



# Grants for Northern Ireland

## 2024 – 2025

### Guidance Notes

The Architectural Heritage Fund

<https://ahfund.org.uk/grants/northern-ireland/>

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Garfield Weston  
FOUNDATION

## What does AHF do?

The AHF helps communities across the UK find enterprising new ways to revitalise old buildings.

We do this by providing advice, grants, and social investment loans. Our grants are targeted towards early-stage project development, while loans may be used at any stage in a project. Our social investment loans (repayable finance) is also available for the acquisition of buildings, to provide working capital, for bridge / cashflow funding, or to kick-start enterprising activities.

Our aims are:

- delivering targeted investment that leads to the sustainable reuse and management of historic buildings.
- supporting charities and social enterprises to take ownership of, develop and sustain new uses for historic buildings.
- championing the impact of heritage and community-led regeneration.

## What kinds of projects does AHF support?

We want to support the conservation and sustainable re-use of historic buildings for the benefit of communities, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas.

- In general, your project will be eligible if **all** of the following apply:
- your project involves an historic building, which we define as:
  - Listed - Category A, B+, B1 or B2
  - unlisted but in a Conservation Area
  - unlisted but highly valued by the local community for its demonstrable historic interest
- your project is being led by a not-for-private-profit organization
- your project involves the building changing its use and/or a change of ownership
- your organisation already has or seeks to acquire the freehold or a long lease (usually for a minimum of 25 years) on the building

Things we **cannot** normally fund:

- work that has started before a decision to award a grant
- on site capital works
- repair costs that are not part of a larger scheme to find a new sustainable use
- ongoing maintenance costs

## Who can apply?

Your organisation must be one of the following not-for-private-profit organisations:

- Unincorporated charities (for Project Viability Grants only)
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs)
- Charitable Companies Limited by Guarantee
- Community Benefit Societies
- Not-for-private-profit Companies Limited by Guarantee
- Community Interest Companies (CICs) Limited by Guarantee
- Co-operatives

## We will not fund:

- Private individuals
- Local authorities or other public sector bodies (unless applying on behalf of an organisation still in formation)
- Universities, colleges and other mainstream educational institutions, including independent schools
- For profit companies, unless in a partnership led by a not-for-profit organisation
- Unincorporated organisations (e.g. charitable trusts and associations) that are not intending to incorporate
- Organisations with less than three Trustees or Directors (if there are only three Trustees/Directors none of these should be spouses or otherwise related to each other)
- Limited liability partnerships
- Churches or other places of worship, where the building or the space within the building you are enquiring about will be used as an active place of religious worship – defined as hosting regular religious services or religion-based activities such as prayer or religious study.

If you are unclear as to whether your project is eligible on the basis of religious activity taking place within your building, please contact one of our Officers.

## **Funding priorities**

We will prioritise projects that:

- involve a new use of a vacant historic building
- are in the top 30% most deprived areas
- involve and support diverse and marginalised communities
- have a strong focus on environmental sustainability and energy efficiency
- contribute to local regeneration schemes

## **Village Catalyst programme**

AHF is a partner in this innovative cross-departmental programme, with the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and the NI Housing Executive. Grants administered through this programme help charities and social enterprises to find uses for listed buildings or historic buildings in conservation areas, in rural villages with a population of 5,000 or fewer, which help tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

## **How are applications assessed?**

1. We consider the heritage value and condition of your building, including whether it is at risk. Does it have clear historic, architectural, or artistic significance? Is it of particular importance within your community? Does your project have the potential to improve its condition, and secure community ownership?
2. We look at the social and economic impact that your project may deliver. The building and your vision for it must have the potential to increase the vitality of the place. For example, will it increase footfall, create a new offer for residents or visitors, or support jobs and skills development. We will look at whether it contributes to a local regeneration scheme, such as a town improvement plan. Priority is given to projects in areas of high deprivation, and to projects led by, and/or benefiting, Black, Asian or minoritised ethnic communities or disabled communities, which have been traditionally under-represented as owners and users of historic assets.
3. We consider the environmental impact of the project. Are options for improving the environmental sustainability of the building and its use being explored or in place?
4. We take account of your financial need for a grant, and why the work needs to happen now. For example, is a building at risk of being lost, or do you have time-limited match funding?
5. We assess the potential risks to your project, and your organisational track record and capacity to deliver the work proposed.

## **Project Viability Grants (PVG)**

**Grant amount:** Up to £10,000 for early-stage viability work

**Project length:** Up to one year

**Location:** Anywhere in Northern Ireland

**Funding covers:** Exploring options for re-use

**Project stage:** RIBA Plan of Work stage 0 - 2

**Match-funding:** Preferred but not essential

**Timetable:** We run a two-stage application process.

## **What kind of work can be supported with an early-stage PVG grant?**

These grants should help you to establish whether a project is feasible. Work can focus on understanding the condition of the building, how it might be used, and whether that intended use is appropriate for the building and likely to be sustainable.

You may have already undertaken or commissioned some work, but still have some gaps to fill in, or you may be starting from the beginning and exploring possible options for use of a building. We need to understand how the particular piece of work or activity you are proposing will help you move forward and contribute towards revitalising a historic building.

Grants typically support an initial assessment of the building's condition and repair needs, outline design solutions sympathetic to its heritage value that can accommodate the uses under consideration, and the outline cost of the works needed to repair and convert the building. It will also involve considering the outline business case for the possible uses, based on research and consultation, and how the project could be funded. In many cases, it may be necessary to obtain an independent property valuation, for example if the funding strategy may include Social Investment (loan finance) or to identify the conservation deficit, which is where the cost of the project will exceed the value of the restored building.

## **Points to note**

We can fund up to 100% of the cost of work involved, although the overall package of work required will often be more than we can afford to pay ourselves. In that case, we prefer but do not require to see, some evidence of match funds having been secured or sought. Match funds means that you would contribute to some of the costs from your own resources and/or funds raised from other sources. For example, costs of £10,000 could mean you apply to AHF for £5,000 and apply to other sources for £5,000.

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a reasonable prospect of securing ownership, for example, a letter from the owner giving you preferred bidder status, or that they have agreed to allow you time to raise the necessary funds.

You should generally be already constituted as one of the organisational types listed above, but if part of your work is to explore the best type to set up as, we will accept applications in advance of formally registering your group. At a minimum, we will still want to see that you have an initial governing structure, clear constitution and an organisational bank account.

We prefer applications to be based on an actual quote rather than an estimate. If any item of work for which you are seeking funds is over £10,000, you must obtain at least three competitive quotes. Please get in touch with a Support Officer if you need assistance with this.

You will need to show that the proposals will be sympathetic to and not harm the historic character of the building. We want to know that there is no reason in principle why planning permission and listed building consent would not be granted. This will need to be backed by evidence that you have taken appropriate advice, including from conservation-accredited professionals.

You may find it helpful to refer to the RIBA Plan of Work when discussing your requirements with an architect or professional team and developing briefs for their work. A summary guide to the RIBA stages can be found [here](#).

## **What will this grant help you achieve?**

At the end of the funded work, you should be in a position to decide whether to commit to further cost, risk and effort in developing the project and be able to provide a route map for the next steps. We ask you to use our Project Viability Appraisal template to bring together the results of any professional reports and studies with your own knowledge of the area and potential project. This will also be a document you can then present to potential funders and supporters to help explain your plans.

## **Project Development Grants (PDG)**

**Grant amount:** Up to £20,000

**Project length:** Up to one year

**Funding covers:** Project development costs

**Match-funding:** Prefer 50% in place or being sought

**Location:** Anywhere in Northern Ireland

**Project stage:** equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 2 - 4

### **What kind of work can be supported with a development grant?**

These grants can help you to develop your proposals from feasibility through to the start of capital works. You can apply for grant support to appoint professional advisors to work with your organisation to advance the plans. These can include architects, surveyors, engineers etc. to develop the architectural plans for the historic building; additional support to build the capacity of your organisation by employing or contracting a project manager; support with refining your business plan, building community engagement and preparing funding bids.

### **Points to note**

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a formal agreement to acquire or lease it. You should be set up formally, as one of the organisational types listed above.

We require applications to be based on an actual quote rather than an estimate. If any item of work for which you are seeking funds is over £10,000, you must obtain at least three competitive quotes. Please get in touch with a Support Officer if you need assistance with this.

You will need to show that the proposals will be sympathetic to and not harm the historic character of the building. We want to know that there is no reason in principle why planning permission and listed building consent would not be granted. This will need to be backed by evidence that you have taken appropriate advice, including from conservation-accredited professionals.

If you have not completed a Project Viability Appraisal funded by us, you will need to provide details of the work you have done to test the viability of your plans – this could include an Options Appraisal, business plan or other documents. We will consider how likely it is that your project will be able to go on to attract the capital funding required.

### **What will this grant help you achieve?**

At the end of the funded work, or series of grants if more than one, you would be expected to reach the stage of securing capital funding to enable the delivery of your project.

## Which of our grants could be right for you?

Stage you have reached	Grant scheme	Decision cycle
<p><b>Just Starting Out</b></p> <p>You may be thinking about forming an organisation or have recently constituted or are a long-standing organisation tackling a new project. You have identified a building or buildings - either already in your ownership or one you are considering taking ownership. You may have some ideas about how the building could be restored and used but want to explore the options and test whether these will work.</p> <p>Village Catalyst Project Viability Grants are focused on supporting projects in villages with populations of 5,000 or fewer. Please see the <a href="#">Programme Guidance</a> available on our <a href="#">website</a> for further information.</p>	<p><b>Harnessing Heritage</b></p> <p><b>Project Viability Grant</b></p> <p><b>Village Catalyst</b></p> <p><b>Project Viability Grant</b></p> <p>Up to £10,000</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p><b>Ready to Move Forward</b></p> <p>You have already completed the feasibility and viability work needed, but you need to do more detailed work to develop your plans and help secure capital funding to deliver your project.</p> <p>Through our Village Catalyst partnership, we can offer support for project development work for projects progressing through that programme. Please see the <a href="#">Programme Guidance</a> available on our <a href="#">website</a> for further information.</p>	<p><b>Project Development Grant</b></p> <p><b>Village Catalyst Project Development Grant</b></p> <p>Up to £20,000</p>	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>Monthly</p>

In considering which grant best fits the stage you have reached in building design terms, you may find it helpful to refer to the Royal Institute of British Architect’s Plan of Work. This may help you in discussing your requirements with your architect and professional team and developing briefs for their work. A summary guide to the RIBA stages can be found [here](#) and the relevant Plan stages are noted in the tables below.

AHF grants in Northern Ireland are supported thanks to funds from the [Department for Communities](#) and [Garfield Weston Foundation](#).



## Examples of eligible costs for all grant types

- Employment of a project co-ordinator (either someone appointed externally on a consultancy basis or an existing employee(s) working additional hours on this specific project).
- Fees for professionals/consultants needed for initial plans (e.g. architect, quantity surveyor, structural engineer, mechanical & electrical engineer, energy consultant).
- Legal costs where this is critical in establishing ownership or the viability of proposed uses (e.g. advice on restrictive covenants) or for advice on governance (e.g. to explore constitutional models for delivering the project and operating the building following completion).
- Costs associated with setting up a charity, converting a Community Interest Company into a charity, or converting an existing charity or social enterprise into a Community Benefit Society.
- Property valuation by a RICS registered valuer.
- Outline fundraising plans.
- Outline business plans.
- Costs associated with developing a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund or other capital funders (e.g. Activity Plan, Training Plan, Conservation management Plan).
- Costs of community engagement work (e.g. outreach, pop-up events, consultations).
- Specialist VAT advice to help identify the most tax efficient approach.
- Organisational overheads/administration costs (no more than 20% of the grant requested).
- One year's membership of relevant organisations, such as the Heritage Trust Network, the Heritage Alliance, or Fit for the Future.

**Please note we cannot fund any work that has started, or costs you have incurred before we issue a grant offer letter.**

## How to apply

### **Application timetable:** Two-stage application process

- You can submit an Expression of Interest anytime (Stage 1)
- You will hear back from us within 2 weeks
- If your project is a close match with our funding priorities, we will invite you to submit a full application (Stage 2)
- We will let you know if your bid has been successful 2 - 3 months after receiving your second stage application

**Stage 1** – complete our short online [Expression of Interest form](#) online. This asks for initial information about your organisation, the building you are interested in, and your plans for it. We welcome the chance to discuss your plans with you before you submit your enquiry. We may also get in contact once we have received your enquiry to discuss your project and ask some follow-up questions.

**Stage 2** – if your organisation and project are eligible and appears to be a good fit with our priorities, we will invite you to submit a full application. We will send you a link to the online application form. You can complete and submit this to us when you are ready.

Please ensure you read the full guidelines before starting your application and refer to the [application form help notes](#) as you complete your application.

**Decision** – we normally take 6 - 8 weeks to assess applications. Your request for funding will then be considered at one of our monthly meetings. We will tell you when this is once we receive your application, and you will hear the outcome within one week of this meeting. If your application is unsuccessful, we will provide feedback.

## Supporting Documentation

### Essential for all applicants:

1. Your organisation's governing document (if not previously supplied).
2. List of current trustees or directors and very brief description of their roles and relevant experience.
3. Copy of a minute from a meeting of your organisation's trustees or directors, or other evidence formally recording the decision to apply for a grant from the AHF for this project.
4. Your organisation's latest audited accounts and balance sheet, recent management accounts (if available) or up-to-date certified financial statement.
5. A number of high-quality digital images of the interior and exterior of the building and any associated community events and activities.

### Essential for all applicants except Project Viability Grant applicants:

6. Proof of your organisation's ownership/long lease of the building (e.g. a copy of the title deed from the Land Registry), or evidence that your organisation can acquire the building (e.g. a letter from the owner indicating a willingness in principle to transfer ownership or lease to your organisation).
7. A Project Viability Appraisal, Feasibility Study or Options Appraisal. This should include:
  - o Evidence that the project is permissible in planning and conservation terms (e.g. copy of pre-application advice received from the local planning authority)
  - o Evidence of community/stakeholder consultation
  - o Market research report/evidence of demand from potential users

### Additional items:

Supporting information, such as that listed below, strengthens the application as it helps us to assess the overall viability of the project and how our funds could help move the project forward:

8. Business Plan.
9. Valuation report, if applicable, for example to support the calculation of a conservation

deficit, or in relation to the financing of the project.

10. Building condition report / structural survey.

11. Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment.

12. Copy of briefs for development work.

13. List of consultants invited to quote for the development work and a copy of the preferred quotation or tender.

14. Job description and person specification of the individual(s) who will be working on the project (either existing staff or new staff to be appointed).

15. Curriculum Vitae of the individual recruited to work on the project.

16. Calculation of allocation of overhead costs (using full cost recovery method).

17. Project fundraising strategy, plus confirmation of awards secured to date.

18. Relevant correspondence with potential match funders.

19. Copies of any match funding grant offer letters (relating to the work you are asking us to fund).

20. Partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding.

21. Any other relevant information you think we need to see.

## **What happens when a grant has been awarded?**

You will receive a formal grant offer letter, which includes terms and conditions. You will then need to confirm that you accept these before you start the funded work.

We provide additional guidance for grant holders, but key points to note at this stage are:

- The work you would like us to fund must not start until after we have taken a decision to award a grant. We cannot cover costs you have incurred before your grant offer date.

- Our grants are normally valid for one year.

- We will ask you for updates during your work, usually when you are making a grant claim.

Following completion, we may ask you to provide brief updates, so that we can understand the outcomes our funding has helped you to achieve.

- We will ask you to publicise our support for your project, as a condition of the grant.
- Grant payments are normally made in arrears, once work has completed: you will need to submit an online claim form and upload copies of invoices and evidence of work completed.

If necessary, we can make grant payments in stages to help you manage costs and cashflow.

- We generally expect you to have claimed your grant in full before applying for any others for the same project, unless you have agreed otherwise with us in advance.

### **Where can I get more help and information?**

There is more information and guidance available on our website at [www.ahfund.org.uk](http://www.ahfund.org.uk). You can also find contact details for our team of Support Officers [here](#), who will be happy to help.

### **Do you offer other financial support?**

Alongside grants, the AHF provides social investment loans to charities, social enterprises and community businesses across the UK seeking to acquire, reuse or redevelop buildings which are of historic or architectural importance.

Social investment is available for the acquisition of buildings, to provide working capital, for bridge / cash flow funding, or to kick-start enterprising activities. Find out more about the different advice, social investment and grants we provide on our website at [www.ahfund.org.uk](http://www.ahfund.org.uk).