



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Project Ireland 2040

**Building Ireland's
Future**

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund



Scheme Outline and Information Booklet



Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

Background

Project Ireland 2040, which was launched on 16th February 2018, is the Government's overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the next ten years, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027, and the National Planning Framework (NPF) which outlines the broader policy principles and priorities in planning for future population and economic growth to 2040.

What is the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund?

As part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government has committed to providing an additional €1 billion for a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund ("the Fund") over the period 2019 to 2027. The Fund will provide investment to support rural renewal for suitable projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. It will be administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The new Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the National Planning Framework, and in particular to achieve Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities - one of the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.

Initial funding of €315 million is being allocated to the Fund on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022.

What will it support?

The objective of the new Fund is to support coordinated and integrated projects between Government Departments, State agencies, Local Authorities, other public bodies, communities and, where appropriate, philanthropic funders and/or the private sector, which will have an impact on sustainable economic and social development in rural areas.

Funding will be awarded through a competitive bid process, based on delivering the objectives for rural Ireland in the National Planning Framework.

The Fund will support ambitious and strategic projects which contribute to sustainable rural regeneration and development. It will support investments of scale which would not otherwise be delivered without the additionality provided by the Fund, and projects that are outside the scope of existing schemes. In this context, projects are likely to be multi-annual and multi-faceted, involving a number of elements or phases as part of a broad strategic plan.

Key outcomes will be to support sustainable community and economic development in rural Ireland, including through regenerating smaller towns and villages and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation to support job creation in rural areas.

Categories of proposals

The first call for proposals under the Fund is being launched in July 2018 and submissions are invited under two categories:

Category 1: “Ready-to-Go” proposals, or initial phases of projects which can be commenced in 2019, which have the necessary consents (e.g. planning) in place, are at an advanced stage of design, are in a position to satisfy value-for-money requirements in accordance with the Public Spending Code, and are procurement-ready.

Category 2: Proposals that have clear potential and quantifiable objectives but require further development to enable them to be potentially submitted as Category 1 proposals in subsequent funding calls.

Successful applications under Category 2 above will be approved to allow detailed development of the proposal to be progressed. Issues that may need to be addressed as part of the development of the proposal could include land ownership/title, planning and design work, value for money assessment, and procurement. Funding will be provided towards the cost of project development in these cases, including for technical or expert assistance.

How much will the Fund provide to projects?

As a general rule, the Fund will provide up to 75% of the total project value, with at least 25% to be provided in matching contributions by the applicants. Match funding may be in the form of a combination of wider Exchequer and/or State sector expenditure, Local Authority investment and/or land, community investment, philanthropic contributions, private sector investment (where appropriate), or other asset contributions.

In-kind contributions (e.g. land lease or voluntary labour¹) are an eligible form of matching contribution; however, a minimum of 10% of matching contributions must be in cash.

A higher maximum contribution of 80% from the Fund will be considered where community contributions form more than 50% of the match-funding.

The precise level of grant for an individual project will depend on the nature and quality of the proposal, and having regard to State Aid rules. While maxima contributions are outlined here, in some cases, the Fund might form the minor part of the total investment, providing a small but important element of funding to add value to a larger project which already has substantial funding commitments in place.

It is envisaged that projects under the first call for proposals (July 2018) will be of a scale such that the minimum request from the Fund for Category 1 projects will be €500,000. There is no upper limit, but all proposals must demonstrate detailed project costings and clear value for money.

Who can apply?

Proposals under the Fund must demonstrate a collaborative approach between two or more organisations. Subject to this condition, the Fund will be open to Local Authorities, Local Development Companies, State agencies, other Government Departments, philanthropic funders, the private sector and communities.

For the purposes of compliance with public financial procedures, the lead party in the application must be a State-funded body.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the Fund can provide additionality to their existing level of activity and deliver a sustainable impact on rural areas.

What areas are eligible?

The Fund will focus on all settlements and rural areas with fewer than 10,000 people which are located outside the five city metropolitan areas. Projects that involve collaboration across Local Authority boundaries, as well as within those boundaries, are strongly encouraged, where the participating settlements/areas meet the population criteria.

¹ Contributions-in-kind can be provided in the form of voluntary labour (i.e. unpaid work) which must be based on the verified time spent and the rate of remuneration for equivalent work. The Lead Applicant must ensure that the rate applied is properly justified in the application.

Rural towns with a population of over 10,000 people are eligible to apply for funding under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund which is administered by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

A small number of specified towns with fewer than 10,000 people but with more than 2,500 jobs (2006 baseline) and which function as significant centres of employment may also be eligible for support under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (see Appendix 1). However, but no individual project will be able to avail of both the Urban and Rural Funds.

Key Criteria

To achieve the objectives of the Fund, proposals supported will need to demonstrate:

- Relevance to one or more of the **National Strategic Outcomes** of Project Ireland 2040 (see Appendix 2).
- A **collaborative approach**, involving relevant Government Departments, State agencies, Local Authorities and other bodies as appropriate.
- A **strategic vision** which is consistent with County Development Plans, Local Economic and Community Plans, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies being developed by the Regional Assemblies, or other local or regional development plans/strategies.
- **Additionality** and value for money – the Fund will not substitute for investment which is already provided for, or which should be provided for, under the remit of a Department or agency.
- **Leveraging of funding** from the partners to the application, including philanthropic funders and/or the private sector where appropriate.
- A **sustainable impact** on the social or economic development of rural communities through measureable outputs.

What type of activities will be supported?

The type of activities that will be supported from the Fund can include:

- Measures to tackle infrastructural deficiencies in relation to services, access, or other infrastructure that may be needed to support town centre housing and/or commercial development.
- Active land management, including the acquisition, planning, design, and enabling (through servicing, decontamination or otherwise), of areas, sites and buildings, to support strategic regeneration.
- Measures to address building vacancy in order to encourage town centre residential living or commercial development, including building refurbishment, redevelopment and/or demolition;
- The development of areas, sites and buildings for community or public facilities;
- Infrastructure that enables improved accessibility within, and to, towns and villages, supporting in particular sustainable modes such as walking, cycling, and public transport links, but also including improvements to roads, bridges and car parking facilities that encourage footfall.
- Infrastructure that improves telecommunications connectivity.
- Public amenity, public realm, safety and security measures and recreational facilities.
- Projects that support job creation, entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas (e.g. development of Digital Hubs, Enterprise Hubs, Creative Hubs, training facilities); alignment with Local Authorities' Local Digital Strategies should be demonstrated, where appropriate.
- Projects which take an integrated approach to developing employment opportunities within a town and/or its environs, for example, based around a sectoral strength (e.g. an industry cluster) or a cultural, heritage or environmental asset.
- Development or expansion of tourism initiatives which generate new areas of economic activity and attract increased visitor numbers to rural areas.
- Enhancement of heritage and/or other community assets including the provision/enhancement of recreational or leisure facilities.

- Measures to tackle social disadvantage.
- Support will also be made available under Category 2 approvals to further develop proposals and prepare for further calls under the Fund. Such costs can include engagement of a dedicated Project Officer, feasibility studies, architectural and engineering design costs and other technical services as required.

This list is not exhaustive but provides an indication of the type of activities which will be eligible for support. A proposal may include more than one component as part of an overall plan to deliver a strategic objective for a town, village or rural area.

Project Selection process

A Project Advisory Board has been established to manage the assessment of proposals and to advise the Minister for Rural and Community Development on the proposals received. The Advisory Board will be chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development and comprise a number of relevant Government Departments, as well as external experts. Projects will be assessed against the criteria at Appendix 3.

The Project Advisory Board may draw on broader, more specialist expertise where considered appropriate and may, where it considers it necessary, meet with applicants to seek clarifications on a proposal.

Final decisions on the funding of projects will be made by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, based on the advice of the Project Advisory Board.

Payment Schedule

Payments from the Fund will be made on a phased basis over the course of the project on the basis of milestones being achieved by the project promoters. Full details will be included in the Funding Agreement signed with the successful applicants.

Financial governance and Project reporting requirements

All expenditure incurred will be subject to the terms of the Public Spending Code which can be found at <http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/>, and the Capital Works Management Framework, available at <https://constructionprocurement.gov.ie/capital-works-management-framework/>.

In addition, the requirements outlined below will apply to all funding approved from the Fund.

1. All appropriate central and/or local Government financial, procurement and accounting rules and regulations will be complied with.
2. Any legislative requirements relevant to the project will be adhered to.
3. Each Lead Applicant will fully account for the sum advanced in a timely manner.
4. All projects will be subject to audit by the Department of Rural and Community Development and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General and/or the Local Government Audit Service. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible for audit purposes at all times and for a period of six years from the date of completion of the project.
5. On-going monitoring and evaluation of the project outputs and outcomes should take place in the context of assessing the impact of the intervention. The Lead Applicant will be expected to collect appropriate data to facilitate this process on an on-going basis and make this data available to the Department of Rural and Community Development. Specific metrics to be collected will be included in the Funding Agreement between the Department and the Lead Applicant.
6. Projects will acknowledge the support of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in all public announcements and advertising relating to the project and will use relevant Government of Ireland/Project Ireland 2040 branding as set out in the Funding Agreement.
7. The Department of Rural and Community Development and/or the Government of Ireland may highlight the project in the promotion of the Fund or of its wider policies.
8. The Lead Applicant will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Rural and Community Development from time to time.
9. Each Lead Applicant will provide a contact point to the Department to facilitate timely interaction in the context of payments and information requests.
10. A final report detailing all elements of expenditure relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

Non-Compliance with the rules outlined above, or any additional stipulations agreed during contract negotiations, may result in a requirement to refund part or all of the grant aid awarded.

Timelines

The first call for proposals under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will open on 4th July 2018.

The deadline for the receipt of applications under the first call for proposals is **12 noon on 27th September 2018**. Applications should be submitted electronically on the official Application Form which is available on the website of the Department of Rural and Community Development at <https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-regeneration-development-fund/>. All applications will be acknowledged.

It is envisaged that an initial announcement of approved projects will be made in late October/early November 2018 following the assessment process, and that projects (or project development in the case of Category 2 proposals) will commence in early 2019.

It is expected a further call for proposals will be announced in mid-2019 and that subsequent calls will be announced on an annual basis thereafter.

Appendix 1

**Towns with population of less than 10,000 people and >2,500 jobs (2016)
which may be eligible for support from either
the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund or
the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund,
but may apply for funding under one scheme only**

- 1 Gorey
- 2 Shannon
- 3 Nenagh
- 4 Westport
- 5 Roscommon
- 6 Monaghan
- 7 Tuam
- 8 Thurles
- 9 Dungarvan
- 10 New Ross
- 11 Ballinasloe
- 12 Carrick-on-Shannon
- 13 Trim

Appendix 2

Project Ireland 2040 - National Strategic Outcomes

Project Ireland 2040 involves total investment in infrastructure of almost €116 billion over ten years to 2027. It sets out a comprehensive framework for the future development of Ireland, to enable a prosperous economy marked by equality of opportunity and well-being for our citizens. It seeks to achieve 10 National Strategic Outcomes as follows:

1. Compact Growth
2. Enhanced Regional Accessibility
3. Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
4. Sustainable Mobility
5. A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills
6. High-Quality International Connectivity
7. Enhanced Amenity and Heritage
8. Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society
9. Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources
10. Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services

Further details on the National Strategic Outcomes are available at:
<http://www.gov.ie/en/project-ireland-2040>.

Appendix 3

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund Project Appraisal Scheme

| Assessment Criteria | Max. marks available |
|--|----------------------|
| <i>A. Policy objectives</i> | |
| Demonstrable contribution to the National Strategic Outcomes in NPF | 200 |
| Evidence of linkage to County Development Plans, LECs, RSEs or other approved development plans | |
| Extent of collaboration between promoting parties | 150 |
| Capacity of partners to deliver project as envisaged and to meet Public Spending Code requirements | 100 |
| <i>B. Potential Impact</i> | |
| Economic or social impact on rural areas or communities (e.g. jobs, investment, place-making, etc) | 200 |
| Self-sustainability and potential for project replication | 100 |
| <i>C. Quality of budgetary proposal</i> | |
| Quality of budgetary proposal and Value for Money | 150 |
| Extent of co-funding/additionality (public or private) | 100 |
| TOTAL | 1000 |