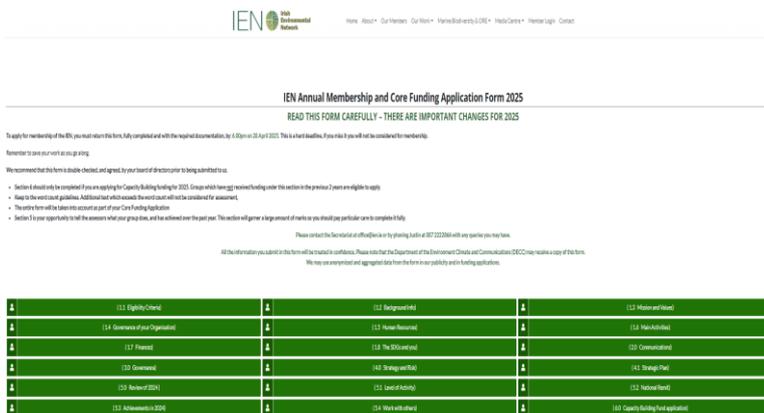


# A brief guide to the IEN Annual Membership/Core Funding process



This guide is intended to help you prepare your application and to have the best chance of doing well.

The advice we give here applies to both your application for membership of the IEN and your application for Core Funding. For simplicity, we refer to the “Assessors” as the target of your work.

However, bear in mind that it is only the Directors of the IEN that grant membership.

## What are you applying for?

Membership of the IEN is annual and all current members, and prospective members, must apply for membership. We also use the annual membership form to allow members to apply for a share of the IEN’s Core Funding grant.

## Main changes for 2025

Based on feedback from our assessors and members, we have tightened up on the questions regarding how your organisation meets our membership criteria for substantial activity, operating nationally, and having a national remit. It is important that your responses demonstrate how your group meets these requirements. The scoring for these sections has changed to reflect their importance.

Remember that your group needs to meet all of our Membership Eligibility Criteria to obtain membership of the IEN before it can be considered for funding.

Please note that your organisation must have completed its registration with the Charities Regulatory Authority. If your organisation has not concluded this process, I suggest that you remedy this immediately. If you are still having difficulty in registering, let Justin know as soon as possible and explain why an exception could be made for your organisation.



We only have to cover another 25 and a half more counties to be truly national

## **The Membership process – an overview**

### **Creating and publishing the form**

The form is drafted by the Secretariat and incorporates changes that were suggested by the Directors and Assessors and the membership sub-committee, and learnings from the process; as well as new elements or concepts that have been agreed by the Directors.

The 2025 form has small but significant changes from previous years so please take some time to consider how you will complete it. The marking scheme has changed to reflect this.

When the form is published groups are given several weeks to complete the form. Reminders and advice on completing the form are regularly sent to the groups throughout the process. In the 3 or 4 days before the end of the process, groups that have not indicated that they are working on the form, are contacted and reminded of the deadline. The Secretariat will provide personal assistance or advice when requested.

### **Deadline for completion of your application**

For 2025 the deadline for completion of the process is 6.00pm on 28th April 2025. This is a hard deadline and if you miss it your group will not be considered for membership. In previous years groups have missed this deadline and were not granted membership, or funding, so make sure that your application is completed before the deadline. To meet the deadline, you must complete the form entirely and also email any required documents to Justin.

### **Processing the applications**

Forms that are submitted well before the deadline are checked by the Secretariat and advice given to the groups re errors and omissions - giving the groups an opportunity to revise or improve their applications before the closing date.

Following the deadline, the Secretariat checks each application form, and the documents submitted, and prepares a report for the Directors. This report lists:

- Any previous members that did not submit an application or attempted to submit a form after the deadline
- The number of applications completed fully
- The number of applications that had issues
- The number of applications that are considered by the Secretariat to be questionable or invalid.

All reporting is by exception. The names of the applicants are not normally used in the report. Where necessary, names are provided to the Directors but the convention is to preserve anonymity as far as possible. This is to remove any potential challenges regarding bias amongst Board Members.

The Directors decide on the applications and which groups will be admitted to membership. In cases where decisions are not clear cut the membership sub-committee generally looks at the application(s) in detail and makes a recommendation to the board.

## Why we ask for this information

The IEN has a multi-annual funding agreement with the Department of the Environment, Climate and communications (DECC). This agreement requires us to ensure certain requirements are met before we can receive funding and before we can disperse it to our members. We have to report to the DECC on the governance and tax compliance of our members as well as on how the funding is spent. Consequently, we request this information through the annual application process and also validate the details provided

## Assessing

The IEN has 3 independent assessors who will look at the applications. The assessors are independent and are not connected to our members. They serve a 3 year term, with one assessor retiring every year. We do not release the names of the assessors, although they are known to the to the board, as we believe that their independence is a very important of the process.

- One assessor is an academic in an environmental field
- One assessor is a Local Authority officer, usually a biodiversity or heritage officer
- One assessor works for a development NGO



The forms and any documentation you have submitted are made available to the three independent IEN Assessors who individually mark the forms out of a total of 100 using the marking scheme shown below. The assessors then meet at the IEN offices, or virtually, together with observers from the DECC, and the CEO and COO from the IEN. At this meeting, the assessors discuss and agree on scores for each of the groups. The DECC only observe the

process and the IEN staff support the process but do not take part in the assessments.

The assessors also pick a small number of Capacity Building applications and ask for further information on the projects – for later decision by email.

During the scoring process, the assessors give general comments and advice for all groups, as well as specific comments for individual groups. They will also give feedback on the 4 themes that are marked.

## Distribution of the funding

The total number of points awarded is divided into the total Core Funding grant available and a point value is established. This is then multiplied by the score awarded to each group.

A letter is then sent to each group. This contains the general comments from the assessors, the specific comments for the group, the marks they received, and a copy of a spreadsheet showing the distribution of the fund.

Depending on the timing of the grant and the process, interim payments may be made to the groups with the balance being distributed upon completion of the assessment process.

## Your part in the process

There are three things that you can do to give your group the best chance of doing well with the form.

1. Start early.
2. Put a little work into the form, you don't have to do it all yourself.
3. Have someone else review the form before submitting it.

and

Make sure you submit it and the required documents on time.

Notices and updates on the form will only go to the two IEN reps that your group has nominated. So if you are not the person who will complete the form, make sure that they are aware of the process and the deadlines. If you need to change or update the nominated reps, you can do so at any time by emailing Justin or Karen.

Remember, applying for membership and core funding is entirely up to you and your group, so make sure that the correct people in your organisation are informed and ready to work on the application.

### Working on the form.

Many groups leave it until the last weekend to start working on the form, and then encounter difficulties. You have approximately 6 weeks to do it so make a plan to complete the form. Ask some of your board members to help. It is best to plan to have the form completed about two weeks before the deadline.

By chipping away at the form you will be able to fit it in with your other work and you will be able to devote quality time to it. You will also be able to revise or reword your earlier work.

Our assessors generally have a lot of experience in marking papers and will quickly pick up on rushed or draft versions of a form. They also remember the forms that were submitted last year so try to avoid copying and pasting from a previous application. If you don't take the application seriously, the assessors will pick up on this and will mark you down.

Be as clear as possible and stick to the word limits. Make it as easy as possible for the assessors to mark your application. Remember that they have to mark 39 applications, and check 39 websites, 39 sets of accounts, and 39 sets of accompanying documents, so if you write clearly and concisely, your application will stand out.

Another suggestion is to ask yourself if you are the best person to complete the form. Would someone else in your organisation be better at completing the form?



## Starting work on the form

- Check that your organisation is tax compliant. If it isn't, sort this out immediately. Remember that you will need to be tax compliant when you submit the application and that we are not allowed to distribute money to groups that are not tax compliant, so check this now and sort any problems.
- Check that you have a copy of your most recent financial statements (accounts) these are the ones that have been submitted to the CRO and the CRA. This will probably be your 2023 accounts, although you may have completed your 2024 set. It is very important that you have credited the (Core) funding from the IEN and DECC in your accounts.
- Check that your website is up to date, and that your social media is active.
- You will have to submit a list of contact details for your board of directors so make sure that you have these details to hand.
- Save the form as you go along. When saving, you can also print out a copy of the data you entered.

Some people find it easier to draft their responses for the free-text sections of the form on their computer and then copy the text to the form.

If you encounter problems with the form or have a query about how to answer something, you can always ask Justin for help or assistance. Remember that the other members of your board can help with the form so don't feel that it is all up to you.

When you have completed the form it is a good idea to ask your board to look over it before submitting it. Having other people look through it and make suggestions, fix typos, and spot errors is a really good idea. Forms with obvious errors or inconsistencies will get marked down.

Don't leave it to the very last minute to submit the form - problems with broadband, or your computer could mean you missing the application deadline.

## What activities can be referred to in your responses on the form

Obviously, only work that is done on behalf of your group can be included in an application.

Acceptable activities for an application are:

- Only work that is done on behalf of the member group can be included in an application
- Your organisation should be the main, or principal, participant in any activity you refer to
- Work that is mentioned should be in line with the objects clause of your Memo and Arts
- Work that is claimed should be performed by members/volunteers of your group
- Work that is claimed should be performed in the name of your group
- Work that is claimed should have tangible results or outputs.

## Marking the form, and the marks you receive

The marking scheme for the form is very simple.

**The percentages awarded for each area are as follows**

<b>Strategy</b>	
Strategic plan	15%
Stakeholder and risk assessment	5%
<b>Operations</b>	
Activity	30%
National reach and National remit	30%
<b>Governance, accountability, transparency</b>	15%
<b>Finances</b>	5%

The assessors will award marks for all of your answers, and will take into account any extra information that you may wish to provide, such as publications that you made or articles that you were featured in. The marks cover 4 broad themes and the percentages allocated to each theme are shown above. As some parts of the form cover more than one of these areas, the Assessors will award marks for how you demonstrated your organisation's performance on each of the themes. And will provide feedback on each of the 4 themes

It is obvious from the marking scheme that most of the marks are given to the questions in section 5, which covers the actions and activities that your group conducted in the past year. You should pay special attention to these sections. It is important to demonstrate that your organisation is active throughout the year, and is operating Nationally or on issues of national importance.

The final mark that your group is awarded is agreed by the three assessors. At the assessors meeting, they discuss each group in turn and they reveal the marks that they have awarded the group. They discuss the application and give their comments on the application, noting the successes, omissions, failures, etc. If the marks are close, they will agree a score and move on to the next group.

If there is a large difference in the marks, the assessors will discuss, in more detail, how they arrived at their score and their opinion of the application. They will eventually agree on a score that all three are happy with.

The assessor's comments cover the areas which they feel you need to give attention to.



I think that the Assessors will realise you used Chat GPT to fill out the form

## What information are the Assessors looking for

The form is marked across 4 themes (Strategy Operations, Governance, and Financial). 60% of the marks are allocated to operations (the work that your organisation does, and did in 2024) so it is important to focus on this area. Obviously the sections of the form can cover more than one theme. The table below shows the main themes covered by the various sections of the form.

Section	Main Theme	Other themes that may be Included
1.1 Membership Eligibility Criteria	Governance	Operations
1.2 Background Information	Governance	Operations
1.3 Your Mission and Values	Operations	Strategy
1.5 Human Resources and Volunteers	Operations	Finance
1.6 Your Unique Contribution to Our Network	Operations	Strategy
1.7 Your Main Activities	Operations	Strategy, Finance, Governance
1.8 Finances	Financial	Governance
1.9 The SDGs and You	Operations	Strategy
2.0 Communications	Operations	Strategy
3.0 Governance	Governance	Operations
4.0 Your Stakeholders	Strategy	Governance
4.1 Strategy and Risk	Strategy	Governance
5.0 – 5.4 Review of Your Activity in 2023	Operations	Strategy, Finance, Governance
6.0 Capacity Building Grant application	Optional	

## The important sections of the form

As you can see, over half of the available marks are given for what your group actually does. So it is important that you give some context to the assessors for what your group does and what your ethos is.

**Section 1.6** asks you to rank and identify the main activities of your group and allows you to show what your group believes is important and how you decide on what activities your group undertakes.

**Section 1.8** asks you to give a larger context for your work and to link it to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Select the goals and sub-goals that your work compliments or works towards.

**Section 5** is the most important part of the whole form and it attracts a large proportion of the marks. This section is your chance to tell the Assessors what your group has done over the last year and to explain to them how or why this is important. Spend some time working on your response to this section. It is important to focus on demonstrating that your organisation works on a national basis and has been active over the past year.

Demonstrating that your group is both active and active nationally are areas that both the Directors and Assessors regard as being very important to your Membership Application and your Core Funding Application so make sure that you illustrate this in your application. You can use the same examples in your answers to all of the questions in section 5 but make sure that you demonstrate that your group meets all of our Membership Eligibility Criteria.

Do not worry about admitting failure or errors on your form. The assessors generally regard frankness and/or self-criticism as a positive aspect of a group, so be honest on the form.

Try to stick to the point in your answers. One comment that the assessors regularly make is that the form is not a forum for airing grievances or rehashing annoyances.

### Capacity Building applications

The last section of the form is where you can apply to the Capacity Building fund. The fund is there to help groups build their capacity and move the group forward.

Capacity Building applications should be for self-contained projects which have a definite start and end point. They should not include employing people or committing to long-term spending unless you can demonstrate how these will be self-financing.

In general 3-4 groups are awarded funding per year and the largest award is approximately €12,000.

To apply for the fund you need to explain the project in 200 words. You should give an idea of the total cost. There is no need to go into great detail – the important thing here is to communicate the idea and how it will improve your group.

The assessors will select the applications that they like best and will ask for further information, including detailed costings etc before deciding on which ones to award funding to. The evaluation criteria will include: Benefit to your organisation, value for money; creative thinking/innovation, viability and critical timing.

### Other information required as part of the application

In addition to the form itself, you are required to send (by email) the following information to Justin:

You must email the documents listed below as part of your 2025 application:

1. Your most recent audited/certified accounts or CRA returns
2. List of current company Directors/Trustees and their personal contact details (personal email addresses will suffice)
3. Your strategic plan
4. The tracking page from your Governance Code records
5. A copy of your Memorandum and Articles of Association, or Constitution, if they have changed since 2023
6. **Optional** - copies of, or links to, publications you featured in in 2024

### Summary

It takes a few hours to complete the form, assuming that you have all of the required information to hand. So allocate some quality time to completing the form.

- Start early
- Make a plan for how you will work on the form
- Involve other members of your organisation in the completion of the work



I can definitely have it ready by  
Tuesday Morning

- If you have problems, let us know asap
- Save the form as you go along
- Do not leave it until the last minute to start on the form
- Be clear and concise in your answers
- Stick to the point
- Check your details, and figures
- Get someone to look over the form before you have submitted it
- Do not miss the deadline
- Make sure that you submit the required documents on time
- Start early