Northern Ireland Office

CONNECT FUND
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Rounds of the Connect Fund

Q: What are the dates for Round 3 of the Connect Fund?

A: Delivery of Round 3 will run between 1 April 2027 and 31 March 2028. Applications can be submitted from 2 November 2026 until 17:00 pm 18 December 2026. Delivery of projects funded under Round 3 may not begin prior to 1 April 2027, and must be completed by 31 March 2028.

Connect Fund Eligibility and Project Scope

Q: Can the same organisation fund numerous projects at the same time?

A: No, lead applicant organisations are only eligible to receive funding for one project at a time. Organisations are welcome to partner in the delivery of other projects in Round 3, but can only be lead applicant on one project at a time.

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Q: Our project was funded through a previous Round of the Connect Fund, can we bid to run it again during Round 3?

A: Yes, organisations who were successful in their bid for funding during a previous round of the Connect Fund are eligible to bid to run the same project again during Round 3. Please refer to Round 3 Application Guidance and Supporting Documents which details criteria for returning applicants.

Q. Our organisation delivers a pre-existing project which aligns with the Connect Fund, are we eligible to apply for funding to support this project?

A: The Connect Fund will consider applications from pre-existing projects, on the condition that evidence is provided to highlight how the Connect Fund will support the enhancement or development of the pre-existing project and any funded activity is delivered between 1 April 2027 and 31 March 2028.

Q: Does the Connect Fund support one off activities or longer term Projects?

A: The Connect Fund supports both. You should be mindful of the dates for Round 3 when submitting an application. Funding must be drawn down during that period and cannot be carried across or outside of this funding period.

Q: Can social enterprises apply?

A: Yes, social enterprises can apply.

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Q: Can a local authority be considered an eligible partner if a GB organisation is the lead applicant?

A: Yes. Local authorities (such as district councils in Northern Ireland) are classified as statutory bodies.

Q: I've already built up a relationship with my counterparts in GB. Can I still apply to strengthen that relationship?

A: Yes, that would be permitted.

Q: Is there an age restriction on applications, can we work with children?

A: There is no age restriction. Applicants working with children, young people or vulnerable adults will need to have a safeguarding policy in place explaining how they'll be safe.

Q: Would study visits be appropriate under the Connect Fund?

A: If your application meets the grant's objectives, it will be considered.

Q: How do Civil Service travel, accommodation, and subsistence rates apply to residential packages?

A: The Connect Fund recognises that residential packages often incur higher costs than standard overnight stays due to bundled operator amenities, activities, and meeting facilities. Applicants should translate baseline accommodation and subsistence limits into overall residential costs and explicitly detail the cost difference in their budget notes.

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Q: Can grant funding cover participant accessibility adjustments and caring responsibilities?

A: Yes. Connect Fund guidance explicitly covers costs that ensure project activities are accessible to all participants. Eligible items include, but are not limited to, portable loop systems, screen readers, mobility aids, accessible document formats, British/Irish Sign Language interpreters, personal assistants, accessible transport, and contributions toward caring or childcare responsibilities.

Q: Does the Connect Fund support sports-based projects, such as coaching exchanges between GB and NI?

A: Coaching, mentoring, and peer-learning exchanges between Great Britain and Northern Ireland are supported under the core objective to build East-West leadership and community links. Projects must have an eligible East-West partnership, directly benefit communities in Northern Ireland, and adhere to standard budget rules.

Q: Can an organisation with accommodation on its premises apply for funding to cover the costs of accommodation?

A: Whilst the Connect Fund cannot fund core operational costs, organisations with accommodation provision within their own building or venue can apply for funding to support participants to access said accommodation. The Connect Fund Travel and Subsistence Guidelines apply.

Q. Can projects focused on religious activity be funded through the Connect Fund?

A: The Connect Fund does not fund religious activities. This includes but is not limited to religious worship, instruction, and / or observance. Applications for funding premised on the advancement of religion, promotion of, or delivery of religious activity are not eligible for funding.

Faith-based organisations are welcome to apply for funding in their capacity as formally established non-profit organisations, so long as their proposed project does not seek to advance a religious or faith-based purpose and will benefit the communities of Northern Ireland, regardless of religious belief.

Q. Can an application to the Connect Fund include organisations or participants from outside of the UK?

A: The Connect Fund will not provide funding to cover the costs of project participation or attendance for organisations or individuals outside of the UK. Whilst organisations and participants based outside the UK are not eligible for funding under the Connect Fund, their inclusion is welcomed should applicants find alternative ways of facilitating this, recognising the value of expertise and best practice from other regions.

Application and Project Delivery Partners

Q: Is a partner always required?

Organisations applying from GB must always have a partner organisation in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland organisations can apply individually. Northern Ireland organisations who propose projects which involve connection or collaboration with GB organisations should name the organisations they intend to work with.

Q: Can application partners be identified in multiple applications at one time?

A: Yes, provided they have the capacity to deliver on their role.

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Q: Can partners be in receipt of other funding?

A: Yes, that is acceptable. You may be asked to demonstrate that your project is not in receipt of duplicate funding from another agency.

Q: Where a project has multiple partners, who holds the budget?

A: Payment will only be made to the lead organisation. Lead organisations are responsible for managing payments appropriately with partners.

Q: The application form only includes space for the inclusion of four project partners. Can I include more partners?

A: Yes. Please see the 'Additional Partners' document on the Connect Fund webpage to support your inclusion of additional partners.

Q: Is it possible for eligible organisations to partner up with for-profit partners / individuals?

A: For-profit individuals / organisations cannot be project partners in an application. Applicants can, however, include in their application their intention to hire for-profit individuals / organisations to support or facilitate their one-off activity or longer-term project. Details should be provided on the purpose for hiring for-profit individuals / organisations in the Activity Outline section of the application, with associated costs noted in the Resourcing and Costs section.

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Q: Is it possible for eligible organisations to partner up with partners / individuals from outside of the UK?

A: All organisations and participants in projects funded through the Connect Fund must be based in the UK. The UK refers to Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, and includes the smaller linked islands e.g., Rathlin Island, the Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, Isle of Wight, and Anglesey. The UK does not include Crown Dependencies such as the Isle of Man or Channel Islands, nor the Overseas Territories e.g., Bermuda, Falklands.

Organisations from outside of the UK are not eligible to be partners in proposed projects. Whilst organisations and participants based outside the UK are not eligible for funding under the Connect Fund, their inclusion is welcomed should applicants find alternative ways of facilitating this, recognising the value of expertise and best practice from other regions.

Funding and Financials

Q: Can funding be carried across rounds or Financial Years?

A: Funding must be fully drawn down during the round for which it has been allocated and cannot be carried across.

Q: On what schedule will funding be eligible for draw down in Round 3 of the Connect Fund?

A: Grant recipients who are successful in their bid to the Connect Fund for funding of £10,000+ will be eligible to draw down their funding award in arrears on a quarterly basis. This option is also available for recipients in receipt of under £10,000, based on preference. Grant recipients will be required to evidence spend via a Claims Form and to include relevant evidence of expenditure. The funding drawdown schedule is as follows:

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Drawdown Occurrence	Date of Drawdown Eligibility Window
First Drawdown	End of June 2027
Second Drawdown	End of September 2027
Third Drawdown	End of December 2027
Final Drawdown	End of March 2028 - but not later than March 31st 2028

Q: Is it possible for funding to be provided before I begin the Project?

A: If your project is funded at a value under £10,000, you are eligible to request funding in advance of beginning the project. This must be formally requested; the process of doing so will be communicated post signing of a Grant Funding Agreement. You will need to demonstrate that you have delivered agreed milestones and must return any underspend within 30 days of project completion. If you have requested over £10,000 in funding, funding will be drawn down on a quarterly basis.

Q: If our timelines change during project delivery, is there an amendment procedure?

A: Yes. Timeline adjustments and milestone re-profiling are permitted, *subject to prior communication and formal written approval from the funding team*. Grant recipients must submit a formal re-profiling request detailing the rationale for shifting milestones or expenditure schedules. All revised activities and spend must still conclude within the designated financial year (by 31 March), as grant funding cannot be carried across financial years or funding rounds

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Q: Is there information available on funding items which will be considered and those which are ineligible under Round 3?

A: Yes, please refer to Connect Fund Round 3: Eligible Item Requests & Funding Parameters.

Application Requirements and Submissions

Q: How much detail are we expected to provide on the project delivery plan?

A: You should refer to the Delivery Plan Resource available under Supporting Information.

Q: How much detail are we expected to provide on the Budget Tool?

A: You should refer to the Budget Tool Resource available under Supporting Information.

Decisions on Successful Applications

Q: What is required for a successful application to the Connect Fund?

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A: Successful applicants to the Connect Fund will be defined as those who receive the highest scores out of 50, achieving a minimum score of 30 / 50 overall and 4 / 5 for Value for Money. Funding will be assigned on this basis until the funding pot has depleted. Prospective applicants should refer to the Application Guidance.

Q: There is a finite funding pot for Round 3 of the Connect Fund, how will decisions be made in the event that multiple applications qualify but limited funding remains?

The Northern Ireland Office wishes to support a portfolio of projects, covering a range of themes and geographies across Northern Ireland, subject to the volume and quality of proposals received. If demand outweighs the funding pot available, equally scored projects may be weighted to ensure a balanced spread of approved projects across Northern Ireland. For applications to be considered in this eventuality, applications must achieve a minimum total score of 30 and a minimum Value for Money score of 4.

Unsuccessful Applications

Q: Will you provide feedback for unsuccessful applicants?

A: If unsuccessful, applicants are welcome to apply for feedback on their application. Application scores will be provided to eligible applicants.

Other Questions

Q: I have another question, who do I reach out to?

A: If you require any further information for your application please contact connectfund@nio.gov.uk.