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**Community & Voluntary Sector Grant Aid Policy**

**2025/2026**

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1. **Introduction**

The Community and Voluntary Grant Aid Programme provides financial support to local community and voluntary organisations and individuals to deliver a range of projects and activities which meet the needs of their community in line with Mid Ulster District Council’s Corporate Plan and Community Plan.

1. **Policy Aims and Objectives**

To allow the Council to support organisations and persons from the district, and to confirm the process for providing financial support in the form of a grant.

Policy Objectives

* Provide a mechanism that enables Council to support the community and voluntary sector in the provision of programmes and activities for community benefit.
* Provide a policy which demonstrates Council commitment to equality to all individuals and groups throughout the district.
* Confirm the process for administering grant aid.
* Confirm criteria which should be met for applications to be eligible, and the scoring mechanisms used to determine the level of grant aid allocated.

1. **Policy Scope**

This policy relates to the provision of financial support to groups and individuals contributing to the development and capacity building of community, arts, culture, heritage, environment, sports and health and well-being activities within the Mid Ulster District Council Area. It extends to how requests are considered and the standard to be achieved to receive grant aid.

1. **Linkage to Corporate Plan**

Theme 5: Communities

Priority: We will continue, through our community development programmes, grant aid schemes and our partnership working, to support local communities and to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector.

* Allocating grants to support communities to deliver for their local areas
* Capacity building and investment to support local groups to maximise investment for their facilities and programmes
* Promoting and developing the usage of our minority languages, the Irish Language through our services and with our local groups and Ulster Scots cultural expression.

1. **Grants and Categories**

The Grants team will administer the Community and Voluntary Grant Aid Programme via the online portal Submit.com.

The grants will be divided into four Categories. \*In any one year, groups can apply for one grant from Category 1, one grant from Category 2 and one grant from Category 3 and any or all grants in Category 4.

\*All grants are subject to eligibility and assessment.

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|  | **CATEGORY 1 – Please note - groups can only apply for one grant from this category.** | | | | |
| **Grant Name** | **Small Development Grant** | **Community Venues/Facilities Grant** | **Strategic Sports Development Grant** | **Strategic Arts & Culture Grant** | **Strategic Community Development Grant** |
| **Purpose of the grant** | To provide financial support to local community groups to deliver a range of community, arts, culture, heritage, environment or sports projects within the district. | To provide financial support to local community groups who provide community venues and facilities (including sports). | To provide financial support to Sports Governing Bodies that provide direct support across Mid Ulster through the employment of a Sports Coach and related costs. | To provide financial support to organisations that deliver a structured annual Arts & Cultural programme within their own performance space/theatre. | To provide financial support to larger organisations that provide community development support to other groups across the district. |
| **Who can apply?** | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11). | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) and can evidence ownership or long-term lease of a community venue or facility which is open for community use more than 10 hours per week. | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) and is a Governing body of Sports as recognised by Sport NI. | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) and owns or has a long-term lease on a dedicated performance space. | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) and can evidence provision of community development support to other groups. |
| **Application requirements** | * Level of activity and participation * Duration of activity * How activity addresses social inclusion/diversity * Contribution to volunteer development * Breakdown of costs | * Level of activity and participation * Duration of activity * How activity addresses social inclusion/diversity * Size of venue/facility. * Evidence of sustainability * Breakdown of costs | * Sports development activity plan * No. of beneficiaries * Proposed outcomes * Partnerships with local clubs, schools and wider community * Level of geographic coverage * Breakdown of costs | * Annual programme of arts & cultural activity * No. of beneficiaries * Proposed outcomes * Size of performance space * Level of geographic coverage * Breakdown of costs | * Level of community support activity * Level of benefit * How activity targets deprivation & social need * Level of provision * Level of geographic coverage * Breakdown of costs |
| **Award Level** | Up to £1,500 | Up to £3,500 | Up to £15,000 | Up to £20,000 | Up to £8,000 |
| **When will the application open?** | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 for Activity between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 | | | | |
| **When will I know if I was awarded & when will I get paid?** | Letters of Offer/Unsuccessful Letters issued as early as possible in new financial year  100% payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer | | Letters of Offer/Unsuccessful Letters issued as early as possible in new financial year  50% Advance payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer, balance on receipt of final online monitoring and claim form with corresponding invoices and bank statements for full project expenditure. | | |
| **Verification of outputs and expenditure** | Submission of online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grant. 10% onsite verification spot checks on outcomes and expenditure | | | | |

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|  | **CATEGORY 2 - Please note - groups can only apply for one grant from this category.** | | |
| **Grant Name** | **Community Local Festival Grant** | **Good Relations Grant** | **Strategic Events Grant** |
| **Purpose of the grant** | To provide financial support to local community groups delivering a community festival or event.  This should utilise the potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors to promote equality, tackle poverty and social inclusion. | To provide financial support to local community groups to deliver projects which promote good relations in line with the Government Together Building United Communities Strategy Themes: Our Shared Community, Safe Community, Cultural Expression through increased use of shared spaces and services | To provide financial support to local community groups delivering a large community festival or event (over 1000 people) which receives regional tourism attendance and coverage.  This should utilise the potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors to promote equality, tackle poverty and social inclusion. |
| **Who can apply?** | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) |
| **Application requirements** | * Level of activity and participation * Duration of activity * Number of beneficiaries (Mid Ulster and neighbouring areas) * How activity addresses good relations and social isolation * Development of festival * Breakdown of costs | * Community beneficiaries and participation * Contribution to Good Relations themes as noted in purpose of grant above * Proposed outcomes * Breakdown of costs | * Level of activity * Duration of event * Number of beneficiaries * Promotion of Mid Ulster Council and area at a regional level * Development of event * Social, Regeneration and Economic Return * How activity addresses good relations and inclusion * Event Management experience * Breakdown of costs |
| **Award Level** | Up to £1,500 | Up to £1,500 | Up to £8,000 |
| **When will the application open?** | Round 1 Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025  Round 2 Open 6th June – 4th July 2025 (if budget available after Round 1) | | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 |
| **When will I know if I was awarded & when will I get paid?** | Round 1 - As early as possible in new financial year  Round 2 Sept/Oct 2025  100% payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer | | As early as possible in new financial year  50% Advance payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer, balance on receipt of final online monitoring and claim form with corresponding invoices and bank statements for full project expenditure. |
| **Verification of outputs and expenditure** | Submission of online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grant. 10% onsite verification spot checks on outcomes and expenditure | | |

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|  | **CATEGORY 3 - Please note - groups can only apply for one grant from this category.** | | |
| **Grant Name** | **Pitches and Recreational Spaces Strategy Feasibility Development Grant** | **Pitches and Recreational Spaces Strategy Infrastructure Development Grant (groups eligible for one award every 3 years)** | **Capital Discretionary Grant (groups eligible for one award every 3 years)** |
| **Purpose of the grant** | To provide financial support to sports clubs/organisations for technical assistance costs that will assist in the delivery of their development plans. Specifically in the preparation of future capital funding applications that require Economic Appraisals/Business Cases, Feasibility Studies/Professional Design/Planning Consultant fees. | To provide financial support to sports clubs/organisations for capital investment to improve facilities that will enhance community outcomes for the 5 identified sporting codes within the Councils Pitches and Recreational Spaces Strategy that was approved by Council in February 2022 (Association Football, Gaelic Games, Hockey, Lawn Bowls and Rugby). | To provide financial support to groups for capital investment to improve facilities that will enhance community outcomes for a period in excess of five years, examples of which may include a new facility or refurbishment/renovation of an existing building or facility.  This grant will not provide support for acquisition of land, buildings or other assets such as equipment other than fixed plant for example permanently installed elevators/lifts. |
| **Who can apply?** | Any sports club/organisation that meets the standard eligibility criteria at pg. 11 and is affiliated to a Sport Northern Ireland recognised governing body of sport;and their substantive area is one of the following 5 sporting codes as identified in the Pitches and Recreational Strategy:   * Association Football * Gaelic Games * Hockey * Lawn Bowls * Rugby | Any sports club/organisation that meets the standard eligibility criteria at pg. 11 and is affiliated to a Sport Northern Ireland recognised governing body of sport;and their substantive area is one of the following 5 sporting codes as identified in the Pitches and Recreational Strategy:   * Association Football * Gaelic Games * Hockey * Lawn Bowls * Rugby   The applicant must own or have an appropriate long-term lease (minimum 10 years) in place and have a capital project with a minimum value of £150,000. Groups eligible for one award every 3 years. Groups can not apply for this grant and the Capital Discretionary within a 3-year period. | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria at pg. 11.  The applicant must own or have an appropriate long-term lease (minimum 10 years) in place and have a capital project with a minimum value of £150,000. Groups eligible for one award every 3 years. Groups can not apply for this grant and the Pitches and Recreational Spaces Infrastructure Development Grant within a 3-year period. |
| **Application requirements** | * Evidence of need and benefit * Up to date 3-year Club Development Plan in place. * Contribution to Council’s corporate aims and objectives including how it links to the Mid Ulster District Council Pitches and Recreational Spaces Strategy * Project Timeline. The Project must be completed within 18 months of letter of offer | * Evidence of community ownership (legal title or an appropriate long-term lease - minimum 10 years - will be required) * Evidence of need and benefit * Up to date 3-year Club Development Plan in place. * Statutory Requirements - The project must be at a state of readiness at time of application; with match funding, planning permission, land acquisition or lease agreement (if required), and other statutory permissions in place along with certified accurate costings. * Contribution to Council’s corporate aims and objectives including how it links to the Mid Ulster District Council Pitches and Recreational Spaces Strategy. * Project timeline. The Project must be completed within 18 months of letter of offer | * Evidence of community ownership (legal title or an appropriate long-term lease - minimum 10 years - will be required) * Community Benefit – A Project Plan must be in place to show community need and benefit and to avoid any potential issues of duplication. * Statutory Requirements - The project must be at a state of readiness 6 months after letter of offer; with planning permission, land acquisition or lease agreement (if required), and other statutory permissions in place along with accurate costings. * Contribution to Council’s Corporate aims and objectives including how it links to the Mid Ulster Council Community Plan * Project timeline. The Project must be completed within 18 months of letter of offer |
| **Award Level** | Up to 50% of eligible costs with a maximum grant award of £10,000 | Maximum grant award of £50,000, with a match funding requirement of £100,000, to deliver schemes of a minimum £150,000 value | Maximum grant award of £50,000, with a match funding requirement of £100,000, to deliver schemes of a minimum £150,000 value |
| **When will the application open?** | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 | | |
| **When will I know if I was awarded & when will I get paid?** | As early in the new financial year as possible.  A 50% Advance payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer, balance will be paid on receipt of final online monitoring and claim form with corresponding procurement, invoices and bank statements for full project expenditure. | As early as possible in the new financial year  Payment on receipt of final online monitoring and claim form with corresponding procurement documents, certificate of works, invoices and bank statements for full project expenditure and site visit carried out. | |
| **Verification of outputs and expenditure** | Submission of online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grant. 10% onsite verification spot checks on outcomes and expenditure | Submission of online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grant along with associated procurement, certificate of works and corresponding bank statements. 100% onsite verification checks on outcomes and expenditure | |

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| **CATEGORY 4 – Please note groups can apply for all grants in this category** | | | | | | | |
| **Grant Name** | **\*Irish Language Activity Grant** | **\*Regional and Minority Languages Bursary** | **\*Seachtain Na Gaeilge/Irish Language Week** | **Sports Representative Teams Grant** | **Sports Representative Individual Grant** | **School Sports Access Grant** |
| **Purpose of the grant** | To provide financial support to local community groups to deliver a range of initiatives to promote the Irish language in the mid Ulster area. | To provide financial support to assist in the learning of Irish and Ulster Scots through study visits to recognised Summer Colleges. | To provide financial support to local community groups to deliver activities to recognise and promote Seachtain Na Gaeilge/Irish Language Week in March 2026 | To provide financial support to local sports clubs who have qualified to represent the district/county at a provincial, national or international level. | To provide financial support to individuals who have qualified to represent the district/county at a provincial, national or international level. | To provide financial support to under-represented sports clubs for use of schools’ synthetic pitch facilities or to schools which offer access to their synthetic pitch facilities outside curriculum times. |
| **Who can apply?** | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) | Residents of Mid Ulster District Council area who are registered to attend a language course in Irish or Ulster Scots. | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) | Any sports club team that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) and is recognised by Sport NI and has qualified to represent the district/county in a competition recognised by the governing body of their sport. | Any resident of Mid Ulster that has been selected by their governing body to participate in a representative team or individual sport at provincial, national, or international level | Any group that meets the standard eligibility criteria (page 11) or a school based in the Mid Ulster Council area that is using the funding for one of the following under-represented sports:   * Hockey * Ladies’ Soccer * Ladies’ Gaelic/Camogie * Ladies’ Rugby |
| **Application requirements** | * Level of Activity and participation * Proposed outcomes * Proposed Partners * Breakdown of costs | * Course details * How the course will develop your language skills | * Level of Activity and participation * Proposed outcomes * Proposed Partners * Breakdown of costs | * Evidence of qualification * Location of event (must be outside NI) * Level of representation * Breakdown of costs | * Letter from governing body confirming selection or proof of qualification * Location of event (must be outside NI) * Level of representation * Breakdown of costs | In relation to the under-represented sport that funding is sought:   * Level of activity, frequency and numbers * Identification of need * Contribution to fitness, well-being and sports development * Breakdown of costs * Confirmation letter from School providing facilities |
| **Award Level** | Up to £15,000 | Up to £500 | Up to £3000 | Up to £500 | Up to £250 | Up to £5,000 |
| **When will the application open?** | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 | Opens 6th June – 4th July 2025 | Rolling Grant Open from 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026 (or until budget exhausted) | Rolling Grant  from 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026 (or until budget exhausted) | Open 17th Jan – 14th Feb 2025 |
| **When will I know if I was awarded?** | As early as possible in the new financial year | As early as possible in the new financial year | Sept/Oct 2025 | Within 60 days of application | Within 60 days of application | As early as possible in the new financial year |
| **Verification of outputs and expenditure** | Submission of online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grant. 10% onsite verification spot checks on outcomes and expenditure | | | | | 50% Advance payment on receipt of Form of Acceptance of Letter of Offer, balance on receipt of final online monitoring and claim form listing expenditure relating to grants, with corresponding invoices and bank statements for full project. |

\*Applications are advertised and accepted in both Irish and English language. If the application is made in Irish, correspondence will be returned in Irish. If the application is made in English, correspondence will be returned in English. Grants team to request translations from Irish language Officers as required.

1. **Standard Eligibility Conditions**
2. Groups applying for grant aid must be a Mid Ulster based, constituted community or voluntary organisation with no element of personal or private gain.
3. Evidence of good governance required with applications is set out in the table below. Please note that registered charities with a current valid registration number will not be required to submit their annual governance documentation with any application, as assurance is confirmed via annual returns made to the Charities Commission NI under regulatory compliance. Charity numbers will be checked and must be up to date with returns.

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| **Documents** | **Registered Charities (with Charity Commission NI)** | **New groups and groups who have not received Council funding in last 3 years** | **Groups applying for under £3500 (who have received Council funding in last 3 years)** | **Groups applying for over £3500** |
| **AGM Minutes** | Not required | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 |
| **Financial Statement** | Not required | 🗸 | 🗸 | 🗸 |
| **Constitution or governing document** | Not required | 🗸 | **\***Confirm in place and available on request | 🗸 |
| **Relevant insurance cover** | Copy required if a new group or had no Council funding in last 3 years. If previous funding received confirm available on request. | 🗸 | **\***Confirm in place and available on request | 🗸 |
| **Relevant Safeguarding policies** | Copy required if a new group or had no Council funding in last 3 years. If previous funding received confirm available on request. | 🗸 | **\***Confirm in place and available on request | 🗸 |

🗸 Document to be uploaded with application

\*Groups will be asked to tick to confirm that these documents are in place and have not changed since their last application and that they are available to view on request. If there have been changes, amended versions will be required. Spot checks will be carried out.

1. Statutory organisations, activities and recipients (incl. activities that receive statutory core provision) are not eligible for grant aid, except for schools in the School Sports Access Grant.
2. Regional groups/organisations are not eligible to apply for grant aid except for governing bodies in Strategic Sports Grants
3. Individuals can apply to the sport’s representative grants and regional and minority language bursaries only.
4. Groups should have no element of personal or private gain to any member of its committee. Community Interest Companies will need to confirm directors are not in receipt of any remuneration and have at least 3 non-related directors.
5. Groups are only eligible to apply for one grant from Category 1, one grant from Category 2 and one grant from Category 3 and any or all grants in Category 4.
6. All applicants must present a project that will take place within the Mid Ulster District Council area (except Sports Representative Grants and Regional and Minority languages Bursary.
7. Applicants must present a project that will be delivered between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 (except for capital grants that have 18-month Letter of Offer)
8. Funding cannot be allocated for a project or venue where an existing SLA exists with Council for the same project or venue.
9. The same project cannot be split across different grant categories.
10. Incomplete applications or applications which are deemed to include misleading information will not be considered.
11. Religious or political activity cannot be funded under any grant.
12. All funded activities should be open and inclusive
13. **Items not eligible for funding**
14. Hospitality greater than 20% of the grant maximum level of funding
15. Bad debt, loans, bank charges, deficits or arrears in payments of any organisation, reclaimable VAT
16. Flags, bunting or alcohol
17. Gifts and Donations
18. Retrospective or duplicate funding applications
19. Salaries are only eligible under strategic grants up to the value of 50% of the maximum grant award with the exception with Strategic Sports Grants which can be funded at 100% but must be match funded by a governing body.
20. **Grants** **administration process**
21. Annual grant aid policy reviewed and approved through Committee and Council.
22. All grants publicly advertised in local papers, Council website, community newsletter and social media platforms
23. Grant Aid information sessions held across the district and online
24. Applications will be online via the Mid Ulster Council website.
25. All eligible grant applications will be scored against the set criteria by an assessment panel of at least 2 people from the grant’s administration team.
26. Grant Moderation will be carried out by a panel of at least 2 people, separate from the assessment panel. They will review a random selection of applications and scores to ensure that the assessment process has been carried out fairly and consistently.
27. Declaration of interest forms will be completed before assessment and moderation panels in line with The Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.
28. Recommendations for awards based on assessment panel scores will be presented to Development Committee and Full Council for approval and ratification.
29. Letters of Offer or unsuccessful letters will be issued to all applicants
30. For grant awards under £3500, 100% of the funding will be paid out on receipt of the signed Form of Acceptance.
31. For grant awards over £3500, 50% of the award will be paid in advance (on receipt of form of acceptance) and the remaining 50% paid once final monitoring and claim form are submitted with corresponding invoices and bank statements. (exception for Capital Discretionary and Pitches Infrastructure Grants)
32. All claim and monitoring information must be submitted by 30th June 2026 deadline. Claims received after this time will not be considered for payment (exception for Capital Discretionary and Pitches Infrastructure Grants)
33. If an advance payment has been made and no corresponding claim has been submitted by 30th June 2026 deadline, this payment must be refunded to Mid Ulster District Council. No further payments will be made to the group until the refund has been received.
34. **Appeals Process**

An appeals process will be available for unsuccessful applicants. There will be no right of appeal in relation to the level of funding granted however appeals can be made based on the view that:

1. The stated process has not been followed.
2. The application has been rejected on the basis that eligibility criteria has been applied incorrectly.
3. The scoring against the assessment criteria for the programme has not been undertaken correctly.

An appeal letter must be submitted to the grant administration team in writing within 10 working days of the date of receipt of an unsuccessful letter. This must make clear the basis on which the appeal is being made.

This will be considered by the Strategic Director of Communities and Place who will review the process and application and present a recommendation. In all cases, the reasons for decisions will be given in writing along with any proposed recommendations.

1. **Monitoring and Claim Verification**

Monitoring and evaluation of grant funded projects will aim to ensure that:

* Expenditure relates to project application
* The predicted outcomes are delivered as described in the application (where outcomes are not being met, a development officer will support the group to address any issues).
* Council has received adequate communication/promotion
* Council procurement requirements have been met ensuring value for money

All grant recipients will be required to complete an online monitoring and claim form at the end of their project detailing:

* Project expenditure
* Level of community benefit
* Any increase in the level of volunteering
* How Mid Ulster Council was recognised as the funder of the project

For grants up to £20,000, officers will carry out a verification visit on 10% of completed projects. This will include:

* Verification of invoices and bank statements against listed expenditure.
* Evaluation of the project's performance and outcomes against its aims and objectives
* Identify any areas for improvement or development support.

For grants over £20,000 (Capital Grants), officers will carry out verification visits on 100% of projects. This will include:

* Public Advertisement of tender opportunity (Belfast Telegraph or Irish News and Newsletter).
* Full specification as supplied to potential bidders
* Tender report summarising the tender evaluation process including scoring matrix.
* Original Invoice/s for the total project cost, addressed to the organisation showing suppliers name, address & contact details. Invoices should detail the work undertaken or goods supplied.
* Professionally signed off certificates of works (to the full value of the total project costs as submitted in the application)
* Bank statements showing payment of total project costs clearing the organisations bank account.
* Site Visit by Grants Officer to view finished project.
* Final grant payment will be paid in arrears (no advance payment).