

**Policy Screening  
ACNI Small Grants Programme  
13<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

## **Part 1. Policy scoping**

### **Information about the programme**

#### **Name of the policy**

ACNI Small Grants Programme

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#### **Is this an existing, revised or a new programme?**

This is a revised programme by ACNI and funded by Department for Communities.

#### **What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)**

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of this new programme to encourage greater participation in the arts; and to increase equality of access to and opportunities in the arts across all Section 75 groupings. In particular, this programme seeks to capture first time applicants and those underrepresented in local authority areas to give a more equitable opportunity and platform of entry into the arts sector. There is a particular focus on local authorities with relative low uptake of our funding, namely:

- Antrim & Newtownabbey
- Ards & North Down
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon
- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Fermanagh and Omagh
- Lisburn and Castlereagh
- Mid and East Antrim
- Mid Ulster
- Newry, Mourne and Down

The New Small Grants Programme aligns with ACNI's broader policy ecosystem by delivering practical, targeted support that advances long-term strategic goals around inclusion, regional balance, equality of opportunity, and community-level engagement in the arts. It acts as a mechanism for ensuring grassroots and first-time applicants can access arts funding, thereby complementing and extending the reach of ACNI's larger and more established programmes.

The Small Grants Programme did run from 2022-2023 but did not run in 2023-2024. This revised Programme offers and facilitates an entry point into the arts sector for those who have not applied before and for those groups and local authority areas that have low or unsuccessful application rates and representation in the arts sector in Northern Ireland.

##### **Our Outcomes**

We have derived a set of outcomes for the art sector, and a set of outcomes that the sector then delivers as a result for society.

#### **Arts Sector**

- A sector that develops and looks after its people and is more inclusive.
- A sector that is more supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.
- A sector that facilitates platforming and visibility of grassroots organisations.

#### **Society**

- People from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.
- Development and involvement of creativity, diversity, innovation and inclusion.
- A sector that is more valued across society and government.

The outcomes overlap with one another and are reliant on one another. These detailed below are illustrative of the programme and its alignment to ACNI's business and strategy plan for engagement and development for 2025-2026.

These outcomes are aligned with increasing engagement overall with hard-to-reach groups, people who do not or have not applied to the Arts Council before or local authority areas outside of the Belfast area that have a low rate of applicants, no applicants or unsuccessful applicants.

This includes:

- Support efforts by arts organisations to increase audiences, participation engagement with underrepresented groups, including in particular younger people from more deprived areas, those living in rural areas and areas distant from Belfast, those not currently engaged in arts activities.
- Strengthen engagement with artists, arts organisations, local authorities and grassroots organisations through building relationships through regular forums and/or meetings with artists and arts organisations based in rural areas, with freelance artists and ethnic majority artists.
- Monitoring of underrepresented groups and geographic areas.

**Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?**

**If so, explain how.**

The purpose of this programme is that all Section 75 categories will benefit from this policy. However, ACNI understands there are potential barriers for some groups within this, which this programme is hoping to redress with specific actions in place to improve access for these groups.

**Who initiated or wrote the policy?**

ACNI led the revision of this programme. As the development and funding agency for the arts in Northern Ireland, ACNI distributes public money and National Lottery funds to develop and deliver a wide variety of arts projects, events and initiatives. From theatre and literature to art in the community, we work in partnership with hundreds of artists, arts organisations and venues.

To inform our draft strategy, ACNI engaged with the arts sector, section 75 groups and other key stakeholders, such as Local Authorities. This identified the need for targeted schemes to reach a wider group of artists, arts audiences and participants. This revised programme is included in the business plan covering the period of 2025-2026.

**Who owns and who implements the policy?**

ACNI is the agency responsible for the implementation and administration of the Small Grants Programme

All organisations applying will be welcome to contact ACNI for further advice in advance of making an application. Existing ACNI clients will be recommended to contact their Arts Council Officer before applying so that they can receive the appropriate support/advice to complete their application.

All applications will be judged on merit, regardless of any previous relationship with ACNI or DfC.

**Implementation factor**

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the programme? No.

If yes, are they

☐

financial

☐

legislative

☐

other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Main stakeholders affected**

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the programme will impact upon?

☐

staff

☒

service users

☒

other public sector organisations

☒

voluntary/community/trade unions

☒

other, please specify - commercial organisations/venues

**Other policies with a bearing on this policy**

The following existing Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) funding schemes support or complement the aims of the New Small Grants Programme. All are owned and implemented by ACNI:

1. Annual Funding Programme (AFP) – Provides core and programming support for key arts organisations across Northern Ireland. It shares the Small Grants Programme's priorities around engagement, access, and inclusion, particularly for communities underrepresented in the arts.
2. National Lottery Project Funding – Offers medium-scale project support and targets equality of access for Section 75 groups, mirroring the Small Grants Programme's emphasis on participation by underrepresented communities.
3. Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP) – Supports individual artists, including those from minority or marginalised backgrounds. While focused on individuals rather than organisations, it complements Small Grants by enabling more inclusive programming and participation.
4. Small Capital Grants Programme – Funds improvements to physical spaces that increase accessibility for disabled and older people, thus indirectly supporting the aims of Small Grants when projects take place in these enhanced venues.
5. Arts and Mental Health Partnership Programme – Aims to improve wellbeing through arts engagement. It shares the Small Grants Programme's focus on social outcomes through participation.
6. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy and Action Plan (2024–34) – Provides the strategic framework for advancing equality across all ACNI programmes. The Small Grants Programme operationalises this policy by prioritising participation from all Section 75 groups and underrepresented geographies.
7. The Arts Council also does run the Rural Engagement Programme and the Ethnic Minority Residency Programme every year, which are aimed to facilitate arts funding for rural artists and Ethnic Minority art practitioners and organisations in areas outside of Belfast. ACNI also is in the early stages of re initiating engagement Ethnic Minority facilitation, forums and discussions, and in what that format will look like. There is a need for better peer support and networking opportunities to reduce professional isolation and recognition of making creative spaces for artists that support equality and inclusion accessibility. ACNI are seeking to create a more purposeful Minority Ethnic Action Plan and planned engagement in 2025 with renewed membership and partners. To assess the situation on the ground, The Arts Council organises and facilitates a Rural Engagement forum and with Freelance Artists. They demonstrate that artists have differing needs based on their geographical locations and there is a need to generate new opportunities for emergent artists, a need to value the differing skill sets of artists – not monolithic and a plan for succession planning in areas outside of Belfast. This dovetails into the current work relationship that ACNI is conducting with Local Authorities to identify and seek the needs of their varying area after we have monitored and measured which Local Authorities are underrepresented by Arts Council Funding. The data below highlights which local authorities are underrepresented and part of the purpose of the New Small Grants Programme is to also to capture first time applicants within low catchment local authority areas.

### **Available evidence**

#### **Data Sources:**

- AFS Survey 2023-2024
- ACNI EQIA Reporting 2023-2024
- NISRA Census 2021
- Continuous Household Survey 2023-2024

While this data shows strong overall engagement, it highlights some disparities related to gender, disability, age, deprivation, and caring responsibilities. These findings reinforce the importance of targeted measures—such as accessibility support and outreach to marginalised groups—within the Small Grants Programme to promote equality of opportunity and reduce barriers to participation.

## **Section 75 Data – AFS Survey Data 2023-2024**

### **Religion**

| <b>Religious faith</b>                  | <b>Managers</b> | <b>Specialist Staff</b> | <b>Artists</b> | <b>Other Staff</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Buddhist                                | 1               | 0                       | 2              | 0                  | 3            |
| Catholic                                | 67              | 49                      | 97             | 200                | 413          |
| Protestant                              | 31              | 25                      | 64             | 94                 | 214          |
| Hindu                                   | 2               | 1                       | 5              | 0                  | 8            |
| Islam/Muslim                            | 2               | 1                       | 5              | 0                  | 8            |
| Jewish                                  | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Sikh                                    | 1               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 1            |
| Other religious faith                   | 3               | 1                       | 5              | 1                  | 10           |
| No Religious Faith                      | 26              | 31                      | 131            | 83                 | 271          |
| Religious faith not listed specify here | 0               | 0                       | 2              | 6                  | 8            |
| Prefer not to say                       | 26              | 41                      | 76             | 34                 | 177          |
| Not known                               | 53              | 356                     | 3139           | 430                | 3978         |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>212</b>      | <b>505</b>              | <b>3526</b>    | <b>848</b>         | <b>5091</b>  |

ACNI captures religious belief across all sections of all staff, this data represents a sample that the Annual Funding Organisations. Each annually funded body was asked to give a breakdown of their staff, the majority of which responded with not known, prefer not to say, no specified in survey and no religious faith. This illustrates that within the majority of organisations, there is a shift towards non-identity of religion, 413 respondents identified as Catholic and 214 identified as Protestant. Ethnic minority religions are underrepresented in arts organisations Northern Ireland.

The continuous household survey shows that religious background makes a slight difference in engagement, with Protestant respondents (81%) showing marginally higher engagement than Catholics (79%), though both were close to the population average.

### **Political Opinion**

In this screening and to date, there has been no suggestion that any political grouping suffers any adverse impact in accessing and participating in the arts in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence from any monitoring returns of any negative impact with regards to political opinion.

There has been an historical tendency for voting preferences in Northern Ireland to closely reflect the religious affiliations of the population. This implies that those issues and differentials identified in relation to persons of different religion may also impact on persons of different political opinion.

### Ethnicity

ACNI captures data on ethnicity of employees working within Annual Funding Programme organisations:

| <b>Ethnicity</b>                             | <b>Managers</b> | <b>Specialist Staff</b> | <b>Artists</b> | <b>Other Staff</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| White                                        | 192             | 280                     | 1596           | 675                | 2743         |
| Irish Traveller                              | 0               | 0                       | 1              | 0                  | 1            |
| Roma                                         | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Chinese                                      | 0               | 0                       | 9              | 1                  | 10           |
| Indian                                       | 3               | 3                       | 13             | 4                  | 23           |
| Pakistani                                    | 0               | 1                       | 2              | 0                  | 3            |
| Bangladeshi                                  | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Other Asian                                  | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Asian not listed, please specify here        | 1               | 2                       | 4              | 0                  | 7            |
| Black Caribbean                              | 0               | 0                       | 10             | 2                  | 12           |
| Black African                                | 0               | 0                       | 11             | 1                  | 12           |
| Black Other                                  | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Black not listed, please specify here        | 0               | 0                       | 14             | 0                  | 14           |
| Arab                                         | 0               | 0                       | 7              | 0                  | 7            |
| Filipino                                     | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Mixed Ethnic Group                           | 0               | 0                       | 24             | 2                  | 26           |
| Other Ethnic Group                           | 0               | 0                       | 0              | 0                  | 0            |
| Ethnic group not listed, please specify here | 0               | 1                       | 7              | 0                  | 8            |
| Unspecified or Uncollected                   | 3               | 128                     | 410            | 125                | 666          |
| Not Known                                    | 13              | 97                      | 1418           | 31                 | 1559         |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>212</b>      | <b>512</b>              | <b>3526</b>    | <b>841</b>         | <b>5091</b>  |

In 2023-2024, the majority of staffing in ACNI funded arts organisations, was still predominately white with 2743 respondents return. The second largest response was from those that did not specify, unknown or ethnicity not listed. Ethnic minorities are

still largely underrepresented with only 123 respondents of across arts organisations identified as a minority out of 5091. There is still an increasing underrepresentation across the board ACNI arts funded organisations, this could also partially be due to the population demographics of Northern Ireland and entry points into the arts sector.

This is highlighted in the NISRA census data below from 2021, where whilst ethnic minorities have gained in population since 2001, it has been still at a low % rate.

| Ethnic Group    | 2001 Count | 2001 % | 2011 Count | 2011 % | 2021 Count | 2021 % |
|-----------------|------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|
| White           | 1,671,013  | 99.15% | 1,778,449  | 98.21% | 1,837,575  | 96.55% |
| Irish Traveller | 1,685      | 0.10%  | 1,287      | 0.07%  | 2,609      | 0.14%  |
| Roma            | N/D        | N/D    | 14         | 0.00%  | 1,529      | 0.08%  |
| Other           | 12,569     | 0.75%  | 31,113     | 1.72%  | 61,466     | 3.23%  |
| Total           | 1,685,267  | 100%   | 1,810,863  | 100%   | 1,903,179  | 100%   |

[Census 2021 - Briefing](#)

## Age

ACNI captures data on the age range of employees working within Annual Funding Programme organisations:

| Age               | Managers   | Specialist Staff | Artists     | Other Staff | Total       |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 0-15              | 0          | 0                | 4           | 0           | 4           |
| 16-24             | 2          | 20               | 120         | 116         | 258         |
| 25-34             | 19         | 77               | 408         | 156         | 660         |
| 35-44             | 51         | 77               | 369         | 97          | 594         |
| 45-54             | 70         | 68               | 301         | 84          | 523         |
| 55-64             | 46         | 36               | 153         | 47          | 282         |
| 65+               | 11         | 7                | 39          | 15          | 72          |
| Prefer Not to Say | 4          | 60               | 202         | 0           | 266         |
| Not known         | 9          | 156              | 1891        | 376         | 2432        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>212</b> | <b>501</b>       | <b>3487</b> | <b>891</b>  | <b>5091</b> |

In 2023-2024, the age range for ACNI arts funded organisations highlights that majority of staffing lie between 25 and 34 and 35 and 44. This demonstrates that young, training and/or skilled staff are underpinning arts organisations. The second highest is between 45-54 and 55 and 64 categories which may represent senior level

management of organisations. Although the lowest number of age-related staff is 65+, this may represent a more voluntary base workforce in arts organisations.

According to the Continuous Household Survey 2023/24, 80% of adults in Northern Ireland engaged in the arts either by attending or participating in activities. However, engagement varied notably across demographic groups. Engagement differs across age groups, with younger adults (16–24) reporting 88% engagement, compared to 69% among those aged 75 and over, indicating a participation gap linked to age and potentially mobility or access.

ACNI also captures data on disability access within annually funded organisations under the following headings:

- Captioning
- British Sign Language
- Irish Sign Language
- Audio described
- Hearing support loop
- Large print / braille for programmes
- Wheelchair access
- Relaxed performances

#### Disability 2023-2024

| Classification    | Managers   | Specialist Staff | Artists     | Other Staff | Total       |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Disabled          | 11         | 27               | 70          | 33          | 141         |
| Non-Disabled      | 141        | 154              | 696         | 400         | 1391        |
| Prefer not to say | 8          | 114              | 162         | 93          | 377         |
| Not known         | 52         | 217              | 2598        | 315         | 3182        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>212</b> | <b>512</b>       | <b>3526</b> | <b>841</b>  | <b>5091</b> |

In 2023-2024, the disability range for ACNI arts funded organizations highlights that majority of artists of staffing lie between nondisabled at 1391 and disabled at 141. 377 respondents preferred not to outline their response.

The data below refers to the total number of performances available with each of the accessibility types.

| Support           | Number of organisations | % of portfolio |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Braille           | 9                       | 0.108433735    |
| Large print       | 29                      | 0.34939759     |
| Induction loop    | 27                      | 0.325301205    |
| Captioning        | 28                      | 0.337349398    |
| Audio Description | 18                      | 0.21686747     |

|                        |    |             |
|------------------------|----|-------------|
| BSL interpreter        | 19 | 0.228915663 |
| ISL interpreter        | 11 | 0.13253012  |
| Wheelchair access      | 77 | 0.927710843 |
| Accessible toilets     | 74 | 0.891566265 |
| Lifts                  | 63 | 0.759036145 |
| Signage                | 63 | 0.759036145 |
| Maps                   | 41 | 0.493975904 |
| Relaxed performances   | 37 | 0.445783133 |
| Dementia friendly      | 30 | 0.361445783 |
| Multisensory workshops | 27 | 0.325301205 |

Disability access across the arts sector in 2023-2024, suggests that venues are taking into consideration the needs of disability audiences and facilities accessible but also attendance and participatory elements as well, that require descriptive signage and mapping.

According to the Continuous Household Survey, adults without disabilities were significantly more likely to engage in the arts (85%) than those with disabilities (63%), highlighting an important area for continued access support.

#### Men and women generally:

According to the Continuous Household Survey 2023/24, 80% of adults in Northern Ireland engaged in the arts either by attending or participating in activities. However, engagement varied notably across demographic groups. Women reported higher levels of engagement (83%) than men (78%), continuing a consistent gender trend observed in previous years.

#### Dependants

Engagement was also lower among individuals with dependants (77%) compared to those without (82%), and among those living in the most deprived areas (74%) compared to the least deprived (86%), according to the Continuous Household Survey.

#### Marital Status

Differences also emerged in the Continuous Household Survey by marital status: people who were married or cohabiting had an engagement rate of 83%, single individuals reported 82%, while widowed adults had a substantially lower engagement rate of 63%, and those separated or divorced reported 75%. This may suggest specific barriers faced by older or formerly married individuals.

#### Sexual orientation

The Continuous Household Survey does not report arts engagement by sexual orientation, and therefore no disparities can be identified from this data source. While no evidence currently highlights specific barriers linked to this category, the absence of detailed data on LGBTQ+ participation or on people of different marital status represents a limitation in the available evidence base. The Small Grants Programme addresses this by being open to all eligible organisations regardless of sexual

orientation or family status, and by encouraging inclusive programming that welcomes participants from all backgrounds. These findings reinforce the importance of continued outreach, inclusive design, and targeted support for underrepresented groups to ensure that all communities in Northern Ireland can access and benefit from the arts.

### Needs, experiences and priorities

| Section 75 category | Details of needs/experiences/priorities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Religious belief    | <p>There is no indication of any inequality in access to the arts based on religious belief. Due to the complexities in the subject matter, many respondents to the survey, do not provide this information. This makes this difficult to ascertain the true nature and breakdown of survey participants by religious affiliation.</p> <p>However, in relation to arts access, a proportion of arts related activities by funded organisations are done so through community development and or cross community.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Political opinion   | <p>Political opinion is another complex topic and would explain why due to historic circumstances, it can correlate religious belief with political opinion and determine that there is no evidence for any inequality in arts provision by political opinion.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Racial group        | <p>Northern Ireland has a small ethnic minority and racial community in comparison to the UK and this is highlighted in the response and proportion of respondents in the arts sector. The size of the sample makes it difficult to predict trends, however the ethnic population growth in the last ten years highlights a 1.5% jump between 2011-2021.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Age                 | <p>Young people have considerably higher attendance and participation in the arts than any other age group, and older people have lower attendance and participation. The Arts Council recognise both these age groups in their targeted programmes, recognising the formative influence of the arts on young people and the wellbeing benefits observed with older people. ACNI have an Arts and Older People Programme as well as The Young People and Wellbeing Programme is an arts focused National Lottery funded programme through the Arts Council of NI. It aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people (aged between 12-18) by engagement in high quality arts and is based on a programme</p> |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                         | (Articulate). Our evidence highlights that issues of mobility that could be related to age are potentially limiting engagement.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Marital status          | Marital status does not necessarily prevent to working in the art sector for any marital status, however it is likely that age, family commitments and childcare can.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Sexual orientation      | Our evidence does not highlight any specific data gaps or targeted support needs related to sexual orientation. However, qualitative findings from the Annual Report reference strong engagement with LGBTQ+ communities in general, and through specific events such as the Outburst Queer Arts Festival, indicating active inclusion in industry activity. |
| Men and Women Generally | Our evidence indicates strong participation by women in the arts. For example, women represent 60% of the workforce of our sample of national lottery organisations and Annually Funded Organisations, with men, 38%. Only 1% of the workforce identify as non-binary (including androgyne).                                                                 |
| Disability              | Our Client Satisfaction Survey highlights the need for stronger support for artists with disabilities in terms of support when completing applications. We will continue our work with University of Atypical, where this type of support is provided to artists applying to our programmes.                                                                 |
| Dependants              | Our evidence does not highlight any specific data gaps or targeted support needs related to dependants.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## **Part 2: Screening questions**

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Religious Belief:**

The programme is open to all organisations regardless of religious affiliation and encourages participation from underrepresented communities, including faith-based and cross-community initiatives. No adverse impact is expected.

**Level of impact:** Minor

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Political Opinion:**

The programme is politically neutral but operates in a region where political opinion and religious background can intersect. The programme aims to reach diverse communities across all council areas, ensuring political inclusivity.

**Level of impact:** Minor

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Racial Group:**

The programme explicitly supports increased participation by global majorities and migrants, including in areas where they are underrepresented in funded arts activity. This is aligned with ACNI's EDI objectives.

**Level of impact:** Minor

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Age:**

The programme encourages applications involving intergenerational participation, including youth and older people. It complements existing ACNI programmes targeting mental health and wellbeing across age groups.

**Level of impact:** Minor

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Marital Status:**

No barriers are presented on the basis of marital status. While not explicitly targeted, the programme's community-based approach is inclusive of family-oriented and single-person households.

**Level of impact:** None

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Sexual Orientation:**

The programme is inclusive of LGBTQ+ organisations and encourages participation from all sexual orientations. There is no evidence of structural exclusion.

**Level of impact:** None

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Men and Women:**

The programme encourages applications from a wide range of organisations and participants regardless of gender. There is currently no evidence of gender imbalance in participation.

**Level of impact:** None

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Disability:**

The programme encourages applications that involve participants and artists with disabilities. Accessibility costs are explicitly eligible, and disability access data is monitored.

**Level of impact:** Minor

### **Details of the likely policy impacts on Dependants:**

While not a core target group, the programme may indirectly benefit people with caring responsibilities, particularly where projects are delivered in accessible locations and

formats.

**Level of impact:** Minor

Are there opportunities for better promote equality of opportunity for people within Section 75 equalities categories?

**Religious Belief – Yes**

The programme is open to all communities and encourages cross-community and interfaith participation. It offers an opportunity to promote shared experiences through the arts and to support organisations working in areas with historical community division.

**Political Opinion – Yes**

While politically neutral, the programme's focus on community-based arts in all council areas creates opportunities to promote engagement across political identities, especially in post-conflict contexts.

**Racial Group – Yes**

The programme seeks to reach global majorities and migrants who are underrepresented in arts funding. Targeted outreach, flexible application support, and the inclusion of accessibility costs provide strong opportunities to increase participation by racial and ethnic minorities.

**Age – Yes**

The programme can support projects that engage both younger and older people, helping to address social isolation and improve wellbeing.

**Marital Status – No**

Marital status does not present a barrier to arts participation, and there is no evidence that specific outreach or adjustments are needed on this basis. The programme remains inclusive to all applicants regardless of marital status.

**Sexual Orientation – Yes**

The programme is open to LGBTQ+ organisations and audiences. It provides a platform to promote representation and inclusion through funded arts projects. Continued outreach and visibility of LGBTQ+ inclusion will help maximise this opportunity.

**Men and Women – Yes**

The programme can help address any imbalances in participation by supporting a diverse range of projects, including those that challenge gender stereotypes or create opportunities for marginalised gender identities in the arts.

**Disability – Yes**

By including accessibility costs (e.g. transport, sign language, visual aids), the programme actively promotes equality of opportunity for disabled artists and audiences. It also complements ACNI's wider disability access commitments.

**Dependants – Yes**

Projects that are designed with flexible access, childcare support, or family-friendly programming can promote equality of opportunity for carers and people with dependants, even if not directly named as a target group.

**To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion, or racial group?**

**Details of the likely policy impacts on Religious Belief:**

By encouraging applications from all local authority areas and supporting cross-community participation, the programme contributes positively to building mutual understanding and respect through shared cultural activity.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor

**Details of the likely policy impacts on Political Opinion:**

While the programme does not take a political stance, it fosters participation across Northern Ireland's diverse communities, including areas traditionally associated with differing political identities. This creates opportunities for collaborative arts engagement that can improve understanding across political divides.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor

**Details of the likely policy impacts on Racial Group:**

The programme actively promotes participation from global majority and migrant artists and audiences/participants, particularly those currently underrepresented in arts funding. By supporting inclusive and intercultural projects, the policy can help foster greater community cohesion and positive perceptions between different racial and cultural groups.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor

**Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion, or racial groups?**

**Religious Belief – Yes**

The programme has the potential to support arts projects that facilitate dialogue, shared cultural experiences, and mutual understanding between people of different religious backgrounds. Cross-community arts projects have a long history of contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and the programme can further enable this by prioritising participation in underrepresented areas.

**Political Opinion – Yes**

While the programme is politically neutral, it has the potential to support inclusive participation from communities with different political traditions. By funding arts initiatives in both unionist and nationalist areas, and those involving cross-community engagement, the programme can contribute to reducing division and fostering respectful coexistence.

**Racial Group – Yes**

The programme presents an opportunity to promote intercultural understanding by supporting projects that showcase diverse cultural expressions and involve minority ethnic communities. It can also support initiatives that address racism and promote inclusion through the arts, helping to improve community relations across racial and ethnic lines.

**Multiple Identity**

People can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Are there any potential impacts of the policy or decision on people with multiple identities?

**Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories.**

No adverse impacts are anticipated for people with multiple identities. The Small Grants Programme is explicitly designed to promote inclusion and equality of opportunity across all Section 75 categories. It encourages applications from first-time and underrepresented applicants, offers accessibility support, and is open to the widest possible range of organisations.

At present, Section 75 monitoring is collected on a category-by-category basis (e.g. disability, age, ethnicity) and does not allow for reliable cross-tabulation or analysis of intersectional experiences. As such, no direct data exists on the impact of this programme on people with multiple identities.

However, ACNI recognises that multiple identity analysis is important for understanding the lived experiences of underrepresented groups. Opportunities exist to strengthen this through internal evaluation mechanisms, including future monitoring and potential clustering analysis to assess how overlapping identities may influence participation and access. This will be reviewed as part of ongoing efforts to improve data collection and equality analysis.

### **Part 3. Screening decision**

An equality impact assessment (EQIA) is not required for this policy.

The Small Grants Programme has been specifically designed to increase participation in the arts by promoting equality of opportunity across all Section 75 categories. The policy explicitly targets groups and geographic areas that are underrepresented in existing funding programmes. It includes measures to remove barriers to participation (e.g. accessibility costs, support for first-time applicants, inclusive eligibility criteria), and it aligns with ACNI's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy and 10-Year Strategic Plan.

There is no evidence to suggest the policy will result in adverse or disproportionate impact on any Section 75 group or on people with multiple identities. Instead, the likely impact is positive and supportive of the statutory equality and good relations duties. Where monitoring highlights potential areas for improvement (e.g. intersectionality or access among specific groups), these can be addressed through programme evaluation and future design, rather than through a full EQIA.

No mitigation or alternative policy is required. The Small Grants Programme has been designed to actively promote equality of opportunity and good relations. It includes targeted measures to increase access among Section 75 groups and those from underrepresented geographic areas, with clear eligibility criteria, support mechanisms, and a commitment to inclusive practice.

Although no adverse impacts have been identified, ACNI will continue to monitor participation data and feedback from applicants, with a view to strengthening the policy if needed. For example, opportunities may arise to enhance intersectional monitoring or support for specific groups as programme delivery evolves.

#### **Mitigation**

**Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?**

There is no need to amend the policy or introduce an alternative. The Small Grants Programme has been designed with the explicit aim of improving equality of opportunity and fostering good relations across all Section 75 categories. It includes targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, support for first-time applicants, and provision for accessibility and participation costs. As such, the policy already incorporates positive measures to advance equality and inclusion.

While no changes are required at this time, ACNI will continue to monitor participation data and feedback to identify any opportunities for further strengthening the policy's reach and impact.

Timetable and prioritising

Not applicable – policy will not be screened in for EQIA.

### **Part 4: Monitoring**

Although a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to monitoring the impact of the Small Grants Programme on equality, diversity, and inclusion outcomes. Participation will be monitored across Section 75 categories where data are available, including religion, political opinion, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and dependants.

ACNI will also assess the geographical spread of applications and awards, with particular attention to local authority areas that are historically underrepresented. Feedback from applicants and funded organisations will inform ongoing review of the programme's accessibility and impact.

This monitoring will support continuous improvement and help identify any barriers or emerging inequalities that may require action in future programme cycles.

## **Part 5 – Approval and authorisation**

Screened by: Javier Stanziola

Position/Job title: Director of Strategic Development and Partnerships

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Approved by: Maria Lynch

Position/Job title : Director of Operations

Date: 23/06/2025