



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Reconciliation Fund Strategy
2014-2017

THE RECONCILIATION FUND STRATEGY 2014-2017

Our Vision

Our vision is a reconciled Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement, and the Agreements which have flowed from it, provide the framework to achieve this vision. The Reconciliation Fund, in the period 2014-2017, will be dedicated to making further progress towards that vision, by supporting the ongoing implementation of the Agreements. In particular, the Reconciliation Fund will support new and innovative approaches to address the unresolved issues that have impeded or slowed the progress which Northern Ireland needs.

Civil society will continue to be our primary partner in achieving this objective.

The Context

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Since 1982, the Reconciliation Fund has provided small grants to organisations working to further peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, on a cross-border basis, and between Ireland and Britain. Since 2008 an Anti-Sectarianism Fund has also directed support specifically to organisations working toward eliminating sectarianism. Between the two funds, over €42 million has been disbursed to over 1,800 projects.

The Fund is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It operated at a small scale in the years preceding the signature of the Good Friday Agreement; in the wake of that agreement it was increased eight-fold in order to fulfil the Government's commitment under the Agreement to "positively consider the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation". In 2014, the combined annual budget for both funds is just over €2.7 million.

Grants vary in size from amounts in the hundreds awarded to small voluntary groups to amounts in the hundreds of thousands to a small number of large strategic partners. The eligibility criteria for the funds are deliberately broad in order to reach a wide range of organisations and activities.

A 2011 review of the Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Funds found that the funds contribute to achieving reconciliation and to reducing sectarianism. The funds are regarded as accessible and user-friendly and have been particularly useful for smaller groups without the capacity to access larger and more complex funding mechanisms. The flexibility and responsiveness of the funds are valued by recipients, as are the regular visits undertaken by officials managing the funds, which allow groups to explain and demonstrate the work they do in person rather than relying solely on paperwork to communicate their achievements and challenges.

The purpose of this strategy document is to outline priorities for the fund in the next four years and a new funding framework to match these priorities, to ensure the fund supports our vision and remains relevant, effective and efficient in the coming years.

THE PEACE-BUILDING CONTEXT

Following ratification of the Good Friday Agreement by the people of Ireland, north and south, the Constitution recognises the need to reconcile the people of this island in all the diversity of our identities and traditions.

There has been significant progress since the Good Friday Agreement in building peace on this island, but this progress cannot be taken for granted. There is still important reconciliation work to be done, work that may take generations. In facing up to the challenges that remain, the Irish Government is involved at a political level in encouraging a strategic focus and commitment from all political actors to promote reconciliation. However, we also recognise the important role which civil society can play in shaping a more reconciled and cohesive society and, through our funding, we support community groups and others who are at the forefront of this work.

Financial support for reconciliation is in the process of changing, with funding streams such as the Atlantic Philanthropies and the European Union's PEACE III coming to an end, and newer funds such as the European Union's PEACE IV and those envisaged by the Northern Ireland Executive's *Together: Building a United Community* policy yet to become operative.

It is essential that funded projects address the issue of their sustainability in this changing context. It is also important that reconciliation is mainstreamed in community work and social policy. The development of a voluntary civil society sector is crucial for its long-term viability.

Groups and communities have moved at different paces towards reconciliation. Therefore there is no uniform method for engaging with various groups and people, and the Reconciliation Fund strategy needs to take account of this in order to ensure that the Fund continues to have a broad and diverse reach. Provision of funding should not necessarily be the first form of engagement with a local community, particularly with a hard-to-reach community. Funding should always form part of a broader and more general engagement at community level.

Our Aims

FUNDING PRIORITIES

1. Since 2008, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has operated both a Reconciliation Fund and an Anti-Sectarianism Fund. The criteria for each fund are similar. In practice, 25% of the overall funding provided is awarded to anti-sectarianism projects and 75% to reconciliation projects. From a policy perspective, anti-sectarianism needs to be an area of priority focus for all funding awarded, and anti-sectarianism will now be mainstreamed throughout the entire programme. This also will streamline the administration associated with running two funds simultaneously.

The funds will now be merged into one Reconciliation Fund, and anti-sectarianism will become one of a number of priority areas to be addressed by the Fund.

2. Consideration for funding from the Reconciliation Fund will be based on the extent to which the proposed programme has the potential to contribute to:

- Reconciliation through education, dialogue, culture, and commemoration;
- Promotion of tolerance and respect;
- Challenging stereotypes of one’s own and of other communities/identities;
- Development and strengthening of meaningful and lasting cross-border links;
- Academic research where the primary purpose relates to promoting reconciliation.

These areas of work will remain deliberately broad to remain accessible to a wide range of organisations and projects.

3. The Fund will focus its support through two **thematic pillars**, outlined as follows:

- **Repairing** of those issues which lead to division, conflict, and barriers to a deeply reconciled and peaceful society;
- **Building** 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.

We will support projects which focus on the following **priority themes**:

RECONCILIATION FUND	
Using innovative approaches to address obstacles to reconciliation and achieve full implementation of the Agreements	
REPAIRING	BUILDING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projects which specifically target sectarianism, which are aimed at eliminating sectarianism at a deep, long-lasting level; - Projects targeted at hard-to-reach and marginalised communities and at those not normally involved in peace-building work; - Projects to promote inter-community links and reduce segregation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projects to build North-South links which build sustainable relationships and connections; - Projects to foster links across communities and generations; - Projects which develop the role of women in peace-building and civic and political life, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325; - Projects which develop and deepen the British-Irish relations.

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

- Geographical location of activity, with the aim of ensuring a suitable spread of funding;

- Value for money of the project;
- The organisation's financial management capacity and sustainability;
- The funding environment for the particular sector.

FUNDING FRAMEWORK

A new funding framework will be put in place to respond to the different levels of need within the peace building and community sectors.

1. The Reconciliation Fund will engage with organisations in communities which could benefit from funding. Where the capacity to absorb funding is low, other types of support will be considered, such as access to training provided by other funded groups, and assistance in developing funding applications.
2. Project funding will continue to be made available based on the current application system, which draws on OECD Development Assistance Committee guidance on evaluating peace-building activities.
3. Organisations which in previous years have been in receipt of project-based funding from the Reconciliation Fund may apply to become a strategic partner of the Fund for a three-year period. Such organisations will be assessed and may be approved for three-year support which may include some salary costs at an appropriate level for the activities to be carried out. Support will be provided in this way on a rolling basis to up to five organisations each year, involving a maximum of fifteen organisations at any one time.

Organisations awarded strategic partner funding will be selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- Their work should respond to the priority themes of the Reconciliation Fund;
- Activities should not be based only in one locality;
- Programmes should have the potential for wider application or replication;
- The organisations should have sufficiently robust financial management, audit and reporting systems in place to monitor and report on the funding provided;
- The organisation should have previously received project level funding from the Reconciliation Fund.

This funding framework will enable us to maintain the flexibility and accessibility of the project funding for which the Reconciliation Fund is known. It will enable us to engage with and encourage organisations which have the potential to positively impact on their communities, but which may not yet have the capacity to access large-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 be able to survive the likely general fall in available funding over the next few years. It will draw on the strengths of the Fund to date as outlined in the 2011 Review of the Fund.

Our Standards

FUND ADMINISTRATION AND EVALUATION

There are systems in place to monitor the Fund and to identify where further improvements in the administration of the Fund can be made. In 2012 an external review of a partner organisation was commissioned for the first time. This objective and professional assessment of organisations can contribute to the effectiveness of the Fund. Moving forward we plan to use up to 1% of the Fund's budget each year to conduct evaluations and reviews of funded groups. This could take the form of a single review of a large partner, or a series of smaller evaluations or audits on smaller partners.

To harmonise the Fund's reporting policy with broader statutory requirements, financial reporting requirements will be adjusted to align with relevant legislation - including the Charities Act 2009 in this jurisdiction, the Charities Act Northern Ireland 2008 and the UK Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice. This harmonisation, matched with direct commissioning of reviews, will ensure value for money and compliance of funding whilst avoiding unnecessary burdens on organisations with lower capacity.

Periodic assessments of the funding and community context are important to ensure that the Reconciliation Fund remains effective. We will maintain contact and encourage information-sharing between funders and other relevant stakeholders.

We will use the annual Reconciliation Networking Forum, hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to facilitate networking and to inform ongoing strategic thinking and review. We will invite other funders and relevant stakeholders to the Forum.

COMMUNICATIONS

This strategy serves to communicate the priorities of the Reconciliation Fund to potential applicants and clearly outlines the thematic areas that the Fund will address through its support of relevant projects. This will ensure that the Fund's priorities correspond with the goals of projects funded under the Reconciliation Fund.

We will work with local media to highlight projects in relevant localities, and to further raise awareness of the Fund. We will ensure that the work the Fund supports is communicated through the Department's website, social media, and other relevant communication media. We will work to ensure that the Reconciliation Fund has a clear and recognisable identity, forming part of the Government of Ireland's commitment to reconciliation.