



Funded by
UK Government

Irish FA/ Department for Culture, Media & Sport Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 26-27 Information & Guidance Notes



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1. Background

The Irish Football Association (Irish FA)/ Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund aims to allow grassroots football clubs, local authorities, schools and football-focused Sports Community/ Charitable organisations in Northern Ireland (NI) to improve and refurbish facilities so that grassroots football clubs and communities have a high-quality pitch to play on, thereby helping to create a better grassroots football infrastructure foundation.

In 2021-22 and 2022-23 the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund supported 54 small capital projects improving grassroots facilities throughout NI. £5.6 million of capital funding was invested in 2023-25 including the installation of 12 new artificial grass pitches (AGPs), 5 existing AGPs refurbished, 9 grounds fitted with new floodlights and 4 grounds upgraded with improved floodlighting. The 2023-25 grassroots facilities capital funding focused on delivering quality pitches and improving existing pitches that were not fit-for-purpose, as well as addressing the deficit in pitch supply throughout NI.

The £3 million capital funding allocation for 2025-26 is currently supporting the delivery of 8 grassroots facilities projects. All projects are progressing as planned and are scheduled for completion by 31 March 2026. The projects comprise the installation of 7 new artificial grass pitches, alongside the replacement of 1 existing AGP, representing a significant investment in enhancing community football infrastructure.

A further £2.775 million of capital funding has been secured for the financial year 2026/27.



2. Priority Areas for Investment

Building on the priorities set out in the 2025–26 programme, the 2026–27 programme will continue to focus on improving access to quality pitches across Northern Ireland. This includes investment in new and replacement artificial grass pitches (AGPs), enhancements to the quality of existing natural grass pitches, the creation of new high-quality natural grass pitches, upgrades to infrastructure and facilities that support pitch use and the development of inclusive facilities that are fully accessible and free from access barriers.

Grants under the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund are for capital items only and are primarily to support grassroots activities in sport. Grassroots activities in sport are foundational, local-level, community-driven, and primarily recreational.

The following list outlines the priority objectives of the Fund. Projects that align with multiple objectives are likely to score more highly during assessment. However, applicants are not required to meet all listed objectives to be considered eligible for funding:

- Improves the capital infrastructure to support the delivery of grassroots football activities across NI
- Delivers a sustained increase in participation in sport and physical activity across NI, improving mental and physical health of participants
- Increases the number of multi-sport facilities in Northern Ireland to deliver a sustained increase in participation in non-football sports
- Reduces the postcode lottery for quality facilities by directing investment to disadvantaged or areas of deprivation and deliver a sustained increase in participation and physical inactivity in these areas
- Delivers improved access to sport facilities for women and girls to deliver a sustained increase in participation
- Deliver improved access for under-represented groups to delivers a sustained increase in participation
- Delivers 'value for money' investment in facilities by securing partner match funding

Objective	Key Performance Indicator
Grassroots Infrastructure	Increase in the number of quality grassroots pitches throughout Northern Ireland
Participation in Grassroots Sport	Increase in participation in sports and physical activity within 12 months Increase in participation sustained or further increased over 4 years
Multi-sport	2 flagship projects which guarantee a minimum 30% share of priority slots for non-football use 40% of investment will fund projects which have a regular and sustained multi-sport offer of more than 5 hours a week Increase in participation sustained or further increased over 4 years.
Deprivation	50% of investment in the top 30% most deprived areas, based on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 (NIMDM2017) and Local Authority inactivity rankings.
Women and Girls	30% of priority usage hours for women and girls within 12 months 50% of priority usage hours for women and girls by year 4.
Under-represented groups	A minimum of one hour of access to the pitch per week for under-represented groups, defined as those who face greater barriers to participation, access, or opportunity.
Value For Money	Average of 35% of match funded projects costs

3. Application Process

How do I apply?

Applications for the 2026-27 Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Investment Fund will open on Wednesday 18 February 2026 and will close at **12 noon on Wednesday 18 March 2026**.

The Irish Football Association is working with external third-party (Co-operation Ireland) to manage the submission and assessment of applications to the Irish FA/DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund. Applications will be made via Co-operation Ireland's application portal, hosted on the submittable application platform.

All applicants to the Irish FA/DCMS Grassroots Facilities Fund 2026/27 must register on the submittable platform to apply to the scheme. You may access the application form using the following link:

[Irish FA/DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 2026-27](#)

You will require a valid email address to be able to register on the portal. Once registered you will be asked to confirm you meet the eligibility requirements through a series of eligibility questions.

This automated screening process will ensure the Irish FA/DCMS Grassroots Facilities Fund 2026/27 is right for your project. Please read the questions carefully. Projects that successfully pass the automated eligibility screening will then be able to access the Application Form. You must upload evidence of eligibility with your application form.

The system will also enable you to save and return to your form later, to invite collaborators and track the progress of your application. Please note only the submission owner (the person who started the application) can submit the application form. Once submitted ownership may be transferred to another person.

Application Guidance:

Read the Questions Carefully and Complete All Sections: You should complete every section of the application form with information that is relevant and appropriate for your organisation and your proposal. Some questions are 'branched' which means they only appear if you tick the relevant option (e.g. selecting 'artificial pitch' will open additional questions to be answered.) Co-operation Ireland reserves the right to reject any incomplete or incorrectly completed forms that prevent a full assessment of your eligibility.

Upload all Required Documentation. All requested documentation must be uploaded to support your application. All uploaded files must be legible and complete. Failure to upload requested documentation in full, or upload of unclear or unreadable images, will result in the application being deemed incomplete.

Contact for Help with the Process: We hope you find the Application Form easy to complete, and whilst we cannot help you with completing your application, if you have any questions in relation to the eligibility criteria or the process, please email dcmsfunding@cooperationireland.org.

For any technical questions about the platform, please visit [Submittable Applicant Support](#).

Submitting: Please ensure that you have completed all sections and uploaded necessary attachments prior to submission. You can download a copy of your application by clicking 'Download' on the top right side of the form. When you are ready, press Apply. You will see a confirmation screen and will be able to see the submitted form in your Submittable account. Please ensure you have a working internet connection and do not wait until the last minute to submit in case of technical issues.

When is the application deadline?

This phase of the Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund will accept online applications until:

12 noon Wednesday 18 March 2026



Application Assessment Process

All applications will be assessed by an external third-party assessor (Co-operation Ireland) who will assess applications against the funding criteria as detailed in the funding guidelines. Co-operation Ireland will act as the assessment and delivery partner for this programme.

Only those projects that pass an initial eligibility sift will be assessed and subsequently considered by the programme advisory panel.

Eligible applications will be scored using a scoring criterion and ranked on merit, but priority will be given to those projects that:

- Demonstrate they can deliver the greatest impact against the programme and funding objectives over a sustained period
- Meet the funds technical requirements
- Evidence need and demand
- Have the capacity to commence quickly and complete the proposed pitch project by 31st March 2027
- Complement government investment priorities and sports development strategies

Funding will be allocated based on application ranking. The third-party assessor will make recommendations which will be presented to an Advisory Panel comprised of representatives of the Irish FA, Sport NI, CLOA and DCMS who will approve awards for grant aid.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate within their application:

- how the proposed project meets the programme and funding objectives
- evidence of need and demand
- confirmation of project's 'state of readiness' to proceed
- detailed itemised project costs
- how they will manage both the construction and sports development phases of the project
- all supporting documentation

Whilst previous grant recipients are eligible to apply, applications are particularly welcome from groups that have not previously been awarded Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment funding.

Application Queries/ Clarification Requests

All clarification requests must be submitted via the dedicated funding email address: dcmsfunding@cooperationireland.org

The Irish FA requires applicants to provide any information necessary to safeguard public funds. Applicants must ensure that all information provided is accurate and complete.

Any misleading statements, whether deliberate or accidental, at any stage of the process may render the application invalid and could result in the recovery of any funds awarded.

Indicative Application Timeline

The application timeline for the 26-27 Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund is as follows:

Action	Date
Applications open	Wednesday 18 February 2026
Applications close	Noon on Wednesday 18 March 2026
Application appraisal / assessment period	April / May 2026
Letter of Offer issued to successful applicants	May 2026
Projects completed and grant aid claims submitted for payment following a verification site visit by the Irish FA	Project claim submission deadline stipulated in Letter of Offer
Collection of annual user surveys and ongoing project monitoring against project targets	Ongoing, 3 months after project completion and monitored on a regular basis thereafter



4. Eligibility Criteria

Eligible Items

The Irish FA/ DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 2026-27 will be directed towards large capital projects located in Northern Ireland. The funding award must be used for investment in capital assets that support grassroots or community sport in NI. Capital assets means tangible infrastructure, permanent assets, or fixtures and/ or upgrades/ improvements to the same.

Community sport is considered to be non-professional, which is local or community-based and sometimes dependent on volunteers. It is not necessarily competitive. It is accessible to the public and does not usually require a certain level of ability or skill to access. For the purposes of this programme, Grassroots Football is all non-professional and non-elite/academy football, serving as the foundation of the game by promoting participation for everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of age, gender, ability or background.

All projects must have the development of a pitch at the core. Funding will support and be directed towards:

- The installation of a new, accessible natural grass pitch or replacement/ enhancement of an existing, accessible natural grass pitch.
- The installation of a new, accessible artificial grass pitch (AGPs) or replacement of an existing, accessible artificial grass pitch.
- The installation of a new, accessible small-sided Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) that is suitable to host small-sided association football activities.

Associated pitch infrastructure will also be considered for funding in addition to the pitch installation as follows:

- Changing room pavilion which may include associated spaces/ hubs to support the use of pitches
- Pitch/ spectator fencing, ballstops fencing/net and/or access gates
- Access/ egress around and leading up to the pitch
- Ground perimeter fencing and entrance/ exit gates
- Car park to service pitches
- Covered dugouts (fixed)
- Covered dugouts (mobile but remain on site)
- 11 a side Goals (fixed)
- 11 a side Goals (mobile but remain on site)
- Small sided Goals (fixed)
- Small sided Goals (mobile but remain on site)
- Bespoke pitch maintenance equipment for natural grass pitch
- Bespoke pitch maintenance equipment for artificial grass pitch (AGP)

Professional fees incurred after the letter of offer has been awarded will be considered for funding, but only where such fees are directly associated with the delivery of a successful

project. Example fees include an industry-accredited pitch consultant, specialist testing consultant, architect, quantity surveyor, engineers, solicitor's fees and services connected to the project e.g. building control.

Professional fees must be reasonable, offer value in line with market costs and may be subject to review by an independent cost consultant, along with project capital costs. A quotation for eligible professional fees should be provided. Further assurance of costs and plans in the areas listed may be conducted by the Irish FA and/or DCMS.

If your organisation is not registered for VAT or is not in a position to have the project zero-rated for VAT purposes, VAT are eligible for funding. If your organisation is registered for VAT, VAT costs will not be eligible.

Further details of the technical requirements for each pitch type, including required supporting infrastructure are set out in Annex A: Technical Requirements.

It is strictly forbidden for all applicants to seek funding which is for the same purpose as funding already awarded/ secured from another third-party grants body.

Eligible organisations

To be eligible, all pitch proposals must be primarily intended to support grassroots football. For the purposes of this programme, Grassroots Football is all non-professional and non-elite/academy football, serving as the foundation of the game by promoting participation for everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of age, gender, ability or background.

Applications are invited from the following organisations:

- Football clubs based in Northern Ireland that are affiliated to the Irish FA.
- Local Authorities based in Northern Ireland
- Association Football-focused Sports Community Organisations based in Northern Ireland
- Association Football- focused Charitable Organisations, that are registered with the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland
- Schools/ Colleges/ Universities based in Northern Ireland

Club Accreditation/Irish FA Affiliation Requirement:

The Irish FA's Club Licensing or Club Accreditation programmes support the development of strong, sustainable clubs that can deliver increased participation at youth and grassroots levels,

and grow the involvement of coaches, match officials, and volunteers. To ensure all funded projects enable sustained pathways for participation all applications are required to meet the following accreditation or licensing requirements:

Where the applicant is a football club:

- The club must be accredited under the Irish FA's People and Clubs accreditation programme, or
- The club must have commenced the accreditation process and be fully accredited before any final grant claim is processed. or
- Be a Northern Ireland Football League club that has been awarded a club licence for the 2026/27 season via the Irish FA's club licensing administration.

Where the applicant is not a football club, they must be partnered with a football club that meets the above requirements. This football club must be named in the application and the partnership evidenced through a Memorandum of Understanding or other written confirmation showing how the club will use the pitch for grassroots football.

Clubs awaiting **licence decision for 2026/27** season via the Irish FA's club licensing may complete the eligibility screening questionnaire as if the licence had been awarded pending a licensing determination. However, evidence of licence award must be provided prior to submission of the full application.

Funding Thresholds & Match Funding

The minimum award available is £100,000 with a maximum award of up to £500,000.

Local Authorities and Schools, Colleges and Universities in Northern Ireland must provide at least 40% match funding. For all other applicants there is a minimum 10% match funding expectation.

This means the minimum total project cost is:

- **£166,666** for Local Authorities and Schools/Colleges/Universities
- **£111,111** for all other applicants

The fund is competitive. Applications that exceed the minimum match funding requirement will score higher, as a greater contribution improves value for money and helps maximise the overall impact of the fund.

Match funding can include cash reserves, a confirmed loan, or funding offered by another source. You must provide evidence at the time of application, such as:

- Bank statements
- Loan confirmation
- Letter of Offer
- Letter of Comfort or Letter of Intent (considered case by case)

Evidence of match funding must be submitted with your application. Applications without this

evidence will not pass Stage 1 eligibility checks.



Retrospective Funding:

Retrospective funding is not permitted. Funding will not be awarded towards the cost of projects where procurement has commenced or works have already started prior to an application being made, an application being determined or approval being given to proceed. Professional fees incurred prior to acceptance of the Letter of Offer will not be supported.

Site location:

All sites must be based in Northern Ireland.

Security of Tenure:

Applicants must provide evidence that they either own (Title Deeds) or lease the project site and at the time of application have a minimum of 10 years' validity on the lease . If the applicant owns the project site but does not have a copy of the Title Deeds, a letter from a solicitor confirming ownership will be acceptable, provided it is accompanied by a map demarcating the portion of ground and aligns with the details in the solicitor's letter.

If the site is leasehold the applicant must have permission from the landowner for the proposed works.

Planning Permission/ Statutory Approval:

As all projects must be completed by March 2027, full planning permission must be in place at the time of application. Applications without confirmed planning consent will be ineligible. Where consent is granted, all pre-commencement conditions must also be discharged to confirm the project is shovel ready.

If planning permission is not required, written confirmation from the local planning authority or a qualified planning consultant must be provided.

Applicants must confirm and upload evidence of planning status whether permission is required or not along with any other necessary statutory approvals (e.g. building control) to their application form..

Committee/Board Approval

All applicants must provide evidence of having secured committee or Board approval for the proposed pitch project. NI Local Authorities will be required to provide the corresponding Council minute confirming the approval of the proposed pitch project.

Timeframe

All projects must be completed by 31st March 2027.

Letter of offer Requirements

Successful applicants will be required to appoint a specialist project team to oversee all elements of the project to include procurement and overall management of the project from initiation, through the main construction phase and on to full completion and handover to the client. Any design and technical plans will be reviewed by the Irish FA or its appointees. Applicants must ensure that adequate insurance cover (public and employer's liability and all risks insurance) is taken out and maintained during the course of the building contract.

An applicant must also develop its pitch project design with an industry recognised pitch consultant. Individuals/ contractors responsible for the design and delivery of the pitch proposal must also be industry recognised, have experience in delivering certified sports pitches and hold recognised accreditations/ qualifications associated with the delivery of sports pitch projects.

The above will be further reflected as conditions of any Letter of Offer.

Recognised accreditations/ qualifications can include but are not exclusive to memberships of/ affiliation to bodies such as SAPCA or the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf. For the construction of associated infrastructure/ facilities contractors must hold the appropriate Health and Safety and professional certifications.

All pitch projects must include a 12-month defects period and applicable supplier product/ performance warranties. Applicants should seek advice from the manufacturer.

Sport Northern Ireland provides a free advocacy service including advice and guidance to design consultants, sports clubs and the general public on all matters relating to the design and procurement of sports related facilities. To avail of this facility, contact Sport NI's Capital team at Tel: 028 9038 3894

5. Application Guidance

General guidance

- All applications must be made online using the Irish FA/DCMS Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund 26-27 application form accessed via the link issued to those applications that successfully pass the eligibility screening questionnaire
- Application Forms must be completed and submitted, by no later than **12 noon Wednesday 18 March 2026**.
- All requested eligibility and supporting documentation must be uploaded as part of your application form.
- An individual application form must be submitted for each pitch project proposal.
- Applicants may only submit one application, for one project proposal, at any one location. However, organisations that hold responsibility for multiple sites, may submit applications for different sites.
- A project proposal may consist of more than one component e.g. pitch and changing rooms and this should be submitted as one application.
- Applicants must provide full project details and answer all the questions detailed on the application form and complete and upload the accompanying usage plan templates.
- The Irish FA reserves the right to reject any incomplete or incorrectly completed forms that prevent a full assessment.
- Failure to upload requested documentation, including evidence of eligibility, will result in the application being deemed incomplete. See Section 6 for further details of the supporting evidence required.
- You must provide your answer in the specified format, including adhering to word limits where these are applied.
- Please note logic has been applied to this form. Some questions are specific to certain project types, so you may not see all questions detailed in the guidance notes.

Application Questions

To enable us to efficiently process your application the form has been separated into the following sections:

About your organisation

In this section you will be asked to provide a project name, project description and details of your organisation including legal name and organisational purpose. If you are not a football club you will be asked to provide details of your anchor football club. You will also be asked to upload evidence of organisational eligibility to this section of the form.

Club Structure

In this section you will be asked about the team structure and numbers of active players involved in each section of your football club or for non football club applicants your anchor football club. You will also need to provide details of where current football activities take place. This information helps us understand how the proposed pitch project relates to your current football activity

Project Overview

In this section you will be asked to provide a summary of the project including a description of the proposed works, total project cost and grant requested. We will ask for evidence of quotations and match funding to be uploaded to this section of the form.

Site Details

In this section you will be asked to provide details of the site of the proposed pitch project including the address, type of tenure and existing facilities. You will be required to upload evidence of tenure.

Consents and Approvals

In this section you will be asked to upload evidence to show you have the necessary approvals in place. This includes landlord approval (if applicable), Committee or Board Approval and planning consents, including uploading evidence of any planning pre conditions having been discharged.

Pitch Technical Details

In this section you will be asked to provide technical details relating to the pitch development works to be undertaken. Questions asked cover the type of pitch, overall size of the pitch and size of the playing area.

Artificial Grass Pitches and **Multi Use Games Area** proposals will be asked about the carpet type, the infill or surface material, shockpad installation, floodlighting and microplastic mitigation measures to be installed.

Natural grass pitch proposals will be asked to provide details on the design, construction and maintenance of the pitch.

All applicants will be asked to provide technical details relating to the associated pitch infrastructure, if any, included in their proposals.

Supporting evidence to be uploaded includes specification documents. See Section 6 for further details.

Project Need

In this section you will be asked to demonstrate project need. This includes providing location details to enable use to access your project against deprivation criteria. Your response should provide detail on the relative adequacy of your existing facilities, the availability of pitch facilities locally and local health/sporting need. Where possible your answer should include reference to pitch technical reviews, feasibility studies, local or national government investment priorities, Irish FA strategic priorities, local sports strategies/plans official statistics or other research that quantifies need.

Any feasibility studies or other reports you have commissioned that evidence need should be uploaded to this section of the form in addition to photos of existing facilities highlighting existing defects. See Section 6 for further details.

Grassroots Football Participation

In this section you will be asked about current and projected grassroots football activities on the site of the proposed pitch project and how these targets will be achieved.

The number of current participants and weekly usage rates will be used as a baseline to help monitor and evaluate progress against your future targets.

The number given should be based on current football activity at the location of your proposed pitch. If it is a new site, the number will likely be zero. For existing or improved sites, use real usage data where possible, such as pitch booking records, sign-in sheets, club membership, scheduled matches, or data from club apps.

You will be asked to complete two tables, one relating to the number of people participating in grassroots football on the pitch and one relating to the number of hours the pitch is used each week for grassroots football activity, broken down into different user groups. The user groups detailed in this section should match the grassroots football user groups detailed in your User Group Register.

Each table includes a column for your current pitch usage (baseline) and the projected number of people participating in grassroots football per week on the pitch/number of hours per week the pitch will be used for grassroots football within 12 months and after 4 years of pitch opening.

The numbers given will be used as your participation target. These targets should be realistic, reflecting what you are able to achieve through the programmes and activities you plan to deliver and the number of playing hours your proposed pitch type can support.

You will be asked to set out how you will deliver these targets. In your response you should clearly show how the proposed pitch project, whether a new or improved facility, will increase capacity for grassroots football on the site. Your response should explain how that increased capacity will be used to increase grassroots participation and hours through specific programmes, activities and partnerships.

Your response should demonstrate a clear link between the facility improvements and the expected growth from your current baseline participation numbers to your target numbers. Strong responses will show how your proposal meets local needs, aligns with strategic priorities, and demonstrates your capacity to deliver.

Your response must be supported by evidence of current usage (if applicable) and a usage plan, using the template available on the Irish FA website.



Multi-Sport Participation

In this section you will be asked about current and projected non football sport activities on the site of the proposed pitch project and how these targets will be achieved. Only those applicants that propose to support more than five hours of multi-sport activities per week will be invited to provide details of multi-sport activities. Projects providing more than 30% time allocation to non football sports will be included for consideration as a flagship multi-sport project.

The number of current participants and weekly usage rates will be used as a baseline to help monitor and evaluate progress against your future targets.

You will be asked to complete two tables, one relating to the number of people participating in multi-sport activities on the pitch and one relating to the number of hours the pitch is and will be used each week for multi-sport activity, broken down into different user groups. The user groups detailed in this section should match the grassroots football user groups detailed in your User Group Register.

The number given should be based on current multi-sport activity at the location of your proposed pitch. If it is a new site, the number will likely be zero. For existing or improved sites, use real usage data where possible, such as pitch booking records, sign-in sheets, club membership, scheduled matches, or data from club apps.

You will be asked to provide four targets, the number of people participating in multi-sport activities per week on the pitch within 12 months and after 4 years of pitch opening and the number of weekly usage hours after 12 months and 4 years.

The numbers given will be used as your participation target. These targets should be realistic, reflecting what you are able to achieve through the programmes and activities you plan to deliver and the number of playing hours your proposed pitch type can support.

You will be asked to set out how you will deliver these targets. In your response you should clearly show how the proposed pitch project, whether a new or improved facility, will increase capacity for non football sports on the site. Your response should explain how that increased capacity will be used to increase participation and hours through specific programmes, activities and partnerships.

Your response should demonstrate a clear link between the facility improvements and the expected growth from your current baseline participation numbers to your target numbers. Strong responses will show how your proposal meets local needs, aligns with strategic priorities, and demonstrates your capacity to deliver.

School curriculum PE is classed as a non football sporting activity.

Your response must be supported by evidence of current usage (if applicable) and a usage plan, using the template available on the Irish FA website.

Access for Women and Girls

In this section you will be asked about current and projected non football sport activities on the site of the proposed pitch project and how these targets will be achieved. All applicants must provide at least 30% of priority usage hours for women and girls within 12 months, increasing to 50% of priority usage hours for women and girls by year 4.

The number of current participants and weekly usage rates will be used as a baseline to help monitor and evaluate progress against your future targets. The number given should be based on current access by women and girls at the location of your proposed pitch. If it is a new site, the number will likely be zero. For existing or improved sites, use real usage data where possible, such as pitch booking records, sign-in sheets, club membership, scheduled matches, or data from club apps.

You will be asked to complete two tables, one relating to the number of women and girls participating in football activities on the pitch and one relating to the total number of hours the pitch will be used for women and girls football, broken down into different user groups. The user groups detailed in this section should match the grassroots football user groups detailed in your User Group Register.

You will be asked to provide six targets, the number of women and girls participating in football or physical activity per week on the pitch within 12 months, after 4 years of pitch opening and the number of weekly usage hours after 12 months and 4 years and the number of priority usage hours that will be reserved for women and girls 12 months and 4 years after opening.

Priority usage hours refer to the most in demand training and playing slots. The numbers given will be used as your participation target.

These targets should be realistic, reflecting what you are able to achieve through the programmes and activities you plan to deliver and the number of playing hours your proposed pitch type can support.

You will be asked to set out how you will deliver these targets. In your response you should clearly show how the proposed pitch project, whether a new or improved facility, will increase access for women and girls sports on the site. Your response should explain how that increased capacity will be used to increase participation and hours through specific programmes, activities and partnerships.

Your response should demonstrate a clear link between the facility improvements and the expected growth from your current baseline participation numbers to your target numbers. Strong responses will show how your proposal meets local needs, aligns with strategic priorities, and demonstrates your capacity to deliver.

Your response must be supported by evidence of current usage (if applicable) and a usage plan, using the template available on the Irish FA website.

Under-represented groups

In this section you will be asked about current and projected participation in sport and physical activity by under-represented groups. All projects must a minimum of one hour of access to the pitch per week for under-represented groups, defined as those who face greater barriers to participation, access, or opportunity.

The number of current participants and weekly usage rates will be used as a baseline to help monitor and evaluate progress against your future targets. The number given should be based on current football activity at the location of your proposed pitch. If it is a new site, the number will likely be zero. For existing or improved sites, use real usage data where possible, such as pitch booking records, sign-in sheets, club membership, scheduled matches, or data from club apps.

You will be asked to complete two tables, one relating to the number of people from under represented groups accessing the pitch on a weekly basis and the other relating to the number of hours per week people from under represented groups will access the pitch, broken down into different user groups. The user groups detailed in this section should match the user groups from your User Group Register.

You will be asked to provide four targets, the number of people from under-represented groups participating per week on the pitch within 12 months and after 4 years of pitch opening and the number of weekly usage hours after 12 months and 4 years.

The numbers given will be used as your participation target. These targets should be realistic, reflecting what you are able to achieve through the programmes and activities you plan to deliver and the number of playing hours your proposed pitch type can support.

You will be asked to set out how you will deliver these targets. In your response you should clearly show how the proposed pitch project, whether a new or improved facility, will increase access for under-represented groups on the site. Your response should explain how that increased capacity will be used to increase participation and hours through specific programmes, activities and partnerships.

Your response should demonstrate a clear link between the facility improvements and the expected growth from your current baseline participation numbers to your target numbers. Strong responses will show how your proposal meets local needs, aligns with strategic priorities, and demonstrates your capacity to deliver.

Your response must be supported by evidence of current usage (if applicable) and a usage plan, using the template available on the Irish FA website.

Usage Plan

The Usage Plan template must be downloaded from the Irish FA Website completed in full and uploaded within the relevant section of your application.

The User Group Register must include details for every individual team or programme that will use the proposed facility.

Each user group entered in the Register will then be available for selection (via dropdown) within:

- Baseline Usage Plan
- 12-Month Projected Usage Plan
- 4-Year Projected Usage Plan

Only user groups listed in the Register can be included in the Usage Plans.

You will also be required to provide proposed hire rates for the facility.

For each user group, you will be asked to provide:

- User Group name
- Relationship to the project (Applicant, Anchor Club, or External User)
- Confirmation of formal agreement (where applicable)
- Sport / activity type
- Age group and gender
- Number of participants
- Main grant objective supported
- Intended use of the pitch (Training, Matches, Both, or Structured Activity)
- Current venue (pre-project)
- Post-project venue status (Primary, Secondary, or Additional Provision)
- Secondary Venue Info
- League name (if applicable)
- Any additional information

The completed Facility Usage Plan will form part of the assessment of your application. It will be used to assess how the proposed facility will:

- Increase Grassroots Football participation
- Improve access for women and girls
- Support underrepresented groups
- Increase Multi-Sport Participation
- Deliver against all other grant objectives

All information provided must be accurate, consistent, and aligned with the wider application. Inconsistencies between the Facility Usage Plan and the application form may impact the assessment of your application.

Applicants are encouraged to complete the Usage Plan carefully and provide as much relevant detail as possible.

Project Delivery

In this section you will be asked to provide detail on how the project will be managed. Information required includes estimated project start and completion dates, details of steps already taken to enable the project to proceed, management arrangements for both the construction and sports development phases of your project as well as details on how you will monitor and evaluate your project.

The information supplied in this section will be used to assess your capacity to deliver your proposed project.

Sustainability

In this section you will be asked how you will ensure the benefit of this investment can be sustained. This includes questions relating to the development of a sinking fund, revenue to be generated through pitch hire as well as your proposed maintenance plan. See Annex A for further details on maintenance requirements.

Risk

In this section you will be asked to outline potential risks to your project, mitigations and/or contingencies that you have already or will put in place to either reduce the likelihood or impact of those risks.

All other projects should provide detail of what might go wrong with their project and steps they will take to address them. Strong responses will consider a wide range of potential risks and outline steps that will be taken to reduce the likelihood of the risks occurring or impact if they do.

Common construction risks include issues such as cost increases, delays due to inclement weather and contractor disputes. Common sports development risks include issues such as loss of key personnel, financial challenges or ineffective strategies to recruit new participants. Keep in mind that risks will vary depending on your organisation, site conditions, proposed works, delivery partners, and your project goals.

Important: Sites that have previously been flooded, suffer from drainage issues, or lie in a high-risk flood area must clearly explain how the new pitch will be protected from future flooding.

Project Budget

In this section you will be asked to provide a breakdown of the project costs, including confirmation of your VAT status and other options considered.

This information provided in this section will be used to assess your project against the value for money criterion and to calculate the value of your grant award.

The amount of grant requested must be between £100,000 and £500,000, with a minimum match funding contribution of 40% for Local Authorities and Schools/ Colleges/ Universities based in NI and of 10% for all other applicants.

Costs provided should align with your quotes, which must be dated within the last 6 months and uploaded to the Project Overview section of the application form.

All projects are required to include a minimum 5% contingency in their budget to mitigate the risk of unexpected additional costs materialising during the construction phase.

If your organisation is not registered for VAT or is not in a position to have the project zero-rated for VAT purposes, VAT costs must be included in the project costs. If your organisation is registered for VAT, VAT costs should be excluded from your total project costs.

Evidence of VAT status must be uploaded to this section of the form.



Contact Details

In this section you will be asked to provide contact details for the person to whom all communication regarding this application will be directed

Declaration

In this section you will be asked to confirm that:

- You are **duly authorised to sign this declaration** on behalf of the Applicant Organisation the information given in this application is true and confirm that the enclosures are **current, accurate and adopted or approved** by the Applicant Organisation.
- that all required supporting documentation has been uploaded to the application form.
- that any offer of grant will be subject to, without limitation, the Irish FA's Terms and Conditions for Grant, a copy of which we confirm having read and accepted.
- the Applicant Organisation has the **power to accept** any offer of grant if the application is successful and to repay it if the grant conditions are not met.
- if you make any misleading statements (whether deliberate or accidental) at any stage during the application process, or knowingly withhold any information, this could make the Project application invalid, and we will be liable to **repay any grant already paid**.
- You understand that the Irish FA may commission an evaluation of the Project and confirm that you will co-operate with any evaluation related activities which are required of us by the Irish FA.
- You note that all data will be processed and collected in line with the Irish Football Association Privacy Notice: <https://www.irishfa.com/privacy>

Submission

You must submit your application by clicking the "Apply" button by **12 Noon Wednesday 18 March 2026**.

You should receive e-mail notification that your application has been received.

You may view a copy of your submitted application form at any time via your submittable account.

6. Supporting Documents

Applicants will be required to provide a range of supporting documents (refer to checklists below)

Stage 1 - Evidence of eligibility

All applicants who pass the eligibility screening must upload the required eligibility evidence to their designated folder. Only applicants who have submitted the correct and complete eligibility evidence will progress to assessment.

Stage 2 - Supporting Information

You must upload site photographs, a baseline and target Pitch Usage plan that matches your proposed participation hours, a copy of the pitch and associated facilities technical specification documents including technical drawings, environmental/sustainability documents and confirmation of VAT Status. If available you should also upload any site surveys, pitch condition reports or feasibility studies you have commissioned.

All proposed pitch usage figures will be benchmarked against FIFA's typical usage figures as detailed in FIFA's stadium guidelines below.

<https://inside.fifa.com/innovation/stadium-guidelines/general-process-guidelines/design/turf-and-pitch-design>

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Stage 1: Evidence of Eligibility

	Y	N	N/A
Your organisation's governing document (for applicants that are Football-focused Sports)			

Community or Charitable Sports Community or Charitable Organisation's)			
For applicants that are Local Authorities, Football-focused Sports Community or Charitable Organisations, copy Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a written undertaking to support a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated 'anchor club'(s) and endorses significant grassroots football activities being hosted at the facility			
Evidence of applicant or anchor clubs' Irish FA accreditation/license or of having commenced the process to become accredited/licensed			
Evidence of Title (if land is owned) or copy Lease Agreement/ Service Level Agreement for site to be developed			
Minutes or other evidence of approval from your committee or board for your proposed pitch development project			
Evidence that the proposed works are permitted by the owner of the property/facility			
Written confirmation from the local planning authority that planning consent has been granted or is not required – must include planning approval reference number for verification			
Evidence of match funding			
Quotations for proposed pitch works and associated infrastructure dated within last 6 months.			
Quotation for proposed professional fees dated within last 6 months			
Evidence of planning preconditions having been met.			



Stage 2: Application supporting documents

	Y	N	N/A
Photographs and/or drawings of the current site for development. The photographs/ site drawings should clearly show the entire site to be developed. If the project is a pitch replacement the photographs should clearly show the current pitch conditions, highlighting any areas of concern			
Floodlighting report or Photographs clearly showing the existing floodlighting columns illuminated. Photographs are to be taken in the evening to show the intensity of light outside of daylight hours.			
Copy technical drawings, site plans, architect drawings, specification documents for capital items to be funded e.g. natural grass pitch/ AGP carpet/ drainage/ shockpad/ subbases, floodlights, fencing, gates etc.			
Copy technical, feasibility surveys, ground surveys, floodlighting surveys, flood risk reports and any other reports or surveys related to the conditions set out in your planning approval			
Environmental/ sustainability documents including AGP infill products, 3G carpet specification, shock pad recycling details, infill migration measures etc, natural grass pitch design and construction plans.			
A proposed pitch usage plan and this plan will form part of the assessment for need and demand. The plan must provide detail on proposed hourly use per each named user group and proposed hourly rate			
Confirmation of VAT status			

Annex A: Technical Requirements

Natural Grass Pitch Projects

The design, construction and maintenance of proposed natural grass pitch installations must align with FIFA's Quality Programme for Football Turf – Natural Grass Guidelines (2023), including appropriate ground preparation, drainage, grass selection and ongoing maintenance. Link to FIFA's Football Turf Natural Grass Guidelines 2023 below.

<https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/13a9ba8e47d968ea/original/FIFA-Natural-Turf-Guidelines.pdf>).

Natural grass pitch specification documents to be submitted with the application.

New AGP/ MUGA Projects

Artificial grass pitches (AGPs) and small-sided Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) will only be funded **where either an existing, fully functioning floodlighting system is already in place and can be retained, or where a new LED floodlighting system will be installed**, as part of the overall project proposal.

Artificial grass pitches (AGP) Carpet Replacement Projects

For all 3G pitch replacement applications, the 3G pitch **must be in demonstrable need of replacement and be at least 7 years old**.

Artificial grass pitch (AGP) carpet replacement projects will only be funded where either an existing, fully functioning floodlighting system is already in place and can be retained, or where a new LED floodlighting system will be installed, as part of the overall project proposal.

Applicants must provide at the time of application photographic evidence of the current condition of the existing AGP carpet, highlighting any areas of concern.

Ground Criteria Considerations & Requirements

For proposed projects at venues that host Intermediate standard football and above, applicants must ensure that all funded items such as pitches (including all pitch markings), floodlighting, fencing, gates, dugouts, changing rooms etc. should comply with the relevant league regulations.

Refer to the Joint Ground Criteria document (November 2019): <https://www.irishfa.com/media/41546/ifa-joint-ground-criteria-nov-2019.pdf>

Pitch dimensions, markings and runoff areas must comply with the relevant infrastructure requirements. Please contact the relevant league operator to discuss physical infrastructure requirements

The Joint Ground Criteria is restricted to detailing the physical infrastructure and technical specification required, from a football perspective, to be in place at the respective levels of football identified. The applicant and its appointees are solely responsible for ensuring that project works meet all required health and safety legislative requirements, as well as securing the site and assets when capital works commence.

AGP/ MUGA Certification and Testing

A specialist pitch testing consultant must also be appointed who is responsible for overseeing the testing and certification of the 3G AGP. All AGPs must be constructed and tested **as a minimum** to the FIFA 'Quality' Standard as part of the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf (FIFA Quality certification is required every three years) or the equivalent European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. The pitch must hold a FIFA Quality standard or EN 15530-1 compliant test report at all times and be listed on the FIFA Resource Hub for approved fields.

<https://inside.fifa.com/innovation/resource-hub>

Refer to the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf Test Manual II – Test Requirements, June 2024 for all FIFA AGP testing standards and requirements.

<https://www.fifa.com/technical/football-technology/standards/football-turf/fifa-quality-programme-for-football-turf>

MUGAs/ small-sided pitches will be considered with 3G surfaces with infill products and should be constructed and tested to the European Standard EN 15330-1:2013. Surfaces designed for multisport use, MUGAs/ small-sided 3G pitches must be designed to support grassroots association football activities.

AGP Infill Proposals and Measures

The installation of AGPs with microplastic infill products, e.g. rubber crumb (e.g. SBR, EPDM, Thermoplastics), will be funded however, applicants should explore budget permitting, alternative infill options such as organic infill (biodegradable materials such as cork, olive husks, corn, coconut fibres, wood chip, natural sand blends) that are suitable for and resilient in the local climate. A locally sourced material would be advantageous to reduce the transportation carbon footprint. Applicants and their appointed pitch consultants should also carefully consider the pitch design to accommodate easy conversion or adaptation to organic infill products after the ban comes into force in October 2031. The use of shockpads is more important with alternative infills and reuse suitability needs to be investigated early for accurate budgeting. For clarity, the microplastic ban is only for the sale of intentionally added microplastics, polymeric infill materials. The ban does not prevent the continued use of microplastic infill material for AGPs, nor does it prevent the construction of new pitches with rubber crumb infill before 2031, but it may make the maintenance of these pitches after this time difficult due to not having access to new top up infill.

The Irish FA's full statement on the EU microplastics ban can be accessed via the link below.

<https://www.irishfa.com/media/52514/eu-microplastics-ban-statement-feb24.pdf>

It is mandatory that all AGP projects comply with "BS CEN/TR 17519:2020 Surfaces for sports arenas. Synthetic turf sports facilities. Guidance on how to minimise infill dispersion into the environment" for infill risk management measures, to minimise the risk of microplastic infill migration into drainage systems and local water courses (refer to Section 9, Environmental Considerations, for more detail). As an example the Technical Report details

1. low-level containment barriers around the spectator perimeter fencing
2. boot cleaning stations for boots post-match at main player access gates
3. No open drainage networks should be accessible for rainwater discharge carrying microplastics, or if so adequate filtering installed.
4. Infill decontamination grates/ mats/ traps
5. Recess area for snow clearance
6. Maintenance equipment storage in pitch recess areas

AGP specification documents relating to proposed pitch infill products, carpet specification, shock pad recycling details, infill migration measures etc. to be submitted with the application.

When considering project design, applicants may wish to access best practice synthetic turf sports pitch/ MUGA design guidance via the Sports and Play Construction Association's (SAPCA) website (<https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>).

Floodlighting Installations

Funding will only be awarded for new or upgraded, fixed, LED floodlighting installations on artificial grass pitches or artificial MUGAs to increase playing time, provide access and availability during evenings/ Winter periods and promote the use of sustainable energy. All new floodlighting installations must use LED technology.

Funding will not be awarded for floodlighting installations associated with natural grass pitches.

Applicants with existing floodlighting may wish to consider upgrading to floodlighting systems with LED lights. As well as having an increased life span, LED floodlighting systems are energy and cost efficient and environmentally friendly.

If there is an existing floodlighting system at the proposed project location, a floodlighting report or photographic evidence must be submitted with the application showing all floodlighting columns are illuminated. Photographs are to be taken in the evening to show the intensity of light outside of daylight hours.

Floodlight installations should be checked on completion by an independent ISO 17025 laboratory with a calibrated illuminance meter. A maintenance factor must be provided in the design.

FIFA Quality Pro, FIFA Quality or FIFA Basic final installation tests should be carried out.

Pitch recycling for existing 3G AGPs

Applicants proposing the replacement of an existing 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) are responsible for ensuring that the removal, reuse, recycling or disposal of materials complies with all relevant environmental and waste management legislation in Northern Ireland.

Applicants should seek appropriate professional advice and engage with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), where necessary, to ensure compliance.

Proposals should outline how end-of-life materials will be managed in accordance with current statutory requirements.

Use of existing shockpad

If an existing artificial turf pitch's shockpad is to be reused a shockpad condition assessment as early as possible should be undertaken. This will support a more accurate budget and identify works required during the replacement project. Key checks can be carried out by a sports specialist consultant or sports test laboratory.

1. Impact attenuation properties specific to the proposed specification
2. Water permeability
3. Visual inspection
4. Tensile strength & elongation
5. Thickness

At feasibility stage the corners can provide an indication to the condition of the shockpad however a full assessment should be carried out once the carpet has been lifted.

For a FIFA test report the results of the shockpad tests must be appended to the FIFA field test report and submitted to FIFA following the initial field test

Use of existing infills

If an existing artificial turf pitch infill is to be reused a comprehensive analysis of site extracted infill should be carried out.

- Performance infill tested to EN 15330-5 Surfaces for sport areas - Synthetic turf and textile sports surfaces - Part 5: Specification for infill materials should be undertaken.
- Stabilising infill can be tested for uncompacted bulk density, particle size grading, shape and visual assessment for contaminants.

Changing Facilities

Associated spaces or hubs may be funded in addition to changing room provision but will not be prioritised as a standalone element ahead of changing facilities. Changing room pavilions must support the use of pitches, improve stakeholder experience, service the needs of the local community, leagues and clubs.

Changing room facilities must be designed for and accessed by male players, female players and those with disabilities. The aspiration should be to achieve equal access for all existing and potential users and therefore a minimum standard as per NI Building Regs Technical Booklet R, BS8300:1:2018 and BS8300:2:2018 should be achieved.

Pitch Maintenance and Sustainability

At the time of application, all pitch projects must demonstrate and evidence the future long-term sustainability of the surface including the confirmation of maintenance schedules/ contracts, topping up of infill products (relevant to AGP projects, noting the potential ban on the use of microplastic infill products) and 'sinking fund' proposals.

All applicants must appoint a reputable and suitably qualified contractor following the completion of the defect's liability period, to ensure ongoing maintenance of the funded asset. It is also recommended that a club official or designated groundskeeper undertakes relevant training to ensure proper maintenance of the AGP surface. This training may be provided by the carpet installer. Where applicable, applicants should submit details of the proposed training and maintenance equipment as part of the application.

The applicant should undertake a programme of maintenance and repair to safeguard the asset and will replace or renew the facility when it becomes necessary through the establishment of a pitch 'sinking fund'. Sinking fund proposals must be submitted with the application providing detail on how the pitch will be replaced at the end of its lifespan.

When considering pitch maintenance, applicants may wish to access best practice for the construction and maintenance of a synthetic turf sports pitch/ MUGA via the Sports and Play Construction Association's (SAPCA) website:

<https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>

Annex B: Irish Football Association Privacy Notice

All data will be processed and collected in line with the Irish Football Association Privacy Notice:
<https://www.irishfa.com/privacy>.



Annex C – Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Term	
AGP	Artificial Grass Pitch	A synthetic turf surface used for football and other sports, often 3G (third generation) quality.
MUGA	Multi-Use Games Area	A flexible sports space designed for multiple sports, often small-sided, including football, basketball, or netball.
IFA	Irish Football Association	
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	
CI	Co-Operation Ireland	
NIMDM2017	Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (2017)	A statistical tool used to rank areas of deprivation in NI; used to identify priority investment areas.
SAPCA	Sports and Play Construction Association	
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association	
VAT	Value-Added Tax	
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding	A formal agreement outlining the collaboration between a non-club applicant and an Irish FA-accredited "Anchor Club".
CLOA	Chief Leisure Officers Association	
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	