



Reach Funding Guidelines

for

Education and Training Boards

2026

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Introduction

The aim of Reach funding is to provide support to the most educationally disadvantaged learners in accessing and participating in community education initiatives.

As defined in the 'Community Education Framework – Transforming Learning'¹, "Community Education is both formal and non-formal learning led by communities for communities to support personal, social, educational, environmental, economic and community development". Community education provision is bolstered by Reach funding and the 'ALL Strategy'².

Introduced in 2020 to support the most disadvantaged learners throughout the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Reach funding continues to provide vital funds to assist Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and community education providers to widen and increase their capacity and ensure that they can support the participation of those who need it most. There is ongoing Government commitment to promote access, collaboration and innovation in community education.

Reach funding places a strong focus on community education to support and engage with educationally disadvantaged learners accessing and participating in adult learning in local communities across Ireland. The primary focus of the funding is on widening participation by key target groups and building skills, while offering educational opportunities through simplified pathways and the possibility of moving forward in FET and beyond. The funding aims to widen and increase the participation of educationally disadvantaged learners, particularly those at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels 1 to 3. It is not to be used to support learners attending PLC courses, Youthreach or any other programmes at NFQ levels 4 or higher.

The benefit of this funding has been widely acknowledged by providers and as a catalyst to help people to re-engage with adult learning. A 2022 AONTAS survey³ of members of the Community Education Network found Reach to be important and

¹ [Community-Education-Framework.pdf](#)

² [Adult Literacy for Life Strategy](#)

³ [AONTAS Policy Paper- FINAL.pdf](#)

appreciated funding that enabled providers to engage learners in new ways. Projects funded by Reach help with access to online learning, connect communities, and provide social supports to the most vulnerable groups. ETBs are strongly encouraged to engage with community groups to see how best these groups and their learners can be supported in their work.

It is anticipated that funding allocated to each ETB for Reach initiatives will be at a similar level to their approved 2025 Reach funding, taking into consideration the overall FET budget allocation.

These guidelines set out the following elements:

- The principles of the funding
- Funding conditions and categories
- The funding allocation process
- Reporting requirements.

Section 1: Principles of Reach funding

- To assist community education providers to widen and increase their capacity to deliver to, and to support and encourage the participation of, educationally disadvantaged learners, particularly on accredited programmes at NFQ levels 1 to 3.
- To support community education principles by including both formal and informal learning, addressing learners' personal development, building skills while offering educational options through simplified pathways and further opportunities to progress to other areas of FET and beyond.
- To tackle inequalities and support access to community education.
- To support community education projects where clear evidence of viability exists, which ensures that the benefits of the investment are maintained beyond the funding period, thereby enhancing the long-term impact of the funding.
- To address topics such as climate justice education, education for sustainable development, and building climate literacy.
- To widen and increase the participation of educationally disadvantaged learners, particularly those at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels 1 to 3.

Reach funding is not to be used to support learners attending PLC courses, Youthreach or any other programmes, at NFQ levels 4 or higher.

Projects financed through Reach funding should not have any adverse impact on existing services or provision funded through ETBs.

Section 2: Funding conditions and categories

2.1 Funding conditions

The funding conditions below set out the governance responsibility and approved funding limitations of the initiative.

2.1.1 Governance

ETBs are responsible for approving grants as well as for administering and managing funding allocated by SOLAS to the ETBs under Reach. ETBs should satisfy themselves that any onward grants comply with all statutory, European Union, and other obligations that apply and as set out in the SOLAS '**Terms and Conditions of Funding**' dated 1st January 2026, issued with funding letters.

2.1.2 Approved funding

ETBs are

An approved funding allocation for any project funded under Reach must:

- (a) Only be used for the specific purpose for which it was approved
- (b) Be spent by 2026 year-end
- (c) Be community based and not linked to other ETB funding streams
- (d) Not be used for capital items

Note: The capital threshold for onward grants (external projects) is based on the cost of any item exceeding €1,000 excluding VAT. The capital threshold for internal (ETB) projects is €3,000 inclusive of VAT.

- (e) Not be used for programme validation
- (f) Not be used for any pay costs or costs of a recurring nature: For **external** (non-ETB) projects, Reach funding may be used for staff costs which are for a specific purpose or fixed term and which relate directly to the Reach project. Commitments/contracts must not extend beyond the end of 2026.

For **internal** (ETB) projects, if additional staff are required for the Reach project, the normal staffing sanction request process applies.

2.2 Funding targets and categories

Reach funding aims to support educationally disadvantaged learners in accessing and participating in community education.

Community Education Targets

As per the Community Education Framework, from a Community Education perspective ETBs are expected to make further contributions to three core targets:

- Widening participation by key target groups
- Increasing overall engagement in lifelong learning
- Growing accreditation of learner outcomes at levels 1 to 3 on the NFQ, while respecting the need for unaccredited provision.

Funding Categories

To support the aim of Reach, funding proposals that meet the criteria in these guidelines under the categories set out below can be considered for funding by ETBs:

1. Projects focused on widening and increasing participation of **target groups**⁴ in learning that offers accreditation at NFQ level 1 to 3, or on non-accredited programmes that provide clear pathways to accredited provision at NFQ levels 1 to 3
2. Projects that will support learners to engage/participate in community based educational programmes, mentoring projects, transport costs for learners, or urgent educational response⁵
3. Projects that address topics such as climate justice education, education for sustainable development, or building climate literacy
4. Projects engaged in education outreach and pre-development work to support the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

2.3 Reach and the Collaboration and Innovation Fund

Reach funding is aimed at supporting educationally disadvantaged learners to access and participate in community education. Reach is complemented by a national Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF), which is administered by the Adult

⁴ See Appendix 1

⁵ Where funding is approved for learner supports, a clear audit trail should be maintained and a form of undertaking signed by the learner in relation to the funding should be received.

Literacy for Life (ALL) National Programme Office. Further information regarding the CIF can be found in Appendix 2.

Section 3 - Funding allocation process and reporting requirements

This section sets out the process for allocation of Reach funding and the reporting requirements of the initiative.

Each ETB must engage with its community education providers to invite applications for support from the available allocation. ETBs should additionally advertise the availability of Reach funding on their websites.

Baselined against the ETB's spent allocation for 2025, each ETB must notify SOLAS of its **final** approved allocations for Reach funding to that value no later than **Friday 27 March 2026**. The listing provided to SOLAS must identify the projects that have been approved to receive funding from the ETB's allocation.

Every effort should be made to expend the full amount of Reach funding allocated to the ETB. The ETB should identify and record a prioritised list of reserve projects (Section 3.1 (i) below).

The list of Reach projects notified to SOLAS by 27 March 2026 will be considered the final approved projects and will be prioritised for Reach funding in 2026, subject to confirmation of the final allocation. The list will be forwarded to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, for use in official announcements/publications relating to Reach funding in 2026.

3.1 ETB and National Reserve Pipeline

In the event of an approved project not running, or indicating an underspend, the ETB must notify SOLAS of this outcome. The ETB must then seek to reallocate funding to another project identified on their 2026 reserve list. The ETB is responsible for ensuring that the selected pipeline project or projects has/have the capacity to achieve spending of the assigned amount by 2026 year-end.

Should it not be possible for an ETB to assign their full Reach allocation in the first instance, or to redistribute previously assigned funding if a recipient is unable to achieve a full spend, SOLAS reserves the right to recover the underspent amounts.

A transparent audit trail must be retained by ETBs to show the rationale for any required reassignment.

3.2 Funding allocation process

Community education providers can apply for funding for eligible projects under Reach funding for 2026. Funding will be administered to community education groups who apply through the 16 Education and Training Boards across Ireland.

An ETB evaluation panel should review all funding applications. The ETB should set up a panel for this purpose, the composition of which will be determined by the ETB. To ensure effective governance and transparency of the allocation process, the ETB should use the funding and evaluation criteria outlined in this document. The ETB should record all panel decisions.

3.3 Allocation of funding

Each ETB, in determining the allocation of funding under Reach, should ensure the following factors are satisfied:

1. Every effort has been made to allot the full amount of Reach funding allocated to the ETB.
2. The application for funding has been reviewed using the Reach funding evaluation criteria set out in Appendix 3 and meets the minimum score requirements.
3. All governance requirements and assurances on how this funding would be spent, if approved, have been satisfied. In keeping with good governance, the ETB should develop a Memorandum of Understanding specifically for Reach. For approved applications, this should be signed by the ETB and their Reach partner(s).
4. Records of the panel decisions, outcomes, scores, etc., are to be kept for timescales appropriate to the audit of State funding.
5. There is no duplication of State funding.
6. Conditions of funding are complied with.
7. No more than 10% of the Reach funding is allocated to internal (ETB) projects and those projects are also subject to evaluation against the same criteria as external applications. Internal projects, however, must not be prioritised above external community applications.

3.4 Reporting requirements

ETBs will be required to report on the allocation and use of Reach funding. The reporting data should include:

- Number of proposals received and approved
- Target groups for funding
- Number of learners benefiting from the funding
- Funding categories and amounts approved
- Purpose of funding (what it will be spent on)
- Expected benefits and outcomes of the funding
- Funding spent.

SOLAS will issue report templates separately.

Dates for reporting

Reporting	Date for submission to SOLAS
Summary data of approved projects	27 March 2026
Reach status report for January to May 2026	12 June 2026
Reach year-end report to cover period to the end of December	26 February 2027

Note: Ongoing financial reporting will continue through the overall ETB budgetary process. The allocation of funding to approved projects should be in line with the Reach funding allocation approved through the overall ETB allocation process.

Appendix 1 – Key target groups and other priority target groups

The **key target groups** for Reach funding, in line with those identified in the Community Education Framework, are:

- Learners under 25 years of age
- Long-term unemployed
- People with disabilities
- Migrants and refugees

Other priority target groups:

- Early school leavers
- Members of the Traveller and Roma communities
- Women wishing to return to the labour market
- Lone parents
- People who are educationally, economically, or socially disadvantaged
- People impacted by mental health issues
- People impacted by addiction
- Women's groups and men's groups
- People impacted by homelessness
- Carers
- LGBTQIA
- Older people

Appendix 2 – Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)

The aim of the ALL Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF) is to support collaborative organisational responses in addressing literacy needs at local level. The main differences between Reach funding and the CIF are outlined below.

Reach Funding	Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)
Community education providers can apply to their ETB for Reach funding.	Any public, non-profit organisation can apply to the ALL National Programme Office for the CIF.
A single organisation can make an application for Reach funding.	Partnership model with a minimum of two organisations needed.
Reach funding aims to assist community education providers to widen and increase their capacity to deliver to, and, to support and encourage the participation of, educationally disadvantaged learners, particularly those on accredited programmes at NFAQ levels 1 to 3	The purpose of the CIF is to support collaborative and innovative activities that will help achieve the aims of the ALL Strategy and create a more equal society. This includes activities that: • Support adults with unmet literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs. • Supports a whole-of-society response to unmet adult literacy needs.
The funding is specifically designed to tackle inequalities and support access to community education.	The funding is to support individuals and/or groups experiencing unmet literacy, numeracy, or digital literacy needs through new and innovative approaches using a partnership model.
Targets funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners in accessing and participating in community education.	Targets funding on innovation activities that support the priority groups named in the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy.
Must be used to support organisations that support individuals with unmet needs.	Can be used to support an individual with unmet needs.

Reach Funding	Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)
Key target groups: Learners under 25 years of age; long-term unemployed; people with disabilities; migrants and refugees. Other priority target groups: Early school leavers; members of the Traveller and Roma communities; women wishing to return to the labour market; lone parents; people who are educationally, economically or socially disadvantaged; people impacted by mental health issues; people impacted by addiction; women's groups and men's groups; people impacted by homelessness; carers; LGBTQIA; older people.	Target groups: Older adults (55+); members of the Traveller community; people with disabilities; one-parent households; low paid workers; carers; long-term unemployed; migrants; international protection applicants; people with language needs; incarcerated persons and ex-offenders; persons recovering from addiction.
ETBs manage Reach funding.	ALL National Programme Office in SOLAS manages the Collaboration and Innovation Fund.

Appendix 3 – Evaluation scoring criteria

Copies of completed evaluation forms and applications may be requested by SOLAS for sampling.

Reach funding evaluation criteria	
Title of Reach funding proposal	
Name of community group or organisation submitting proposal:	

Scoring			
Part 1: Score to be achieved = 4	Part 2: Score to be achieved = 1	Part 3: Score to be achieved = 1	Total essential required = 6
Total minimum score to be achieved for funding consideration (The minimum mark for all essential criteria must be achieved)			6

Criteria		Essential	Desirable
Part 1: One point each must be achieved for A, B, C, & D			
A	The project supports the principles of Reach funding. Yes = 1, No = 0	1	
B	The project does not duplicate the work or have any adverse impact on existing services or provision of community development organisations or ETBs. Yes = 1, No = 0	1	
C	The project has clear and verifiable measurable Key Performance Indicators/Outcomes Yes = 1, No = 0	1	
D	The project shows clear evidence of viability. Yes =1, No = 0	1	
Part 1: Total score awarded – minimum score required = 4		4	

Part 2: Target group of the proposed project				
E	Proposal is aimed at key target group or other priority target group. E1 or E2 below must apply.			
E1: Key target groups at which the proposal is aimed (tick all that apply)				E2: Other priority target group
Learners <25 Y/N	Long-term unemployed Y/N	People with disabilities Y/N	Refugee/ migrant groups Y/N	Other priority target group Y/N
E1	Member of key target group = 3			3
E2	Member of other priority group = 1			1
E: Sub-total score awarded - minimum score required = 1				1

F1	The community group is located within unemployment blackspots or area of disadvantage within the ETB's Region Yes = 1, No = 0		1
F2	Community group targeting educationally disadvantaged learners Yes = 1, No = 0		1
F3	The project proposes innovative approaches to targeting educational disadvantage Yes = 1, No = 0		1
F: Score awarded			
Part 2: (E and F): Total score awarded		1	

Part 3: Reach category addressed by proposed project			
G	Proposed project is aimed at Reach category – mark Y for all that apply; at least one must apply		
G1	Widen and increase participation of key target groups or other priority target groups	Y/N	
G2	Learner supports	Y/N	
G3	Climate and sustainability	Y/N	
G4	Supporting marginalised groups (outreach/pre-development)	Y/N	
At least 1 of G1 to G4 selected Yes =1, No = 0			
Part 3: Sub-total score awarded (maximum score = 1)		1	
		Essential	Desirable
Sub-total score awarded (Part 1 + Part 2 + Part 3)			
Total combined essential and desirable scores awarded			
Meets minimum funding criteria: Yes ☐ No ☐			
Approved by:		Position in ETB:	Date:

Appendix 4 – Evaluation scoring template

Copies of completed evaluation forms and applications may be requested by SOLAS for sampling.

Reach funding evaluation criteria	
Title of Reach funding proposal	
Name of community group or organisation submitting proposal:	

Scoring			
Part 1: Score to be achieved = 4	Part 2: Score to be achieved = 1	Part 3: Score to be achieved = 1	Total essential required = 6
Total minimum score to be achieved for funding consideration (The minimum mark for all essential criteria must be achieved)			

Criteria		Essential	Desirable
Part 1: One point each must be achieved for A, B, C, & D			
A	The project supports the principles of Reach funding. Yes = 1, No = 0		
B	The project does not duplicate the work or have any adverse impact on existing services or provision of community development organisations or ETBs. Yes = 1, No = 0		
C	The project has clear and verifiable measurable Key Performance Indicators/Outcomes Yes = 1, No = 0		
D	The project shows clear evidence of viability. Yes = 1, No = 0		
Part 1: Total score awarded – minimum score required = 4			

Part 2: Target group of the proposed project				
E	Proposal is aimed at key target group or other priority target group. E1 or E2 below must apply.			
E1: Key target groups at which the proposal is aimed (tick all that apply)				E2: Other priority target group
Learners <25 Y/N	Long-term unemployed Y/N	People with disabilities Y/N	Refugee/ migrant groups Y/N	Other priority target group Y/N
E1	Member of key target group = 3			
E2	Member of other priority group = 1			
E: Sub-total score awarded - minimum score required = 1				

F1	The community group is located within unemployment blackspots or area of disadvantage within the ETB's Region Yes = 1, No = 0		
F2	Community group targeting educationally disadvantaged learners Yes = 1, No = 0		
F3	The project proposes innovative approaches to targeting educational disadvantage Yes = 1, No = 0		
F: Score awarded			
Part 2: (E and F): Total score awarded			

Part 3: Reach category addressed by proposed project			
G	Proposed project is aimed at Reach category – mark Y for all that apply; at least one must apply		
G1	Widen and increase participation of key target groups or other priority target groups	Y/N	
G2	Learner supports	Y/N	
G3	Climate and sustainability	Y/N	
G4	Supporting marginalised groups (outreach/pre-development)	Y/N	
At least 1 of G1 to G4 selected Yes =1, No = 0			
Part 3: Sub-total score awarded (maximum score = 1)			
		Essential	Desirable
Sub-total score awarded (Part 1 + Part 2 + Part 3)			
Total combined essential and desirable scores awarded			
Meets minimum funding criteria: Yes ☐ No ☐			
Approved by:		Position in ETB:	Date:

Appendix 5 – Reach funding reporting timelines

Month	Action	Timeline for completion
2026		
March	ETB submits summary report of approved projects to SOLAS	27 March 2026
June	ETB submits Reach status report for January to May 2026 to SOLAS	12 June 2026
2027		
February	ETB submits Reach 2026 year-end report to SOLAS	26 February 2027