An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
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Ár dTodhchaí Tuaithe
Our Rural Future

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

2026/27 Scheme Outline

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1. Strategic Context

Our Rural Future

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) supports the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and the necessary repair/maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland. The scheme is funded under "Our Rural Future" which specifically prioritises the growing outdoor activity tourism sector as part of a long-term vision for a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland.

The policy acknowledges that outdoor recreation plays a key role in achieving the ambition for rural Ireland to be a destination of choice for outdoor activities and adventure tourism. The increase in tourism will provide opportunities for employment growth in rural areas through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking, cycling and canoeing.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027. is shaping the strategic direction of outdoor recreation in Ireland. The strategy will lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation in the medium term. The strategy aims to increase the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups, and to foster a greater understanding of how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

The strategy also aims to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage by better planning where and how we develop outdoor recreation infrastructure by providing guidance on the process and practices for developing outdoor recreation infrastructure in a sustainable fashion. This will lead to enhanced protection of the environment and will be in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats. This emphasis on developing outdoor recreation infrastructure in a careful and sustainable manner is reflected throughout the ORIS scheme outline.

Given the increase in visitor numbers to many of our most popular outdoor recreation sites, the strategy also envisages developing visitor management approaches, which can be tailored for the needs of each site in order to prevent adverse impacts to the surrounding environment. It also aims to improve how recreation and access is managed in upland areas and addresses the impact of increased recreational use on some of our most iconic mountain ranges.

It is essential that all projects applied for under ORIS are consistent with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors.*

The Strategy has identified 6 interdependent strategic objectives: -

Leadership	To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach at national and county level to ensure best use of our resources
Environment	To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats
Access	To protect and improve access to the outdoors, for the benefit of all
Opportunities	To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups
Awareness	To create awareness of our outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly
Expertise	To improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners

County Outdoor Recreation Plans

Among the key actions in the strategy is the development of a County Outdoor Recreation Plan and the establishment of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee in order to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach for the development of outdoor recreation in the county.

The plans, which are being funded by DRCDG, consider the current outdoor recreation amenities in an area and outline where outdoor recreation infrastructure and services should be located over a three-year period.

Future investment decisions in each county will be informed by these plans, including funding decisions taken under ORIS. The majority of counties have launched or are at an advanced stage of development of their plans. If a plan has been completed, or is in development, it is expected that the ORIS project applications submitted to the Department are consistent with this plan.

In addition, project applications must be discussed with the County Outdoor Recreation Committees in place in each county. Where a committee is not yet in place, the projects should be discussed with the project team overseeing the development of the strategy.

Applicants should be advised to refer to County Outdoor Recreation Plans and the various actions contained therein.

Island Policy

Our coastal islands are an integral part of the State's cultural and natural heritage. In line with **Our Rural Future**, the Department has developed a ten-year policy on the Islands. As part of the policy, it is proposed that additional funding opportunities will be afforded to island communities.

Projects are also encouraged to support vibrant and sustainable Gaeltacht communities

In this regard, an additional Project Development Measure application will be accepted from local authorities with inhabited coastal islands or Gaeltacht areas. This additional application can be up to €50,000 and is limited to one application per local authority who have either inhabited coastal islands or Gaeltacht areas.

Under measure 1 Small Scale Repair/Maintenance/Development/Promotion and Marketing, one additional application will be accepted from local authorities with inhabited coastal islands or Gaeltacht areas. This additional application under measure 1 can be up to €40,000 and is limited to one application per local authority who have either inhabited coastal islands or Gaeltacht areas.

These measures are set out in Chapter 4.

2. ORIS 2026/27 Scheme Focus

In line with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, outdoor recreation is defined as activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, Pétanque and show-jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers). As a consequence, such activities are not eligible for funding under ORIS. Further detail on the definition can be found in the Strategy.

A list of eligible activities is detailed below; however, it should be noted that this list is not exhaustive:

Land-Based	Water-Based	Air-Based
Walking	Canoeing/Kayaking	Paragliding
Hillwalking/Hiking	Rowing	Hang-gliding
Leisure cycling	Wild swimming	
Mountain biking	Surfing	
Horse riding	Coasteering	
Running	Wind surfing/Kite surfing	
Orienteering	Sailing	
Bouldering, Scrambling, Rockclimbing, Mountaineering	Diving	
Caving	Angling	
Play in nature	Stand Up Paddleboarding	
Passive enjoyment of the outdoors		

The focus of ORIS is to support outdoor recreational infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland that not only provides an outlet for the communities in which they are situated but also delivers added value from a tourism perspective.

Projects typically funded by ORIS include walkways, cycleways, blueways, water and cycle trails, mountain access routes, bridleways, and open water amenities at bogs, rivers, lakes and beaches, including tidal pools.

In respect of trails and cycleways and in line with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, the scheme will give equal priority to upgrades, maintenance works and other improvements to existing routes (to ensure a high standard of trails is maintained) as to the development of new trails.

Projects which position rural areas to avail of economic opportunities and add value to the tourism sector are encouraged. In particular, projects that can display a specific tourism or other sectoral impact that may aid economic development.

Collaboration

Collaboration & Engagement with Local Communities

Early engagement with the local community is vital to the success of a project. The scheme will prioritise projects which have evidence of strong community engagement. Lead applicants must ensure that in advance of the submission of an application that the local community has been consulted and their feedback taken on board. It is important that the adoption of such a collaborative approach is evidenced in the application.

Strategic Collaborative Projects

The Department will prioritise projects of scale from two or more local authorities/local development companies working together. Such projects should be submitted as a joint application and will be assessed as such. If projects are part of a cross-county partnership, please ensure that this is clearly stated in the application in order for the Department to consider same.

Consultation

Projects should demonstrate engagement with the relevant, Rural Recreation Officer (see here), Outdoor Recreation Officer and Town Regeneration Officers (see here) where appropriate.
Details of these engagements must be clearly outlined in the relevant part of the application form.

ORIS applications should demonstrate documented engagement with the relevant Heritage Officer and Biodiversity Officer, where applicable, prior to submission. This engagement will ensure that local heritage and ecological knowledge inform project design from the outset. This could involve a check against the RMP/SMR and NIAH datasets. See here https://www.archaeology.ie/collections-and-publications/collections/catalogued-collections/. For projects involving significant ground disturbance in areas of known or likely archaeological sensitivity, require archaeological monitoring during construction.

3. Objectives

General

Sport Ireland trail register and insurance

Recreational trails must be robust, durable and fit for purpose. Lead applicants should take measures to ensure projects that have been developed or improved are done so with health and safety in mind and ensure that adequate indemnity is in place to protect recreational users.

All trails funded under ORIS should, where feasible, be developed and maintained to the trails criteria as recommended by Sport Ireland. https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/irelands-trails.

Following completion of the works, costs relating to an inspection by Sport Ireland can be considered as eligible expenditure within a project application.

Sport Ireland Outdoors provides information to support with the development, grading, classification, maintenance and accreditation of trails in Ireland. Once a trail is developed to the Sport Ireland standard and maintained at that standard, it will be listed on the Sport Ireland trails register and will benefit from inclusion in the Sport Ireland Trail Insurance policy. Further details are available on the Sport Irelands website: www.sportireland.ie

Accessibility & Inclusion

Projects that result in improved access to recreational facilities for those with disabilities and older people are actively encouraged and will be prioritised. Infrastructure funded under ORIS should be in line with the Universal Design Principles and as far as practicable, be accessible to all.

Disability friendly and age friendly measures should be incorporated into the overall design and layout of projects where practical. These measures should include the provision of appropriate information, suitable path surfaces and seating at appropriate intervals. Active Disability Ireland (formerly Cara) has developed an extensive range of guidance for the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure. Applicants should refer to these resources when they are developing their applications. For further details see: www.activedisability.ie or https://www.iwa.ie/access-guidelines/great-outdoors-access-guidelines

Planning Permission

It is a requirement for all ORIS measures that planning permission (if required) must be obtained in advance of submitting the application. If the project has not yet secured planning permission, the submission of an application should be postponed. Alternatively, the Project Development Measure (PDM) might be considered.

The PDM funds the detailed development of projects through detailed planning, design and preparation for procurement. This is with a view to preparing an application under a future round of ORIS Measure 1, 2 or 3.

Written Consent- Coillte/ NPWS

When a proposed project traverses Coillte/NPWS lands, a letter of consent/support **must** be submitted clearly outlining the specific works along with the completed application form. Please note that requests to Coillte can be submitted via their recreation proposal form (see here). A list of relevant project applications will be shared with Coillte for review.

Greenways

The Department of Transport sets out the Government's priorities in relation to the funding of greenways in Ireland. It is not the intention of ORIS to supplement or replace this strategy by funding regional or national greenways i.e. those greenways that are over 20km in length. Greenway projects funded under ORIS must be of a local nature and not exceed 20km (all phases).

Where a project application relates to a phase of a greenway, and the overall planned greenway exceeds 20km, this project should not be applied for under ORIS as funding is available under Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). Local extensions or local spurs off those greenways may be considered for funding under ORIS. The development of infrastructure to link a rural town or village to a greenway may also be considered.

Blueways

This section relates to applicants seeking funding for existing Blueways or projects which intend using the "Blueway" brand. A Blueway is defined as "a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked to the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences. "Examples could include kayaking, stand up paddle boarding or walking/ cycling adjacent to water.

Applicants submitting project to create a new Blueway should engage in the Blueway accreditation process. Completed applications must be accompanied by letter of supports from both the Blueway

Accreditation Inspector and at least 2 activity providers operating locally. The Blueway brand may not be used if a project has not engaged with or sought accredited under the Blueway accreditation process. For further information please refer to the Blueways Developers Toolkit Blueways Developers Toolkit. Applications which are water based but not accredited or intending to apply for accreditation as a Blueway may still be considered.

Targeted Focus on Equestrian Trails

The 2026/2027 scheme includes a new approach to address specific recreation needs whereby local authorities will be entitled to submit one additional PDM to the value of €50,000 for a specific type of recreational infrastructure. Local authorities will be encouraged to engage with local development companies and state bodies to identify opportunities – projects developed in partnership will be prioritised.

For the current iteration of ORIS it is proposed that the focus of this targeted PDM will be on equestrian trails. For subsequent iterations of ORIS, the area of focus will be discussed in advance with Comhairle na Tuaithe before being selected.

Upland Areas

Projects involving upland areas should adhere to the Helping the Hills - Guiding Principles for the Management of Path Erosion in Upland Areas. Any works to upland areas should have appropriate supervision by a qualified person/s party. All proposed projects in upland areas must take into consideration the often fragile and sensitive habitat of upland areas and should ensure that habits and biodiversity is protected and supported.

Best Practice

All works should be carried out in line with best practice as per the following guidelines and toolkits:

- Trail Development | Sport Ireland
- Recreational Horse Trails Criteria for Ireland
- Blueways Ireland -Blueways Developers Toolkit
- Helping the Hills Mountaineering Ireland
- The Great Outdoors – Accessibility | Active Disability Ireland
- Leave No Trace Resources
- Fáilte Ireland Greenway Visitor Experience and Interpretation Toolkit
- Nature based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas

NOTE

With regard to project elements dealing with specialised equipment to support those with disabilities to participate in outdoor recreation, lead applicants should give consideration to the storage, maintenance, access and insurance of such items before submitting an application for funding such items. Details regarding these considerations should be provided at application stage. Other types of equipment are not eligible under ORIS.

Visitor Management

Under *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, there is a commitment to improving visitor management at key sites. Applicants should be cognisant as to whether their project contributes to visitor management or the protection of sensitive environments. Consideration should be given to;

- Trail re-routing
- Boardwalks in sensitive habitats
- Visitor management infrastructure
- Trailhead facilities

Compliance with the Official Languages Act

All signage must comply with the Official Languages Act 2002 revised and updated to 1 June 2025 regarding the use of the Irish language, i.e. all text must be in Irish and English (with Irish displayed first), or in Irish only. This applies if the signage is permanent or temporary, indoor or outdoor, directional or promotional, new or a replacement etc. Guidance in this regard is available from An Coimisinéir Teanga.

Therefore, it is essential that all interpretative signage, electronic signs, information leaflets, plaques and advertisements are bilingual i.e. in Irish and English (with Irish displayed first), or in Irish only. New branding and signage guidelines for projects funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht are available here

Environmental

Appropriate Assessment Screening

Appropriate Assessment Screening is required in advance of application being submitted where a project is located in, or may potentially impact on, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA) or any other designated lands. If significant impacts cannot be excluded, a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be required in order for the project to proceed. Further guidance on screening for appropriate assessment is available here.

If the project needs, but has not yet undergone appropriate assessment, the submission of an application should be postponed.

Activities Requiring Consent (ARC)

Proposals impacting on a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA) which fall under Activities Requiring Consent ARCs - may require consent from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) e.g. Activities Requiring Consent (ARC)-09 refers to construction or alteration of tracks, paths, roads, bridges, culverts or access routes. Further details are available here .

Rain-Water Management

Where relevant and if possible, applications should build on the design principles set out in the guidance document Nature based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas as produced by the local authority Waters Programme and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Climate Action

The Climate Action Plan 2025 sets out how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development. It sets out a roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050.

Biodiversity

As part of the Department's commitment to The Climate Action Plan 2025 applicants will be required to identify, where appropriate, how a proportion of the funding sought will be used to support climate action or biodiversity measures e.g. tree/hedgerow planting on trails. It is imperative that projects do not have a negative environmental impact and, where possible, they involve measures which enhance the biodiversity of the area in question or introduce measures that support Climate Action.

Project applications should seek to enhance biodiversity and avoid or minimise loss of existing local habitats and wildlife corridors. Existing trees, hedgerows and watercourses should be retained and planting should comprise native and pollinator-friendly species, consistent with National Pollinator Plan. Nature-based solutions should be incorporated into design at an early stage. Examples include: SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems), permeable paving, swales, basins, and ponds to support local biodiversity and mitigate potentially harmful effects of development.

Many local authorities have Biodiversity Officers and engagement with these officials is a requirement in advance of submitting an application under ORIS.

All projects submitted for consideration should be consistent with the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 in terms of their impact on biodiversity.

4. Scheme Measures

The Scheme will be delivered under four Measures as outlined below. The level of funding, project scale, and eligible applicants vary under each Measure.

Measure 1: Small Scale Repair/Maintenance/Development/Promotion and Marketing

Grant Amount: Up to €40,000

Eligible Activities: Small scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the upkeep, repair, maintenance and development of trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways, recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes and beaches, natural play areas that form part of a larger outdoor recreation project and the promotion and marketing of such infrastructure. Projects should, where possible, indicate how they are inclusive of people with disabilities and older adults.

Lead applicants must work with local communities to identify projects (evidence of this will be required) that enhance or redevelop existing amenities or support new opportunities to develop local natural resources as referenced at section 2 above.Where a location has been funded previously in the last 5 years, the linkage with, and additionality to, previous funding provided through ORIS should be clearly explained in the application form and the project will be assessed with reference to that detail.

Eligible Applicants: Local authorities, local development companies[1]

Maximum Number of Projects:

A maximum of 6 (prioritised (1-6) applications may be submitted per local authority.

Where a local authority has a Gaeltacht area and/or an offshore Island, they will be permitted to submit one additional measure 1 application up to the value of €40,000 for project located in these areas; this must be clearly marked as Gaeltacht or Island.

A maximum of 3 (prioritised 1-3) applications may be submitted per local development company.

Indicative Project Completion Date: All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 18 months of approval.

[1] Local Development Companies as referenced under Section 128f(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014) are designated eligible applicants under Measure 1 for this Scheme.

Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Maintenance/Upgrade and New Trail/Amenity Development

Grant Amounts: Up to €200,000

Eligible Activity: Medium scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of new recreational infrastructure, extensions/upgrades to already established trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways, water or cycle trails or other recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes or beaches. Projects can also include works for the repair, maintenance or promotion of such infrastructure.

Lead applicants must work with local communities to identify projects (evidence of this will be required) that enhance or redevelop existing amenities or support new opportunities to develop local natural resources as referenced at section 2 above. Where a location has previously been funded in the last 5 years,the linkage with, and additionality to, previous funding provided through ORIS should be clearly explained in the application form and the project will be assessed with reference to that detail.

In addition to alignment with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors and County Outdoor Recreation Plans,* projects should indicate, where applicable, linkages with regional or national strategic initiatives, policies or plans e.g. Destination Experience Development Plans.

Eligible Applicants: Local authorities, local development companies and state bodies.

Maximum Number of Projects:
A maximum of 3 prioritised (1-3) applications may be submitted by each local authority. In order to maintain a balance between the maintenance of existing infrastructure and the development of new outdoor recreation amenities, a minimum of one application under Measure 2 should be for the development of new outdoor recreation infrastructure.

A maximum of 1 application may be submitted per Local development company or State body.

Indicative Project Completion Date: All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 24 months of approval.

Measure 3: Strategic Large-Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategic Trail/Amenity Development

Grant amounts: Up to €500,000

Eligible Activity: Strategic large-scale projects that are in line with the objectives and focus of the Scheme. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of new larger-scale recreational infrastructure, as well as **significant** extensions/upgrades to already established trails, walkways, mountain access routes, cycleways, blueways, water or cycle trails or other recreational facilities at bogs, rivers, lakes or beaches.

In addition to alignment with *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors and County Outdoor Recreation Plans,* projects should indicate, where applicable, linkages with regional or national strategic initiatives, policies or plans e.g. Destination Experience Development Plans and County Outdoor Recreation Plans.

Eligible Applicants: Local authorities and State bodies

Maximum Number of Projects: Local authorities and State bodies will be confined to 1 application each under this Measure.

Indicative Project Completion Date: All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 24 months of approval.

Project Development Measure (PDM): Development Costs for Outdoor Recreation Projects

Grant amounts: Up to €100,000 (see below)

Eligible Activity: This Measure will provide funding for the detailed development of projects which would enable them to reach a standard (be shovel ready) for application under future rounds of ORIS. Such work might encompass detailed design, screenings, preparation for planning and/or procurement, appropriate assessment, ecological surveys etc.

The overall aim for the investment under this Measure should be for the development of projects that are of a scale that may be funded under a future Measure 1, 2 or 3 application, or developed in two phases under such Measures i.e. projects with an expected delivery cost of less than €1 million (that are in line with the objectives and focus of this Scheme).

The approval of an application under this Project Development Measure does not guarantee approval of funding for the subsequent delivery of the project. All project applications are subject to a competitive application process under future calls, regardless of any previous funding provided.

Eligible Applicants: Local authorities, local development companies and state bodies.

Local authorities:	May submit up to 4 prioritised (1-4) applications each under this Measure. The combined total of these 4 projects may **no**t exceed €100,000.
Additional LA PDM's	If sufficient interest and demand exist, (i) one additional application focussing on equestrian trails/bridleways up to €50,000 and (ii) for local authorities with inhabited offshore islands or Gaeltacht areas, one additional application, up to €50,000. (max 6 overall per LA)
Local development companies:	May submit up to 3 prioritised (1-3) projects with a combined total of up to €70,000.
State bodies:	One application up to €50,000.

Multiple applications for one project:

It is not permitted to apply under this Measure on multiple occasions in respect of the same project. Only one Project Development Measure will be awarded in respect of any given project.

Indicative Project Completion Date: All projects must be finished and drawdown of funding completed with 18 months of approval.

5. Eligibility

Eligible Projects

In the first instance all projects must align to Embracing Ireland's Outdoors, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027. The strategy considers outdoor recreation as activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It precludes activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, and show-jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers).

Eligible Applicants

Local authorities, local development companies and state bodies must work with local community/voluntary groups, particularly Trail Management Organisations, and the County Outdoor Recreation Committee to identify projects. It should be noted that private commercial entities or bodies trading for profit are not eligible for funds under the scheme.

Project Location

Projects located within any of the five main city boundaries (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) are not eligible under the scheme.

Projects should, in the main, be located in the countryside (i.e. not within the environs of towns or villages). However, ORIS will fund recreational infrastructure linking a town or village to significant other outdoor recreation facilities located in the countryside. Given the emphasis on recreational amenities located near rivers, lakes and beaches, water-based projects located within town environs are also eligible.

Post-Construction Maintenance

There is a commitment in *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* to ensure continued investment in the maintenance of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure. An action under the Strategy includes the requirement for funding for asset renewal and maintenance of existing trails. These type of works i.e. asset renewal and maintenance of existing trails are eligible for funding under ORIS. Capital maintenance works such as path repair, fencing, trail furniture repair/replacement, trail head enhancement works and replacement signage are all eligible and encouraged. This work can be combined across a number of sites provided this is similar capital works across all sites. However, ORIS does not cover routine/annual works that are operational in nature such as vegetation control, clearing debris from drains, cleaning signs, strimming or litter control.

Toilets

Toilets may be considered for high use sites in remote locations. Preference will be given to eco toilets or the upgrade of existing facilities. ORIS will not fund toilets in community centres as these can avail of other funding streams.

Marketing & Promotion

Cost associated with the marketing and promotion of outdoor recreation infrastructure can be considered as an element of a larger project or as a stand-alone project provided a strong business case is made for the justification of same. Applicants are encouraged to aim for trail accreditation with Sport Ireland, thereby benefitting from inclusion of the Irish Trails Register.

Network Connectivity

Applicants are asked where appropriate to demonstrate network connectivity, projects that connect with, or expand upon, existing outdoor recreation assets such as:

- Trail networks
- Just Transition trail developments
- Greenways and Blueways
- Cycling routes
- Coastal or mountain trails (particularly the emerging Wild Atlantic Way coastal trails)

Eligible Costs

All costs must be:

- Directly related to the construction of the project being applied for and as a result of an appropriate public procurement process.
- Incurred after project approval by DRCDG and within the project delivery period.
- Verifiable by invoices and proof of payment.

Ineligible Projects/Costs

The following types of projects and activities, in particular, will not be supported by the scheme:

- Greenways in excess of 20km
- Infrastructure for commercial activities
- Purchase/lease of land
- Legal fees
- Standalone outdoor gym/calisthenics workout area projects
- Sculptures

- Motorised vehicles
- Sports grounds, traditional playgrounds and Multi-Use Gaming Areas (MUGAs)
- Works within Town Parks, marked street trails, walkways and cycleways within towns and villages except as outlined in *Project Location* above
- Any surfacing works to public roads regardless of whether they form part of an existing trail. The level of finish for any works on trails on non-public roads must be commensurate with the needs of walking trails and not the needs of vehicular traffic i.e. the scheme is not designed for tarring roads
- Refurbishment and construction of buildings[2] (except for toilets as noted above and in very exceptional and limited circumstances for projects where this would substantially improve access to, and the utilisation of, recreational resources by the wider public)
- Walking or running tracks located in a confined space, e.g. around sports pitches or playgrounds, or within other sports grounds
- Works covered under the agreed work plans of the Walks Scheme
- Activities which do not comply with the definition of countryside/outdoor recreation as set out above and as defined in Embracing Ireland's Outdoors[3.]
- Capacity building or training
- Ongoing operational costs
- Costs not directly related to the project
- Indirect costs of the project e.g. community organisation staff time spent working on the project in an administrative capacity
- Organisation core costs, including overheads
- Retrospective costs - activity that has already been undertaken or costs incurred prior to date of project approval
- VAT where applicants are registered for VAT
- Charges such as bank interest costs, fines, financial penalties, and legal dispute costs
- Sponsorship and charitable donations
- Depreciation
- Notional costs e.g. lost opportunity

[2] The relevant local authority should discuss any potential projects in this category with the Department before submitting an application.

6. Grant Levels

Grant aid

Up to 90% of the total cost of a project under the Scheme will be provided for any individual project. The remaining 10% match funding must be contributed by the successful applicant and/or the community group and/or philanthropic contributions. Other state funding cannot be used to meet the 10% match funding requirement.

Cash Contribution

A minimum cash contribution of 10% of the overall project costs is required. The grantee will be required to provide confirmation that the cash contribution is in place and retain a record of the source of the cash contribution.

Procurement and Value for Money

All projects must comply with the National Public Procurement Policy Framework here published by the Office of Government Procurement. The framework supports and enables Public Bodies, including local authorities and local development companies, to adopt procedures to meet their public procurement requirements and facilitates compliance with EU and National Procurement Rules.

Please note the threshold at which applicants are required to advertise all contracts for goods and services on eTenders is now €50,000 (exclusive of VAT) following publication of DPER Circular-05-2023 (threshold change). The threshold at which applicants are required to advertise all contracts for works on eTenders is now €200,000 (exclusive of VAT). A minimum number of written quotes is required below these thresholds.

Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in the associated expenditure being deemed ineligible.

Contribution in Kind & Voluntary Labour

Contributions in Kind is not eligible as match funding.

Staff Costs

The default position is that works undertaken will be subject to a separate competitive tender process or involve drawdown of a contract under an existing framework agreement. Where work is proposed to be undertaken in-house by the grantee e.g. project management costs, self-delivery of works etc.

a breakdown of these costs must be included in the application form and a rationale provided for same.

If staff costs are included, they must be proportionate to the overall cost of the project. Only salary costs in respect of time spent directly on the project shall be deemed eligible. Travel and subsistence, allowances etc. are not considered an eligible cost. The proposed level of costs will be assessed at application stage.

NOTE: Local authority project management costs are not eligible in light of separate funding for "Capital Delivery Teams." Local authority applications should be discussed with Capital Delivery Teams and Single Point of Contacts should familiarise themselves with applications being submitted for assessment.

In addition, the reasonableness of the cost must be verified by the grantee i.e. there must be evidence on file that the cost charged is in line with, or less than, the cost of engaging an external contractor. This will be reviewed at project inspection stage. Failure to have this on file could deem the amount charged ineligible.

Professional Fees

In recognition that some projects are delivered in sensitive areas e.g. ecological or archaeological, the threshold for professional fees has been removed but must be at a **reasonable level** and this would be detailed in the application form. The Grantee staff costs, as referenced above, that relate to project development, supervision etc. should also be included as part of this calculation.

Charging for Use

The default position is that the infrastructure funded under ORIS should be available free of charge to the public. In limited instances where a modest charge is proposed, this has to be agreed with the Department **in advance of application**. Failure to secure this agreement will be considered to breach the applicable funding agreement. Please note that infrastructure for commercial activities are not eligible under the Scheme.

Delays with Project Delivery

It should be noted that the 2024/25 allocation of approved projects may be reduced for any applicant should there be excessive delays in the projects already approved under previous iterations of this Scheme.

7. Funding and Timelines LOCAL AUTHORITIES

An indicative budget of €20 million is available for successful projects under the 2024/2025 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. Funding will be provided under four different categories of projects (Measures) based on the size of the investment requirement.

All Measures must be capable of being delivered in a realistic timeframe i.e. within an **18-month** timeframe for Measure 1 & the Project Development Measure, or a **24-month** timeframe for Measure 2 & 3.

Eligible applicants must submit applications on the template application forms provided by the Department. Completed applications must be submitted via email to ORIS@drcdg.gov.ie by:

Note: this timeline is for Local Authorities only

Measure	Application Deadline Date	Approval Date (Indicative)	Timeline for Project Completion
Measure 1	September 25th, 2026	Qtr. 1 2027	18 months
Measure 2	December 15th, 2026	Qtr. 2 2027	24 months
Measure 3	December 15th, 2026	Qtr. 2 2027	24 months
Project Development Measure	September 25th, 2026	Qtr. 1 2027	18 months

8. Application Format

Expressions of Interest

Lead applicants must seek Expressions of Interest (EOI) from local community groups to identify projects that enhance or redevelop existing amenities or support new opportunities to develop local natural resources. Local development companies must, at a minimum, seek EOIs from the Trail Management Organisations that they engage with on the Walks Scheme.

Lead applicants must submit an "Application Overview" spreadsheet detailing projects selected for submission to the Department. This overview should prioritise projects and provide a short rationale for same. Project application forms (MS Word) in respect of each prioritised project must also be submitted. For local authorities submitting a specific measure 1 application under the additional option for Gaeltacht/Island areas, this should be clearly marked as such on the Application Overview sheet.

In 2026/27, each local authority and local development company must complete a list of the other projects which responded to the Expression of Interest call, but which were not prioritised at local screening stage. This list should not be submitted to DRCDG but should be retained by the lead applicant should details be required into the future.

Applications

As per above, an application form **(MS Word only)** must be submitted in respect of each prioritised project. Applicants are required to supplement the applications with maps and/or photographs showing the location of the projects (please specify coordinates). Applicants are encouraged to specify relevant linkages with other outdoor infrastructure in surrounding areas.

The Department may not be in a position to follow up regarding missing documentation or incomplete application forms. The Department may exclude applications that do not include all relevant documentation or assurances at the time of submission.

It should be noted that projects applications that were previously unsuccessful under ORIS may be submitted for consideration under the 2026/2027 scheme but discussion with the ORIS team in the Department is advised prior to submission.

Project Splitting

Projects must be standalone and operational in their own right with the exception of the Project Development Measure.

It is not acceptable to divide the same project into a number of separate applications in the one year with the effect of overcoming the maximum funding limits under each Measure e.g. submitting different parts of the same project under both Measure 2 & 3, or under two applications under Measure 1. Artificially splitting projects may breach procedures under the Capital Works Management Framework.

In addition, where a single project application involves more than one type of intervention, there should be a clear link between the interventions e.g. located in same area and linked or for multiple trail upgrades.

New Phases of Existing Projects

New phases of existing projects under ORIS will also be eligible for consideration provided that there has been satisfactory progress with the phases previously funded. However, where the infrastructure e.g. a trail is of a significant scale that would require funding under ORIS for more than 3 phases, consideration should be given to applying under alternative funding streams that are designed for projects of significant scale e.g. RRDF.

Sign-off on Applications

Local authority applications must be signed by the relevant Director of Services. Local development company applications must be signed by the CEO. Applications from State body must be signed at Director level or equivalent.

9. Project Assessment

Competitive Assessment

Selection of projects under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2026/27 will be by means of a competitive process based on applications received and the criteria outlined below. Final project selection will be made by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. The Department may also consult with other bodies as part of the assessment process including Fáilte Ireland, Sport Ireland, Department of Transport as appropriate.

Applicants are advised to take note of the relevant "Assessment Criteria" when completing applications. In approving applications and selecting the successful projects, a number of factors will be considered by the Department, including the information supplied in the Application Overview and Application Form; the range, mix, quality and impact of proposed projects; previous funding provided; any prioritisation of projects indicated by the applicants; inclusion of different population groups including people with disabilities and older adults; and other relevant considerations.

It should be noted that the allocation of approval for projects may be reduced for any applicant should there be excessive delays in the projects already approved under previous iterations of this Scheme.

Extra consideration will be given toward projects which are part of a broader, more strategic, plan for an area. Examples of this may include-

- Projects derived from a County Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- Projects which meet an objective arising from *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors.*
- Projects which are engaging in a Destination Experience Development Plan process with Fáilte Ireland.

Guidance on the criteria that the Department may refer to during the ORIS assessment process are provided below. The level of response deemed necessary to address these criteria will increase in line with the amount of funding sought.

Measure 1 Assessment Considerations:

• Does the project meet an objective of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*?
• Is the project in line with the County Outdoor Recreation Plan (if one has been developed) and been discussed by the County Outdoor Recreation Committee/project team for delivering the strategy as appropriate?
• Does the project align with the Climate Action Plan and is it project environmentally sustainable/does it include a biodiversity element?
• Are all the necessary permissions and screening in place (e.g. planning, AA, Ecological Assessments etc.)?
• Has clear evidence of community engagement with all stakeholders and an EOI process been set out in the application?
• Does the project clearly support outdoor recreation?
• Is the project collaborative in nature?
• Does the proposed project address an identified need?
• Are the timelines clearly set out in the application and realistically achievable?
• Are there clear and reasonable costings for the project?
• Does the project support an inclusive approach for people with disabilities, or does it enhance the opportunities for people with disabilities?
• Does the project outcomes have clear positive health impacts or benefits for local communities?

Measure 2 & 3 Assessment Considerations:

Strategic and collaborative nature of the project	• Does the project meet an objective of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*? • Does the project align with the Climate Action Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan? • Is the project in a Destination Experience Development Plan process with Fáilte Ireland? • Is this project aligned with the County Outdoor Recreation Plan? • Has the community been involved in the project development? • Has the County Outdoor Recreation Committee been consulted? • Have the Biodiversity or Heritage Officer been consulted? • Is the application collaborative in nature? • Is there evidence that funding this project will have an impact at regional or national level?
Demonstration of need and potential impact of project	• Does the application set out a clear need for a project of this type? • Does the application demonstrate, or consider, any additional value-added that might arise from completion of this project? • Will the project be developed in line with best practice guidelines and with the least impact on the environment?
Value of the project for the local area	• Does the proposal add value to current infrastructure or address an existing deficit? • Do the project outcomes have clear positive health impacts or benefits for local communities? • Do the project outcomes have clear economic and/or tourism impacts?

	• Do the outcomes of the project demonstrate a sustainable and positive impact on the local area? • Is the project environmentally sustainable/does it include a biodiversity element? • Does the project support an inclusive approach for people with disabilities, or does it enhance the opportunities?
Realistic nature, Value for Money of the proposal **Quality of the application**	• Has the project been the subject of funding under the Project Development Measure? • Is there evidence of the required permissions, screenings and approvals in place? • Are the costings for each element of the project clear and reasonable? • Is the project clearly set out in the application form? • Is the rationale for the project clearly laid out and extent to which it justifies the action? • Are the timelines for the project realistic?

Project Development Measure Assessment Considerations:

• Does the end project meet an objective of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*? Is it in line with the County Outdoor Recreation Plan and discussed with the County Outdoor Recreation Committee?
• Is the project collaborative in nature?
• Does the proposed project address an identified need?
• Would the proposed end project be eligible under Measures1, 2 or 3?

10. Funding Conditions for Rural Schemes.

All expenditure registered through the Department's Rural Schemes i.e. Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) is subject to the terms of the Public Spending Code which can be found at http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/.

All projects must comply with the National Public Procurement Policy Framework published by the Office of Government Procurement. The threshold at which contracting authorities are required to advertise all contracts for goods and services on eTenders is now €50,000 (exclusive of VAT) following publication of DPER Circular-05-2023 (threshold change).

In addition to this, the requirements outlined below will apply to all funding approved through those schemes. The need for adherence to all of the requirements will be reflected in the contractual agreement between the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht and the grantee approved for funding under the scheme.

1. Projects will be expected to commence and be completed in line with the timelines set out in the relevant Scheme Outline.

2. The Department may de-commit funding allocated to projects under the Scheme where the project is not completed within the time specified, and where the express agreement of the Department to extend the funding arrangement has not been agreed in advance.

3. The grant funding for the approved project will be provided from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht's capital budget. For local development companies and state bodies, administration and/or professional costs associated with the proposed project, where allowed for in the Scheme Outline, should be kept to a minimum.

4. A cash contribution as set out in the relevant Scheme Outline is required. The grantee will be required to provide confirmation that the cash contribution is in place and retain a record of the source of the cash contribution.

5. Projects must be completed in full in order to drawdown the full grant amount. Where it is established that a project has not been completed, the Department may request the grantee to repay any funding received on the project. Any changes to the proposed project must be advised and agreed with the Department in advance of the change being implemented.

6. Where an element of the approved project is not carried out as per the project application, grant funding may be reduced to reflect the amended project.

7. If the project involves large capital investment works on buildings or lands (not including trails) that are not in the ownership of the grantee, a minimum 15-year lease must be in place from date of project completion.

8. In the case of funding allocated to enterprises or facilities (i.e. community centre, hubs, vehicles), it is a requirement that they must operate as funded for a minimum of 5 years following release of the final stage of funding, otherwise funding may have to be repaid. Where they do not operate as funded this must be advised and agreed with the Department in advance.

9. All appropriate financial, Public Procurement and accounting rules and regulations must be complied with and each grantee will fully account for the funding received in a timely manner.

10. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible by Department officials for audit purposes at all times and for a period of six years from the date of completion of the project.

11. Recipients will acknowledge the support of the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Our Rural Future, Project Ireland 2040/Government of Ireland, (in relation to projects funded under ORIS) and any other applicable sources of funding (as identified in the relevant Funding Agreement) in all public announcements, advertising and signage, as appropriate, relating to the project. In addition, the Department may seek to use the project in the broader promotion of its policies.

12. All signage must comply with the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 regarding the use of the Irish language, i.e. all text must be in Irish and English, or in Irish only (with Irish displayed first). This applies whether permanent or temporary, indoor or outdoor, directional or promotional, new or replacement signage, etc. Guidance in this regard is available from An Coimisinéir Teanga.

13. Grantees will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht from time to time.

14. On-going monitoring and evaluation of the project outputs and outcomes should take place in the context of assessing the impact of the project. Grantees will be expected to collect appropriate data to facilitate this learning on an on-going basis. On request, a brief report (1-2 pages) on the outputs and outcomes of the project funded should be completed and made available to the Department on the case study template.

15. Each grantee will provide a contact point/points to the Department to facilitate payment and information requests. The Department should be updated on any changes to contact personnel in a timely manner.

16. A checklist confirming compliance with funding conditions relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

Non-Compliance with the conditions as outlined or any additional stipulations agreed during contract negotiations may result in a sanction being imposed or the requirement to refund part or all of the grant aid awarded.

Further conditions will form part of the Funding Agreement to be agreed in respect of each successful projects.

ORIS Specific Conditions:

- Particular care should be taken with proposed works in designated areas, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), etc. Any necessary screening for appropriate assessments and/or other ecological assessments /approvals/planning permissions etc. that may need to be obtained must be in place prior to any application being submitted.

- Applicants should ensure that all necessary consents are in place from all relevant landowners (private and public) or any groups or individuals that may be affected by the proposed works, and that works, where applicable, comply with relevant standards set by Sport Ireland Trails, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) or other relevant bodies before submitting the application.

- In the context of repair work on trails, the applicants must provide extracts from Sport Ireland Trails Inspection reports which confirm the need for such repairs. In the absence of a recent Sport Ireland Trails report, photographic evidence of the area requiring repairs may suffice.