

£100,000 fund to boost women's involvement in public decision-making forums

7.3.2026 - Ruth Anderson | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

NIO's Engagement for Change Fund to promote leadership and advocacy development.

A new £100,000 fund will support women from Northern Ireland's community and voluntary sector to influence positive change, by equipping them with the skills to represent their views and experience to policy decision makers in Government.

The Northern Ireland Office's (NIO) Engagement for Change Fund, which will run over three years, was announced by NIO Lords Spokesperson and Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office Baroness Ruth Anderson following a series of International Women's Day engagements in Northern Ireland.

The Fund will help community leaders of all genders develop and enhance the leadership and advocacy skills necessary to promote and advocate for the critical work they deliver, and the communities they support. It will also include a specific focus on supporting more women into the public forum.

The announcement is the latest NIO initiative to support local communities. It builds on the success of the Connect Fund, which has so far awarded £500,000 to community and voluntary organisations across Northern Ireland, and the £1 million Community Partnership Fund, to strengthen and empower Northern Ireland's voluntary sector and grassroots community organisations.

A key focus of the Engagement for Change Fund will be to support women's participation in the forums of public debate, countering underrepresentation.

A single community organisation will be appointed to provide upskilling on Northern Ireland's policy landscape, effective communication, advocacy and network building, engagement with traditional and social media, and how to collect and use robust data and evidence. As part of the wider programme, the successful applicant will include a workstream on addressing barriers to women's participation.

Ahead of International Women's Day, Baroness Anderson visited Strathearn School where she welcomed questions on a career in politics from young, female politics students.

She also hosted an International Women's Day networking event with women from across Northern Ireland's community and voluntary sector.

Baroness Anderson then travelled to Shankill Shared Women's Centre, where she engaged with participants from the Change Makers programme for women who want to get involved in community development, advocacy or politics.

Baroness Anderson said:

"This year's International Women's Day theme is 'Give to Gain,' so I'm delighted that the NIO's new Engagement for Change Fund will support women's representation and participation in decision-making at the highest level.

“Women have always played a critical role in Northern Ireland’s progress, leading their families and communities and influencing positive change.

“Ensuring that their voices continue to be heard and their knowledge and experience is at the forefront of decision making is vital to ensuring a positive and inclusive future for Northern Ireland.”

In the coming months, the NIO will work closely with the voluntary and community sector to develop the Engagement for Change Fund, ensuring it will provide targeted and needs-based support.

Later in the year, the fund will invite applications from established voluntary sector organisations to deliver a programme, which must include a dedicated workstream or module to address the specific barriers and challenges women face in accessing and thriving within the public forum.

Following a competitive process, £100,000 will be provided to a single suitable and qualified delivery organisation to deliver programming over three years.

The Fund is reflective of the UK Government’s Civil Society Covenant commitments. It will promote participation and inclusion and involve people in decisions that affect their lives, ensuring their voices are heard and barriers to democratic participation are removed.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100000-fund-to-boost-womens-involvement-in-public-decision-making-forums>