



Ards and North Down Borough Council

Multi-annual Arts Grant 2026 - 2028

Application Criteria and Guidance Notes

Deadline for applications: **Monday 12 January 2026, 12noon**

General Conditions of Application:

- All applications must be: completed in full, submitted with all necessary supporting information and received by the closing date set out in the advertisement and application form.
- Late / incomplete / retrospective applications will not be considered.
- Applications to the Arts Multi-Annual Fund will open every two years.
- Grants awarded are subject to budget approval.

Applications must be submitted to:

artsgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk or to Ards Arts Centre, Town Hall, Conway Square, Newtownards, BT23 4NP

**Please read these guidance notes carefully before
submitting an application**

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Multi-Annual Arts Funding 2026-28 Criteria and Guidance Notes

Multi-Annual funding for Arts is used to help arts organisations in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area to carry out their work, and to create annual programmes which benefit people in the borough. Arts organisations, in all recognised artforms and practices, can apply for funding for their core and programming costs.

The aim of the Multi-Annual Arts Fund is to support non-profit making arts organisations for overheads and to deliver arts programmes:

- To improve access to the arts
- To contribute to the thriving arts sector in the borough
- To promote and encourage artistic development and skills in the community
- To encourage participation in the arts
- To support wellbeing through creative activity
- To ensure quality arts experiences

The Multi-Annual Arts Funding stream will be open for applications from [17 November 2025](#) and will close on [12 January 2026](#).

Timescales

Scheme advertised	From 21 Aug 2025
Scheme open	17 Nov 2025 – 12 Jan 2026
Date of Assessment	15 Jan 2026
Award and regret letters issued	From 16 Feb 2026
Letter of acceptance received	By 16 Mar 2026
Completion of grant period	Year 1: 31 Mar 2027 Year 2: 31 Mar 2028
Claim to be submitted	First claim by 16 Mar 2026
Monitoring Form to be submitted	Year 1: By 28 Feb 2027 Year 2: By 28 Feb 2028
Close of Scheme	31 Mar 2028

Who is eligible?

This grant stream is open to:

- Non-profit making arts organisations¹ in all recognised artforms² that are based in the borough of Ards and North Down.
- The core purpose of the arts organisation and an 80% majority of their annual programming must be arts specific. See Appendix 2.

To determine eligibility, applicants must answer the eligibility Section 2 of the application form and are required to provide the following information:

- A copy of the arts organisation's Constitution or Articles of Association
- Most up-to-date accounts with the application.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for Multi-Annual Arts funding, the applicant must meet **ALL** of the following criteria:

- Be an established arts organisation as defined in Appendix 1
- Be located within the Ards and North Down Borough
- The core purpose of the arts organisation and an 80% majority of their annual programming must be arts focused within the recognised artforms
- Contribute to the thriving arts sector in the borough
- Have been in operation as a constituted arts organisation for a minimum of three years
- Have a demonstrated record of regular, ongoing arts programming
- Have a viable administrative structure
- Demonstrate effective governance by a Board of Directors or other body responsible for the arts organisation
- Demonstrate good financial management and balanced budgets

The above will be reviewed by the assessment panel to determine if eligibility criteria have been met by the applicant.

Who is not eligible / exclusions?

Examples of applicants who are not eligible for the Multi-Annual Arts Fund:

- Individuals or sole traders
- Organisations which do not meet the eligibility criteria and do not have arts as the core purpose of the organisation
- Organisations which cannot demonstrate an 80% majority of their annual programming is arts focused within the recognised artforms

¹ See Appendix 1 for definition of an Arts Organisation for the purpose of this funding stream

² See Appendix 2 for definition of recognised artforms for the purpose of this funding stream

- Community groups
- Umbrella organisations (eg: those that fall under / are governed by another main organisation)
- Statutory bodies for activities which fall within their statutory remit
- Broadcasters
- Commercial trading companies
- Companies that exist to distribute a profit
- Applicants who have broken the terms of a previous Ards and North Down Borough Council letter of offer in the previous 4 years or who remain in breach of previous terms
- Grants will not be given for charity fundraising / donation-led activities
- Grants will not be given for profit making activities
- Grants will not be given for gifts and prizes
- Retrospective funding is not available

Community organisations undertaking arts related events/projects are not eligible for this funding stream as other community and arts project funding is provided by Ards and North Down Borough Council to support these needs.

Funding

There are two types of Multi-annual Arts Funding:

Multi-Annual Arts Fund: CORE

This is for Arts Organisations who are providing a year long programme of arts activity. Their costs will reflect having premises from where they administer and/or deliver the annual arts programme.

Arts Organisations can apply for up to £5,000 per annum.

- Administrative salaries
- Rent and Rates
- Light and Heat
- Maintenance, security, etc.
- Telephone and Fax
- Printing, postage, stationery
- Financial costs e.g.: accountancy
- Insurance

Multi-Annual Arts Fund: PROGRAMMING

This multi-annual arts funding is for arts organisations who deliver an annual, large-scale, quality arts project to a high standard.

Arts Organisations can apply for up to £4,000 per annum.

- Artists' costs
- Volunteer expenses
- Publicity/Marketing (excluding catering/merchandising)

- Transportation
- Travel, accommodation, subsistence
- Equipment/Materials

What type of grant is available?

- Maximum grants of up to £4,000 (Programming) or £5,000 (Core) are available for each year of the award - April 2026 to March 2028.
- Grants can represent up to 50% maximum of overall programme/expenditure.
- Grants can be used in conjunction with other funding sources, such as the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Applicants must clearly demonstrate that other funding will be used for different elements of their programme(s).
- Each recipient of Programming funding cannot receive funding for the same festival/event activity from other Ards and North Down Borough Council funds.
- **Grants awarded are subject to budget approval.**

Successful applications will not automatically lead to repeat funding.

Scoring

1. Eligibility (Yes / No)

Assessed under Qs 1 - 8 of the application form, plus constitution

In this section, the applicant must clearly demonstrate:

- That they meet the eligibility criteria as stated on pages 2 – 3 of the guidance notes

If applicants do not meet the eligibility criteria, the application will not be scored further.

Scoring Matrix

On meeting the above eligibility criteria, applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Artistic Merit / Quality and Programming (40%)

Assessed under Q11, Q12, Q14, Q15 of the application form edit Qs to be correct

In this section, the applicant must clearly demonstrate:

- a strong artistic vision delivered through the proposed annual programme and linked to the arts organisation's core aims and objectives or strategic plan
- a programme that demonstrates artistic merit and quality

2. Organisational Management, Governance, and Finances (25%)

Assessed under Q10, Q16, Q17, Q20, Q21 of the application form

In this section the applicant must clearly demonstrate:

- capacity to deliver the proposed programme
- good practice in terms of governance

- good practice in terms of financial management

3. Audience Benefit (35%)

Assessed under Q13.i. – Q13.iv. of the application form

In this section, the applicant must clearly demonstrate:

- who the audiences and participants were and who/how many you engaged with
- how you engaged with your audiences/participants
- specific activities used to promote greater access and participation to the arts
- how the arts organisation contributes to the development of the arts sector in the borough

Applications will be scored based on a Scoring Matrix.³

A pass mark will be agreed and set before applications are assessed. Those who do not reach the pass mark will not be awarded.

In the event of the grant stream being oversubscribed against maximum funding available, allocation of funds will be awarded to successful applicants based on ranked scores, until the maximum available funding is reached.

Assessment Process

- All grant applications received by email (to artsgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk) will receive an auto-reply to confirm that the email has been received.
- All grant applications will receive an acknowledgement email after the date of the deadline from the Arts Service of Ards and North Down Borough Council, along with information on the next steps.
- Fully completed and submitted applications received by the closing date and time will be assessed against the criteria detailed in the Criteria and Guidance Notes by an assessment panel comprising Council Officers.
- Assessment panels will apply a minimum pass mark; scoring criteria will be detailed in the grant Criteria and Guidance Notes; details of a situation where the amount of grant funding exceeds the available grant budget will be outlined in the grant criteria and supporting guidance notes.
- All applicants will be informed by email of the outcome of the assessments once this process has been completed.
- A Letter of Offer and Form of Acceptance will be issued to successful applicants.

How to draw down the grant:

- Successful applicants must accept in writing any award given within 4 weeks of the letter of offer being received in order to draw down 80% of year 1 of the grant in **April 2026**. In the event of this deadline not being adhered to, the offer will be withdrawn.

³ See Appendix 3 for details on the Scoring Matrix

- In order to draw down the remaining 20% of year 1 of the grant, applicants must complete an evaluation report before the end of each financial year. No funding will be paid out for Year 2 until this evaluation report has been received for Year 1.
- Ards and North Down Borough Council must be acknowledged on all promotional material in accordance with branding guidelines.
- Organisations must ensure suitable insurance/public liability cover is in place for all activities.
- Where appropriate, recipients must produce a current safeguarding policy.
- Successful applicants are required to invite a representative of Ards and North Down Borough Council to public events or activities.
- Arts funding must be used for the purpose for which the application was initially made. If any change is to occur in relation to the use of funding Ards and North Down Borough Council's Arts section must be informed immediately.
- In circumstances where the conditions of grant are not adhered to satisfactorily, Ards and North Down Borough Council will insist on full repayment of the funding allocated.
- Any money not utilised or accounted for must be returned to Ards and North Down Borough Council.
- **Grants awarded are subject to budget approval.**

What happens to your Application?

- Applications to the Multi-Annual Arts Fund are assessed after each deadline by a panel made of Ards and North Down Borough Council Officers
- You will be notified by email of the outcome of your application once this assessment process is complete.
- The deadlines for receipt of applications are published on the cover of the application form. Completed applications should be submitted to Ards Arts Centre via the contact details given, and by the relevant deadline.
- A pass mark will be agreed and set before applications are assessed. In the event of the grant stream being oversubscribed against maximum funding available, allocation of funds will be awarded to successful applicants based on ranked scores, until the maximum available funding is reached.
- Please refer the Council website regarding appeals procedure.
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Equality of Opportunity, Section 75 and Good Relations

Ards and North Down Borough Council is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability or without
- persons with dependants or without

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, Council is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Council is committed to fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties across all functions (including service provision, employment and procurement)

Freedom of Information

Ards and North Down Borough Council is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This Act came into operation on 1st January 2005. Applicants should be aware that the information provided in the completed application document could be disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Council will proceed on the basis of disclosure unless an appropriate exemption applies. No information provided by applicants will be accepted "in confidence" and Ards and North Down Borough Council will not accept liability for loss as a result of any information disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

Ards and North Down Borough Council does not have a discretion regarding whether or not to disclose information in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act, unless an exemption applies. Decisions in relation to disclosure will be taken by appropriate individuals in Ards and North Down Borough Council having due regard to the exemptions available and the Public Interest. Applicants should be aware that despite the availability of some exemptions, information may still be disclosed if the Public Interest in its disclosure outweighs the Public Interest in maintaining the exemption. Applicants are required to highlight information included in the application documents which they consider to be commercially sensitive or confidential in nature, and should state the precise reasons, why that view is taken. In particular, issues concerning trade secrets and commercial sensitivity should be highlighted. Applicants are advised against recording unnecessary information.

In accordance with the Lord Chancellors Code of Practice on the discharge of public functions, Ards and North Down Borough Council will not accept any contractual term that purports to restrict the disclosure of information held by the Council in respect of the contract or grant process save as permitted by the Freedom of Information Act. The decision whether to disclose information rests solely with Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Ards and North Down Borough Council will consult with applicants, where it is considered appropriate, in relation to the release of controversial information.

Data Protection

Ards and North Down Borough Council values the right to personal privacy. We collect this information solely for the purposes of this application and do not share it with anyone. We comply with the DPA (Data Protection Act) 2018 and UK GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), ensuring that information is collected fairly and lawfully, is accurate, adequate, secure, up to date and not held any longer than necessary.

For further information our Privacy Statement can be viewed at <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/privacy-and-cookies>

How to Apply:

Applications for Multi-Annual Arts Funding are available from:

1. Download online at www.andculture.org.uk or www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/resident/grants
2. Request by email to: artsgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
3. Contact the Arts Service on 028 9181 0803
4. In person at Ards Arts Centre, Conway Square, Newtownards, BT23 4NP during opening hours

DEADLINE

Completed applications should be returned by email* by the closing date of **Monday 12 January 2026, 12 noon** along with the required documentation to:

Email: artsgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Please type the subject line: Multi Annual Arts Fund Application

**If you would prefer to hand deliver your application to Ards Arts Centre, please contact us in advance to arrange a delivery date and time before the deadline to ensure staff will be in the building to receive your application and issue you with a receipt of delivery. Please note that Ards Arts Centre is closed on Sundays, Mondays, and Bank Holidays.*

If you are emailing your application and documents we advise you to password protect emails that contain sensitive data in order to keep you and your personal information safe and if requested we can forward you instructions on how to do this. Council also now use Zivver for safe transfer of information and we can assist applicants with doing this.

Appendix 1

Definition of an ‘Arts Organisation’

The following is a definition of an arts organisation to be eligible for the purpose of this funding stream:

An arts organisation is a non-profit organisation, whose core objective is to create art, support artistic development or share artistic experiences with the public and our local communities.

Their activities can include curating exhibitions, staging performances, providing arts education and outreach arts programmes, supporting artists, and fostering public engagement with the arts. They contribute to enriching cultural life within our borough, presenting artistic quality, merit and making the arts accessible to diverse audiences.

Appendix 2

Definition of ‘Recognised Art Form’

The core purpose of the arts organisation, and their annual programming, must be arts focused within the recognised art forms as stated.

The following are examples of recognised art forms for the purpose of this funding stream:

Visual Arts:

This includes traditional painting, drawing, printmaking, illustration, sculpture, photography, and more contemporary forms such as lens-based, installation art and digital art.

Craft:

Craft is considered as those disciplines defined by the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland (<https://www.dcci.ie/>). This can include ceramics, textiles and fashion, woodworking, silver/goldsmithing, glasswork, stonework. *Please note that in this instance for this grant scheme, ‘Upcycling’, candle making / work containing candles or wax melts, cosmetics / soaps / skin care, and electrical goods will not be eligible.*

Literary Arts:

This includes poetry, prose, creative writing, and other forms such as screenwriting and songwriting.

Performing Arts:

This includes music, theatre, dance, and other forms of live performance.

Digital Art:

This refers to artwork created exclusively in the digital space, including online artwork, digital installations, and digital applications that deliver artistic content. It can either exist in the digital space or be translated into a physical object or tangible experience through technology.

Appendix 3

Scoring Matrix

The following scoring matrix will be applied when assessing applications:

Score	Measure
10	Exceptional response that fully meets and exceeds all criteria.
9	Excellent. Very strong response that meets all criteria with only minor, non-critical gaps.
8	Very Good. A solid application that meets most criteria well, though there may be some areas for clarification or development.
7	Good. Generally good response, meeting the majority of the criteria. Some aspects may be underdeveloped, unclear, or require further detail.
6	Satisfactory. Acceptable application with some strengths, but key elements are missing or inadequately addressed.
5	Fair. Meets some basic criteria but lacks depth, clarity, or cohesion. Shows some potential, but significant development needed.
4	Weak. Does not adequately meet several criteria. Application lacks coherence or clear rationale. Limited potential demonstrated.
3	Poor. Major gaps in response. Application fails to address core requirements and lacks clarity or focus.
2	Very Poor. Severely lacking across all areas. No clear artistic rationale, feasibility, or impact.
1	Inadequate. Completely fails to address the criteria. No artistic merit or relevance apparent. Application may be incomplete or off-topic.
0	Not Applicable. No response provided to relevant criteria, or application is ineligible or disqualified.



**Ards and
North Down
Borough Council**

Multi Annual Arts Funding Application Form 2026 - 2028

Deadline for application:

Monday 12 January 2026, 12noon

Please read the Funding Criteria document carefully before completing this form and remember to keep a copy of the completed application form for your own records.

Please also note that where a maximum word count is stated, any words over the word limit will not be considered or assessed.

SECTION 1 – CONTACT INFORMATION

Name of arts organisation (*This should be the same as the name on your constitution*)

□

Name of contact person

Contact person's address (please include town and postcode)

Daytime Tel

Evening Tel

E-mail

SECTION 2 – ELIGIBILITY

In this section you will be asked questions that will determine your eligibility for this funding stream.

1. Address of arts organisation (please include town and postcode)

2. Please tell us which best describes your arts organisation currently, and arts programming (tick all that apply):
 - Visual arts programming (eg: exhibitions, studio space, arts workshops)
 - Performing arts programming (eg; music, dance, drama, arts festival)
 - Arts venue (eg: performance venue, studio spaces, gallery)

3. Please tell us how long your arts organisation has been in operation / when it was founded:

4. Please provide evidence of your organisations overall programming / activity from the past year (April 2024 – Mar 2025):

5. Does your organisation programme other activity / events that are not arts related / not on the list of recognised artforms? Yes / No
6. If yes, please provide details of these activities and the percentage of your overall programming that these represent:
7. Please tell us which of the below applies to your arts organisation?

If you are a company AND a recognised charity, please tick both boxes

Unincorporated club or association
Company limited by guarantee
Company limited by shares
Recognised charity
Trust
Other: Please specify

Recognised charity number (if applicable)

VAT registration number (if applicable)

8. Does your organisation have either a Constitution or a Memorandum and Articles of Association? (required)

Yes No

If so, please attach a signed copy.

9. Does your organisation require Safeguarding (Child Protection) policies and procedures?

Yes No

If yes, a copy will be requested

SECTION 3 – ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

10. Please describe the structure of your organisation and demonstrate how you ensure good organisational governance, financial management and organisational management.

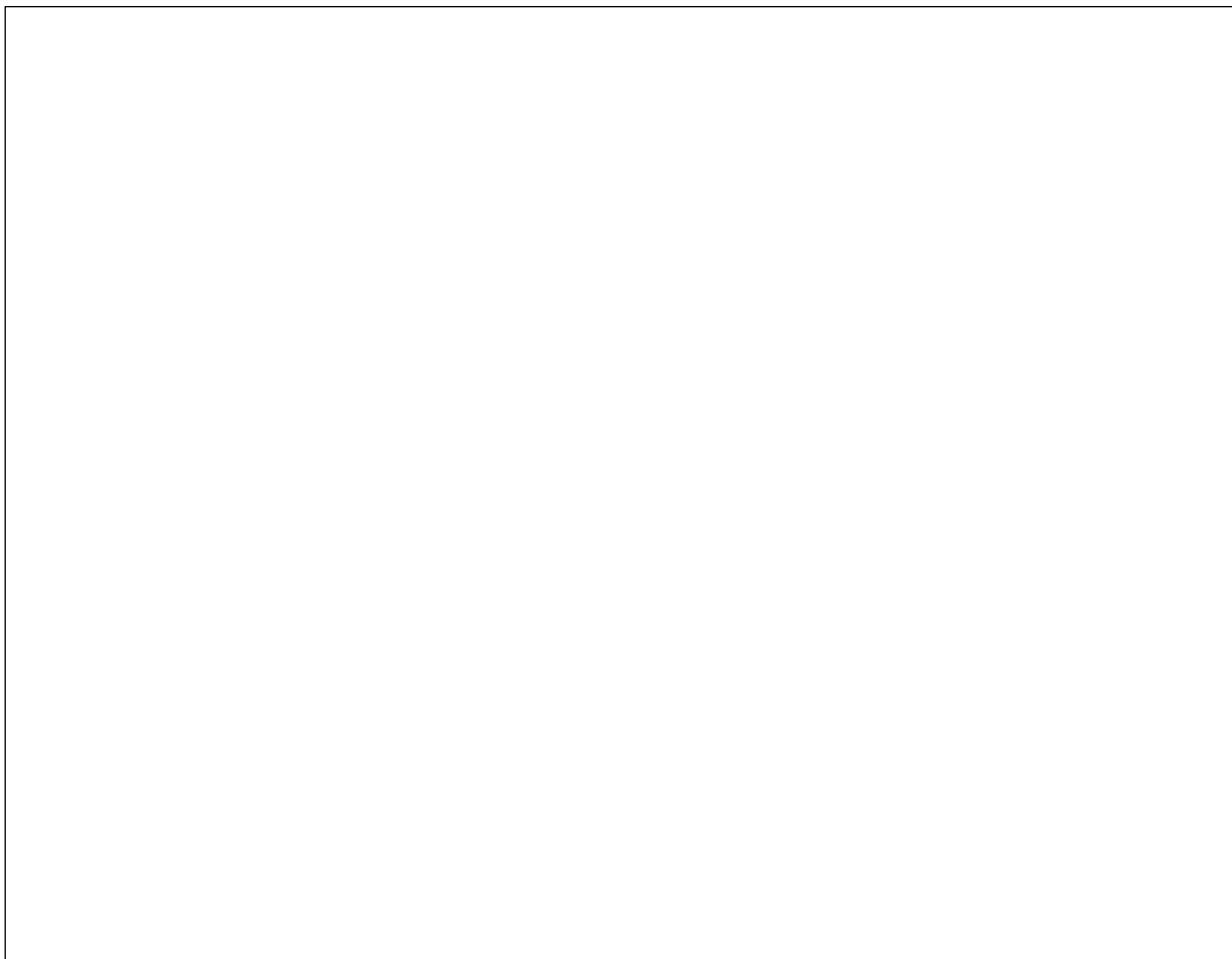
Please also attach experience statements of key personnel involved in your organisation.

Maximum 2400 characters (approx 400 words)

SECTION 4 – ARTISTIC MERIT / QUALITY AND ARTS PROGRAMMING

11. What are the main aims of your arts organisation?

Maximum 1200 characters (approx 200 words)



12. Please describe in brief, your activities over the past three years to show a track record of delivering a successful arts programme(s).

Please include: Types of activity, types of groups/participants engaged with, and participant/project numbers.

Maximum 2400 characters (approx 400 words)

13. Please describe the benefit to your audience that you engaged with through your programme over the past three years;

- i. Who the audiences and participants were and who/how many you engaged with, including a breakdown of the demographics of audience (1800 characters / 300 words max)

- ii. How you engaged with your audiences/participants (1800 characters / 300 words max)

- iii. Specific activities you used to promote greater access and participation to the arts (1800 characters / 300 words max)

- iv. How the arts organisation contributes to the development of the arts sector in the borough (1800 characters / 300 words max)

14. Please give an overview (in bullet pointed format) of the main elements of your proposed arts programme, including intended audiences, for each year of activities for 2026 - 2028.

Maximum 2400 characters (approx 400 words)

15. Please describe how you plan to promote the different elements of your programme to maximize engagement.

Maximum 1200 characters (approx 200 words)

16. Please describe how you plan to monitor and evaluate the different elements of your programme.

Maximum 1200 characters (approx 200 words)

SECTION 6 – COSTS

17. What is your total anticipated expenditure in 2026 - 2027?

£

18. Please tick which grant you are applying for (*please only tick ONE option*):

CORE Funding (max £5,000)

PROGRAMME Funding (max £4,000)

19. How much are you asking Ards and North Down Borough Council's Arts Section for? Grants can represent up to 50% maximum of overall programme / expenditure.

£

20. Please detail in the table below your anticipated expenditure for 2026 - 2027

Expenditure Item or Activity	2026-27 £
Core costs:	
Administrative salaries	
Rent and Rates	
Light and Heat	
Maintenance, security, etc.	
Telephone and Fax	
Printing, postage, stationery	
Financial costs e.g. accountancy	
Insurance	
Other (please detail)	
Programming costs:	
Artists' costs	
Volunteer expenses	
Publicity/Marketing	
Catering, merchandising	
Transportation	
Travel, Accommodation, Subsistence	
Equipment/Materials	
Other (please detail)	
TOTAL COSTS	

21. What is your anticipated total overall income for your organisation in 2025 – 2026, including the amount you are requesting in this application?

Please also include any other anticipated grant monies/sponsorship stating the name of the funding body or sponsor.

If you are expecting income from ticket/book/publication/DVD sales, you should tell us how much you are charging (see example below).

Please note that we will only pay awards into an organisational account that requires at least two unrelated people to sign each cheque or withdrawal from the account.

Please provide details of your most recent completed annual accounts:

Accounts for the year ending:	Day	Month	Year
Total (gross) income	£		
Total expenditure	£		
Profit or loss for the year			
Savings (reserves, cash or investments)			

SECTION 7 – ENCLOSURES & CHECKLIST

I have enclosed the following essential documents	YES/ NO	Comment
A signed copy of your arts organisation's constitution.		
Most recent audited accounts		
Experience statements of key personnel involved in your organisation		

SECTION 8 – DECLARATION

TWO SIGNATURES ARE REQUIRED ON THIS FORM:

(A) the designated contact person identified in Section 1 of this form,
AND
(B) the Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Secretary or Treasurer

NOTE: (A) & (B) CANNOT BE THE SAME PERSON

(A) The contact person should sign this section

I confirm that by submitting my application that I have read, understood, and agree to the Criteria and Conditions of Application.

I confirm that I have read the Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Equality statements.

Fundraising Declaration

As per Ards and North Down Grants Policy, provision of funds to organisations to host fundraising / donation-led activities is not permitted. Therefore, if the activity would not go ahead without the collection of donations intended for retention by the organisation or distribution to third parties, you should not accept any grant offered.

I confirm the activity applied for is not a fundraising event as defined in the guidelines.

I confirm that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, all the information in this application form is true and correct. I understand that you may ask for more information at any stage of the application process.

Signed: <input type="text"/>	Date <input type="text"/>
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(B) The Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Secretary or Treasurer must complete and sign this section.

Title <input type="text"/>	First Name <input type="text"/>	Surname <input type="text"/>
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I agree, on behalf of (insert group's name) that to the best of my knowledge and belief, all the information in this application form is true and correct. I understand that you may ask for more information at any stage of the application process.

I understand that if any of the information in this application form is found to be false or misleading, that this application form will be null and void and not eligible for this funding stream.

Signed: <input type="text"/>	Date <input type="text"/>
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Please remember to keep a copy of this application form for your own records.

CLOSING DATE: Monday 12 January 2026, 12noon

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER THE CLOSING DATE / TIME WILL NOT BE ASSESSED

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APPLICANT TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO ALLOW FULL CONSIDERATION OF THE APPLICATION.

INCOMPLETE APPLICATION FORMS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED

Applications for Multi-Annual Arts Funding are available from:

1. Download online at www.andculture.org.uk or www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/resident/grants
2. Request by email to: artsgrants@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
3. Contact the Arts Service on: 028 9181 0803
4. In person at Ards Arts Centre, Conway Square, Newtownards, BT23 4NP during opening hours

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