



What Works In Communities Fund (2026)

Guidance Note for Applicants

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Purpose of this Document

This Guidance document provides information for community and voluntary (C&V) organisations (whether urban or rural based) interested in applying to the 2026 “*What Works In Communities Fund*”, run by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE). This document outlines the aims of this Fund, the eligibility requirements for potential applicants, the assessment process, and conditions attached to the funding.

The 2026 What Works In Communities Fund seeks to empower communities by supporting C&V organisations that deliver prevention and early intervention initiatives for children and young people, including those with disabilities, those that are marginalised, and those at risk of social exclusion.

The Fund specifically aims to support not-for-profit, non-statutory organisations based in the Ireland that are community-led and providing services, supports or advocacy for community benefit. They must operate outside of formal state-run systems such as education or health service delivery.

Applicants are required to read this Guidance Note, together with the associated Terms and Conditions document, before submitting applications. A clear understanding of these two documents will assist the applicant to understand the process and avoid a risk of disqualification due to non-compliance.

These two documents form part of the basis of the funding agreement between DCDE and the successful applicants (also referred to as “Grantees”). Additional documents such as the grantee’s application and other documents as agreed between DCDE and the grantee may also form part of the agreement.

What is the “*What Works*” Initiative?

The *What Works* Initiative, led by DCDE, aims to maximise the impact of prevention and early intervention to improve outcomes for children and young people living in Ireland. At the core of the initiative is a commitment to fostering continuous learning and curiosity among those working to improve the lives of children and young people.

Four key strands (as detailed on the *What Works*’ [website](#), and linked to the fund’s objectives outlined below) underpin the *What Works* initiative.

Previous *What Works* funds are the 2025 Enhancing Quality Fund, the 2023 Building Evidence Fund, the 2022 Sharing Knowledge Fund, and the 2021 Learning Together and Digital Solutions Funds. More information can be found on the [What Works website](#).



2026 What Works In Communities Fund

The 2026 What Works In Communities Fund focuses on **inclusion, equality and participation** within prevention and early intervention practice in Ireland. The design of this Fund is inspired by:

- The EU Presidency theme of ‘Values’, which include equality, respect for human dignity, and human rights (including minority rights).
- *Young Ireland*, Ireland’s National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028.
- Input from The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN)¹.

The **main objectives** of the 2026 What Works In Communities Fund (which are aligned to all four strands of the What Works initiative) are to:

1. **Data:** Improving data collection relating to the lived experiences of children, young people and their families, and building the national prevention and early intervention evidence base to support future policy development.
2. **Evidence:** Harnessing learning from prevention and early intervention initiatives and actively supporting the use of this learning as a resource to inform planning, delivery, evaluation and continuous improvements.
3. **Professional development and capacity building:** Enhancing the capacity and skills development of policymakers, providers and practitioners to appraise and apply informed prevention and early intervention approaches.
4. **Quality:** Aligning, enhancing and sustaining quality in the development and delivery of policy, provision and practice for children and young people.

Intended Use of Funding

The 2026 What Works In Communities Fund seeks to empower communities by supporting C&V organisations that deliver prevention and early intervention initiatives for children and young people, including those with disabilities, those that are marginalised, and those at risk of social exclusion.

This Fund recognises that valuable learning can be generated through different types of work, and it will therefore support a spectrum of activity across prevention and early intervention practice. **Projects must apply one of the following approaches:**

¹ The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) represents organisations and individuals working in children, family and community services throughout Ireland who are committed to developing a prevention and early intervention-led approach to service planning and delivery.



1. Piloting and testing innovative prevention and early intervention approaches.
2. Scaling up existing prevention and early intervention approaches where there is an opportunity to better understand how and in what contexts these approaches are effective.
3. Evaluating an existing prevention and early intervention project so it can contribute to the national evidence base and potentially be upscaled and/or replicated elsewhere.

Regardless of the approach taken, all projects must demonstrate:

- Clear alignment with the Fund's objectives, and the What Works strands.
- Commitment to the inclusion of service users (e.g., the voice of the child/young person) to inform the methodology, and to capturing the lived experiences of children and young people (and their families if appropriate).
- How the proposal will generate practical and actionable insights, and how this learning will contribute to the prevention and early intervention sector.
- In alignment with the EU Presidency theme of 'Values', the project **must cover at least one of the scope areas outlined below:**
 - *Address the needs of marginalised children, young people, and families.*
 - *Support children and young people at risk of social exclusion.*
 - *Support children and young people with disabilities.*

Note for organisations following approach #3 above (evaluating an existing project)

Many existing prevention and early intervention projects across the C&V sector are demonstrating promising outcomes for their local communities. While routine monitoring and data collection is valuable, evaluation goes beyond this by generating learning that can inform future policy and practice, and the wider rollout of projects.

Project evaluations are important for several reasons:

- **For C&V organisations**, evaluations support reflection and improvement, as well as enabling suitable projects to be upscaled and/or replicated elsewhere.
- **For children, young people and families** interacting with C&V organisations, evaluations can elevate their voices and lived experiences.
- **For the Government of Ireland**, evaluations enable promising prevention and early intervention projects to contribute to the national evidence base and future policy development.



DCDE recognises that the level of internal evaluation capacity can vary greatly between C&V organisations.

1. Organisations **with limited existing evaluation capacity** may use this Fund to engage external researchers or consultants, provided evaluation activities are co-produced and demonstrate staff development in the area of evaluation.
2. Organisations **with existing evaluation capacity** may undertake evaluations internally and may also engage external expertise where appropriate.

In all cases, applications must demonstrate how evaluation capacity will be embedded within the organisation beyond the funding period.

Where possible, applicants are encouraged to leverage relationships with researchers and consultants on their own Board of Management or from local colleges / universities.

Applicants who plan to use external researchers or consultants **must follow the guidance outlined in the table below:**

Eligible Use of Researchers/Consultants	Ineligible Use of Researchers/Consultants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-production models that demonstrate active participation of internal C&V staff in evaluation planning, data collection, analysis and report writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers/Consultants acting as sole planners / data analysts / report authors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing mentoring / training is provided to internal C&V staff (e.g., shadowing and gradual handover) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once-off/sporadic training with limited involvement in the evaluation work or transfer of knowledge to the C&V organisation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must demonstrate how internal capacity will be strengthened and sustained after the evaluation is complete. 	

Where applicants plan to use researchers or consultants under this Fund, they must demonstrate in their application how they plan to align with the above guidance.



Eligibility for the 2026 What Works In Communities Fund

Applicants should carefully review the eligibility criteria below.

- The Fund specifically aims to support **not-for-profit, non-statutory organisations based in the Republic of Ireland** that are community-led and providing services, supports or advocacy for community benefit. They must operate outside of formal state-run systems such as education or health service delivery.
- The project's **service users must include children, young people (18-24) and/or families.**
- The project **must have a prevention and early intervention focus.** **Prevention** is defined as “*providing a protective layer of support to stop problems from arising in the first place or from getting worse*”, while **Early Intervention** is defined as “*providing support at the earliest possible stages when problems occur*” (PEIN, 2026). For the purpose of this funding call, the “*problems*” in these definitions typically refer to social issues.
- Organisations already in receipt of funding from a Government Department or State Agency for a similar project are not eligible to apply.
- Only one application per organisation will be accepted.
- Lobbying officials of DCDE or any other Government department or agency, including but not limited to Ministers, public representatives (County / City Councillors, TDs, Senators) at any point throughout the application or assessment process will lead to immediate disqualification.
- Statutory organisations are not eligible to apply for funding; however, they can act as financial host organisations for Grantees that are not set up with bank details.
- Incomplete applications will be deemed ineligible. DCDE will not engage further with applicants to solicit additional paperwork for completion of their application.

Funding Information

The 2026 What Works In Communities Fund is financed through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). This Fund aligns to the DAF's requirements that its funding is used to help people who are educationally, economically or socially disadvantaged by supplying opportunities for personal and social development.

The total value of the 2026 What Works In Communities Fund is **€400,000**.

Grant allocations will be a **minimum of €10,000** and a **maximum of €40,000** per Grantee.

Funding is provided on a once-off basis only. Ongoing funding will not be available.



All funding awarded to Grantees must be fully expended within a 12-month period from the date of receipt of funds. Grant funds that are unspent by the end of the funding period must be returned to DCDE.

All project costs must be directly related to the approved project activities, clearly detailed and justified in the application, and in line with the eligible and ineligible cost guidance set out in the next section “**Eligible and Ineligible Project Costs**”.

As outlined in the “**Project Reporting**” section of this document, Grantees will be required to submit details of all costs in the end-of-project report.

Due to the limited amount of funding available, not all applications will be successful.

Eligible and Ineligible Project Costs

Only costs that are necessary, proportionate, and directly related to the delivery of the approved project activities are eligible under this Fund.

Eligible Project Costs (these must be incurred within the period of the funding)
Training / upskilling activities directly related to capacity development.
Staff costs - limited strictly to time spent on approved project activities and to the project duration. No funding will be available beyond the project end date.
Researcher / Consultancy services (in compliance with the guidance on co-production and skills transfer and upskilling outlined in the “ <i>Intended Use of Funding</i> ” section of this document).
Costs associated with analysing project data including qualitative and quantitative data analysis.
Online platforms required for data collection, analysis or learning activities.
Administration costs (e.g. printing, advertising, media, graphic design, travel and subsistence costs) where these are project specific and do not to exceed 15% of the budget
Small IT equipment including software - not to exceed 10% of budget
Media production (e.g. podcasts)
Venue hire



Ineligible Project Costs
Capital costs (including purchasing or renovation of land, equipment, premises, renovation or repurposing of premises)
Large-scale equipment (including purchase or renting of vehicles etc.)
Individual funding or benefits (including cash transfers, subsidies)
Costs already covered by other funding from another Government Department or State agency.
Costs not related to the delivery of this specific project
Purchase of mobile phones and mobile phone contracts with service providers
Laptops
Rental of premises

Applicants are encouraged to seek clarification from DCDE in advance where there is uncertainty regarding the eligibility of a proposed cost.

Methodology Guidelines

Applicants should note the following guidelines when considering their proposal:

- Applicants must clearly articulate the purpose and focus of the project, including how it will measure the project's effectiveness.
- The proposed methodology should be proportionate, practical and appropriate to the scale, duration and the context of the project.
- The proposed methodology should aim to capture the lived experience of children, young people and/or families where appropriate.
- Research can draw on both quantitative and qualitative evidence, using approaches that are appropriate to the context and scale of the project.
- Applicants should demonstrate alignment between the project, the proposed methodology, and the learning the project seeks to generate.
- The project outcomes should be consistent with the four What Works strands and the EU Presidency theme of 'Values' particularly in relation to inclusion, equality and participation.



Research Ethics Considerations

Applicants must consider ethical requirements if planning to gather data from children, young people and/or families.

Some proposals may require ethical approval from a Research Ethics Committee (REC) before commencing. **DCDE does not have and cannot facilitate access to an REC.**

The responsibility for securing ethical approval rests with the applicant. Where ethical approval is required, applicants must factor this into their project plan and timelines.

Applicants should first consider if their proposal will require ethical approval.

Applicants should clearly indicate in their application:

- Whether ethical approval IS required, and if so from which REC.
- Where ethical approval IS NOT required, applicants should outline their rationale.

Regardless of whether formal REC approval is required, all projects funded under this scheme must adhere to good ethical practice. This should include, where appropriate:

- Informed consent (and assent) where applicable
- Safeguarding and duty of care considerations
- Confidentiality, anonymity and data protection
- Respectful and inclusive engagement with participants
- Minimising any potential risk or harm to participants

Further guidance on ethical best practice can be found in DCDE's publication on [Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children and Young Adults](#).

Submitting an Application

Applicants with any queries on the application process, including queries on eligibility for this Fund, should contact DCDE as soon as possible at WhatWorks@dcde.gov.ie.

All queries received, along with the DCDE responses, will be anonymised [and published on the What Works website](#). The deadline for queries is **close of business 22 July 2026**. For reasons of transparency and fairness to all applicants, DCDE will not enter written or telephone correspondence with any individual about the assessment process.

The application form must be completed in full, adhering to the specified word counts per question and including all supplementary information requested.



Application forms should ideally be submitted in Word (.docx). Where this is not feasible, PDF will be accepted. Hard copy applications, and applications received beyond the deadline, will not be accepted.

Please note that application forms must be submitted by **close of business 31 July 2026**, via email only, to WhatWorks@dcde.gov.ie. The email must be sent from (or CC) the signatory to the application.

All applications received will be sent a receipt of acknowledgement. We ask all applicants who do not receive a receipt to contact WhatWorks@dcde.gov.ie.

Assessment Process

1. All applications will first be checked for their eligibility by DCDE officials. Applications deemed to be ineligible will be disqualified, while applications deemed to be eligible will be assigned for assessment.
2. An assessment panel, including both DCDE officials and independent evaluator(s) with knowledge of the sector, will be established by DCDE to assign scores to the applications. Scoring will be based on the criteria outlined below:

Award Criteria	Weighting	Total Marks Available	Minimum Score Required
1. Rationale and Strategic Alignment	20%	200	100
<i>a) Evidence of need to be addressed by the project.</i>	10%	100	50
<i>b) Alignment with the Fund's theme, objectives, and the What Works strands.</i>	10%	100	50
2. Design, Learning and Evidence Generation	80%	800	400
<i>c) Quality of project methodology, including appropriate data collection methods and evidence to be generated</i>	20%	200	100
<i>d) Commitment to inclusion of service users (e.g., the voice of the child/young person) to inform the methodology, and to capturing the lived experiences of children and young people (and their families if appropriate).</i>	10%	100	50



e) <i>Potential to inform wider practice, policy or future service development. Potential for learning to be shared across the prevention and early intervention sector.</i>	10%	100	50
f) <i>Quality of project management (including Gantt Chart), and confirmation if ethical approval will be required (please see “Ethics Considerations” section in this document for further details).</i>	20%	200	100
g) <i>Level of detail / clarity in budget, alignment between costs and proposal, and compliance with eligible and ineligible cost guidance.</i>	20%	200	100
TOTAL MARKS	100%	1000	500

Notification of Results and Feedback

Once the assessment process is complete, all applicants will be informed of the outcome by email. Please note that the decision of the assessment panel is final. **Feedback will not be provided to applicants (qualitative or numerical).**

Process for Successful Applicants

A letter of award and an Award Acceptance Form will issue to successful applicants. By signing the Award Acceptance Form, Grantees will be confirming their agreement to the Terms and Conditions outlined in this Guidance Note, as well as the separate Terms and Conditions document.

Project Reporting

Grantees will be required to provide DCDE with progress reports on their projects as outlined below:

1. **A mid-project report** (*due 7 months from date of receipt of funding*). This will include information such as:
 - a) Progress to date, as set out in project plan from the application.
 - b) Project expenditure to date.
 - c) Preparation for the end of the project.



2. An end-of-project report (*due 14 months from date of receipt of funds*). This will include information such as:

- a) Review of project and presentation of outcomes.
- b) End-of-project financial review including detail on all costs, the final spending position, and the accounting officer sign-off.
- c) Any future planning that has derived from the funding, including plans to use evidence gathered or to upscale the project.
- d) The report must also be accompanied by either **a) A short video** or **b) A high-quality infographic** outlining the work carried out over the course of the project. These will be considered for inclusion on the What Works Website and for presentation of at events/seminars/webinars.

Templates for the mid-project and end-of-project progress reports will be provided at the appropriate times by DCDE.

Please note that **both progress reports should be accompanied by a certificate of assurance** (signed at management or board level by two responsible persons) certifying that the public money granted was used in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant.

Important Deadlines for this Fund

Launch of Call	17 June 2026
Deadline for Queries relating to Application Process	22 July 2026
Application Deadline	31 July 2026
Outcomes Communicated to Applicants	October 2026 (indicative)