



Department of Foreign Affairs

Reconciliation Fund

Strategy for 2021-2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision is ever deeper reconciliation between people and traditions within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, North and South, and between these islands.

In the period 2021-2024, this Strategy will guide the work of the Reconciliation Fund in supporting reconciliation and deeper mutual understanding within the framework of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements up to and including the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement of 2020.

The new Strategy reaffirms the core aims and objectives of the Reconciliation Fund, but in its updated priorities for 2021-2024, reflects the evolving wider context in which reconciliation work is undertaken, including the United Kingdom's decision in 2016 to leave the European Union, the Stormont House Agreement, Fresh Start Agreement and New Decade, New Approach agreement, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The new Strategy provides for a deepening of the Fund's work North/South and East-West, as well as continuing and increasing our support to reconciliation in the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities in Northern Ireland and border counties.

It will also guide the launch of an ambitious Strategic Partners programme to offer stable multi-annual funding to a wider range of organisations, allowing them to focus even more on the core of the important work they do.

The new Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive consultation process that took on board views and input from a wide range of stakeholders, including a significant cross-section of organisations working directly in the area of reconciliation and peace building.

Our Funding Priorities

In the coming years, our funding priorities will continue to be rooted in two key thematic pillars – **Repairing and Building**. The Fund will seek to support projects aimed at **Repairing** those issues which lead to division, conflict, and barriers to a deeply reconciled and peaceful society *and/or* **Building** a strong civil society that encompasses all communities.

Funding applications will be welcomed in line with one or both of these overarching pillars, with a focus also on one or more of the Reconciliation Fund's priority themes/activities. These include reducing segregation, targeting and eliminating sectarianism, tackling paramilitarism, building sustainable North-South links, addressing the legacy of violence during the Troubles and developing and deepening British-Irish relations.

The fifteen themes/activities are set out in full in the body of the Strategy on page 8.

Funding Framework

Under this Strategy we will launch a new **Strategic Partnerships** scheme in 2021, which will provide for multi-annual (3-Year) funding for 15-30 organisations. This will build on the successful pilot scheme delivered under our previous strategy.

We will continue to accept applications for 12-month **project funding** through our two annual funding rounds. These applications can also request a contribution towards indirect project costs (e.g. salaries/overheads), where they are directly attributable to the management/delivery of the project.

In response to an identified need to provide organisations with support beyond costs relating to particular projects, we will also accept applications requesting a contribution towards an organisation's **Core Operational costs** (e.g. salaries/overheads) as well as for certain **Capital** costs (full details on page 11)

Fund Administration and Evaluation

The Reconciliation Fund will continue to listen carefully to all those who seek our support, in order to identify where we can improve our administrative and operational procedures to ensure that we engage with and support organisations as effectively as possible.

Under this strategy, we will undertake a number of initiatives in this area, including reviewing the effectiveness and suitability of our online grants application system and examining both our reporting requirements and our procedures for dealing with approval requests for adaptations to projects. We will also consider how best to ensure that the learning from the projects we support can be shared as widely as possible. In order to ensure value for money and in line with auditing requirements, we will seek to develop a more structured system of evaluation and review, with a view to commissioning a greater number of reviews and evaluations of funded groups and conducting annual spot checks on a selection of grantees.

Outreach and Communications

The Reconciliation Fund views the building and strengthening of relationships as a key part of our role in supporting civil society to carry out the work of peace-building and reconciliation.

Under this Strategy, we will engage in a number of initiatives in this area, including by using the annual Reconciliation Networking Forum, hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to facilitate networking and to inform our ongoing strategic thinking.

Reconciliation Fund Strategy 2021-2024

1. Our Vision

Our vision is ever deeper reconciliation between people and traditions within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, North and South, and between these islands.

2. Our Approach

The Reconciliation Fund will work to support reconciliation and deeper mutual understanding within the framework of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements.

In the period 2021-2024, the Reconciliation Fund will continue to support the implementation of those agreements by facilitating initiatives that seek to address and heal the legacy of division and violence and build a society founded upon respect for all identities and traditions.

We will build upon the relationships, links and shared experiences that already connect people throughout the island of Ireland and Britain.

We will work with all sections of society towards a shared vision of a cohesive, inclusive and reconciled Northern Ireland and mature, constructive relationships, built on trust and mutual respect, between both parts of the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain.

We believe that we can best achieve this goal by supporting partners in civil society and enabling them to lead positive change and support communities in taking the path of reconciliation.

3. History and Purpose of the Reconciliation Fund

The Reconciliation Fund, which is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, was established in 1982 to support organisations working to further peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, on a cross-border basis, and between Ireland and Britain. Since then, the Government of Ireland has supported some 2,800 projects with more than €60 million in grant funding through the Reconciliation Fund.

Originally operating at a relatively modest scale, the Government increased the Reconciliation Fund's size eight-fold after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, reflecting the Government's commitment under the Agreement to "positively consider the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation". From 2008, an Anti-Sectarianism Fund was operated alongside the Reconciliation Fund, but following a 2011 review, the two funds were merged in 2014, with Anti-Sectarianism being retained as a key policy aim under the new combined fund.

At the time of the *New Decade, New Approach Agreement* signed in January 2020, the Government committed to maintaining the Reconciliation Fund's annual budget at no less than €3.7 million. Since then, reflecting in particular the wide-ranging implications of Brexit and the impact of Covid-19 on community and voluntary sector organisations working in peacebuilding, the Government has committed to further increasing the Reconciliation Fund's budget.

The eligibility criteria for funding are intentionally kept relatively broad to ensure that the Fund can support a wide range of organisations and activities that promote reconciliation, with grants varying in size from just hundreds of euros to small groups, up to amounts in the hundreds of thousands for a small number of larger partners.

Since the 2014 launch of our previous strategy document, the Reconciliation Fund has moved to an online application system and has piloted a successful Strategic Partnership programme of multi-annual funding for a small number of partner organisations.

The purpose of this strategy document is to outline priority funding areas over the next four years and an updated funding framework that aligns with those priorities and aims to address the needs of organisations working in reconciliation. These priorities and funding framework have been arrived at following an extensive process of consultation on the new strategy during autumn 2020. This involved engagement with a range of key stakeholders, including a significant cross-section of organisations working directly in the area of reconciliation and peace building. It also took on board feedback received through ongoing engagement over several years with a large number of organisations both at our annual Reconciliation Networking Forum and more routinely through the annual grant cycles. This engagement has helped us to identify what our funding partners value about our approach and would like us to build upon, where we can improve, and how we can best support them in carrying out the work of reconciliation.

The Reconciliation Fund looks forward to working closely with organisations and practitioners in the coming years to ensure that the Government remains responsive to their needs and able to adjust its approach when required to meet changing circumstances.

4. The Peacebuilding Context

In April 1998, the signatories to the Good Friday Agreement committed “to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements”. Great strides have been taken since then to build reconciliation within each of the three strands of the Good Friday Agreement, representing the three sets of relationships: between communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South and between Ireland and Britain.

The Irish Government remains committed to building on this hard work to ensure that we continue to move towards the shared goal of reconciliation and rapprochement.

In the years since the launch of the 2014 Reconciliation Fund strategy, the peacebuilding context on these islands has changed significantly, with a series of wider political and other developments affecting the work of reconciliation.

These include:

- In 2014, a framework was provided by the *Stormont House Agreement* (SHA) to deal with the Legacy of the Troubles. The SHA remains the agreed and most appropriate way of dealing with a range of legacy issues and ensuring that appropriate support is provided to victims and survivors.
- The United Kingdom’s decision in 2016 to withdraw from the European Union has created additional challenges and complications, not only in terms of the very practical impact of *Brexit* on day-to-day life, but also around issues of identity, rights, and the Border. Brexit

has also led to greater public discussion about future possible constitutional change, in line with the principle of consent, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

- In January 2020, the *New Decade, New Approach Agreement* provided a basis for a return to devolved Government in Northern Ireland after three years' absence, including provision for "a new framework both recognising and celebrating Northern Ireland's diversity of identities and culture and accommodating cultural difference". The Government's commitments at the time of the NDNA to maintain our level of funding for reconciliation, with a focus on hard-to-reach and marginalised communities, and support research on challenges for border communities and the needs of minority communities, will be delivered under this strategy.
- As part of the Programme for Government, the Government set out its approach to engage with all communities and traditions on the island to work towards a consensus on a Shared Island. The Shared Island agenda involves working together, North and South, on common strategic challenges, developing the all island economy and cooperation in areas such as health and education, as well as fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue and supporting relevant research. The ongoing commitment of the Reconciliation Fund to supporting such dialogue and research is clearly complementary to that agenda, and we will ensure that the work of the Fund and of the Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach remain appropriately coordinated, in line with overarching Government policy.
- This new Reconciliation Fund strategy has been developed at a time when restrictions across Ireland and the United Kingdom necessary to tackling the *Covid-19* pandemic are also changing the way reconciliation work is carried out, creating both serious challenges and new opportunities for those working in the sector. This has highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Reconciliation Fund can be agile and responsive in dealing with unexpected and significant external events which impact on the work we seek to support.
- This strategy is also being launched in the lead up to some of the most significant and challenging anniversaries in the *Decade of Centenaries*. The Government is deeply conscious that, depending on their background/tradition, people across these islands may have very different perspectives on the upcoming anniversaries, particularly those of partition and the foundation of Northern Ireland. In marking this period in our history, the Government is committed to continuing to work with the British Government and all stakeholders based on the sensitive and inclusive approach that was so important in the earlier phase of the decade.

These significant events and developments have changed the wider context in which Reconciliation work is undertaken and presented fresh challenges and opportunities to those working in the area. They have informed the process of development of this strategy and are reflected in our new priorities for 2021-24.

5. Our Funding Priorities

Thematic Pillars

Our funding priorities continue to be rooted in two key thematic pillars – *repairing and building*. The Reconciliation Fund will focus its support on reconciliation and peacebuilding work that seeks to:

- **Repair** those issues which lead to division, conflict, and barriers to a deeply reconciled and peaceful society;
- **and/or**
- **Build** a strong civil society that encompasses all communities, through the continued implementation of the Agreements and promoting a rights-based society, political stability and respect for all.

Priority areas

Applications should be in line with one or both of these overarching pillars, while also focusing on one or more of the Reconciliation Fund’s priority themes/activities. Requests for funding support should therefore involve projects which:

- Through dialogue or other means, seek to build understanding between peoples and traditions, whether within Northern Ireland, on a North-South basis, or on a British-Irish basis.
- Promote inter-community links and reduce segregation in Northern Ireland, including in the areas of integrated education and housing, and the use of shared community spaces.
- Build sustainable North-South links through the development of relationships and connections.
- Develop and deepen relations between Ireland and Britain.
- Seek participation in the most hard-to-reach and marginalised communities (in terms of economic and social deprivation), or those not normally involved in reconciliation and peace-building work, in line with the Government’s commitments made at the time of the NDNA Agreement.
- Seek to address the legacy of violence during the Troubles.
- Specifically target sectarianism, and which are aimed at eliminating sectarianism from society.
- Help to tackle paramilitarism and support the transitioning of members of paramilitary groups to peaceful, democratic activities.
- Employ a transgenerational approach, helping a younger generation to be more aware of the recent past and to break the cycles which are barriers to long term reconciliation.
- Develop the role of women in peace-building and civic and political life, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and which build their capacity to take their rightful place as leaders in society.
- Educate and illuminate the events of the past, and in particular the events of the Decade of Centenaries, in order to deepen understanding and promote respect and tolerance between different groups and traditions.

- Explore issues around identity (including language and other cultural traditions) in ways that promote understanding, tolerance and inclusivity, or help to recognise the common aspects of traditions and identities shared by different groups.
- Involve academic research likely to significantly promote mutual understanding, peace and reconciliation, including in the context of the Government's commitment at the time of the NDNA Agreement to commission research on the challenges faced by border communities (with a particular focus on minority communities in border counties).
- Empower diverse, underrepresented or new voices to articulate their views on issues relating to reconciliation.
- Assist communities from different traditions in trying to build a shared vision of the future.

Other factors guiding consideration of applications

In addition to assessing whether applications contribute under the thematic pillars and key priority/activity areas outlined above, we will be guided by a number of other factors in considering funding applications:

General factors:

General factors which will be used in assessing applications will include:

- Geographical location of activity, with the aim of ensuring an appropriate spread of funding;
- Value for money of the project;
- The organisation's financial management capacity, governance arrangements and sustainability;
- The funding environment for the particular sector.

Methodology:

The Reconciliation Fund welcomes applications that propose new and innovative approaches, as well as those that use methods rooted in current practice. We also welcome applications that use any of a wide number of approaches to bring people from different backgrounds together (e.g. arts, culture, sports, skills development, dialogue) exploring how society can address issues of common concern to all.

Support for new generations of practitioners:

Reconciliation is the work of generations. It cannot be achieved without a sufficient cohort of dedicated well-trained practitioners who can carry on into the future the vital work of many who have dedicated themselves to peace and reconciliation since the very difficult years prior to the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. As we welcome the emergence of a new generation of people working to build peace and reconciliation, we recognise the importance of ensuring that

young adults working in the sector are equipped with the skills and knowledge which will help them to play an active role in that work.

Capacity building for organisations:

We recognise that there is a wide spectrum of groups of different sizes and capacities working in reconciliation. The Reconciliation Fund is open to supporting organisations to build up their own capacity where the organisation can show an identified need while also demonstrating that it has strong potential to carry out useful work in line with our priorities.

Potential for transmission of learning:

The potential for projects to produce learning which is useful both to project organisers themselves and to others working in the sector is important. Both the Reconciliation Fund and the organisations we support have a role to play in ensuring that learning from their projects is shared, so we particularly welcome funding proposals which include structured plans for achieving this.

Importance of access to crisis support:

The Reconciliation Fund will also seek to identify new issues and developments that have the potential to negatively impact the work of reconciliation and peacebuilding as they arise. In such cases, we will look at how we can best support organisations to address these issues. In the case of Covid-19, the Reconciliation Fund will continue to monitor its impact and examine how organisations can best be supported in the most appropriate manner.

The above is intended to provide a general guide to the themes, topics and activities which we will prioritise during the lifetime of this strategy. Additional more detailed information will be made available on our website as appropriate to supplement this strategy document.

6. The Funding Framework

Following close engagement with our funding partners, we have sought to design our funding framework for 2021-2024 in a way that best responds to the needs of those working to build reconciliation and peace:

Strategic Partnerships

- The Reconciliation Fund piloted a Strategic Partnership programme in 2014, making funding (both core and project-based) available to a small number of organisations, who became Strategic Partners of the Fund, over a three-year period. Given the success of this pilot programme and the identified continuing need in the sector for multi-annual funding

that offers organisations an opportunity to undertake more strategic planning, we will be seeking applications for a new and expanded Strategic Partners programme in 2021.

- This initiative will be implemented outside of our normal funding rounds, via a separate call for applications, advertised through our website and social media channels. We will welcome applications from organisations which have previously received Reconciliation Fund grants. Following assessment of applications, organisations may be approved for three-year support, with award levels likely to vary considerably, in line with the terms of the scheme, which will be set out in the advertised call for applications. Support will be available for both project-related and core operational costs.
- It is envisaged that some 15-30 organisations, ranging in size and capacity, will be approved for support as Strategic Partners of the Reconciliation Fund under this scheme.

Project Funding

- We will continue to accept applications for project funding through two annual funding rounds. These applications can request a contribution towards indirect project costs (e.g. salaries/overheads), where they are directly attributable to the management/delivery of the project.
- These funding rounds generally take place in Spring and Autumn, and applications must be made through our online application system. That system will remain open for a number of weeks in each case before the funding round's closing date.
- Opening and closing dates will be advertised through a number of channels, but details will always be available on our website: www.dfa.ie/reconciliation

Core Operational costs

- In response to an identified need to provide organisations with support beyond costs relating to particular projects, we will also accept applications requesting a contribution towards the organisation's core operational costs (e.g. salaries/overheads) that are not directly attributable to particular project initiatives. In the case of low capacity organisations, core operational costs could also include initiatives designed to upskill staff, improve governance and financial structures and develop the organisation's capacity to access funding.
- Any application for funding for core operational costs should be made in a standalone application in one of the main twice yearly funding rounds and will need to demonstrate that the organisation's overall objectives, plans and activities are sufficiently aligned with the Reconciliation Fund's key objectives and priority funding areas to merit support.

Capital Costs

- We recognise that access to support for capital costs can be a significant enabler for organisations to deliver particular forms of reconciliation work and the Reconciliation Fund is open to receiving applications in this area.
- Requests can include small-scale capital purchases (such as equipment) required for a specific project and such requests should form part of the related project application.
- Support can also be sought for larger scale renovation, refurbishment or construction works e.g. to support the creation or development of a shared space which will facilitate and promote cross-community activities. In such cases, an organisation will need to demonstrate in its application how the premises/site in question will contribute to the work of reconciliation, while also demonstrating that its overall objectives and work programme are sufficiently aligned with the Reconciliation Fund Strategy to merit support. Any application for larger scale capital projects should be made on a standalone basis in one of the main twice-yearly funding rounds.

General points to note on the Funding Framework

- This funding framework will enable us to maintain the flexibility and accessibility of the project funding for which the Reconciliation Fund is known, while also allowing us to increase our range of supports in the area of core and capital costs. It will enable us to engage with and encourage organisations which have the potential to positively impact on their communities, but may not yet have the capacity to access larger-scale funding. It will also enable us to support organisations which have had a positive impact on community relations but which without multi-annual funding, may not have the capacity to further develop and expand their work programmes in support of peace and reconciliation.
- From time to time, we may need to adjust the funding framework to provide greater flexibility and allow us to respond most appropriately to the needs of organisations in the sector in light of any significant new developments.

The Reconciliation Fund's website (www.dfa.ie/reconciliation) will continue to provide details on all calls for funding applications, in advance of our two funding rounds or any new initiatives to be implemented from 2021. Details of how to apply, opening/closing dates and access to the Department of Foreign Affairs' online funding application portal, will also be included. We will also advertise funding rounds through the Department's social media and other channels.

7. Fund Administration and Evaluation

The Reconciliation Fund will continue to listen carefully to all those who seek our support, in order to identify where we can improve our administrative and operational procedures to ensure that we engage with and support organisations as effectively as possible.

During the lifetime of this strategy, we will undertake the following:

Reporting requirements

We will examine our reporting requirements in order to make them as streamlined, clear and informative as possible. As part of that, we will review our requirements for submission of annual financial statements/accounts, with the aim of aligning them more closely with the financial obligations placed on charities and other community and voluntary groups operating North and South. Our aim will be to reduce any unnecessary financial and/or administrative burden on organisations, while ensuring that relevant audit requirements are fully complied with.

Sharing of learning

We will examine how best to ensure that the learning from the projects we support can be shared as widely as possible, particularly through our Reconciliation Networking Forum. This issue will inform our review of our reporting requirements, with the aim of ensuring that project learning is captured at the reporting stage.

Approach to dealing with changes during project life cycle

We appreciate that projects may need to be adapted during the project life cycle, due to changing circumstances or unexpected events, with implications for planned activities and related costs. We also understand the importance of our being able to respond promptly to requests for approval for such changes. We will review and update our procedures for handling such requests with a view to streamlining and standardising the process to make it as quick and user friendly as possible.

Online application system

We will continue to review the effectiveness and suitability of our online grants application system to ensure that it can meet the needs of the organisations we support.

Evaluation and review

In order to maximise the value for money and effectiveness of our grants, we will develop a more structured system of evaluation and review, with a view to commissioning a greater number of reviews and evaluations of funded groups. We will also conduct spot checks on a number of funded groups every year, to ensure value for money and in line with public auditing requirements.

8. Outreach and Communications

The Reconciliation Fund views the building and strengthening of relationships as a key part of our role in supporting civil society to carry out the work of peace-building and reconciliation.

We will:

- Ensure that we proactively engage with our funding partners and potential applicants, and that the Reconciliation Fund Team remains accessible and available to provide assistance and support.
- Use the annual Reconciliation Networking Forum, hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to facilitate networking and to inform our ongoing strategic thinking. We will invite other funders and relevant stakeholders to the Forum.
- Look to host other events (e.g. annual regional information sessions) to create opportunities for organisations to network with each other and engage in person with the Reconciliation Fund team
- Work with local media to highlight the hard work and successes of those building peace and reconciliation. We will also use the Department's website, social media, and other relevant media to enhance the ways in which we communicate about the work we support and the role of the Fund.
- Work to ensure that the Reconciliation Fund has a clear and recognisable identity, emphasising the Government of Ireland's commitment to reconciliation.
- Seek to develop greater engagement with other funding bodies and relevant stakeholders to ensure that, as a group, we can collaborate to identify the ways in which the work of peace and reconciliation can best be supported.

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Ireland, United Kingdom and Americas Division
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