



## Tender Opportunity

**Specialist Support to the Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group:**

Supporting the Development of a Baseline Analysis of the Partnership Agreement and Fair Funding Principles to Inform Ongoing Implementation, Evaluation, and Reporting

**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 12: 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 deliver specialist support to the [Joint Government and Voluntary Sector Forum \(Joint Forum\)](#), specifically to the **Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group**, in delivering its current workplan.
- The **Joint Forum** brings together representatives from the public sector and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to strengthen collaboration and partnership working.

- The Forum is currently mandated to support the monitoring and implementation of the [Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland](#), endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive in **July 2025**.
- Developed through the Joint Forum, the **Partnership Agreement** sets out shared values, principles and ways of working designed to enhance relationships between the public sector and the VCS.
- Via an **Annual Report** the Joint Forum will be required to report annually to the Northern Ireland Executive on progress against understanding and application of the key principles and ways of working defined within the Agreement across both sectors and its impact, including identifying key areas for change or development.
- The Joint Forum has agreed a **workplan** to support awareness, understanding and application of the shared values, ways of working and **Fair Funding Principles** outlined in the Partnership Agreement.
- Delivery of this workplan is supported by a number of **thematic working groups** comprising both public sector and VCS representatives.
- The **Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group** has been established to evaluate progress in the Partnership Agreements implementation across both sectors, and to lead on the development of an ongoing evaluation and reporting framework.
- Specialist external support is now required to assist the Evaluation Working Group in undertaking an **initial baseline analysis** of awareness, understanding and application of the Partnership Agreement and its commitments across the public sector and the VCS.
- The findings and insight from this work will be expected to directly inform and contribute to the development of both:
  - **A practical evaluation framework** to measure ongoing progress and impact; and
  - **A format for annual reporting** that reflects this.

### 3. Purpose

NICVA seeks to appoint a suitably experienced service provider(s) to support the Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group to:

- **Undertake a baseline analysis** of awareness, understanding and application of the Partnership Agreement, Ways of Working, and Fair Funding Principles across both the public sector and the VCS and how to meaningfully capture impact and areas for development.
- **Use the findings to directly inform and support:**
  - Ongoing implementation of the Partnership Agreement.
  - Development of a **draft evaluation framework** to support ongoing assessment, evaluation, and reporting by the Joint Forum
  - A **draft format for annual reporting** by the Joint Forum to the Northern Ireland Executive.

This work will provide an evidence base for future evaluation activity and inform practical steps to strengthen implementation of the Partnership Agreement.

## 4. Objectives

The key objectives of this support are:

### 1) Analysis and Assessment

a) **Conduct a baseline analysis through:**

- **Online survey(s)** targeting stakeholders across both sectors.
- **A limited number of focus groups**, subject to available timescales, to gather qualitative insights.

*The scope of this analysis will be agreed with the Working Group and will reflect the timescales and resources available.*

b) **Assess awareness, understanding and application of:**

- The Partnership Agreement
- Ways of Working
- Fair Funding Principles

c) **Develop understanding of how progress and impact can be most effectively captured and measured.**

*The scope of this assessment will be agreed with the Working Group, reflective of the time available. It is anticipated that the analysis will focus on a limited number of elements within the Partnership Agreement and Fair Funding Principles.*

### 2) Reporting and Insights

a) **Analyse findings and present a summary report** to the Evaluation Working Group to:

- Support broader implementation of the Partnership Agreement
- Provide recommendations to enhance awareness, clarity, and practical application
- Inform and shape future evaluation and reporting

b) **Provide insights and recommendations** to inform:

- Design of a practical and proportionate evaluation framework
- Indicators and methods for ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including identification of priority focus areas.
- An effective format/approach for annual reporting

*The range and level of reporting will be agreed in line with the timescales and resources available.*

## 5. Scope of Work

With NICVA's coordination and support, and under the leadership of the Evaluation Working Group, its Co-Chairs and members, the successful service provider will be expected to:

- **Review relevant documentation**, including the Partnership Agreement, Fair Funding Principles and Ways of Working.
  
- **Work with the Evaluation Working Group** to agree priority areas of focus. Given the timeframe for delivery, this is expected to be limited to a number of key areas, to be confirmed by the Working Group.
  
- **Undertake a baseline analysis** across public sector and VCS stakeholders, including:
  - Designing and piloting an accessible online survey(s);
  - Developing and facilitating focus groups, as required and subject to the available timescale (held online and/or in person).

*Given the delivery timescale, the baseline analysis is expected to focus on a limited number of key elements of the Partnership Agreement and/or its Fair Funding Principles.*

- **Analyse qualitative and quantitative data** to identify:
  - Levels of awareness, understanding and application of the Partnership Agreement and Fair Funding Principles in practice;
  - Priority areas for improvement, change, or further development.
  - How impact and progress can be most meaningfully captured, measured, and evaluated.
  
- **Produce a concise report** with clear analysis and actionable recommendations.

## 6. Key Deliverables

The expected deliverables are:

1. **Design and delivery of a baseline survey.**
2. **Development and facilitation of focus groups** (as required and subject to available timescales).
3. **A composite baseline analysis report**, incorporating survey results and any qualitative findings, with clear conclusions and recommendations.

4. **Recommendations on key considerations and an appropriate format/approach** for ongoing, evaluation and reporting.
5. **Presentation of insights and findings** to the Evaluation Working Group and, where appropriate, to the wider Joint Forum.

*Subject to agreement with NICVA and/or the Working Group, certain deliverables may be scaled back or renegotiated in line with the timeframe available.*

## 7. Timescale

This support is expected to be delivered over an **8 – 10-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 completed between 11 March and 29 April 2026**. **Please refer to Section 14: Proposed Project Timeline for further detail.**

Suggested/Indicative delivery phases:

- **Weeks 1–2:**
  - Inception meeting and document review;
  - Refinement of key lines of inquiry with the Evaluation Working Group;
- **Weeks 3–4:**
  - Design and piloting of baseline survey tools;
  - Preparation of focus group materials as required.
- **Weeks 4–7:**
  - Baseline data collection, including survey dissemination and focus groups/interviews as required.
- **Weeks 7–10:**
  - Quantitative and qualitative data analysis;
  - Drafting of baseline analysis report and recommendations;
  - Headline reporting to Evaluation Working Group
  - Presentation of final findings and recommendations to the Evaluation Working Group and Joint Forum as required.

The scheduling of certain tasks can be adjusted to reflect practical delivery requirements. Additional time beyond this initial timeline may be made available, subject to approval and/or the securing of any further resourcing as required.

## 8. Input and Governance

The service provider (s) will work closely with NICVA, the Joint Forums Secretariat and membership of the Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group.

NICVA will:

- manage the contract;
- facilitate engagement with the Working Group/Secretariat; and
- provide oversight and quality assurance.

The service provider will report to the Joint Forum Evaluation Working Group via NICVA.

A named Project Lead will be required, and regular progress check ins will be agreed at inception.

## 9. Budget

The **maximum available budget is £15,000 inclusive of VAT** and all associated delivery costs such as travel and stakeholder engagement.

The service providers time is expected to be delivered on a **concentrated basis over the agreed delivery period**, recognising the intensive nature of the work programme, the level 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. Required Skills and Experience

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
  - Design and application of evaluation frameworks and approaches
- **Strong understanding** of public sector and voluntary and community sector relationships, including funding arrangements.
- **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.
- **Capacity to deliver high-quality work within a compressed timeframe.**

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

## 11. Data Protection and Ethics

The service provider (s) must comply fully with data protection legislation, including UK GDPR.

Tenderers should outline their approach to:

- Ethical research practice and informed consent;
- Secure data collection, storage, and retention;
- Confidentiality and anonymity of participants as appropriate.

Any use of digital or AI-enabled tools must be declared and comply with data protection requirements.

## 12. 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:

1. **Brief proposal** outlining:
  - understanding of the brief;
  - proposed Methodology and workplan, including approach to each key deliverable;;
  - risks and mitigation.
2. **Delivery Plan and Schedule**, aligned to the proposed timeframe/delivery schedule, with key milestones and timeline.
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: **7 pages**
- Use clear headings aligned with the sections above.
- Font: minimum 11pt, standard margins

## 13. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following weighted criteria:

Criteria	Description	Weight %
Understanding of the relationship between the VCS and Public Sector.	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.

## 14. 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 20 May 2026* * It is anticipated that <b>the majority of activity will be delivered between 11 March and end April 2026.</b> Additional time will be available by agreement, for project wrap-up and reporting.

## 15. 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.