



## Tender Opportunity

### **Fair Funding Principles: Review of current Practices, Implementation and Application**

Provide support to the Joint Forum Funding Subgroup to analyse a range of public sector funding arrangements against the Fair Funding Principles and Ways of Working set out in the Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, generating insights and practical recommendations to inform their ongoing implementation across the public and voluntary and community sectors. **Funded by the Department for Communities.**

## Instructions to the Service Provider

Submissions by 12 noon on Wednesday 4 March 2026

Submissions by email for the attention of **Edwina Crummy** to:  
[edwina.crummy@nicva.org](mailto:edwina.crummy@nicva.org)

Clarification requests no later than 12 noon on Friday 27 February 2026, by email only to: [edwina.crummy@nicva.org](mailto:edwina.crummy@nicva.org)

Submissions to be marked as Commercially Confidential

Please refer to Section 11: Submission Requirements

**Late or incomplete proposals cannot be considered.**

## 1. NICVA Overview

NICVA, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, is a membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Northern Ireland.

With over 1,500 member organisations – ranging from household name charities to grass roots community groups - we lobby and campaign to advance the interests of the people and communities that our members support. We offer a wide range of practical services, products, and support to our members. NICVA is committed to pursuing social, environmental, and economic sustainability as some of its core values.

Alongside the Department for Communities' Voluntary and Community Sector Division, NICVA provides joint secretariat and development support to the [Joint Government and Voluntary Sector Forum \(Joint Forum\)](#) and a range of associated working groups to support delivery of the Forum's workplan.

NICVA is a registered charity (Charity number: 100012, Company No: NI001792). Find out more about NICVA and its activities on [www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)

## 2. Introduction and Background

NICVA invites tenders from suitably qualified and experienced service providers to provide specialist support to the Joint Government and Voluntary Sector Forum (the Joint Forum), specifically the Joint Forum Funding Subgroup, to deliver against its current workplan.

During its current term, the Joint Forum has a mandate to support implementation of the [Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland](#), which was fully endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive in July 2025. The Agreement was developed by the Joint Forum and the core values, principles and ways of working outlined in this document are intended to strengthen and develop the relationship between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector, including addressing some key areas of challenge.

The Joint Forum has co-developed a three-year workplan to support delivery of the Agreement, including its **Shared Values, Ways of Working and Fair Funding Principles**. A series of thematic working groups and subgroups have been established to support the practical delivery of key elements of this workplan.

In line with the Joint Forum Workplan, a **Joint Forum Funding Subgroup** has been established to identify and agree a representative sample of current public sector funding arrangements with the voluntary and community sector (VCS). These funding arrangements will be reviewed against the **Fair Funding Principles and Ways of Working** set out in the Partnership Agreement.

The purpose of this work is to:

- identify and evidence good practice and areas for improvement, change, or development; and
- support consistent understanding and application of the Fair Funding Principles across public sector funders and VCS organisations.

Findings from this work will be reported to the Joint Forum and will contribute to:

- the development of a framework for the ongoing assessment of implementation of the Partnership Agreement;
- the first Annual Report on the Partnership Agreement, to be progressed by the Joint Forum's Evaluation and Communications Working Groups; and
- increased awareness, understanding, implementation and application of the Fair Funding Principles and Ways of Working across both sectors more broadly.

### 3. Purpose

The appointed service provider(s) will support the Joint Forum Funding Subgroup to:

- agree and analyse a representative range of current public sector funding arrangements; and
- assess their alignment with the Fair Funding Principles and Ways of Working.

This support will involve engagement with both:

- the Joint Chairs, Secretariat, and membership of the Joint Forum.
- Public sector and VCS members of the Funding Subgroup
- public sector organisations acting as funders; and

- voluntary and community sector organisations acting as fundees.

The work will generate evidence-based findings and practical recommendations to support improved funding practice across and between both sectors.

NICVA will coordinate including connection with Joint Forum membership and structures to ensure delivery across key areas of enquiry and engagement.

## 4. Objectives

The key objectives of this support are to:

1. **Analyse a sample of public sector funding arrangements against the Fair Funding Principles** and Ways of Working, using desktop analysis and targeted engagement with public sector funders and VCS fundees. These examples will be identified and agreed via the cross-sector membership of the Funding Subgroup and the range and number determined by the available timescale. A working list of examples has already been compiled via the Subgroup.
2. Provide a **baseline assessment** of current knowledge, understanding, and application of the Fair Funding Principles across public sector and VCS organisations.
3. Identify gaps in knowledge, inconsistencies of interpretation (for example: Full Cost Recovery), barriers to implementation, and areas of alignment with the Fair Funding Principles, highlighting both good practice and opportunities for improvement.
4. Produce **clear, practical recommendations** to improve awareness, clarity, and consistent application of the Fair Funding Principles, and offer guidance to inform future funding arrangements.

## 5. Scope of Work

Working under NICVA's guidance, and the guidance and leadership of the Joint Forums Joint Chairs, Secretariat and Funding Subgroup, the Service Provider/successful bidder will be expected to:

- Review relevant documentation, including the Partnership Agreement, Shared Values, Ways of Working and Fair Funding Principles.
- Work collaboratively with the Joint Chairs and members of the Joint Forum Funding Subgroup to **agree a representative sample of funding arrangements**, reflecting diversity (e.g. scale, geography, rural/urban contexts). A draft list of current funding arrangements has been suggested, and it will be the role of the service provider to help facilitate decision making by the subgroup on final selection.
- The range of examples to be explored will be determined by the timescale available but may include examples from across one or more government Departments and/or local government etc.

- Any necessary contacts and permissions etc will be brokered via the Co-Chairs, Secretariat, and/or membership of the subgroup, which includes key departments including the Department of Communities and the Department of Finance.
- Develop an **analysis framework** for assessing funding arrangements against the Fair Funding Principles.
- Design an **Assessment Pro Forma** to support both document analysis and interview preparation.
- Undertake desktop analysis of selected funding arrangements.
- Design and facilitate semi-structured interviews with a sample of:
  - public sector funders; and
  - funded VCS organisations.

These will be agreed and brokered via the subgroup and Secretariat, with the sample reflective of timescale available.

- Analyse qualitative and documentary evidence.
- Produce a **comprehensive report** including:
  - selected funding examples across the Fair Funding Principle;
  - assessment of alignment with the Fair Funding Principles;
  - examples of how principles and ways of working are applied in current funding processes/practice;
  - key challenges and gaps;
  - opportunities, success factors and;
  - overall and principle-specific recommendations.

## 5. Key Deliverables

The Service Provider/successful bidder will be required to deliver the following:

- **Suggested criteria** for selecting a representative sample of funding case examples.
- **An analysis framework** for assessing funding arrangements against the Fair Funding Principles.
- **Analysis of a range of funding examples.** The number and scope of case examples will be agreed with the Funding Subgroup, taking account of the timescales available for analysis.
- **A final recommendations report** outlining practical, actionable steps to develop and improve funding practice and to support implementation of the Fair Funding Principles.
- **A presentation of findings and recommendations** to the Funding Subgroup and, where appropriate, the wider Joint Forum and relevant stakeholders.

Subject to agreement, some key deliverables may be negotiated to align with the timeframe available.

## 7. Timescales

This support is expected to be delivered over a **7– 9-week period**, commencing **11 March 2026** with an **immediate start required** pending contract agreement and approval. The service provider(s) will be expected to deliver their time on a **concentrated basis** throughout this period. It is anticipated that the **majority of tasks will take place/be delivered between 11 March and 29 April 2026**.

### Indicative/ Suggested Phases

- **Weeks 1–2:** Document review and initial engagement with the Funding Subgroup
- **Weeks 3–4:** Agreement of funding examples with the Funding Subgroup and development of the analysis framework
- **Weeks 5–6:** Data collection and analysis
- **Weeks 7–8:** Draft report development and provision of headline feedback to the Subgroup
- **Week 9:** Final report completion and presentation of findings

Additional time may be available to further develop and/or continue elements of this work beyond the initial timeline, subject to approval and the securing of any additional resourcing.

## 8. Input and Governance

The service provider (s) will work closely with NICVA, the Joint Forums Joint Chairs, Secretariat, and membership of the Joint Forum Funding Subgroup.

NICVA will:

- manage the contract;
- facilitate engagement with the Joint Chairs and Subgroup; and
- provide oversight and quality assurance.

The Joint Chairs/Secretariat/Subgroup will:

- advise and agree on selection of funding examples and stakeholders;
- provide feedback on draft tools, findings, and reports; and
- support and broker access to relevant stakeholders and resources as appropriate.

## 9. Budget

The **maximum available budget is £13,500 inclusive of VAT** and all associated delivery costs such as travel and stakeholder engagement.

The service provider's time is expected to be delivered on a **concentrated basis over the delivery period**, recognising the intensive nature of the work programme, the volume of stakeholder engagement required, and the need for rapid analysis, iteration and reporting to agreed timescales.

Tenderers are invited to set out clearly how the work will be programmed across the delivery period in a way that is **proportionate, efficient and represents value for money**.

Value for money will be assessed not solely on cost, but on the optimal balance between **quality, expertise, efficiency, and price**, having regard to the specialist nature of the assignment and the requirement for delivery within a compressed timeframe.

10. Service Providers/successful bidders must clearly evidence the following in their submission:

- **Demonstrable experience** of facilitating multi-stakeholder or collaborative processes within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and/or the public sector.
- **Proven experience** in evaluation, baseline studies, and analytical research.
- **Strong knowledge and understanding** of public sector funding processes, and of voluntary and community sector structures and dynamics.
- **Recent and relevant experience** of stakeholder engagement and qualitative data collection.
- **Strong analytical, reporting and presentation skills.**
- **Ability to work collaboratively** with multi-sector stakeholders and governance groups.
- **Demonstrable project management capability**, including the ability to deliver high-quality outputs within defined time constraints.

Joint or consortium bids are welcome, provided that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

## 11. Submission Requirements

Interested Service Providers are asked to provide a detailed written response that clearly demonstrates their experience and capability to deliver the project. The proposal should be structured as follows:

Tender submissions should include:

1. A **Brief proposal** outlining:
  - understanding of the brief;
  - proposed methodology and approach;
  - risks and mitigation.
2. A **Delivery Plan**, aligned to the key deliverables with key milestones and timeline detailed
3. **Relevant Experience and Expertise (refer to section 10 required skills above)**
  - Brief bios of key personnel demonstrating their experience and capability to deliver the project
  - Examples of relevant similar work delivered in the last 5 years

#### 4. Project Management and Coordination

- Proposed management structure, staffing, and roles.

#### 5. Costing

- Detailed table of project costs (itemised breakdown) including:
  1. relevant daily rates for key personnel assigned to the project,
  2. number of days at each rate,
  3. travel, expenses, ancillary costs etc.
  4. VAT (if applicable)
  5. Total estimated cost (excluding/including VAT).
- Proposed payment schedule (by phase / milestone / date as appropriate)

#### Format:

- Submit as a single PDF document.
- Maximum length: **6 pages**
- Use clear headings aligned with the sections above.
- Font: minimum 11pt, standard margins

## 12. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following weighted criteria:

Criteria	Description	Weight %
Understanding of the relationship between the VCS and Public Sector, current funding landscape, and scope of this project	Clear evidence that the Service Provider understands both the voluntary and community and public sector context and the specific scope of this project. This includes awareness of the policy context, challenges, opportunities, and stakeholders involved, and how these relate directly to the project objectives.	25
Methodology and approach	Quality, clarity, and feasibility of the proposed methodology and project plan. Evidence that the approach is well thought through, addresses all of the project requirements and deliverables, is inclusive, realistic, and capable of delivering the required outcomes within the timeframe	30
Evidence of relevant experience and expertise	Demonstrated track record in delivering similar projects within the last 5 years. Relevant skills and expertise of the proposed team, supported by at least two references that show credibility and impact	20
Project management and coordination	A clear project management structure, including roles and responsibilities, staff involved, coordination mechanisms, and a project risk assessment with appropriate mitigation strategies.	10
Cost and value for money	Transparent breakdown of costs (day rates, number of days, travel, total costs).	15

## Assessment Process

- All written submissions will be scored against the evaluation criteria.

## 13. Proposed Project Timeline

Stage	Anticipated Date
Deadline for Clarification Questions	12 noon on Friday 27 February 2026
Deadline for Service Provider Submissions	12 noon on Wednesday 4 March 2026
Project Award	By Friday 6 March 2026
Project Start (indicative)	Wednesday 11 March 2026 onwards
Project Close	*Wednesday 13 May 2026.  * It is anticipated that <b>the majority of activity will be completed between 11 March and 29 April 2026.</b> with some additional time available as required for final reporting and wrap up.

## 14. Conditions

Service Providers should note that NICVA reserves the right to cancel the quotation process at any point. NICVA is not liable for any costs resulting from any cancellation of this quotation process, or for any other costs incurred by those submitting proposals for this project. NICVA is not obliged to accept the lowest or any quote received.

Confidentiality: The Service Provider should treat this tender and documentation as private and confidential between the Service Provider and NICVA.

Period of Validity: The Service Provider is required to keep their proposal and pricing valid for a period of 60 days from the closing date.

Economic and Financial Standing: The Service Provider may be required to furnish information as to their economic and financial standing prior to the acceptance of any Proposal.

Costs and Expenses: The Service Provider will not be entitled to claim from NICVA any expenses incurred in preparing their Proposal whether it is successful or not.

Assumptions: The Service Provider must not assume NICVA has prior knowledge of their organisation or their service provision. The Service Provider Proposal will only be evaluated on the information provided. Whilst every endeavour has been made by NICVA to provide an accurate description of the requirements, the Service Provider should form their own conclusions about the methods and

resources needed to meet those requirements. NICVA cannot accept responsibility for the Service Provider's assessment of the requirement.