



SMART VILLAGE NETWORK PROJECT

GUIDANCE NOTES

PEACEPLUS is a new European Union funding Programme, designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. PEACEPLUS aims to build upon the work of the previous Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (PEACE) and Interreg Europe Programmes.

Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) are seeking to identify up to 8 prospective partners from rurally based organisations to participate in a funding bid to establish Rural Smart Digital Hubs within the council area under PEACEPLUS Funding Investment Area 2.4.

DCSDC Business Team has established a cross-border partnership to develop the bid for the **Smart Village Network Project (SVNP)**, which will harness the benefits of Rural Connectivity, Digital Transformation, and the Green Transition to deliver growth and wellbeing across our rural economies, environment, and society.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the PEACEPLUS Programme

Places across Europe are rapidly investing in expanding the benefits of smart solutions into rural areas. The global smart cities market is expected to treble over the next five years to reach almost £3 trillion. **Investment Area 2.4 Smart Towns and Villages Development Programme** is a key opportunity for rural areas in DCSDC to gainfully participate in this digital transition by preparing a strong bid application for the PEACEPLUS programme. The key benefits to places include improved services and planning through real-time data use, being able to achieve more with less, and better communication and involvement of citizens regardless of where they live.

The PEACEPLUS Programme aims to deliver:

- Increased digital connectivity within physical spaces with high-speed broadband and state-of-the-art facilities proven to address the urban–rural digital divide.
- Added value by enhancing physical proximity and digital connectivity, enabling rural citizens to benefit from several networks and engage in various business and community support activities (such as distance learning, remote working, e-health, e-services, and e-commerce).
- Business support initiatives to deliver innovation initiatives across the region: powering innovation, supporting entrepreneurial activity through new business start-ups and growth, productivity gains, and developing business clusters.

1.2 Level of Investment Aid

The PEACEPLUS programme has been divided into six themes. Each theme aims to address longstanding social and economic challenges which impact communities. This bid focuses on **Investment Area 2.4 Smart Towns and Villages Development Programme**, which falls under Theme 2: Delivering Socio-Economic Regeneration and Transformation. The total budget available for Investment Area 2.4 is €30 million (inclusive of €24 million ERDF and €6 million governmental match funding). 100% of eligible project costs can be sought.

The areas identified for potential PEACEPLUS Investment Area 2.4 funds include:

- **Mobile digital hubs:** The design and development of advanced rural digital hubs to ensure the widest possible opportunities for digital access for rural citizens and enterprises.
- **Digital services by transforming existing assets:** The development of projects which will help transform existing assets within towns/village centres for citizen recreational, social and enterprise usage.
- **Mentoring programmes:** The design and delivery of digital mentoring programmes to be delivered through the proposed rural digital hubs in rural communities and businesses.
- **Digital clusters:** The development of digital clusters that can develop opportunities to increase remote working and, by so doing, reduce the need for rural citizens to leave their communities and commute long distances to work.
- **Social enterprise / innovation-led projects:** The development of social enterprise / innovation-led projects designed to apply advanced ICT to create new models of social service and economic development.

A successful collaborative bid under PEACEPLUS Investment Area 2.4 will enable DCSDC to expand connectivity and digital capabilities in the rural areas within the Derg, Faughan and Sperrin District

Electoral Areas (DEAs) our aim is to establish at least one Rural Smart Digital Hub within existing properties in each of the target DEAs. **Please note this process is designed to build a strong bid, and funding has not yet been secured for this project.**

1.3 Smart Village Network Project Overview

The Smart Village Network Project (SVNP) is a competitive process to identify and provide consultancy support to eight prospective partners to form part of a comprehensive PEACEPLUS bid for a share of the PEACEPLUS funding. Table 1.1 below outlines important dates for community information sessions to learn more about this opportunity and engage with DCSDC in mandatory pre-application support facilitated by consultants Bable. Visit www.derrystrabane.com/rural/ to book a place at the Smart Village Network Project events.

| Table 1.1 Important Dates | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Information sessions | <p>6 September 2023 2pm-4pm, Killeter Heritage Centre, 16 Main Street, Killeter, Co. Tyrone, BT81 7EL</p> <p>6 September 2023 6pm-8pm, Glenely House, 11b Main Street, Plumbridge, Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT79 8AA</p> <p>7 September 2023 10am-12noon, Eglinton Community Centre, 40 Main Street, Eglinton, Co. Londonderry, BT47 3AD</p> <p>A video recording of the information session will also be available from 8 September.</p> <p>Register at http://www.derrystrabane.com/rural</p> |
| Expression of Interest opens | <p>6 September 2023 (not mandatory)</p> <p>Please submit Expression of Interest Form via email to smartvillagenetwork@derrystrabane.com</p> |
| Familiarisation Trip | <p>13 September 9:30am-4pm</p> <p>Familiarisation trip to three Rural Digital Hubs. Booking essential click here</p> |
| Expression of Interest closes | <p>15 September 2023 at 5pm (not mandatory)</p> |
| Pre-application workshops | <p>Attending one of the Pre-Application workshops is mandatory to meet the eligibility criteria</p> <p>Register at http://www.derrystrabane.com/rural</p> <p>19 September 2023 9am-12noon Aghyaran Community Centre (St Davog's GAC), 5 Aghyaran Road, Castlederg, Co. Tyrone, BT81 7YA</p> <p>19 September 2023 2pm-5pm, Orange Hall, 16a Lisnarragh Road, Donemana, Co. Tyrone, BT82 0QL</p> <p>20 September 2023 9am-12noon, Diamond Centre, 630 Baranailt Road, Claudy, Co. Londonderry, BT47 4EA</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| Pre-application clinics | <p>3 and 4 October 2023</p> <p>1-2-1 consultation appointments with BABLE</p> <p>Schedule to be confirmed based on demand; online sessions may also be provided as required. Booking for the clinics will open at the Mandatory Pre-Application workshops and be allocated on a first come first served basis.</p> |
| Last date to submit pre-application questions | <p>6 October 2023 by 5pm</p> <p>Please submit questions to smartvillagenetwork@derrystrabane.com</p> |
| Application process closes | <p>19 October 2023 (12 noon)</p> <p>Please submit applications via email to smartvillagenetwork@derrystrabane.com</p> <p>Only complete applications received on time at will be considered. Please note that we will also cross reference attendance at the Mandatory Pre-Application Workshop to confirm eligibility</p> |
| Notification of Decision | <p>27 October 2023</p> <p>Successful Applicants will be informed and assigned a BABLE mentor for 1-2-1 support</p> <p>30 October 2023</p> <p>Unsuccessful Applicants will be informed and signposted to the appropriate support</p> |
| Successful Applicants | <p>1- 15 November 2023</p> <p>1-to-1 mentoring support (Online)</p> <p>Successful applicants must be available for up to 15 hours mentoring across the first two weeks of November 2023</p> |
| PEACEPLUS Funding Bid Submission | <p>November/December 2023 (TBC)</p> <p>PEACEPLUS Investment Area 2.4 Smart Towns and Villages application will be submitted by Derry City and Strabane District Council as lead partner, on behalf of all partners, in the Smart Village Network Project Bid</p> |

1.4 Who can apply

The Smart Village Network Project (SVNP) welcomes proposals from organisations that:

- Are located within the Derry City and Strabane District Council area and specifically within these target rural areas:
 - Derg DEA rural wards of Finn, Sion Mills, Newtownstewart, Glenderg, and Castlederg.
 - Faughan DEA rural wards of Eglinton, Claudy, Slievekirk, Enagh and Newbuildings.
 - Sperrin DEA rural wards of Glenelly Valley, Park, Donemana and Artigarvan.

And can meet all the following criteria:

- Provide both a broad-based Community Development Programme and encourage general community participation with clear community benefit.
- Promote equality of opportunity and good relations including Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- Have reasonable accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Have identified one or more spaces suitable for adaption as a digital hub/co-working space.
- Have adequate kitchen facilities and toilet provision OR have identified a suitable internal space to accommodate this in future.
- Have relevant statutory approvals (anything that requires planning permission beyond minor works is unlikely to be successful).
- Project proposals clearly linked to key local drivers of need specific to your area, aligned to but not limited to addressing the issues identified within the [Local Growth Plans](#).
- Project proposals clearly linked to the key themes of this programme: Rural Connectivity, Digital Transformation and Green Transition

Stakeholders can come from any sector or organisation but note consideration will only be given to those projects which benefit the wider community. Council welcomes collaborative applications provided they meet the above criteria and are submitted as one joint application.

1.5 Who cannot apply?

The following are not eligible for funding:

- Project proposals that do not directly and broadly benefit Derry City and Strabane District Council residents.
- Project proposals which are not located specifically within these target rural areas detailed in section 1.4 above
- Project proposals related to the promotion of religious or political interests.
- Project proposals already funded or within the scope of the council's responsibility and projects that are clearly the responsibility of another statutory body.
- Project proposals that improve or benefit privately owned land that has no or significantly restricted public access.
- Project proposals whose primary objective is to raise money for charity or for profit.
- Project proposals already funded through existing or future PEACEPLUS projects.
- Project proposals that won't be fully operational before March 2025.

1.6 What can be funded?

DCSDC is seeking 8 prospective partners from rurally based organisations to participate in a funding bid to establish Rural Smart Digital Hubs within the council area under PEACEPLUS Funding Investment Area 2.4.

Project proposals can include requests for capital expenditure and staff resourcing costs, which will be assessed against the merits of the proposal. In all cases of expenditure, the council will seek to strategically pool procurement and to share the benefits of assets or staff resourcing across the SVNP. DCSDC will also support applicants in the designing of projects.

Expenditure that will be considered for funding includes, but is not limited to:

1) Internal and external minor works that do not require planning permission to existing buildings to develop rural digital hubs. This may include:

- i. Capital Assets as required for the fit out of the Rural Digital Hub
- ii. Capital Assets that will promote citizen recreational, social and enterprise usage of advanced technology.
- iii. Social enterprise / innovation-led projects: The development of social enterprise / innovation-led projects designed to apply advanced ICT to create new models of social service and economic development.

2) Examples of eligible capital expenditure may include:

- i. Expenditure to deliver enhanced connectivity in rural areas.
 - a. Office furniture
 - b. IT hardware
 - c. Signage
 - d. Fibre or wireless infrastructure
 - e. Secure access and/or room/desk booking systems.
- ii. Technology to demonstrate the benefits of Digital Transformation in local rural areas such as
 - a. Extended Reality Technologies for rural tourism for example AR, VR, and Immersive tech
 - b. The Internet of Things using sensor technology to harness the power of local data for resource management, farm management, and traffic management.
 - c. Data Analytics
 - d. Robotics
- iii. Technology to demonstrate the benefits of Green Transition in local rural areas.
 - a. Smart energy management systems for example Smart meters
 - b. Smart Efficient Lighting
 - c. Renewable generation and energy storage
 - d. Low Carbon Heating solutions for example, Heat pumps
 - e. Smart Mobility Solutions for example, EV charging stations, Electric Bicycles

3) Staffing costs/resources will be considered as part of the wider project. Please note it is not anticipated that the project will support a full-time staff resource in each of the hub locations. Staff resources will be shared across the SVNP as far as is practical.

- 4) **Overheads** will be considered as part of the wider project. Please note these costs will be in line with SEPUB Guidance which is forthcoming for Investment Area 2.4.

Note will seek to maximise the benefits of any funding secured by assuming responsibility for coordination across the projects, which could include:

- Energy audits and identifying green investments and infrastructure.
- Coordinating a co-designed mentoring programme with potential partners as part of the PEACEPLUS bid. For example, Green Skills, Digital Skills, and Intergenerational projects
- Project Management, Marketing and Administration of the project
- Strategic shared procurement (e.g., solar panels) and managing shared assets (e.g., 3D printing) across borders/hubs.

1.7 What should I submit with my application?

To apply you will need to attend one of the pre-application workshops taking place on 19 and 20 September 2023 (see full schedule in section 1.3). Your [application form](#) must be fully completed and submitted by 12:00 noon on 19 October 2023 via email to smartvillagenetwork@derrystabane.com. Late applications will not be accepted.

2 How to answer the questions

All sections of your application form must be completed as fully and concisely as possible as this information will be used in the assessment of your project proposal. Incomplete applications will be deemed ineligible and will not be assessed for funding. Please note maximum word limits per question. The application form provides a brief description of how to fill each question.

2.1 How to access pre-application support

There are several opportunities to engage with council, including an information session (and recording), a mandatory pre-application workshop, and a pre-application clinic to increase the quality of applications. A mandatory pre-application workshop forms part of this support. Visit www.derrystabane.com/rural/ to book a place.

2.2 How we will address queries and clarifications

The process will be open and transparent. All questions and queries collected across the pre-application engagement process will be recorded with answers published on the website. The closing date to submit a question or clarification is 6 October 2023 at 5pm. Email: smartvillagenetwork@derrystabane.com. Answers will be published on www.derrystabane.com/rural/ by 5pm noon Monday 9th October 2023

3 How we assess and score your application

Every application received will be assessed to ensure the following:

- That an application falls within the requirements for funding (geography, impact, and scope)
- To ensure that the organisation/business/social enterprise is eligible to apply to this scheme.
- To ensure each applicant's capability to deliver the proposal, and

- To determine how well the proposal meets the community need and supports wider economic, social and sustainability ambitions.

An acknowledgement receipt will be issued to you electronically once your submission has been received. The Council will assess your application for eligibility. If your application is eligible, it will be forwarded for full assessment and scored against the stated criteria.

3.1 Eligibility Assessment

If the applicant, based on the information supplied, can satisfy the Council of their eligibility, they will progress to the next part of the process.

3.2 What if an application is not eligible?

If your application is not eligible, you will be notified by 30 October 2023, and the reasons will be outlined to you. Your application will not proceed to assessment and scoring. If an applicant is not eligible for funding through the SVNP, organisations may wish to contact the Council, who will help signpost to other sources of support.

3.3 Assessment and Scoring

If the applicant, based on the information supplied, can satisfy the eligibility criteria, they will be scored according to established assessment criteria shown in the table below.

| Score | Comment |
|-------------------|---|
| 5 Excellent | Response is completely relevant and excellent overall. The response is comprehensive, unambiguous and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the requirement and provides details of how the requirement will be met in full. |
| 4 Good | Response is relevant and good. The response is sufficiently detailed to demonstrate a good understanding and provides details on how the requirements will be fulfilled. Good supporting evidence supplied. |
| 3 Acceptable | Response is relevant. The response addresses a broad understanding of the requirement but may lack details on how the requirement will be fulfilled in certain areas |
| 2 Poor | Response is partially relevant but generally poor. The response addresses some elements of the requirement but contains insufficient/limited detail or explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled. A response with reservations. |
| 1 Very Poor | Response is partially relevant but generally very poor. The response addresses some elements of the requirement but contains insufficient/limited detail or explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled. An unacceptable response with serious reservations. |
| 0 Unacceptable | Nil or inadequate response. Fails to address the question or demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement |

The application will be assessed against 7 criteria, with each criterion attracting a score between 0-5. Each question is weighted, and the score obtained will be multiplied by the weight to get an overall score out of a possible 100.

The criteria and weighting are:

| CRITERIA | Score out of a possible 5 | Weighting | Overall Score |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Q1 Project Need: Clear and concise evidence of the need for the project including demand from target audience within the scope of the fund. | | X 4 | /20 |
| Q2 Peace Plus Impact: Transformative capacity is clearly defined for local and cross-border activities. | | X 2 | /10 |
| Q3 Economic Impact: Clear and realistic outcomes set for the project that will deliver clearly defined benefits beyond the funding period. This could include employment opportunities, additional amenities or helping reposition the targeted rural area as a smart place | | X 4 | /20 |
| Q4 Social Impact: Points awarded for projects that clearly demonstrate social impact and improved societal outcomes within the scope of the funding. | | X 2 | /10 |
| Q5 Environmental Impact: Points awarded for clearly describing how the project will support the theme of Green Transition and contribute to Net Zero ambitions. | | X 2 | /10 |
| Q6 Project Experience/ Management Strength: Ability, skills, and experience of the organisation which enables them to deliver the project | | X 4 | /20 |
| Q7 Innovation: Points awarded for projects that clearly demonstrate innovation to solve a problem within the scope of the funding. | | X 2 | /10 |
| Total | | | /100 |

Applications must score at least 65 marks to be considered for funding.

Applicants will be ranked according to score obtained across the three targeted rural areas to identify up to 8 projects to proceed for 1-to-1 support. Applicants who fail to achieve a score of at least 65 marks will be advised that they have been unsuccessful. Applicants who score above 65 marks, but who do not score high enough to be awarded funding due to lack of available funding will be notified of this.

3.4 What happens if an application is successful?

Up to 8 successful applicants will be identified for 1-to-1 mentoring support to further develop project proposals as part of the collaborative SVNP application for PEACEPLUS. **Successful applicants must be available for specialist mentoring provided from 1st November-15th November 2023.** This mentoring includes up to 15 hours of online support from BABLE Smart Cities experts who will be matched to specific project needs. We expect the SEPUB call opening under 2.4 to open in December 2023 and this provides enough time to have a strong bid proposal ready in for the opening. **Successful applications will be notified by 27th October 2023 by email.**

Unsuccessful applications will be notified by 30 October 2023 by email. The council will also signpost unsuccessful applicants to any additional support available through existing council programs.

3.5 Where do I send a request for more information?

You may submit pre-application questions until 6 October 2023. The answers to submitted questions will be available at www.derrystrabane.com/rural/ so please check our website first. All requests must be made in writing via email: smartvillagenetwork@derrystrabane.com

3.6 Contact details for submitting an application

The contact details for submitting your application to Derry City and Strabane District Council is: smartvillagenetwork@derrystrabane.com

Applicants are reminded that the deadline for submission of applications is 12:00 noon on **Tuesday 19th October 2023**. Applicants are encouraged to submit their application early as this deadline is absolute.

Please do not wait until near the closing time to submit your application. Under no circumstances will an application be deemed eligible after the 12:00 noon deadline.

Be aware of the speed of your internet connection, your system configuration and the volume of general web traffic that may impact on the time required to upload your application.

DCSDC cannot accept responsibility for transmission delays. Your completed application must be received before the deadline.

Please note that all projects will be subject to a monitoring and evaluation process. Please read all documentation carefully before submitting your application.

Appendix 1: Additional Information for Applicants

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Derry City and Strabane District Council will use the information you give us on the application form during assessment and for the life of any grant we award you to administer and analyse grants and for our own research.

We may give copies of this information to individuals and organisations we consult with when assessing applications, when monitoring grants and evaluating the impact of our funding programmes. These organisations may include accountants, external evaluators and other organisations or groups involved in delivering the project.

We may also share information with other government departments, organisations providing match funding and other organisations and individuals with a legitimate interest in applications and grants, or for the prevention or detection of fraud.

We might use the data you provide for our own research. We recognise the need to maintain the confidentiality of vulnerable groups and their details will not be made public in any way, except as required by law.

We will dispose of the information we hold when we no longer require it and in line with our Retention and Disposal policy.

For further details on your privacy see the Derry City and Strabane Privacy Statement Derry City & Strabane - Privacy Policy (derrystrabane.com)

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request any information that we hold, subject to certain exemptions that may apply. This includes information received from third parties, such as, although not limited to, grant applicants, grant holders and contractors.

If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act we will release it, subject to exemptions, although we may consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, you should let us know when you apply.

For further information please visit the Council's web page at <https://www.derrystrabane.com/about-council/freedom-of-information>

Equality Considerations

Derry City and Strabane District Council recognises that discrimination, harassment, and victimisation are unacceptable, and it aims to ensure that no-one engaging with council, receives less favourable facilities or treatment or is harassed or victimised either directly or indirectly on the grounds of:

- religious belief (or none)
- political opinion (or none)
- racial group (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, including Irish Travellers)

- age
- marital or civil partnership status
- sexual orientation
- gender, including gender reassignment
- disability
- having or not having dependants
- trade union membership/non membership
- record of convictions

This Equal Opportunities Policy is fully supported by Elected Members, the Chief Executive and senior management and has been agreed with trade unions and/or employee representatives.

End of guidance document