Arts Council of Northern Ireland

National Lottery Organisations Digital Evolution Awards

Deadline for Applications: 12 noon, 27 November 2025
Decisions: February 2026

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

Please Note: this programme is for proposals which will complete by **28 February 2027**

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Individual Artists Digital Evolution Awards scheme. This programme is administered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland with match funding support from Future Screens NI.

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.

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on our website at [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Organisations Digital Evolution Awards (ODE) (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 Organisations Digital Evolution Awards

Programme Objectives:

- Upskilling NI arts organisations in the use of new, emerging, and immersive Technology
- Creation of excellent Digital Art*

Programme Priorities:

1. Creation of digital arts
2. Creating the opportunities for audiences to experience digital and immersive art
3. Encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration

*What is Digital Art within the context of this programme?

> For this programme digital art is artwork that is created exclusively in the digital space; it can either exist in the digital space or be translated into a physical object or tangible experience through technology. Work that exists only in the digital space can be artwork that is consumed online or offline; the latter having some form of installation in a venue.
>
> This grant programme does not cover the simple digitisation of art (in any artform) or performance and must relate to the development of your artistic practice and digital

capability. Filmed performances, audio recordings or video capture of material that would be intended for in-person performance is not suitable as the output of a project proposal, and applications applying for such output activity will be rejected as ineligible. Such filmed or recorded elements *can* be used as assets within a piece of digital art, for example within animation, virtual experiences, or app development.

Is your proposal timeframe suitable?

This programme only relates to those proposals that will take place between **1 March 2026 and 28 February 2027**. All eligible expenditure must be incurred within these dates. If this is not the case for your proposal, 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?

- The maximum award value will be £10,000.

How much partnership funding do you need?

No partnership funding is required, but if your proposal cost is greater than the award value you must detail the total cost of your project and all other sources of funding in your application.

Eligibility

Who can apply?

Eligible applicants to this scheme are as follows:

- Arts organisations, registered charities and other organisations which cannot distribute profits.
- Groups of organisations working together to deliver specific projects.
- Organisations currently in receipt of an Arts Council Annual funding Programme award may apply for:
    - projects of an exceptional nature which were not anticipated at the time of their AFP application.

Who cannot apply?

- For-profit organisations.
- Individuals or sole traders.
- Broadcasters (excluding community service broadcasters).
- Central Government Departments.
- Umbrella organisations not previously funded by the Arts Council.
- Organisation who are in breach of the terms of previous ACNI grants.
- Organisations currently holding an Organisations Digital Evolution Award.
- Organisations who have been in receipt of a maximum of 3 awards for the development of digital evolution.

What you can apply for

Here are some examples of the type of project we are aiming to support through this scheme, this list is far from exhaustive.

- Creation of a virtual environment or augmented reality environment, such as augmented reality visual arts or sound overlay on venues or geographical spaces.
- Using technology to translate data into artistic content; for example, algorithms/Artificial Intelligence that create music or visual content from data input
- Series of events or exhibitions which showcase emerging and immersive artwork to NI audiences.
- App development for the delivery of artistic content; this could include gamification or making an artistic experience for consumption on digital devices. (Note: this does not include streaming of filmed / recorded performances)

- Piloting new forms of support to individual artists or organisations that results in the creation of digital art.
- Essential digital equipment and software up to a max 20% of Total Request Value (i.e. 20% of the total amount you are requesting from us in the application). All requests for hardware or software must be integral to project delivery and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by assessors.

Here are some examples that **would not** be considered through this scheme:

- Filmed theatrical or musical performances for online or offline distribution.
- Audio recording of music or literature recitals for online or offline distribution.
- Photography or filming of visual arts pieces for online or offline purposes.

If you are uncertain about the eligibility of a proposal, it is encouraged that you speak to ACNI's Creative Industries Officer prior to making your application.

Are collaborative projects eligible?

Collaborative applications with creative businesses, freelance creative industries practitioners or other arts organisations working together in **cross-discipline** projects/activities are encouraged. One application form should be used for the complete collaborative project.

Single artform collaborations are also eligible and your project may include creative industries freelancers / businesses with skills in relevant technologies to contribute towards the delivery of the project.

Collaborative projects must have a lead applicant – that is, the applicant in whose name the application is submitted and who, in the event of an award, will be the organisation responsible for managing the grant, and monitoring and reporting on the project. The lead applicant **must be based in Northern Ireland**.

What you cannot apply for
- Activities that are not arts related.
- New administrative or new salaried arts posts.
- Film or video production, purchase of assets for film and video, unless they are part of a piece of digital native art as detailed on page 2.
- Activities where contracts have been entered into before we issue a letter of commencement. We do recognise that certain preliminary work needs to take place,

but advertising of projects in advance of a Council decision is undertaken at the organisation's own risk.

- Capital costs over 20% of the Total Request Amount.

- Activities or events which duplicate what already exists.

- Website design and upkeep.

- Translations of literary works by Northern Irish artists into other languages.

- Costs already covered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, other funders, or other Government schemes.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

If you have any queries regarding the eligibility of your proposal, please contact Matthew Malcolm. Arts Council staff are currently working remotely however can be contacted by email. Staff contact details are available on the Arts Council website: [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Contact Us (opens in a new window)](#).

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 Organisations Digital Evolution Awards (ODE) (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,

Making an 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 Organisations Digital Evolution Awards scheme webpage : [Arts Council of Northern Ireland Organisations Digital Evolution Awards (ODE) (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, ie. 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 note, you will not be given additional time to submit any missing enclosures once the programme deadline has passed.**

- **Please ensure that you leave sufficient time to upload all documents to the system as there may be delays as the closing deadline approaches. Please note that the system will shut down at <u>12 noon precisely</u> on the closing date, Thursday 27 November 2025.**

- If your complete application with enclosures 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 time and date.

Mandatory enclosures

These are the documents which you must provide in conjunction with your application. 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.
- **All data must be PC compatible**. If non-PC compatible data is supplied, your application will not be assessed. 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.
- 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 application before submission:

- Constitution and/or Memorandum and Articles of Association*****
- 2025 Audited/Certified/adopted accounts*****
- Management accounts for the period up to 31 March 2025 (**if** the accounts provided are not for 2024/25 – see additional notes below)
- Detailed Project Description
- **Detailed Income and Expenditure budget for your project** - where possible, all costs above £1,000 should be broken down.
- Detailed description of how your project meets the programme criteria.

*If these documents are already available on the Government Funding Database, you do not have to upload them with your application.

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

- Copies of letters of offer from partnership funders or sponsors
- CVs or information on artist/s, groups, technical staff, other personnel you propose to employ as part of the project.

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 Arts Council of Northern Ireland by email at artgrants@artscouncil-ni.org.

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 made ineligible</u>.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Constitution and/or Memorandum and Articles of Association	Online Application	Only upload these documents to your application if not already available on the Government Funding Database. (**NB:** It is your responsibility to ensure the docs have been uploaded to the GFD, if not provided with your application.) 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.
Most recent set of Audited /Certified Accounts	Online Application	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 2024/25 (i.e. if your most recent accounts are for the 2023/24 financial year), we require a set of management accounts covering the intervening period up to March 2025. We require these accounts to assess the overall financial wellbeing of your organisation and to judge whether there is a need for Arts Council funding.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Management Accounts up to the period 31 March 2025	Online Application	Applicants are required to provide a copy of their organisation's most recent Audited/Certified Accounts. If the accounts provided with the application or uploaded to the GFD are not for the year 2025 (i.e. if your most recent audited accounts are for the 2024 financial year), we require a set of management accounts covering the 2024 financial year, up to March 2025. We require these accounts to assess the overall financial wellbeing of your organisation and to judge whether there is a need for Arts Council funding.
Detailed project description	Online Application	You should describe in detail the project you wish to deliver, describing the overall aims and objectives of the project and all the activities within the project. You should also include the following: • Detailed timeline for your project • How the final project outcome will be presented / which platform it will be presented on. • Locations and dates of any events within the project • Names of artists, tutors, facilitators, creative industries contractors for each event or project; OR details of the process you intend to use to select the artists / creative industries contractors. • If relevant projected participation in each event or project – numbers and whether they will actively participate or will be an audience for a final presentation. • Name of Project Manager for each major element, along with experience statement
Detailed description of how your project meets the programme criteria.	Online Application	The programme criteria are listed below. You must address each sub-criterion directly in no fewer than 200 and no more than 500 words. **You must address each sub-criterion separately; identify and number** your response to each so that the assessing officer can clearly see which sub-criterion you are addressing. If you do not separately address, identify and number each sub-criterion response, your enclosure will be ineligible.

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Detailed description of how your project meets the programme criteria continued		**Criterion 1: Public Benefit** (500 words maximum per sub-criteria) **1)** Describe how your project contributes to the Arts Council's strategy[1]. **2)** Describe how your project contributes to the growth of the digital arts in the community for new and existing audiences, and how it reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland society and culture. **3)** Describe how your project contributes to the digital upskilling within your organisations and/or the sector. **Criterion 2: Quality of Arts Activity** (500 words maximum per sub-criteria) **4)** Describe how your project offers creative vision and imaginative programming. **5)** Describe your project's production/performance/ presentation/facilitation and process. **6)** Give details of the artists, facilitators, and creative industries practitioners who will be involved with your project. **Criterion 3: Organisational/Project Viability and Quality of Management** (500 words maximum per sub-criteria) **7)** Describe how you have planned your project. **8)** Describe how your organisation is governed, including details of how often your board meets, reporting mechanisms, sub-committees, and training **9)** Describe how your organisation manages its finances.

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

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
Detailed I&E budget for your project	Online Application	This must be a detailed income and expenditure budget for the project, **which should indicate the requested ACNI contribution to each budget line**. You must include a breakdown of any budget line over £1,000 and itemize expenditure wherever possible (example "Staff time £5,000" must be broken down to give specific details of activities). You should also include details of how you have calculated any fees you are paying, e.g. hourly/daily/weekly rates. Where box office or sales are shown you should include details of pricing and numbers of tickets/publications to be sold. The Arts Council recognises non-monetary forms of assistance to a project, such as the following: - members of the public wishing to contribute time, experience and expertise to arts groups or organisations. - young people wishing to contribute time but who also wish to gain work experience and or accreditation and training. - professionals and or consultants wishing to donate their time, professional experience and expertise to organisations who would benefit from this resource. - employers who encourage and support employees in volunteering to bring their time, knowledge and expertise to groups and organisations requiring assistance. - free use of premises and/or equipment - free access to other services "In-kind" funding does **not** include the time given by your committee or board members to carry out their regular duties. If you are including "in-kind" support to your project, you MUST demonstrate how you have calculated this. The Arts Council accepts the following:

Mandatory Enclosure	Upload to	Guidance on Enclosure
		• the equivalent of the hourly minimum wage for members of the public and young people contributing time as described above. • a limit of £120 a day for professionals and/or consultants and employees volunteering their time the costing by the supplier for the use of premises, equipment, and other services You cannot include the costs of employing committee/board members or directors of the organisation to work on the project as research shows that the public regard this as inappropriate use of Lottery funds which are to be used for wider public benefit rather than private gain. You cannot include the costs of hospitality or alcoholic beverages. The only hospitality costs we will pay for are where they are integral to the project, for example, an arts conference where lunch is provided to delegates.
Copies of LOOs from Other Funders	Online Application	If you have any letters from sponsors or other funders you should include them with your application as demonstration of support.
Artists / Freelancer CVs	Online Application	If you know which artists and creative freelancers will be involved in your project, provide us with copies of their CVs. This will help us assess the quality of your proposal.

After you submit your application

- You will receive a Monitoring Form which will be published to your application account when you submit an application. You will receive an email advising you that the monitoring form is available for completion once it has been published to your account. You **must** complete and return the Monitoring Form by the timeframe specified as part of the application process. Failure to do so may affect eligibility.
- The Arts Council will acknowledge receipt of the application form.

- The Arts Council will undertake a completeness check on the application form and notify you if your application is ineligible.
- Eligible applications will be assessed by an Arts Development Officer.
- Assessors will consider applications using their professional judgement, based on the information provided within the application and enclosures, knowledge of your track record (in relation to both arts activity and your previous management of any ACNI funding), knowledge of the wider arts and digital development landscape, and the competitive context in which all applications are evaluated.
- Officer assessments will be subject to a moderation process which will include input from Future Screens NI.
- 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 proposal against the following criteria.

Public Benefit	Max Score	Assessed Against
1. Describe how your project contributes to the Arts Council's strategy.	5	*Detailed Project Description and Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosures.
2. Describe how your project contributes to the growth of the digital arts in the community for new and existing audiences, and how it reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland society and culture.	5	*Detailed Project Description and Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosures.
3. Describe how your project contributes to the digital upskilling within your organisations and/or the sector.	5	*Detailed Project Description and Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosures.
Quality of Arts Activity	Max Score	Assessed Against
4. Describe how your project offers creative vision and imaginative programming.	5	*Detailed Project Description and Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosures.
5. Describe your project's production/performance/ presentation/facilitation and process.	5	*Detailed Project Description* and *Detailed description of how your project meets the programme criteria* mandatory enclosures.
6. Give details of the artists, facilitators, and creative industries practitioners who will be involved with your project.	5	*Detailed Project Description* and *Detailed description of how your project meets the programme criteria* and *'Artists/Freelancer CVs'* mandatory enclosures.
Organisational/Project Viability and Quality of Management	Max Score	Assessed Against
7. Describe how you have planned your project.	5	*Detailed Project Description and Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosures.
8. Describe how your organisation is governed, including details of how often your board meets, reporting	5	*Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria* mandatory enclosure.

mechanisms, sub-committees, and training.		
9. Describe how your organisation manages its finances.	**5**	*Detailed Description of How your Project Meets the Programme Criteria, Accounts/Management Accounts* mandatory enclosures.

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

The decision process

Assessors will consider applications using their professional judgement, based on the information provided within the application and enclosures, knowledge of your track record (in relation to both arts activity and your previous management of any ACNI funding), knowledge of the wider arts and digital development landscape, and the competitive context in which all applications are evaluated.

Assessment recommendations are then subject to a moderation process including Future Screens NI.

Is the Arts Council Decision final?

There is a review procedure, which is available on the website and will be issued to any unsuccessful applicants upon request.

If you receive an award

Letter of Offer

Following the decision, Arts Council will issue successful applicants 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 expenditure until you have received your letter of offer from the Arts Council. You should take this into account when planning your proposal.

- 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 proposal 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.

- A pre-condition of grant drawdown will be the submission of signed MOUs between any partnership organisations for awards to collaborative projects.

- **If there are any changes to your agreed project from the original application, you must inform the Arts Council immediately in writing <u>before incurring any proposal expenditure.</u>** 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 payments will be made

Payments are normally made in stages each of which will have specific 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. Arts Council will make payments using BACS transfer only. You will need to complete and return the BACS form issued with your letter of offer.

Post-project monitoring

At the conclusion of your project, you will have to submit an End of Project Report and provide a final income and expenditure account for the project, in addition to evidencing the appropriate use of Arts Council and National Lottery branding throughout the course of project delivery. The project report will include:

- Details of how the project has benefited you as an organisation.

- An evaluation of the project – was it successful? Did you meet your targets? etc.

We may discuss with you how this information is to be collected.

Post-project monitoring – Verification Visits

Your project may also be subject to a verification process which will ensure that the project grant has been spent in accordance with your letter of offer. It is therefore important that you retain all the project documentation to evidence this.

Other information

If you have any queries about the programme or need any help or advice completing the application, please contact Matthew Malcolm.

These Guidance Notes and the relevant application form are available on request in large print format.

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 – btinernet, yahoo and virgin – and customised email addresses.

The issues lie with those email providers and are beyond the control of 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 prior to application to this scheme.

Good luck with your application!