

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Musical Instruments for Individuals

Application Guidance Notes

Deadline for Applications: 12 noon, Monday 28 July 2025

Decisions: September 2025

Please note that all instruments must be purchased and delivered **by Tuesday 31 March 2026**

If you are unable to meet these conditions, you should **NOT** apply to this scheme as the Arts Council will not meet any costs incurred beyond this period.



**arts
council**
of Northern Ireland



Department for
Communities

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme.

These guidance notes give information on who is eligible to apply to the programme and how to submit an application. It also describes how your application will be assessed, how decisions are made and what you will be asked to do if you are awarded a grant.

If you are looking for information on other Musical Instrument Schemes, guidance notes for all schemes are available on our [website \(opens in a new window\)](#). **You should read the guidance notes for each scheme to find the most suitable for you and your project idea.**

A general summary of who each scheme is aimed at is given below.

Musical Instrument Scheme	Who is the scheme aimed at?
Musical Instruments for Bands	Bands based in Northern Ireland, which are formally constituted. Eligible band types: accordion orchestras/bands (part, melody or marching); brass bands; concert bands; flute bands (part, melody or marching); pipe bands; wind bands.
Musical Instruments for Professional & Non-professional Performing Groups	Professional and non-professional <u>performing</u> groups, involved in <u>regular performance</u> in any genre, who are based in and will make regular use of the instruments in Northern Ireland.
Musical Instruments for Individuals ¹	Professional musicians who are from or currently reside in Northern Ireland (please note that you must be based in Northern Ireland ² and make regular use of the instrument in Northern Ireland) AND who are working as a high-level performer in a solo capacity or as part of a small group / chamber ensemble in any musical genre.

In addition, a number of other schemes are offered under the umbrella of the Support for Individual Artists Programme which provide funding support for projects by individuals. You can find information and guidance on those schemes on our website at [Arts Council for Northern Ireland Funding for Individuals \(opens in a new window\)](#).

¹ Further funding schemes for individuals are available on the ACNI website: [Funding for Individuals | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)

² Please note that the Arts Council may seek additional confirmation of where you are based, including documentary evidence if required.

Getting Help With Your Application

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on our website [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Musical Instruments for Individuals \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to offering clear and accessible application processes and programmes that are open to everyone. If you have any access needs and are thinking about making an application, we can help to make sure that you're supported during the application process.

We have a number of ways we can support you to make your application:

- Arts Officers can offer general guidance to applicants on making an application
- If you are d/Deaf, disabled, or neurodivergent, University of Atypical can provide support with completing your application. **Please contact University of Atypical as soon as possible to ensure sufficient time for the support process.** Phone: 028 90239450; Email: access@universityofatypical.org.
- Other accessibility support for disabled applicants: The Arts Council of Northern Ireland can make information available in other formats tailored to individual requests for the application in other formats e.g. large print, braille, audio, Easy Read and British Sign Language

Please contact us at artgrants@artscouncil-ni.org if you need further assistance with your application including alternative language versions.

Further contact details for all our Artform staff can be found on the Arts Council Website [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland welcomes applications from the widest possible range of individuals, representing all categories under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. **We particularly welcome applications by disabled artists and by artists from the generally unionist community as applications from both these demographics are currently under-represented across our programmes aimed at individuals.**

Aims of the Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme

The Arts Council has designed this programme to provide funding for highly skilled, exceptional, high-profile performing musicians working **only** at a professional level who seek support for the purchase of high quality instruments that are central to their performing career. This award is open to musicians working as a high-level performer in a solo capacity or as part of a small group / chamber ensemble in any musical genre. This scheme is aimed at providing instruments for rehearsal and performance.

Applicants must evidence:

- That they are clearly a high quality, high impact artist
- That they have the respect of their peers and are acknowledged by senior artists or practitioners in their field with a public profile
- That they have received international or national awards, prizes and performances
- A strong record of significant work of outstanding potential;
- Originality, challenge and/or artistic innovation or innovation in practice;
- A clear, realistic view of the potential development of their career over years;
- A coherent, targeted, scheduled plan for artistic growth which clearly articulates their capacity to exploit the opportunity and how they will do it.

Is your project timeframe suitable?

You should only apply to this programme if you will be able to complete the procurement, purchase **and delivery** of your requested instrument between date of notification of award (September 2025) and the 31 March 2026. Eligible expenditure can only be incurred within these dates and the Arts Council will not cover any costs incurred outside that timeframe. If you are unable to meet these conditions, you should NOT apply to this scheme as the Arts Council will not meet any costs incurred outside this period.

How much funding is available?

Please keep in mind that the amount of money available is limited and demand for funds is likely to be extremely high. It is not usually possible to fund all applications which simply meet the criteria.

We will aim to distribute our funds as widely as possible and may take account in the assessment of your application the level of support you have previously received or are currently receiving, as well as your management of any previous grants.

Please note:

- You may apply for one instrument only.
- The minimum award will be £500; the maximum, £10,000. Your request must be within this range.

- Up to 100% of the total cost of the instrument will be awarded.
- You will need to provide at least 2 quotes for the requested instrument; more if the value of the item is above £5,000 (see pages 13 – 14 below)
- Remember that the grant will be paid in 2 stages (see page 17 below)
- You should be realistic in your expectations and bear in mind the limited nature of the funds available.
- Once awarded, grants cannot be increased.
Support provided by this award will be made available through a grant payment to the individual musician.

How much partnership funding do you need?

No partnership funding is required however the Arts Council may not be able to fund 100% of your request. If your proposal cost is greater than the request, you must detail the total cost of your project and all other sources of funding in your application.

Eligibility

Who can apply?

The Arts Council welcomes applications from the widest possible range of individuals and in particular from applicants categorised under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

In addition, in order to be eligible to apply to this programme **you must be a professional musician**, and must be

- living in Northern Ireland, who will make regular use of the instrument in Northern Ireland;
(ACNI's budgets are limited and subject to extremely high demand. Our priority must be for artists living and regularly contributing to the arts within Northern Ireland. If you are primarily living in another region of the UK, Republic of Ireland or elsewhere (i.e. you live in that region for the majority of the year), you should apply to the Arts Councils in the relevant jurisdiction. Where the Arts Council has concerns regarding this matter, we may seek further clarification from you with regard to this including documentary evidence.)

AND

- working as a high-level performer in a solo capacity or as part of a small group / chamber ensemble in any musical genre.

Eligible applicants must also

- Have made a contribution to artistic activities in Northern Ireland for a minimum period of **1** year within the last 5 years.
- Be at least 18yrs old and not in secondary education.

Who cannot apply?

- Non-professional musicians
- Individuals under the age of 18 or still in secondary education
- Applicants who have previously received an award from the Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme in the previous 8 years.
- Applicants who have broken the conditions of any previous ACNI award.

What can you apply for?

- Instruments for rehearsal and performance
- The instrument applied for must be the **primary instrument** of the applicant or one in which the applicant can demonstrate a track record of performance.
- In addition to musical instruments, the following items are eligible:
 - Bows
 - Drum heads
 - Drum sticks / brushes
 - Effects pedals
 - Electro-acoustic equipment
 - Instrument cases
 - Reeds
 - Shoulder rests
 - Mutes

How you must use the purchased instrument

- Awarded musicians must make regular (not necessarily exclusive) use of the instrument in Northern Ireland for at least three years. In the case of pianos or other large non-portable instruments, the instrument will be housed in the musician's normal place of practice³.
- Applicants must make adequate provision for housing, insurance, care, maintenance and repair of the instrument.

What you cannot apply for

Please note that you cannot apply for *equipment* only, without an associated instrument. (although you can request a bow only). If your application requests only equipment (e.g. an effects pedal) it will be made ineligible.

- Instruments that have been pre-ordered with a deposit prior to the issue of a letter of offer
- Second-hand instruments or equipment
- Choir risers
- Insurance/instrument maintenance costs
- Rehearsal space purchase / rental

³ Please note: all awards may be subject to Verification Visits by Arts Council staff. The verification includes physical inspection of any items purchased at the location at which they are housed.

- Uniforms
- Travel / expenses (e.g. shipping) related to purchase of instruments
- Tuition, conducting, coaching fees
- Tuition CDs, DVDs.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive. If you have any queries about the eligibility of a proposal, you should contact and speak with the relevant art form officer before submitting an application [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us \(opens in a new window\)](#).

How to apply

Help with your application

These Guidance Notes are available on request in large print format and disk, and also on the Arts Council's website here: [Arts Council of Northern Ireland \(opens in a new window\)](#).

If you need any help or advice completing the application, please contact us on:

Head of Music

Ciaran Scullion

cscullion@artscouncil-ni.org

Arts Development Officer: Traditional Arts

Fíona Ní Mhearáin

fnimhearain@artscouncil-ni.org

Arts Development Officer: Music

Jamie Thompson

jthompson@artscouncil-ni.org

Assistant Arts Development Officer: Music incl. Bands

Shannon Dougan

ShannonDougan@artscouncil-ni.org

NB: Officers' advice is restricted to general proposal eligibility and general advice on costs. Officers cannot give consideration to detailed budgets or comment on written proposals until a full application has been submitted. (Please note also, that it is only on submission of the full application that a final determination of eligibility can be made.)

Full staff details are available on our 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. You will find a link to the Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme webpage here [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Musical Instruments for Individuals \(opens in a new window\)](#)

- Online applications may be edited, saved and returned up to the closing date.
- 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 leave sufficient time to upload all documents to the system as there can be long delays as the closing deadline approaches and the system will shut down at 12 noon precisely on the closing date, Monday 28 July 2025.**
- If your complete 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.**

Please remember that it is your responsibility to ensure that we receive the application form and uploaded enclosures by the closing deadline. The Arts Council will not accept responsibility for applications which are not successfully submitted by the programme deadline.

Ineligible applications

Your application will be ineligible if:

- it is not submitted by the programme deadline;
- all of the necessary enclosures have not been uploaded with the application – see info on Mandatory Enclosures below;
- you have not submitted at least two suppliers' quotations **for each proposed instrument** to be purchased (depending on instrument value);
- it relates to instruments already purchased or which will be purchased before funding decisions are made; or
- it is not completed in full.

Mandatory enclosures

These are the documents which you must provide in conjunction with your application which must be uploaded to your online form via the attachments page.

You must upload the following mandatory enclosures to your Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme application **before** submission:

- Your Artistic CV
- Reference from senior artist or practitioner in your genre
- Audio or video recordings of your performance of **2 contrasting works** of no more than 8 minutes each
- **2 or more quotations** for your requested instrument and for each item of equipment⁴, depending on cost (**see pages 13 - 14 below**).
- A scheduled plan for artistic growth and career development;
- **IF** in addition to your primary instrument, you are also requesting to purchase other eligible items, you must provide a detailed budget listing all the requested elements of your application request.

Please keep in mind the following important points:

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

⁴ If you are requesting a highly specialized instrument or item of equipment for which there is only one supplier, you must upload a statement explaining why this is the case.

- The submission of weblinks or website addresses in lieu of enclosure documents or quotations is **not** acceptable – except where expressly stated as permissible, ie. for audio/video recordings of your performance - and will result in your application being made ineligible.

Detailed guidance on mandatory enclosures

Further information on all mandatory enclosures can be found below. If you have any queries about any of the documents, please contact the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Staff details are available on our website - [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us](#) ([opens in a new window](#)).

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

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Artistic CV	Online Application	Your Artistic CV should show us your track record of artistic practice and contribution to the arts. Starting with the most recent examples of your practice, it should include exhibitions, performances, publications, collaborations etc, as well as any prizes, nominations, awards, commissions, that you have received. If you have a 3 rd level/post-graduate or professional qualifications <u>related to your practice</u> ⁵ , you should also list them in your CV. <u>NB:</u> - Do not provide unnecessary narrative. - Please note web links to the applicant’s website or to examples of artistic practice are not acceptable.
Reference	Online Application	The reference should be a statement from senior professionals / artists / practitioners including from institutions, labels, promoters, agents, festivals for example to vouch for your standing as an artist in your genre. The reference should be signed unless there are extenuating circumstances which prevent this. Digital/typed signatures are acceptable.

⁵ Do not provide information in relation to educational attainment not related to your artistic practice, or below 3rd level education, ie. do not list O’Levels, GCSEs or A Levels etc.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		<p>The reference must include contact details for the referee (email address/contact numbers/postal address).</p> <p>Note: reviews (such as those published on websites and in newspapers) will not be accepted in lieu of references.</p>
2 Audio / Video recordings	Online Application	<p>You must upload audio or video recordings of 2 contrasting works of no more than 8 minutes each. (These must be of suitable recording quality.)</p> <p><u>Acceptable File Formats</u> Sound files : (MP3, WMA) Video files : (QuickTime – AVI, MOV, MP4, WMV)</p> <p>Weblinks Instead of uploading audio or video files, you may provide weblinks to audio or visual recordings of 2 contrasting works of no more than 8 minutes each. These should be provided in a separate enclosure document entitled “Weblinks”.</p> <p>Please note: you provide weblinks at your own risk. If the weblinks provided are not working during the assessment period, the enclosures will be considered missing, and your application will be ineligible for assessment. NB: You must not provide links to any subscription service that requires a login to access. If you provide any such links, the enclosures will be deemed missing, and your application will be made ineligible.</p>
A scheduled plan for artistic growth and career development;	Online Application	<p>You must provide a detailed plan of how you will use this instrument over the next year to improve your skills and enhance your career. This must include rehearsal, planning, organisation or other musician engagement/collaboration as well as future performances.</p> <p>The plan must be targeted and coherent.</p>
Quotations for the instrument and each Item of equipment	Online Application	<p>The number of quotations you must provide depends on the cost of the instrument or item, as follows:</p>

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		<p>(i) 2 quotations for items up to £5,000 in value (excluding VAT);</p> <p>(ii) 3 quotations between £5,000 and £30,000 in value (excluding VAT);</p> <p>Quotes do not require delivery dates. However, in the event that you receive an award, all instruments (and any other equipment purchased using the award) must be purchased and delivered by 31 March 2026 in order to be an eligible grant cost. Should you receive an award, the Arts Council will not cover any costs incurred either before the date of a letter of offer or after 31 March 2026.</p> <p>Acceptable Quotations: Scans of original documents; email quotes; screen captures from online retailer sites.</p> <p>Unacceptable Quotations: Weblinks or website addresses in lieu of quotations <u>are not acceptable</u> and will result in your application being made ineligible. Please note that illegible quotations will not be accepted.</p> <p>If you are requesting a highly specialized instrument or item of equipment for which there is only one supplier, you must upload a statement explaining why this is the case. Please note that the Arts Council will make its own judgement on the validity of your rationale.</p> <p>IMPORTANT NOTE: If any submitted quotation is found to be fraudulent in any regard, your application will be made ineligible. It is the responsibility of all applicants to source reputable suppliers.</p>
Detailed Application Budget	Online Application	IF you are requesting more than one item, that is, if in addition to your primary instrument, you are also requesting to purchase other eligible items, you must provide a detailed budget listing all the requested elements of your application request.

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 as 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 be assessed by an Arts Development Officer or Head of Artform Team.
- Assessments will be subject to a moderation process.
- The Arts Council will contact you with the final decision by letter by email. If rejected, the Arts Council will provide you with detailed reasons for the rejection.

How we will make our decision

Assessment criteria

We will assess your project against the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Quality of the Artist

Criterion 2: Potential for new instrument / equipment to benefit the applicant's artistic development and career

Criterion 3: Financial viability/Value for Money

It is very important that you think carefully about how your application satisfies these criteria and use the application form and enclosures to demonstrate this to us. Your project must meet all the programme criteria.

Criterion 1 – Quality of the Artist: This will be assessed using the Artistic CV, reference and recordings submitted with your application, in addition to our knowledge of your previous work and the wider sectoral landscape.

Criterion 2 – Potential for new instrument / equipment to benefit the applicant's artistic development and career: This will be assessed using the information you provide in your application, your scheduled plan for growth and our knowledge of the wider sectoral landscape. You should detail in the application form how the instrument / equipment requested will benefit your artistic development and career.

Criterion 3 - Financial Viability/Value for Money: This will be assessed using the quotes you provide with the application and the content of your application form where relevant. If you are a previous ACNI grant recipient, we may also use our knowledge of your management of previous Arts Council grants.

How are decisions made?

All applications will be assessed by an assessor against the criteria as listed above, taking into account the programme's aims. Assessor recommendations are then subject to a moderation process.

Is the Arts Council decision final?

There is a review procedure, which is available on the web site and will be sent out to any unsuccessful applicants. Please note however that you cannot ask for a review on the basis of our assessment of artistic quality.

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 purposes for which the award can be used.

- You will not be able to incur project expenditure until you have met certain conditions of grant and received your letter of offer from the Arts Council. You should take this into account when planning your project.
- 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 expenditure must be incurred.
- **If there are any changes to your project from the original application, the Arts Council must be informed immediately in writing before any 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.

How will payment be made?

Payment of the grant will normally be made in 2 stages. The first payment of up to 80% of the value of the award will be made upon provision of a supplier's invoice. The second and final payment will be made **retrospectively upon proof of payment and delivery**. Payments will be made through BACS transfer.

Procurement of goods and services

Applicants must seek the best value for money in relation to all proposed instrument and equipment purchases; best value for money is defined as the most advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to meet your requirements.

Successful applicants must ensure that any purchases made with grant funds are in compliance with the guidance on procurement as stated in their Letter of Offer and as reproduced on pages 13 – 14 above. **They must also maintain a clear audit trail of robust decision-making and retain all appropriate procurement documentation.** The Arts Council will reserve the right to inspect this documentation at any point, and it will be specifically requested should your project be selected for a Verification Visit.

Post-project monitoring

- At a set date following project completion, you will be required to return an Evaluation Report detailing how and to what extent the new instrument / equipment has impacted on your performances and career.
- **Verification Visits** - Your project may also be subject to a verification visit by ACNI staff to ensure that the grant has been spent as agreed in your letter of offer and that all processes (e.g. procurement, insurance, location of instrument) related to your application are in compliance with LOO conditions. It is therefore important that you retain all the project documentation which evidences this.

The Arts Council will retain a financial interest in the instrument purchased for a period of between 5 and 10 years, dependant on the value of the instrument purchased. **You will not be able to dispose of any instrument or equipment within that time period, which will be stated in your letter of offer, without the Council's approval.**

Other Information

Openness and accountability

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 any information held by us (which will include your application) is potentially accessible by the public.

Information supplied by you will be held in manual and / or computerised files and also on a computer-based grants management system. Reports from the information you supply and from comments made on your application by external assessors and staff members are likely to be held on both manual and computer-based systems. The information you supply will be made available to those assessing any other grant applications you make.

By submitting your application, you waive any right to raise any type of proceedings against the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as a consequence of, or in contemplation of, any disclosure of the contents of your application in response to an information request made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Data protection

Data held on our grants management system is used for of the following purposes; application assessing, accounting purposes, statistical reporting, and for contacting you. For full details of how the Arts Council of Northern Ireland uses personal data please refer to our Privacy Policy available on our website : [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Privacy Policy \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Applying online

Applications to the Musical Instruments for Individuals Programme will only be accepted online.

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.

Should you be affected by a problem which cannot be resolved with an email provider, we would strongly recommend that accounts are set up using Gmail or Outlook email addresses. Where applicants may have previous accounts with other email addresses, we will be able to transfer historical information to new accounts if required.

And finally...

If you have any queries about the programme or need any help or advice completing the application, please contact the Arts Council. A list of staff can be found on the website - [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us \(opens in a new window\)](#).

These Guidance Notes are available on request in large print format and disk, and also on the Arts Council's website here: [Arts Council of Northern Ireland \(opens in a new window\)](#).