.com **and** mailuk@grantapplication.com **will not be blocked by your email or firewall programmes.**

Finally

If you have any queries about the programme or need any help or advice completing the application, please contact the relevant Arts Council officer- see above.

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on request in large print format and disk, and also on the Arts Council's website here: http://www.artscouncil-ni.org .

APPENDIX 1

AFP Programme Criteria
C1: Artistic excellence and creative innovation **We will take the following C1 Sub-criteria into account when assessing your application** • Your organisation's track record of delivering work of artistic excellence in 2026/27[17] • The quality of your proposed 2027/28 programme • The level of innovation in your proposed 2027/28 programming **C1 assessment will be based on the following** o Information provided in your application (including enclosures) o Knowledge of your organisation's track record o Knowledge of the artform / arts practice context of your proposal
C2: Contribution to Sectoral Development **We will take the following C2 Sub-criteria into account when assessing your application:** • How your organisation works in partnership with other organisations both within the arts sector (within your own area of practice and cross-artform) and beyond it to develop the arts sector within Northern Ireland. • How you support the development of artistic talent/arts practice of artists/practitioners from Northern Ireland (this could include commissioning new work, mentoring, supporting artists/practitioners to learn new skills, or offering time/space/resources to develop). • Your organisation's policy on the remuneration of artists **OR** *if you are a sectoral support organisation* - How your organisation promotes best practice within all aspects of the sector, including in relation to the remuneration of artists. • How your organisation works to reduce the environmental impact of its activities **C2 assessment will be based on the following** o Information provided in your application (including enclosures) o Knowledge of your organisation's track record o Knowledge of the artform / arts practice context of your proposal
C3: Public Benefit and Engagement **We will take the following C3 Sub-criteria into account when assessing your application:**

[17] *…high-quality support to the arts sector* - For sectoral support organisations only

- Your digital engagement strategy, if you have one.
- The geographic range of the work you will deliver in 2027/28
- How you will work to increase the number and range of people who have the opportunity to experience or participate in high-quality art (this can include, for example, touring or plans to support, produce and distribute creative content and experiences digitally).
- Your plans for keeping current audiences and developing new ones[18] or, if *you are a sectoral support organisation,* how you will work to support audience development and information capture within the arts sector.
- How you track your current audience and collect feedback from them[19].

C3 assessment will be based on the following

- Information provided in your application (including enclosures)
- Knowledge of your organisation's track record of engagement
- Knowledge of the artform / arts practice context of your proposal

C4: Resilience, Organisational Capacity and Governance

We will take the following C4 Sub-criteria into account when assessing your application:

- Your organisation's track record of financial management.
- The financial resilience of your organisation, including your level of reserves and how effective you are at maintaining / building them.
- Your organisation's approach to fundraising and/or generating income from sources other than the Arts Council to strengthen the resilience of the organisation.
- How you consider risks to the successful delivery of your programme of work and put in place plans to mitigate these risks.
- The appropriateness of your organisation's financial procedures / controls and financial reporting.
- How your board and sub-committees (where relevant) are structured and what training or induction board and committee members receive.
- The range of skills presented by your board members and the suitability of these skills in relation to your organisation's activity and management.
- Evidence of Board leadership and oversight through planning, communication and reporting mechanisms.
- The appropriateness of your organisation's staffing structure in relation to the management and delivery of your organisation's activities.
- Evidence of a fair and open recruitment process for staff and board members
- Evidence of succession planning in relation to key staff positions

C4 assessment will be based on the following

[18] For example, marketing strategy / budget, social media engagement etc.

[19] For example, through audience databases, memberships/subscription list, surveys, evaluations, box office analysis.

- Information provided in your application (including enclosures)
- Knowledge of your organisation's track record in terms of governance and financial management
- Knowledge of your organisation's management of previous ACNI grant awards (AFP and other programmes) including, but not limited to, how you have complied with Letter of Offer monitoring and reporting requirements, eg timely financial reporting, AFS Survey submission.
- The degree to which AFP funding is critical to the overall sustainability of your organisation, including consideration of the quantum and diversity of your organisation's total income, and the size and nature of your reserves

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