



Tender Specification

Delivery of a scoping exercise and business plan to support the delivery of a Digital Hub for the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland

February 2024

Contents	Page No
About the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	3
Background to the Project	4
Proposed Project Activity	5
Tender Requirements and Submission Process and Timetable	6
Scoring Criteria	7

Instructions to Tenderers

Submissions by 12pm, 23 February 2024

Submissions by 23 February 2024 to jodoherty@communityfoundationni.org

Queries by email by 23 February 2024 to jodoherty@communityfoundationni.org

Submissions should be marked as Commercially Confidential

1.0 About the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

1.1 The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland is an independent, grant making trust, inspiring generosity, and achieving impact across Northern Ireland. Currently, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland works with 65 funds, bringing change to hundreds of communities every day. The foundations vision is **“a fair and equitable society for everyone”** and our mission is **“to work hand in hand with communities to build a better future”**. You can view the full strategy [here](#).

1.2 The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, under its 2023–2026 Strategic Plan, has identified the following priority areas.

Poverty: We will invest in projects, campaigns and organisations addressing short- and long-term poverty.

Climate Sustainability: We will create opportunities to educate and learn, decarbonise our operations, commit resources and manage our investments through a climate justice lens.

Community Transformation: We will build and develop opportunities in support of a stronger, more resilient, and inclusive community and voluntary sector.

Digital inclusion: We will commit resources and advocate for a digital strategy for NI, a new approach to digital infrastructure and improve digital support and workforce development.

Social Justice: We will broaden our Human Rights support and continue to advocate for and give greater voice to those most marginalised in our community.

Health: We will develop funding, policy and programmes that address enhanced mental, physical, economic, social, and environmental well-being

1.3 The foundation's 2023-2026 strategy commits to investing in:

- supporting communities;
- driving equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- improving well-being; and
- transformational funding.

1.4 Between **April 2020 – March 2023** the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland awarded **3096** grants through **92** funds totalling **£46 million**, with an average grant of **£14,873**. During this period, our grants benefited over **3 million** beneficiaries across Northern Ireland.

2.0 Background to the Project

2.1 The Community Foundation has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders across the VCSE, business and public sectors in the development of this proposal. This has involved direct engagements, research, and innovation labs, to ensure we understand the needs of the sector.

2.2 In November 2022 the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, supported by Comic Relief, launched the **'Wired Up?'** Report, which explored the current digital needs of the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland and identified areas for potential development.

2.3 The **'Wired Up?'** report was informed by a review of relevant research focussing on digital skills and digital inclusion within the UK policy context. This was further supported with an online survey, with 403 responses and focus groups, representing both the diversity of organisations and all council areas in Northern Ireland.

2.4 Most participants recognised that increasing digital inclusion was now an organisational priority. The top three groups identified as being at risk of digital exclusion were older people (88.5%), people on a low income

(83.5%) and people with a disability (75.3%). The most common barriers to digital inclusion were:

- Poor digital skills (85.0%)
- Lack of ability to afford ongoing cost of data (82.3%)
- Lack of devices other than a mobile phone (82.0%)

2.5 Examples highlighted by the research showed that organisations had successfully reduced digital exclusion by providing a combination of equipment, data, and support to develop digital skills on an ongoing basis. The report also found that further service delivery in this area would require long term investment in devices, data and support for staff and volunteers to strengthen their skills to assist those facing digital exclusion.

2.6 When asked, most participants rated their organisation’s digital culture as excellent (11.7%) or good (46.0%). Over one third (34.3%) rated their organisation’s digital culture as fair, with 8.0% rating it as poor. Over one fifth of participants (22.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation was struggling to adopt a digital culture. Funding was seen as the largest challenge facing the VCSE sector in the future. This was expressed in two ways:

- Difficulty in getting core funding to support digital (81.8%); and
- Short-term funding making it difficult to plan for the future (81.8%).

2.7 In February 2023, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland convened a cross sectoral digital innovation lab to interrogate recommendations from previous evidence and convenings on the issue of digital innovation in parallel with the “Wired Up?” report. The purpose of the innovation lab was to identify solutions and partnership opportunities for future developments addressing digital skills and inclusion within the VCSE sector.

2.8 Solutions and partnership opportunities identified for development included:

- A clear call for cross sector partnership working
- Building a flexible digital fund for the sector, using impact and learning to influence policy
- Development of a “digital hub” for the VCSE sector, a central resource to support digital infrastructure and capacity building. Learnings from the digital fund would inform Hub priorities (Training, licensees, devices, supports, etc.) This Digital Infrastructure Hub could for example support:
 - The creation of a network of approved providers to deliver technical assistance for VCSE sector

- Recruitment of digital champions
- Scope the type and range of capacity training required by the VCSE sector
- Influencing of policy
- Provision of devices
- Advise on social tariffs to overcome data poverty
- Further evidence to support tackling data poverty
- Identification of social value opportunities
- Development of a digital charter for the VCSE sector

3.0 Proposed Project Activity

- 3.1 In response to the need identified through the Community Foundation's work over the last 2 years we are seeking responses to this tender to **complete a detailed scoping exercise** and **to develop a business plan** to support the delivery of a digital hub for the VCSE sector Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland are seeking to commission a scoping exercise to identify the following:
- Digital support services currently available to VCSE organisations in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales and best practice
 - Gaps in support services currently available to VCSE organisations in Northern Ireland through service comparisons and direct engagements with Northern Ireland VCSE organisations
 - Opportunities for information and resource sharing with organisations in other regions that have established digital hubs, including materials, training and resources, and equipment
 - Key partners and areas of expertise, including, but not limited to, NICVA, Department of Finance, Department for Communities, Software Alliance, Digital Inclusion Unit, Volunteer Now, Microsoft, Bytes and Catalyst
 - Engagements with a range of VCSE organisations exploring their strategic and operational approaches to develop and embed Digital Transformation into their organisation, and what support is required
 - Budgeting and business planning for the delivery of a digital hub for the VCSE sector Northern Ireland
- 3.3 The scoping exercise referred to in 3.2 will inform the development of the business plan for the delivery of a digital hub for the VCSE sector Northern Ireland which includes:
- A pathway for the delivery of a transformational digital hub for the VCSE sector Northern Ireland
 - A defined budget for the delivery of a digital hub for the VCSE sector Northern Ireland

- The creation of a cross sectoral digital consortium that will support the delivery of a digital hub to provide bespoke support to transform the sector
- A training and support programme which meets the needs of frontline staff and volunteers to increase their digital capacity and that of the people they support – including resource sharing, digital audits, digital mentoring and collaboration with other UK based digital hubs

4.0 Tender Requirements, Submission Process and Timetable

- 4.1 The Community Foundation is seeking a suitable individual or organisation to conduct a scoping exercise (as set out in 3.2) and business plan (as set out in 3.3).
- 4.2 The contract will commence in March 2024 and be completed approximately by September 2024.
- 4.3 Respondents will be experienced consultants in developing, designing and managing research services and project/business development with experience of working in and/or on behalf of VCSE organisations in the UK or Ireland.
- 4.4 Responses to this tender should fully outline:
- You/your organisations skills and experience
 - A detailed proposed workplan with timescales (maximum 1 year), identifying any challenges or risks and how these will be managed
 - Engagement plan with regular intervals for engagement with the project steering group
 - A proposed budget not exceeding £40,000
- 4.5 Responses should be no longer than 6 sides of an A4 page and should outline your/ your organisations ability to meet each of the scoring criteria outlined at **5.0**.
- 4.6 All proposals must be submitted by 12pm on 23 February 2024 to jodoherty@communityfoundationni.org. Late submissions will not be accepted.
- 4.7 A panel appointed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland will assess tender responses based on the scoring criteria provided. Shortlisted applicants may be required to present to the appointing panel either face to face or online.

4.8 The timetable for this tender process is outlined below:

Activity	Date
Final date for questions	14/02/2024
Submission closing date	23/02/2024
CFNI panel shortlisting	26/02/2024
Interview presentations to panel (if required)	29/02/2024
Confirmation of contract award	1/03/2024
Contract start date	1/04/2024

4.9 Key milestones in the project delivery are outlined below:

Activity	Date
Contract Initiation meeting with CFNI	Week 1
Meet with project steering group	Monthly
Interim report submitted and presented to steering group	Month 6
Final report submitted	Month 7

5.0 Scoring Criteria

5.1 All tender responses received on time will be assessed using the criteria and associated weightings outlined below.

Criteria	Weighting	Marks
Evidence of relevant expertise and experience (including 3 examples) of research design, delivery, analysis, and communication, (ideally for NI VCSE organisations and within the last 3-5 years)	25%	25
Understanding of the brief and robustness of the proposed workplan setting out how all tasks listed in 'Proposed Project Activities' will be delivered with clear timescales including the number of days and cost per day.	40%	40
Anticipation of challenges and indication of how these will be dealt with and how the work will be prioritised	10%	10

<p>Cost</p> <p>Cost transparency is critical. All costs to deliver the tender requirements should be clearly indicated. Any exemptions should be stated.</p> <p>The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland is not VAT registered, all costs quoted to be inclusive of VAT.</p> <p>A score for cost will be calculated as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The lowest cost tender will be given the maximum score of 25 2. The remaining tender amounts will be given a score using the formula: $\text{Score} = 25 \times \frac{\text{Lowest Tender Amount}}{\text{Tender Amount}}$ 	25%	25
Total	100%	100