

# New Solutions Pilot Grants

## What are the New Solutions Pilot Grants?

The New Solutions Pilot Grants is a two-year fund aimed at supporting social innovation initiatives in the Republic of Ireland to trial or test new products, services, practices or models to deliver better outcomes on at least one of the social inclusion themes below:

- 1) Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups
- 2) Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups
- 3) Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- 4) Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

*\*Note: For the purposes of this funding, the following has been defined as **disadvantaged groups**:*

- *People with Disabilities;*
- *Long-term unemployed;*
- *Migrants, Refugees and asylum seekers;*
- *Ethnic Minorities, including Travellers & Roma;*
- *Those experiencing poverty or social exclusion, including homeless people, jobless households, and single-parent families;*
- *Recovering drug users and those with a criminal history;*
- *Educationally disadvantaged (ISCED0-26);*
- *People living in remote or rural areas, island residents*

## Shared understanding of Social Innovation

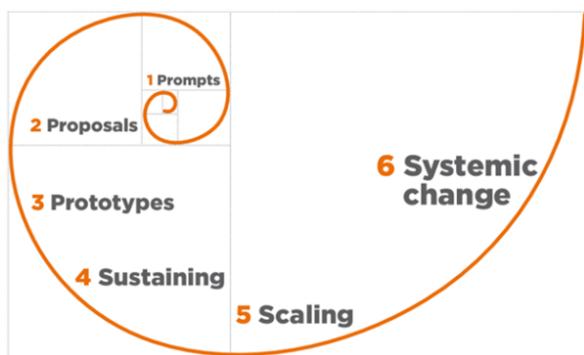
As per Article 2.1.8 of the ESF+ Regulation 2021/1057, Social innovation

‘... means an activity, that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the:

- development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices and models
- that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations
- thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act

## Pilot Definition

A **pilot** refers to a small-scale trial or experiment of a new idea, service or model. It is part of the “Prototyping and pilots” stage (Stage 3 from the 6 stages of Social Innovation Development Curve) – where ideas are tested with prototypes and pilot projects in practice rather than just remaining conceptual.



The aim of a pilot is to **test feasibility and learn quickly**, under realistic but limited conditions – keeping costs and risks relatively low, while gathering feedback from users and providers. Learnings and practical understanding often lead to major changes in the concept, and just as the prototypes of products, many different alternatives have to be tested, in order to find the perfect fit. This is often done before scaling or sustaining the idea<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> [oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/the\\_open\\_book\\_of\\_social\\_innovation.pdf](https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/the_open_book_of_social_innovation.pdf)

The New Solutions Social Innovation Fund – Pilot Grants have a duration of 24 months and are co-funded by the European Union and the Irish Government

The Fund offers a package of cash grants to the value of €4,000,000 for a minimum of 40 projects to help them trial their social innovation.

This includes:

- At least 40 grants between €70,000 and €100,000
- Access to New Solutions Social innovation Hub’s networks and support.

*\*Note: DRCDG will decide how much money to award, which may be less than the amount requested. The final amount of the award will depend on how many organisations are selected.*

You can apply to the New Solutions Pilot Grants via the online form from 11 February 2026 to 13 March 2026 at 6pm.

Please join us for our **application clinics on 18 February 2026 and 25 February 2026** to find out more and answer any questions that you have. These one-hour webinars will provide information on fund eligibility and the application process and offer an opportunity to answer any questions you have.

Register for an application clinic here:

**18 February 2026, 11 AM-12 PM**

[Application Clinic 1](#) - Register here

**25 February 2026, 11 AM-12 PM**

[Application Clinic 2](#) - Register here

For any questions you may have, please contact [\*\*pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie\*\*](mailto:pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie).

## **Accessibility**

We have tried to make the application process as accessible as possible, but we understand that there may still be some difficulties for applicants. If you have access needs or are struggling with the application form, please contact [\*\*pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie\*\*](mailto:pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie).

You will need to download the following documents to complete your online application:

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Project Budget Template** (compulsory)

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Organisation Income & Expenditure Template** (compulsory)

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Results Framework Template** (compulsory)

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Management Accounts Template** (compulsory only for organisations that have been operating for less than a year)

**New Solutions Pilot Grants De Minimis Declaration** (compulsory)

**VAT not recoverable Template** (compulsory only if you are registered with Revenue for VAT but cannot recover it)

The following forms may also help you complete your application:

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Application Form** (for reference only)

**New Solutions Pilot Grants Webtext** (Downloadable Version) (for reference only)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Who can apply?

- Not-For-Profit Organisations
- Non-Governmental Organisations
- Local Authorities
- Community and Voluntary or Charitable Organisations
- Social Enterprises / Profit for Purpose Organisations - social enterprises must meet the definition as outlined in the Trading for Impact – national social enterprise policy 2024-2027 ([trading-for-impact-national-social-enterprise-policy-2024-2027.pdf](#))
- Designated Activity Companies
- Co-operatives
- Entities that are either incorporated (CRO or Co-op) or a registered charity except for the below examples of HEPs and ETBs which have a different statutory setup.  
Types of incorporated entities: any type that can meet the definition of a social enterprise is eligible; this will be checked and verified.
- Higher education providers
- Education and Training Boards

*\*Note: Organisations must meet [the legal form criteria for eligibility](#) by 31 May 2026.*

### Eligibility & Criteria

Projects **must meet** both, the core criteria and the further requirements for New Solutions pilot grants, as set out below:

#### Core Criteria

- The project must address a critical social issue or need, contributing to at least one of the four social innovation themes. Intersectionality (meeting more than one theme) is encouraged, but does not increase scoring of the application:
  - 1) Increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups.
  - 2) Increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups.
  - 3) Personal and social development of young people most at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
  - 4) Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- The project must be innovative in an Irish context.<sup>1</sup>
- The project must be based and make its impact in the Republic of Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> Innovation may include adapting proven approaches for delivery through Irish or in Gaeltacht contexts, bringing new solutions to linguistically distinct communities, or addressing language-specific barriers to social inclusion

- The project must demonstrate clear evidence of how stakeholders and target groups are actively involved in the co-design, delivery and evaluation of the action.<sup>2</sup>
- The project must demonstrate strong potential to generate meaningful learning and to use that learning to test, adapt and/or improve the pilot project.
- The project must demonstrate value for money
- The project must embed the following Horizontal principles:
  - Gender Equality
  - Non-discrimination
  - Equality of Opportunity
  - Do No Significant Harm

#### **Further New Solutions Pilot Grants Requirements**

- Pilot initiatives – have not previously received grant funding for their new initiative or received grant funding within the past 12 months.
 

*\*Note: Grant funding must be specific to piloting a new social innovation. Applicants may still be considered eligible if any grant funding received within the past 12 months was limited to feasibility studies, research, or preparatory work related to the initiative.*
- Applications will be accepted from sole entities (single applicants) and/or from those working in partnership.
 

*\*Note: Should a partnership be successful in their application for funding, the contract will be signed by the lead partner, and a MOU/Partnership Agreement will be submitted to the contracting authority.*
- Applicants must demonstrate experience in the chosen area or/ and show clear understanding of the social issue and capacity to deliver.
- Pilot initiatives addressing the 4th objective (Harnessing the potential of sport for social development and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups) must demonstrate a link/partnership with their local Sports Development Officer created under the Sport Ireland ESF+ Action "Sport 4 Empowerment" (S4E) programme. (*A letter of support is sufficient on headed paper or an email record showing the official email signature*).

#### **Which applicants cannot apply?**

- Applicants under 18 years of age
- Commercial companies
- Staff or immediate family members and consultants/sub-contractors of Rethink Ireland or the New Solutions Consortium Members (The Wheel, DCU, WDC, LDCN or Údarás na Gaeltachta).

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<sup>2</sup> Where there is no direct engagement with target group(s), Letter of Support/Engagement from external organisations will be required

- Staff or immediate family members, or board members of Pobal or the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht that are responsible for administering or overseeing the New Solutions Pilot Grants Fund.
- Theme 4 only: Statutory or public bodies (with the exception of ETB's or those partnering with their local Sports Development Officer under the "Sport 4 Empowerment" (S4E) programme for theme four)
- For profit organisations other than those described above.
- Private Individuals
- Sole Traders
- Unincorporated entities if they are not registered charities
- Government Departments

*\*Note: Private entities cannot apply. However, applicants may procure services from private entities if proper procurement rules are followed. Applicants are responsible for ensuring adherence to procurement regulations.*

**If my organisation has previously received grant funding for my new social innovation, am I eligible to apply?**

No. Grant funding must be specific to piloting a new social innovation. Applicants may still be considered eligible if any grant funding received within the past 12 months was limited to feasibility studies, research, or preparatory work related to the initiative.

**Is this just for large-scale, national organisations?**

No. We welcome applications from organisations of all sizes once they fulfil the criteria.

**Can I apply for this funding even though I am still at the ideation stage?**

No. The New Solutions Pilot Grants are for projects that have moved from the ideation stage to the prototyping stage (Stage 3), trialling the social innovation. See definition here:

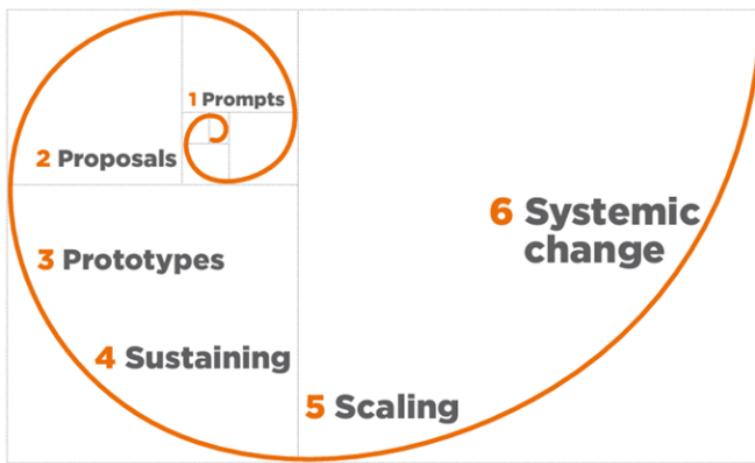
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#### Can organisations make multiple applications?

Yes, there is nothing stopping your organisation from making more than one application for separate projects. However, due to the competitive nature of this selection process, it is very unlikely that we will offer a grant to more than one project from any organisation. We encourage organisations to submit one strong application rather than multiple applications.

#### Is it possible for organisations to collaborate in an application (e.g. a community development organisation and an educational provider)?

Yes. Applications will be accepted from sole entities (single applicants) and/or from those working in partnership.

*\*Note: Should a partnership be successful in their application for funding, the contract will be signed by the lead partner, and an MOU/Partnership Agreement will be submitted to the contracting authority.*

#### What does the fund offer?

- Cash grants up between grant between €70,000 and €100,000 across the 2 years.
- Access to the New Solutions Social Innovation Hub's networks and support.

#### What can cash grants be spent on?

The New Solutions Pilot Grants are for the sole purpose of implementing the New Solutions Pilot Project. Costs are eligible, if:

- They are included in the budget submitted and declared eligible, as the budget is part of the Grant Agreement.
- They do not duplicate public funding or EU funding received from other sources for the same purpose.
- They come from a third party and are verifiable e.g., supported by evidence of compliance with public procurement in Ireland and tax requirements, an invoice and receipt for payment.
- They are reasonable in their nature and amount i.e., are not excessive and are what would be incurred by a prudent person in the conduct of delivering a project of this nature.

- They occur within the duration of the grant agreement (contract) for the project.

**Specifics:**

**Direct Costs:** These are costs directly related to the implementation and delivery of the project. The grantee must demonstrate the direct link with the project.

**Direct staff costs include:**

- **Salaries and pension** costs for staff Grantee or partnership members who are directly engaged on the New Solutions Pilot Initiatives and are included in the agreed budget of the contract. It is each organisation's responsibility to ensure that pensions' auto-enrolment has been taken into account in their budgets. Pension costs incurred by the employer are allowable if directly applicable to the employee engaged in the programme and correctly/clearly identifiable with an adequate audit trail.

- Costs include **employers' PRSI**.

Salary scales should be commensurate with current scales within the relevant sector. All funded projects must clearly demonstrate that Direct Staff are directly linked to the New Solutions Pilot Initiatives.

The following is a **non-exhaustive list of other eligible direct programme costs** for the action:

- Travel & Subsistence.
- Venue, room hire, meeting costs.
- Training costs and materials.
- Marketing and publicity.
- ICT costs, which are specific to website development/online, supports and information.
- Small items of equipment. There is an allowance up to €10,000 per item for minor furniture and equipment (e.g. laptop). The grantee must be able to demonstrate that it is critical to the programme, will only be used to deliver the programme and evidence of procurement is required to support claim.

**Indirect Costs:** Costs not directly connected to the implementation of the project in question. Such costs include administrative expenses, for which it is difficult to precisely determine the amount attributable to the specific projects e.g., overhead costs such as an accountant, telephone and utility bills, cleaning costs, furniture, ICT infrastructure and supports, insurance, postage etc.

Indirect costs must be **no more than 10% of the total direct costs** of the grant. For these costs an **apportionment policy** will be required.

Cash grants may not be used to pay off debts or for capital items such as renovations, or for vehicles, land, buildings or large equipment.

**What supports will Grantees receive?**

The Hub will provide supports to social innovations generally and to Grantees in particular, including workshops and networking opportunities. Grantees are encouraged to attend any relevant offerings and may be required to participate in those identified by the case

manager as important for their project and organisational development. The Hub will also be able to direct and point Grantees to other resources and supports as relevant.

### **What is expected of Grantees?**

- To participate in monthly online check-ins to track progress and expenditure against your project plan.
- To supply updates via an online grantee portal on a quarterly basis and formal financial reporting twice a year.

### **What is involved in completing the application form?**

The application form asks you for information about:

- your social innovation pilot initiative and organisation
- the problem your social innovation tackles
- what makes your social innovation different from others
- who it benefits
- how your social innovation meets the fund conditions
- how you evaluate how well your social innovation was doing
- It also asks you to send us financial documents (Project Budget and Organisation Income & Expenditure).
- And, a Results Framework Template to define how you will measure and report progress over the funding period.
- Plus a short video about your project (this is optional).

### **What kind of video do we need to submit? (Optional)**

Don't worry - you don't need to produce a high quality or expensive video. You can use a smartphone or tablet. We just want to hear you telling the story of your project in 2-3 mins max. The video will not be scored; it is a visualisation of the information in the written application. Please tell us:

- who you are
- why you are applying for the grant
- the problem/issue your social innovation is trying to solve
- how you will do that
- how your solution is innovative or creative.

You can then upload your video to YouTube or Vimeo and password protect it if you wish. You can insert the URL link and the password in the application form. Please note you cannot attach a video file to the application.

## What information do we need to submit with our application?

Note: not all documents are applicable to every organisation. Please see Applicant Guidance.

1. **Project Budget:** all applicants must outline how they propose to use the funds from the New Solutions Pilot Grants and upload a budget.
  - An Excel spreadsheet template is provided to download on this webpage.
  - Fill out the details on your computer, rename your file with your project's name and upload the completed file where instructed on the form.
2. **Organisation Income & Expenditure:** all applicants must provide an overview of their planned organisation's annual income and expenditure.
  - An Excel spreadsheet template is provided to download on this webpage.
  - Fill out the details on your computer, rename your file with your organisation's name and upload the completed file where instructed on the form.
3. **Results Framework:** all applicants must provide an overview on how they will measure and report progress over the funding period, using Outcome Indicators, Activities and Outputs.
  - An Excel spreadsheet template is provided to download on this webpage.
  - Fill out the details on your computer, rename your file with your organisation's name and upload the completed file where instructed on the form.
4. **De Minimis Aid Declaration:** all applicants will need to confirm if they have received any De Minimis Aid funding as part of the eligibility check.
  - A Word document template is provided to download on this webpage.
  - Fill out the details on your computer, rename your file with your organisation's name and upload the completed file where instructed on the form.
5. **Management Accounts:** this is only for applicant organisations who have been operating for less than a year and do not have Financial Statements.
  - A Word document template is provided to download on this webpage.
  - Fill out the details on your computer, rename your file with your organisation's name and upload the completed file where instructed on the form.
6. **Financial Statements:** please upload your most recent full audited (if appropriate) financial statements.
7. **Governing Documents:** if your organisation is **not** incorporated with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), please upload your governing documents/constitution.
8. **Partnership organisational chart and Partnership governing details:** if the application is made under a partnership arrangement, the organisation should provide further details on the partner organisations, their roles, the management of governance arrangements, progress monitoring and risk management.
  - An organisation chart outlining the partnership structure should be uploaded.

- A partnership governing document, like a Memorandum of Understanding should also be uploaded.

**9. Letter evidencing engagement with your local Sports Development Officer:** if the project is addressing the theme 4, the applicant organisation needs to demonstrate the link/partnership with the local Sports Development Officer.

- A letter of support on headed paper or an email record showing the official email signature should be uploaded.

## Accessibility

We have tried to make the application process as accessible as possible but we understand that there may still be some difficulties for applicants. If you have access needs or are struggling with the application form, please contact [pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie](mailto:pilotgrants@new-solutions.ie).

## What happens after we submit our application?

1. The Open Call will close on 13 March 2026 at 6pm.
2. Applications will go through a rigorous selection process (see next question).
3. Interviews will take place online between 11 May 2026 and 5 June 2026. If you are invited to an interview, you will be informed by 24 April 2026.
4. All applicants will be informed of the result from 17 August 2026.

## How does the selection process work?

The selection process is very rigorous and consists of several stages:

- Stage 1 – Open call for applications 11 February 2026 to 13 March 2026
- Stage 2 – Internal and external reviews of all applications 16 March 2026 to 8 May 2026
- Stage 3 – Due Diligence/Governance checks on short-listed applicants
- Stage 4 – Interviews for shortlisted applicants 11 May to 5 June 2026
- Stage 5 – Final decision by DRCDG (mid-August 2026) *Note: Rejected applicants have 2 weeks to make an appeal. Please refer to Applicant Guidelines for details.*
- Stage 6 - Contracting will be done between mid-August 2026 and 25 September 2026

## Who will decide who wins the awards?

All applications will be reviewed thoroughly through a rigorous process. The DRCDG will make the final decision on successful applicants and on the number and value of the final awards given.

## How do applicants find out where they are in the selection process?

We will contact all applicants by email to let them know whether or not they have been shortlisted and invited to interview. Interviews will be conducted via online video link. When final decisions have been made on the successful applicants, we will contact all shortlisted applicants by phone or email to let them know if they have been successful.