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Applications for next round of grant scheme open at the start of November.

A fund described by a Belfast community group as offering a “lifeline to deepen relationships” will soon reopen for applications with a total of £500,000 on offer, as the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) prepares to launch the third round of its Connect Fund grant programme. The Connect Fund strengthens collaboration between community and voluntary groups across the east and west of the UK, and has so far awarded over £1m to 46 projects across Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It funds projects that tackle shared challenges across the UK, bringing community and voluntary groups together to build long-lasting UK-wide partnerships.

Minister for Northern Ireland Sarah Owen visited Belfast performance art group and Connect Fund recipient Bbeyond, to see the positive impact of the funding on the ground. The group has formed the NI-GB Performance Art Network in partnership with TactileBosch in Wales, the Belfast School of Art, and the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury. The project will help Northern Ireland performance artists engage with the wider UK creative landscape, developing leadership skills and cultural understanding.

Minister Owen said:

“Bbeyond’s exciting plans to support Northern Ireland performance artists highlight the Connect Fund’s creativity and diversity.

“While strengthening relationships between community and voluntary groups in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, the Connect Fund has supported a variety of innovative schemes.

“I encourage local groups with proposals to build East-West relationships to apply for the next funding opportunity when it opens in November.”

Bbeyond Programme Manager Bronagh Lawson said:

“Personal and organisational connections outside of Northern Ireland are vital for the arts.

“The Connect Fund has been a lifeline to deepen relationships, forge new connections and bring real opportunities to our members.

“East-West understanding has started to open up, and when artists get together you can be sure the result will be well beyond your original predicted outcome!”

Over the last two years, Connect Fund grants have enriched community and voluntary organisations, enabling them to stage theatre production tours and musical performances, host cross-Nation summits and leadership forums, and launch youth programmes. Successful applicants have strengthened East-West connections by developing civic relationships; supporting the development of links based around culture, sports and people; building leadership capability; and facilitating constructive dialogue on opportunities and challenges facing UK communities.

Previous successful applications and their partner organisations were located across the UK. Round 3 of the Connect Fund will open for applications at https://www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/ from 00.01 on November 2 2026 until 17:00

on December 18 2026. Each applicant can bid for between £300 and £50,000 to deliver their project, and return applicants are welcome to apply with project delivery running from April 1 2027 to March 31 2028.

ENDS

- Guidance on how to apply and a link to the Findagrant application page will be made available here once applications open on November 2 2026: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-connect-fund
- For any further questions please contact connectfund@nio.gov.uk

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/connect-fund-to-offer-up-to-500k-for-northern-ireland-and-gb-voluntary-and-community-groups