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Northern Ireland - Ireland

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MAXIMISING COMMUNITY SPACE

INCLUSIVE AND CONNECTED RURAL COMMUNITIES

THE PROGRAMME

Maximising Community Space (MCS) is an initiative designed to support rural community organisations make the most of the spaces they already have, expanding activities, welcoming more people, and strengthening local connections. The project is supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). It is delivered by a partnership led by Rural Action, working alongside Irish Rural Link (IRL) and the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN).

AIM

The project will work with 40 rural community organisations across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo.

It aims to work with rural based groups who currently own or manage a hall, facility or other community space in order to:

- build leadership capacity;
- increase the level of activities on offer;
- encourage more shared use & participation by the local community.

WHAT DOES MCS INVOLVE

Groups selected to participate will be invited to join a 15-month support programme, working closely with the project team to achieve meaningful and lasting impact.

Participant groups will undertake an accredited training programme focused on inclusive leadership, inclusive spaces, inclusive society and connected communities.

Each participant group will be required to actively engage with all aspects of the project prior to accessing the activity support for their individual community space.

Support will be delivered around **three core pillars**, each designed to help rural organisations strengthen their leadership, energise their spaces, and deepen community engagement.

Pillar 1: Inclusive Leadership

Working with management committee members to build leadership skills, grow confidence, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of their community space.

Groups will benefit from a tailored package of support designed to meet their unique needs and ambitions. This includes:

- Understanding where they are now through a Development Needs Analysis and Baseline Assessment;
- Creating a clear development plan that sets out priorities and practical next steps;
- Access to dedicated mentoring to guide them through challenges and opportunities;
- Targeted training and development support to build skills, confidence, and long-term capacity.

Pillar 2: Inclusive Space

This pillar focuses on exploring how each community space currently operates and identifying practical opportunities to broaden its reach. Through Activity Audits and the development of Inclusive Activity Action & Delivery Plans, groups will gain a clear picture of what's working, what could be strengthened, and where new possibilities lie.

Participating groups will be able to avail of up to £10,000/€10,000 in activity support, helping them bring their development plans to life, increasing usage, widening participation, and turning ideas into meaningful action across the wider community.

Pillar 3: Connecting People & Spaces

A programme of networking events, workshops, and study visits across Northern Ireland, Ireland, and beyond will encourage groups to share learning, explore new ideas, and build relationships with key stakeholders. This pillar focuses on strengthening organisational capacity, increasing community engagement, and creating meaningful connections between people and places.

ELIGIBLE ORGANISATIONS

The programme is open to community-based voluntary organisations with appropriate governance in place, as a minimum, groups must be constituted.

Groups will be asked to provide their governing documents, which must clearly demonstrate the aims & objectives of the organisation, contain an appropriate dissolution clause and demonstrate no personal or private gain from any profits generated.

DEFINITION OF RURAL

MCS is open to rural organisations that own or manage a hall, facility, or other community space and are located in:

NI - Settlements of 5,000 people or less

Border Area - Settlements of 10,000 people or less

These criteria ensure the project reaches rural communities where local spaces play a vital role in the connection and participation of people.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Own or manage a community space
- Are a bona fide group (meeting the eligible organisation criteria, has a governing document & bank account in the name of the organisation with 2 unrelated signatories)
- Have the commitment from the Management Committee to fully engage in the programme and engage on a cross-community and cross-border basis
- Identify at least 4 core participants to take part in accredited training and attend key events
- Have the commitment from the Management Committee to fully support any identified staff or volunteer engagement.

HOW TO APPLY

If interested in applying to the project, please complete the Expression of Interest form available at www.ruralaction.co

Closing Date for receipt of Expression of Interest forms is: **Friday 19th June 2026**

For more information contact:

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