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April 2026

Tender Opportunity

Develop a strategy and
action plan for InsightLink

Tender Opportunity

NICVA are seeking to appoint a suitably qualified Consultant to develop a strategy and action plan for the InsightLink – Connecting Communities Through Shared Learning Project

Key Information

Submissions by: 08.30am on Tuesday 26 May 2026 - Submissions must be submitted by email FAO **Celine McStravick** to: procurement@nicva.org

Clarification requests no later than 12.00 noon on Thursday 14 May 2026, by email only to: procurement@nicva.org

Submissions to be marked as Commercially Confidential

Please refer to Section 9: Submission Requirements

Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered.

TENDER SPECIFICATION

1. Overview

The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) seeks to appoint an experienced consultant to design and develop a comprehensive Strategy and Action Plan for its project **InsightLink – Connecting Communities Through Shared Learning (InsightLink)**.

InsightLink, is a project supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), delivered under PEACEPLUS Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration, Investment Area 6.1: Strategic Planning. InsightLink went live on 01 Feb 2026 and will be officially launched on 16 September 2026. It has 10 Partners and NICVA is its Lead Partner. Full details are provided below.

The appointed consultant will be required to develop a comprehensive InsightLink Strategy that:

- Sets out a clear vision and strategic objectives for the project across its full lifetime aligned with the application submitted
- Is co-produced with all Partners and grounded in evidence gathered through structured engagement
- Addresses all three InsightLink modules, detailed below, in a coherent and integrated way
- Includes a Theory of Change articulating how project activities will lead to lasting change
- Is accompanied by an Action Plan with clear responsibilities, timelines and success indicators aligned with the application submitted
- Positions InsightLink clearly within the existing landscape, demonstrating additionality and minimising duplication
- Is adaptable to changing policy, funding and sector contexts across all jurisdictions

The lead partner is NICVA, 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, it is the voice of the sector, its most passionate advocate and a one-stop-shop for everything the VCS in Northern Ireland needs to operate, develop and grow. NICVA is a registered charity (Charity number: 100012, Company No:NI001792). Find out more about NICVA and its activities at www.nicva.org

2. InsightLink – an overview

Leading the delivery of InsightLink represents an important new phase in NICVA's work. Supported through the PEACEPLUS Theme 6 – Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration: Investment Area 6.1 Strategic Planning and Engagement it aims to address the administrative and legal challenges to cross border working.

InsightLink brings together partners across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain to strengthen collaboration, improve shared understanding of the VCS and support more informed strategic planning across jurisdictions. As referred to above, InsightLink has 10 Partners (Full and Associate).

The Full Partners, who are budget holding are:

- [NICVA - click for more information](#),
- [The Wheel - click for more information](#)
- [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - click for more information](#)
- [National Council for Voluntary Organisations - click for more information](#)
- [Wales Council for Voluntary Action - click for more information](#)

The Associate Partners, who are not budget holding are:

- [Department for Communities NI - click for more information](#),

- [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency - click for more information](#),
- [Central Statistics Office - click for more information](#),
- [Centre for Effective Services - click for more information](#)
- [Co-operation Ireland - click for more information](#)

All Partners are represented on the InsightLink Steering Panel. The Panel will meet quarterly over the project duration. Their role is to guide the strategic direction of the project, to guide and share best practices and to tackle legal and administrative barriers to cross border work.

InsightLink is unprecedented in scale and ambition. It is the first initiative to unite all five national VCS umbrella bodies with government to co-create a data-driven strategic framework for cross border cooperation. Its cross-border and inter-regional approach is essential to address challenges faced by the VCS and shared across the jurisdictions, for example rural isolation, data fragmentation, and policy exclusion. Only a coordinated, all-island, North/South and East/West strategy can address these effectively and sustainably.

2.1. InsightLink – the detail

The PEACEPLUS application developed and submitted for InsightLink included a high-level outline strategy, Theory of Change, and action plan across the three InsightLink modules described below. The project deliverables and budget are set within the application.

2.1.1. Module 1: Closing the Data Gap – Establishing the VCSE

Knowledge Data Hub (KDH): Data sources about the VCS on both sides of the border are based on different approaches, making cross border comparisons challenging. The KDH aims to create a clean, verifiable and comparable dataset on the VCS and to commission wider research. This will improve intelligence about the VCS to those involved in policy making, which will enhance service delivery and improve awareness among governments, cross border bodies and civic society about the value of the VCS.

2.1.2. Module 2: Strengthening Policy Influence – All-Island Alliance

(AIA): Policy fragmentation is a major barrier to the VCS impact across Ireland. Without reliable, verifiable data and a formal engagement mechanism, the VCS often remains sidelined in cross border policymaking. The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) implementation bodies offer models of coordination; no equivalent exists for the VCS. This results in disjointed consultations; organisations may be deeply involved in one jurisdiction but excluded from parallel discussions in the other. The absence of a platform prevents the VCS from presenting cohesive, all-island perspectives on critical issues e.g. social inclusion. The All-Island Alliance (AIA) will fill this gap. 50 VCS reps will be recruited by a process aligned with best practices from the NI Joint Forum and Ireland’s Public Participation Networks. The AIA will meet quarterly and be co-chaired by NICVA and The Wheel. The AIA will formalise cross border engagement, ensuring the VCS’s voice is embedded in policy development. It will formalise VCS access to the GFA institutions North/South and East/West.

2.1.3. Module 3: Enabling Collaboration - AIA cross border collaboration

/ strategic events: Despite growing recognition of its value, the VCS lacks the infrastructure to support meaningful cross border collaboration. Ireland’s 2022 “Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership” paper highlights this need, but implementation remains limited. The iCommunity project, 2021-2025 by NICVA and The Wheel, demonstrates strong demand for collaboration. InsightLink will build on its foundation, transforming its impact and elevating the collaborative infrastructure to the next level.

InsightLink will develop a bespoke framework for VCS collaboration. This will support sustainable mechanisms for data sharing, policy engagement, and operational cooperation, unlocking the full potential of an all-island civil society. It will strengthen the VCS across Ireland by creating a sustainable, data-driven infrastructure for cross border collaboration and policy influence.

It is crucial that the strategy underpins a coherent approach to addressing barriers to cross border working and building a robust VCS data source.

3. Scope of the Work

The Consultant will be expected to deliver the following:

3.1. Phase 1: Discovery and Analysis for InsightLink Modules 1, 2 and 3

The Consultant will be expected to:

- Review the InsightLink application, funding agreement, and all relevant project documentation to establish a clear understanding of the project's scope, objectives, and partner commitments.
- Conduct structured engagement with all Partners across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain to understand their priorities and expectations across the 3 modules — ensuring that the strategy is grounded in the realities of each jurisdiction, reflects a genuinely cross-border perspective and is aligned to the application commitments.
- Review existing strategies, policies, and performance data held by Partners and relevant statutory and VCS bodies to identify what is already in place and where the gaps lie.
- Map the existing data landscape across all three jurisdictions, assess relevant sector trends, and establish a process for establishing the baseline data domains that will inform the foundation of the Knowledge Data Hub development agenda.
- Identify and assess comparable initiatives, platforms, or partnerships currently operating across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain that have similar aims or overlapping scope — including any cross-border data or research programmes within the VCS, and relevant existing all-Ireland civil society groups. This mapping exercise should assess the risk of duplication, identify opportunities for alignment or collaboration, and ensure that InsightLink builds on rather than duplicates what already exists.
- Where relevant, identify organisations or bodies not currently involved in InsightLink whose participation or partnership could strengthen InsightLink's reach, credibility, or sustainability.

Phase 1 Deliverables by 31 July 2026:

- A Discovery Report setting out findings from engagement and desk research. (Presenting to the InsightLink Steering Panel)
- the baseline data domain framework, for Module 1 in particular
- a landscape map of comparable initiatives
- a clear articulation of the strategic challenge the InsightLink project is designed to address — including how InsightLink is distinct from and complementary to existing provision.

3.2. Phase 2 Strategy and Action Plan Development

Strategy: Drawing on the findings of Phase 1, the consultant will draft the InsightLink Strategy in close collaboration with Partners. The strategy should set out a clear vision, strategic objectives, and priorities for the project across its full lifetime, addressing all three modules in an integrated and coherent way, aligned with the application commitments. The Consultant should facilitate at least one collective session with Partners to review and agree the draft before finalisation. The Consultant will submit a draft Strategy for consideration before submitting the final document.

Theory of Change: The Consultant will develop a Theory of Change that articulates how InsightLink's activities across all three modules will lead to meaningful and lasting change for the VCS across all three jurisdictions. This should be developed in dialogue with Partners and should be accessible to a range of audiences including funders, policymakers and sector representatives.

Action Plan: The Consultant will produce a detailed Action Plan for each year, aligned with the application submitted, across all 3 InsightLink modules, and engage all Partner across the 5 areas (NI, Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland) and the InsightLink staff team with a particular focus on the North/South dimension.

- For information the action plan is described through the Work Packages detailed in the application.
- The action plan is to translate the strategy into clear, deliverable commitments — with responsibilities, timelines, and indicators of success agreed with all Partners.
- The Action Plan should reflect the existing Work Packages detailed in the application for each Module and include process maps - to enable delivery. This should include a process map for establishment of the KDH including the process to help identify data needs and how to prioritise the commissioning of research. The Consultant will further develop the plan proposed in the application to help develop the research capacity in NICVA and The Wheel to ensure that by the end of the InsightLink project NICVA and The Wheel are in position to develop comparable data across the 5 VCS umbrella bodies.

Phase 2 Deliverables by 01 September 2026:

- Draft InsightLink Strategy document
- Final InsightLink Strategy document (incorporating feedback from draft stage)
- Detailed InsightLink Action Plan for Year 1 to Year 3 – with Year 1 having the most detail and including process maps for delivery of Module 1, Module 2 and Module 3
- Executive summary suitable for publication
- Presentation of findings to NICVA and the InsightLink Partners

4. Consultant Requirements

The consultant must demonstrate:

- At least 5 years' proven experience in developing relevant strategies and action plans in terms of complexity, scale, financial value (£1 million plus projects), cross jurisdiction, and cross sectoral dimensions.
- Able to evidence 2 examples within the last 5 years including full contact details.
- Strong understanding of and experience of working with public sector partners and the VCS structures.

- Strong understanding of PEACEPLUS concepts and requirements
- Strong reporting and presentation skills
- Strong analytical, research, and facilitation skills.
- Experience working within the VCS
- Capacity to deliver within required timescales

5. Project Management & Governance

The consultant will:

- Work under the direction of the NICVA CEO and the InsightLink Project Manager.
- Provide regular progress updates at agreed intervals / frequency.
- Attend scheduled meetings and workshops.
- Submit draft outputs for review at agreed milestones.

6. Payment Schedule – breakdown

NICVA proposes a 2-stage payment process based on the delivery of each Phase:

- Payment 1 – 50% on completion of Phase 1 – 31 July 2026
- Payment 2 – 50% on completion of Phase 2 – 01 September 2026

Final arrangements to be confirmed once the contract is confirmed.

7. Budget

The maximum budget is **£50,000** (inclusive of VAT and expenses), or Euros €57,708 (as per Commission exchange rate). Tenderers must provide a full cost breakdown, including days allocated to each phase, day rates for the team members allocated, expenses, and any additional charges. Please note that NICVA is not obliged to accept the lowest or any tender. VAT must be shown as a separate cost item.

8. Anticipated Timescales

NICVA anticipates the following timeline:

- Clarifications Deadline: 12.00 noon on Thursday 14 May 2026
- Submission Deadline: 08.30am on Tuesday 26 May 2026
- Submission Review: W/C Monday 25 May 2026
- Contract Award: Friday 29 May 2026
- Contract Start: Monday 01 June 2026
- Phase 1 delivered by: 31 July 2026
- Phase 2 delivered by: 01 September 2026

9. Submission Requirements

Tenderers must submit a Tender Submission document that demonstrates that the Consultant can deliver the requirements of this tender. The document should be formatted as follows:

- Maximum of 15 A4 pages
- Minimum font size of 11
- Microsoft Word / PDF

The Tender Submission should include the following sections / information:

- **Understanding of Requirements**
 - Overview of understanding of project requirements, VCS context, challenges of multi-jurisdictional context, understanding delivering projects under EU funding principles etc.
- **Methodology and Approach**
 - Detail of methodology and approach to deliver the scope of work
 - Outline of work detail for each phase with required outputs
 - High-level project plan / Gantt chart
- **Relevant Experience and Expertise**
 - Details of key personnel to be allocated to the consultancy, providing relevant qualifications and examples of experience of similar work delivered in the past five years. (CVs are not to be included)

- Two examples of similar work delivered in the last 5 years to include scope of work, scale of project, value, expected outcomes etc. Examples of cross-border or multi-jurisdictional consultancy projects are particularly welcomed.
- **A Detailed Pricing Schedule**
 - Time in days allocated to key tasks included in delivery of each phase
 - Daily rate for each member delivering those tasks
 - Costs of travel, accommodation, expenses and other costs as appropriate
 - Total Costs (excluding VAT)
 - VAT value (if applicable)
 - Total Costs (including VAT)
- **Additional Information (Non scoring)**
 - Confirmation of availability and ability to meet project deadlines as set out in Section 3: Scope of the Work
 - Details of any known or anticipated conflicts of interest
 - Confirmation that relevant insurances are / will be in place

10. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Max score
Understanding of Requirements	10
Methodology and Approach	40
Relevant Experience and Expertise	30
Cost of Delivery Costs will be scored using the formula: LOWEST (£) QUOTATION X 20 / QUOTATION (£) ASSESSED	20
TOTAL	100
Additional Information – Non-Scoring	

11. Conditions

- Consultants are expected to carefully examine all instructions and specifications contained in this document. Failure to submit a quotation containing all the required information and documentation according to the instructions may result in rejection of the submission.

- Quotations submitted according to the specifications and within the deadline will be assessed and results will be announced directly to the selected tenderer within one week from the last day for tender submission. NICVA will score the proposals received and will award the Contract on the basis of the submission that appears the most advantageous according to the principles of Best Value.
- NICVA is not bound to accept the lowest price on any Quotation and shall not be responsible for any costs in connection with the preparation of the Quotation.
- If Consultants are VAT registered, please ensure that all costs are quoted exclusive of VAT, with any applicable VAT quoted as a separate line item.
- The Consultant is responsible for their own national insurance and tax arrangements.
- Payment will be made based on the dates noted in the Specification and successful delivery of the phase deliverables. Payment will be made to the Consultant following submission of an authorised invoice.
- Consultants must confirm that they have the capability to deliver the Service within the required timeframe.
- Quotation costs will be treated as remaining valid for a period of at least 6 months from date of deadline
- Quotations should be provided via email and received no later than the time and date specified to: procurement@nicva.org
- Quotations submitted after the deadline will not be considered.
- Consultants may be invited to a short online meeting if there are clarifications required about their Tender Submission
- Consultants are requested not to make contact once the submission deadline has passed as all bidders will be formally advised of outcome position for their quotation once a decision has been reached.

12. Acceptance of Quotation

NICVA

- Does not necessarily accept the lowest priced quotation or any quotation.
- Reserves the right to negotiate with any tenderer or to seek clarification of the contents of a quotation from any bidder.

- Reserves the right to obtain any of the nominated products and services from any party, whether that party is a bidder or not.
- Reserves the right to stop or vary the quotation process, or re-quote, at any time.

Nothing in this document, or in any quotation, or both, shall be construed to create any binding contract (expressed or implied) between NICVA and any bidder.