



Coimisiún
na Meán

Community Media Scheme 2026

Publication Date: Thursday, 23rd July 2026

This document contains information regarding the
Community Media Scheme including:

- a) The Scheme's objectives;
- b) The parameters of the Scheme; and
- c) How it will operate.

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1. Foreword

Coimisiún na Meán (“An Coimisiún”), Ireland’s commission for regulating broadcasters, online media and supporting media development, is committed to ensuring a thriving, diverse and creative media landscape.

An Coimisiún, further to its Media Development function, develops and operates funding schemes to support the creation and delivery of high quality, accessible and inclusive content that reflects and shapes Irish society, and which aims to support the media sector and strengthen its plurality.

The report of the Future of Media Commission (FoMC) recognised *“the critical and valued role played by a strong, independent media sector in Irish civic and cultural life and in the democratic order”*. It recommended that the Broadcasting Fund, currently provided for under Part 10 of the Broadcasting and Other Media Regulation Acts 2009 & 2022 and which supports the Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes, should be converted into a Media Fund to provide funding on a platform-neutral basis to the wider media sector. An overarching aim is to support a range of funding schemes for Public Service Content Providers (PSCPs) on a phased basis including:

- **Local Democracy Reporting Scheme (LDRS);**
- **Courts Reporting Scheme (CRS);**
- **News Reporting Scheme (NRS);**
- **Support for Digital Transformation (DTS);**
- **Community Media Scheme (CMS); and,**
- **Access and Training Scheme.**

In this context and following the establishment of the Local Democracy (LDRS), Courts Reporting (CRS), News Reporting (NRS) and Digital Transformation Schemes (DTS), the new pilot Community Media Scheme (CMS) has now been established.

The Community Media Scheme presented below has been informed by the FoMC report findings and recommendations and research and consultative work conducted on behalf of Coimisiún na Meán.

2. Introduction

The Community Media Scheme (CMS) (“the Scheme”) is a support scheme operated by Coimisiún na Meán (“An Coimisiún”) and funded by the Exchequer.

The key objective of this Scheme is to strengthen the social benefit contribution of the community media sector. The Scheme aims to support a sustainable, inclusive and participative community media sector that delivers social benefit, by strengthening organisational and operational capacity, enhancing skills development through training, enabling community media organisations to better serve diverse audiences, promote social inclusion, and foster active citizenship.

In this context, it aims to provide an opportunity for licensed Community TV and Radio broadcasters to focus on building capacity to support the achievement of greater sustainability and better fulfil their social benefit objectives as set out in their Programme Policy Statements and Service Descriptions. The definition and types of social benefit are set down in the Social Benefit Framework for community broadcasters, published in June 2020.

This is the first iteration of the Scheme, which is a contestable fund on a pilot basis.

This document sets out the key elements of the Scheme in terms of the role of An Coimisiún, the objectives, scope, available funding, and the operational processes. An Coimisiún will publish supporting documentation



for potential applicants on the funding rounds and any associated development measures over the lifetime of the Scheme.

3. Role of An Coimisiún

An Coimisiún is responsible for the management of the Scheme, including corporate governance and the disbursement of the funds. The level of funding has been determined by the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport, Mr. Patrick O'Donovan, TD. and the allocation covers both the administration of the Scheme and funding grants.

The scheme will be implemented in accordance with EU State Aid Rules specifically within the framework of De Minimis. The funding will only be allocated to An Coimisiún licensed community television broadcasters; and community, community of interest, and community of special interest sound broadcasting services.

3.1. Legislative Context for the Community Media Scheme (CMS)

3.1.1. Establishment of the Scheme

Section 154(5) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that An Coimisiún, in preparing a scheme, may have regard to the developmental needs of community broadcasters.

Further, recommendation 6-7 by the Future of Media Commission, the 'FoMC' recommended the establishment of a Community Media Scheme (CMS), finding there was a specific need to establish a support mechanism for community media.'

€1m was secured in Budget 2026 by Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport, Mr. Patrick O'Donovan, TD for the development of a Community Media Scheme to 'reflect the invaluable role that community media plays in community engagement, cohesion, and in the promotion of social inclusion in communities across the State'.

In this context, the new Community Media Scheme (CMS) has been established with the purpose of supporting the development of the community media sector.

3.1.2. Definition of Community Media

Community media forms a vital and unique part of Ireland's media landscape. Defined by principles of community ownership, access and participation, these outlets reflect and amplify the voices of diverse groups in society.

The BAI [Community Media Policy](#) (June 18th, 2021) states "A community media organisation is characterised by its ownership structures, its content production and/or dissemination activities, and its relationship with the community it is licenced to serve. It is owned and controlled by a not-for-profit organisation whose structure provides for membership, management and operation primarily by members of the community. They are also guided by the [AMARC Europe Charter](#)."

Its content production and/or dissemination activities are based on access and participation by members of the community and reflect the special interests and needs of that community. Its relationship with the community seeks to "reinforce other organisations and activities aiming to empower and develop that community."



3.1.3. Scheme Aims and Objectives

Aims

The aims of this Scheme are informed by the Community Media Policy and the [Social Benefit Framework](#) launched in 2021 with the purpose of supporting the development of community broadcasting. The Scheme aims to offer Community Broadcasters the opportunity to build capacity to further fulfil their social benefit remit as set out in their Programme Policy Statements and Service Descriptions.

The definition and types of social benefit are set down in the Social Benefit Framework for community broadcasters, published in June 2020 as follows.

Social Benefit Definition

“Benefits to individuals or collective actors in the community that enhance their lives socially, culturally or economically, or in terms of development, empowerment and/or well-being, that otherwise would not have come about.”

Social Benefit Types

- Individuals, especially minorities and those marginalised, are growing in confidence and creativity and/or reinforcing a sense of belonging, directly from engaging with the Station.
- Individuals are enhancing their employment prospects, through gaining skills and confidence.
- Community members are informed and aware of what is happening around their community.
- Community members are responding more effectively to issues – local to global – because they have access to diverse viewpoints and to more and better information.
- Collective actors (CBOs, NGOs etc.) are facilitated, and reinforced in their capacity, to achieve their goals.
- The community sense of identity and cohesiveness is enhanced.
- Support the development of the community broadcasting sector by helping to improve outcomes across the management, operations, production and broadcasting in community radio stations and assist in their sustainability.



Objectives

The Scheme objectives are to:

- Strengthen the social benefit contribution of the community media sector by supporting practices and activities aimed at delivering measurable social benefits in line with An Coimisiún's Social Benefit Framework.
- Support training and professional development opportunities to build capacity within the Community Media Sector, strengthen workforce sustainability and encourage participation.
- Strengthen fundraising capacity and funds diversification and management enhancing long-term organisational sustainability within the community media sector.
- Enhance the financial and organisational resilience of community media organisations supporting governance, board management, strategic planning and future readiness to ensure long-term viability and accountability in delivering public value.
- Encourage organisational collaboration such as mentorship programmes and or participatory and mutually beneficial collaboration with organisations such as but not limited to Higher and Further Education Institutions, Libraries, Irish language organisations and other inclusive groups.
- Promote and strengthen the use of the Irish language within community media participation, outreach, engagement, and organisational development activity.
- Support accessibility initiatives which enable broader participation in community media by persons with disabilities and strengthen community engagement with underrepresented and marginalised groups supporting community cohesion and intercultural understanding.
- Attract volunteer and community contributor participation thereby increasing public engagement and community representation.
- Support Social Benefit Impact by enhancing the capacity of community media to promote social inclusion, media literacy, counter-disinformation initiatives, democratic engagement and amplify local public service content, culture and identity.



3.2. An Coimisiún's Approach to the Implementation of Funding Schemes

There are core values that underpin An Coimisiún's approach to the task of operating a scheme. An Coimisiún obligates to be:

- **Fair** – in our processes, procedures, and decisions.
- **Independent** – operating as an impartial regulator.
- **Expert** – by informing ourselves through engagement, research, and a commitment to professional learning.
- **Accountable** – in our decisions, our governance, and our resources.

4 Scope of the Community Media Scheme (CMS)

4.1 Strengthening the social benefit contribution of the community media sector

The core aim of the Community Media Scheme (CMS) is to strengthen the social benefit contribution of the sector by supporting the development of community media and the role the sector plays in community engagement and cohesion, and in the promotion of social inclusion in communities across the State.

4.2 Subject Matter

The Community Media Scheme (CMS) recognises Community Media as an essential pillar of Ireland's media ecosystem and offers funding support for projects and initiatives that seek to build capacity to better fulfil Community Media's social benefit objectives as set out in their Programme Policy Statements and Service Descriptions. It aims to strengthen the sector's resilience, enhance its capacity to deliver social benefit and ensure community media continues to provide meaningful public value as a vibrant, relevant and enduring part of Ireland's media landscape.

Funding is available for projects and initiatives which seek to amplify the social benefit contribution of the Community Media sector and align with the Scheme objectives.

4.3 Eligibility Criteria

The Scheme is open to An Coimisiún licensed community television broadcasters; and community, community of interest, and sound broadcasting services; only. Applicants must be regulated entities at the time of applying and pilot services cannot apply.

In this regard, the measure offers grant funding to community broadcasting services licensed by An Coimisiún and which:

- Demonstrate effective Corporate Governance & Financial Management;
- Publish compliant annual accounts; and,
- Have a good compliance track record with An Coimisiún.
- Provide two authorised signatories from the station, including at least one member of the Board / Management Committee.



5 Funding

This section details the approach to funding awards under the Scheme. It also highlights An Coimisiún's obligations under EU State Aid Rules and the obligation on grantees to acknowledge the source of funding.

The funding will support proposals for projects and activities seeking to further deliver on Community Media's unique Social Benefit contribution including areas such as but not limited to:

Outreach, participation and inclusion: Initiatives furthering community participation with community media broadcasters and activities. Activity based projects or events i.e. public engagement/fundraising initiatives, a series of community outreach/workshops and or projects focused on the promotion of media literacy.

Training, education and sectoral learning: In areas such as, but not limited to, journalism, research, audio/video production, organisational development, compliance, administration, governance, financial management, trustee and volunteer leadership, board members training including course participation and the scoping/development of targeted training plans.

Organisational, Leadership and Governance Development: Projects in areas such as, administration, governance, board development, grant writing, procurement and administration, partnership and collaboration development and fundraising development including support for external expertise/consultancy.

Inclusion, Accessibility and Equality Measures: To improve accessibility for disabled people, workers, volunteers and the community. Accessibility audits and accessibility planning. Enabling supports for Irish Sign language (ISL) and enhancing inclusive participation initiatives for minority and underrepresented communities.

Irish language Projects and initiatives: Support projects and activities which seek to advance the Irish language within the organisation and the community.

Collaboration: Supporting initiatives including but not limited to feasibility and research projects, mentorship programmes and other activities which seek to further the social benefit contribution of Community Media through collaboration amongst the sector or with mutually beneficial organisations.

Exclusions: Funding will not be available to finance:

- Content focused Production Projects
- Digital Transformation Projects
- Debt and Debt Service Charges, Interest Owed, Bad Debts, Work that has already taken place.
- Statutory Fines criminal fines or penalties, License Fees / Copyright, VAT, Shareholder Costs / Loans and any such types of costs.
- BAU Utility bills/ Rent and/or mortgage payments
- Repayment of loans
- Vehicles
- General cost of building repairs, construction or maintenance
- Current business as usual (BAU) costs
- Projects / Activities / Positions that are already receiving ongoing public funding from the Irish Government, or any other public source or the EU
- Charges/Costs for any other projects funded by commercial or public (Government & EU) sources.



5.1 Allocation of funds within the Community Media Scheme (CMS)

Funds will be awarded on a national basis and will be awarded, on a contestable basis, to applications which meet the eligibility criteria and align with the aims and objectives of the Community Media Scheme.

The funding will support proposals that fulfil the aim of the Scheme in furthering the Social Benefit contribution of Community Media.

Collaboration between regulated media service providers and other mutually beneficial partners is encouraged and will be given due regard.

The plurality of sources will have regard to the overall level of funding awarded and An Coimisiún may take appropriate measures to limit the overall level of funding awarded to any one Community Media service provider.

5.2 Grant types

An Coimisiún shall have the flexibility to determine, on a case-by-case basis, the most appropriate approach to the allocation of funding to grant applicants and has the discretion to award funding, as it sees fit.

In general, An Coimisiún will allocate grants under the Community Media Scheme (CMS) that represent all of the eligible costs of the proposal and directly associated overhead costs.

Guidance documentation will be published for each funding round and will include detailed information on the grant award levels and budget templates setting out the permitted costs under the Scheme.

The following table provides an example of the funding thresholds available:

Funding Thresholds	
Minimum	Maximum
€30,000	€65,000

5.3 Obligations under EU State Aid Rules

An Coimisiún operates this Scheme having regard to EU State Aid Rules and uses the De Minimis Regulation (EU) 2023/2831. Under this regulation, aid granted to one 'undertaking' cannot exceed €300,000 in a rolling 3-year period. It should be noted that De Minimis payments to one undertaking under a number of measures or Schemes have to cumulatively observe the €300,000 limit.

The current ceiling for all De Minimis aid, regardless of the source of such De Minimis aid, awarded to any single undertaking by any State agency or public body over a three-year period is €300,000. De Minimis aid of up to €300,000 per undertaking over any period of three years is allowed by the European Commission under the De Minimis Regulation as this is considered to be at a level which will not have a substantive effect on trade between Member States nor distort or threaten to distort competition and therefore can be awarded without notification to or clearance by the European Commission.

Applicants must declare to An Coimisiún any De Minimis aid received by them from any public body in the three years before funding is received from An Coimisiún (and any "in progress" applications for state funding). All projects will be checked for De Minimis applicability as part of the initial application and on submission of claims, and this may result in applications being ineligible for grant aid under this Programme.



Applicants seeking support under the De Minimis Regulation will be required to submit a declaration to An Coimisiún declaring all De Minimis aid received over the past three years, in accordance with EU State Aid Rules. It should be noted that a false declaration resulting in the threshold of €300,000 being exceeded could later give rise to the aid being recovered by An Coimisiún with interest.

5.4 Monitoring & Reporting Requirements

An Coimisiún will retain records with information and supporting documents to establish that all the conditions laid down in De Minimis are fulfilled for 10 years from the date of the last award of aid under the Scheme.

For further information: [De Minimis Aid](#)

5.5 Funding Rounds

An Coimisiún will allocate funding using a contestable funding round system. The number of funding rounds, their timing and the level of funding made available will be determined by An Coimisiún, subject to a number of factors, including availability of funding, the outcome of the Budget process and possible future iterations of the Scheme.

5.6 Acknowledgement of Funding

Applicants in receipt of funding from An Coimisiún are contractually required to formally acknowledge this support in a format acceptable to An Coimisiún. An Coimisiún reserves the right to issue applicants with guidelines specifying precise requirements in this regard.

6 Application, Assessment and Awards

This section sets out the approach to the application and assessment process for the scheme and identifies the key principles informing these processes. The primary concern for An Coimisiún is that the application, assessment, and award processes are transparent, equitable and verifiable. An Coimisiún has agreed and operated broad principles in respect of these processes across funding schemes as outlined below. An Coimisiún will make information in relation to the processes and procedures for making applications, the assessment process, contracting and disbursement publicly available.

6.1 The Application Process

An Coimisiún will publish information on funding schemes and will include: details on how to make submissions, eligibility information, application timeframes, details of assessment criteria and other supplementary information as deemed appropriate

6.2 The Assessment Process

The assessment process for the Community Media Scheme consists of the following four phases:

6.2.1 Preliminary Evaluation

The preliminary evaluation ensures that an applicant is eligible for funding under the Scheme. The focus here is to ensure that applicants have met minimum criteria and submitted all required documentation. Any applications that do not pass the Preliminary Assessment stage are disqualified and are not subject to further consideration.



6.2.2 Qualitative Assessment

Each application is assessed on its own merits by an independent panel of assessors based on assessment criteria set out in An Coimisiún's guidance documentation.

6.2.3 Strategic Assessment

In instances where there are more qualifying applications than funds available, An Coimisiún will have a second evaluation phase. This will focus on achieving a balance in the overall package of funded projects in the context of the Scheme objectives. The recommendations from the Qualitative Phase will also be considered here. Final recommendations are then submitted to the Commissioners for ratification.

6.2.4 Formal Ratification

Commissioner Ratification, which is the final stage, sees Coimisiún na Meán ratifying the overall package of applications recommended for funding with regard to fulfilling the Objectives of the funding round. The decision of the Commissioners is final.

Applicants will only be notified of the outcome of their application following the completion of the assessment and ratification process.

6.3 The Award Process

Where An Coimisiún has approved an application for funding the following steps apply:

An Coimisiún informs the applicant of the decision, setting out any condition(s) attached to the offer.

- I. An Coimisiún will make public a list of the funding offers ratified by the Commissioners.
- II. The successful applicant must confirm their acceptance of the offer of funding and any condition(s) attached thereto by An Coimisiún.
- III. A successful applicant is required to enter into a contractual agreement with An Coimisiún, on terms to be specified by An Coimisiún. Such terms include a schedule relating to the drawdown of funds by the applicant. Funds are administered by An Coimisiún in accordance with the terms of the contractual agreement.

Where An Coimisiún has rejected an application for funding, applicants are notified individually and provided with feedback on the performance of their application in the assessment process. An Coimisiún uses a standardised points system to inform the evaluation of applications, and the feedback provided to an applicant.

7 Review of the Community Media Scheme (CMS)

As provided for under the FoMC Report, the Community Media Scheme (CMS) is being established on a pilot basis for an initial period of twelve months and An Coimisiún will review the operation, effectiveness, and impact of the Scheme on completion of this pilot phase and make a written report to the Minister on the review. The evaluation of this pilot scheme will inform policy development of future iterations of the Scheme.

