

Information for Applicants

Background

NIHACT was founded in 1978, when the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT), which operates on a UK-wide basis, donated £3,000 to create an independent charity in Northern Ireland. HACT also founded a similar charity in Scotland.

The Trust deed specifies that NIHACT has only one trustee – the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA).

NIFHA promotes, represents and supports its housing association members in Northern Ireland. It is constituted as a not-for-profit company governed by its housing association members.

The Committee

The Trust deed permitted NIFHA to establish a committee to administer the Charitable Trust and to lay down the committee's rules and procedures. In 2003 a barrister clarified that the NIHACT Committee should comply with NIFHA's constitution and the NIHACT trust deed. Therefore, it is a committee of NIFHA but it must also operate within the terms of the NIHACT trust deed.

The Federation's constitution specifies that each of its committees must include at least four members of the Federation's governing body (NIFHA Council) and at least one of these members must be present for any committee decision to be valid. NIHACT Committee's therefore comprises nine members, of whom four are members of NIFHA Council. The other five do not have to be involved with housing associations but they should be able to contribute effectively to the charity's work.

As part of a three-year rota, one third of the committee members retire every year but they may be re-appointed by NIFHA Council. Each year NIFHA Council appoints the Chairperson, who must retire from that office (but not necessarily from the Committee) for at least a year after serving continuously for three years.

NIFHA Council has delegated considerable authority to the NIHACT Committee. The Committee takes all significant decision relating to NIHACT, apart from those it considers likely to:

- Expose the Trust or the Federation to major risk;
- Impose major resource commitments on the Trust or the Federation; or
- Raise major issues of principle for the Trust or the Federation.

In line with these principles, NIHACT's strategy, criteria for determining applications for assistance, budget and audited accounts are subject to approval by NIFHA Council.

The NIHACT Committee acts on behalf of the Federation in relation to all other matters within its scope. These include:

- maximising the Trust's income, controlling its costs and exercising general oversight of the personnel undertaking NIHACT's day-to-day work;
- processing applications for assistance effectively, economically and fairly;
- properly account for the Trust's resources;

- issuing an annual report; and
- commissioning projects to formulate recommendations on subjects within its scope.

The Trust has no paid staff or office facilities of its own but the Federation provides these services as a donation “in kind”. Furthermore, the Committee members undertake visits and prepare reports on the applications for assistance made to NIHACT. These two factors mean that the Charity’s administrative costs are low.

Scope

NIHACT’s strategy is to give to applications likely to enhance the social, economic or environmental sustainability of communities in which Northern Ireland’s housing associations operate. This does not preclude it, however from assisting ‘any charitable purpose’[♦].

Criteria for applications

The Trust will use the following criteria to assess applications for assistance:

1. We will release no more than £30,000 per annum.
2. Only occasionally will we approve grants or loans of more than £5,000.
3. We may support any charitable activity but we will give preference to applications expected to enhance the social, economic or environmental sustainability of communities in which housing associations affiliated to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) are operating.
4. We will give preference to applications promoting volunteering, rather than the employment of paid staff.
5. We may give preference to applications from organisations which, in our opinion, have less capacity to successfully apply to major sources of funding.
6. We aim to support projects demonstrating long-term viability or with a realistic plan to achieve long-term viability.
7. We expect applicants to invest their own funds in the project for which they are seeking assistance. This should be to the greatest extent reasonable while maintaining long-term financial viability.
8. If we believe the applicant can reasonably afford to repay a loan while maintaining financial viability, NIHACT will offer a loan rather than a grant.
9. Our funding will normally be given in the form of a discrete sum of money. Only in exceptional circumstances will we approve repeat applications or requests for additional assistance to cover costs overlooked or not foreseen by the applicant.
10. Our funding may be used to complement public resources. In exceptional circumstances the Trust may use its funds to substitute for public expenditure. For example, we may decide to support an initiative we believe will demonstrate sufficient public benefit to convince authorities they should assist similar projects.
11. We will accept applications from incorporated and unincorporated bodies but not from individuals. Charitable status is not necessary but the activity for which you are seeking support must fall into the definition of charity[♦].

[♦] As defined by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

12. We attach certain terms and conditions to our grants or loans. For example, we normally require applicants to publicly acknowledge our assistance, supply good quality photographs of the project and provide information on the effectiveness of the completed project within specified timescales.

Application and assessment procedure

The Trust will use the following procedure to assess applications for assistance:

1. Applications should be made on NIHACT's standard form and sent or delivered to:
The NIHACT Secretary
c/o Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
38 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LB.
2. Your application must be dated and carry the *original signature* of a person authorised to act on your organisation's behalf.
3. The Trust's Secretary will acknowledge all applications in a letter. It will give our target dates for considering the application and issuing a decision.
4. If our Secretary considers the application does not satisfy the Trust's funding criteria, a recommendation to this effect will be made. If the Committee agrees, we will advise you in writing and outline the reasons for the decision.
5. If your written application appears to satisfy NIHACT's initial funding criteria, one of our Committee members will visit your project. From this a written report with a recommendation will be made. In the case of a relatively large, or complex, application more than one NIHACT Committee member may be involved in the visit.
6. Your application and the Committee member's report with his / her recommendation will all be considered during the next NIHACT Committee meeting. We generally meet every two months.
7. NIHACT's Secretary will write to advise you of our Committee's decision. This will fall into one of the following three categories:
 - a. accept your application (with or without conditions);
 - b. request further information; or
 - c. turn down your application and outline why this was decided.
8. If you are dissatisfied with the Committee's decision you have the right to appeal. You must submit a written request for the decision to be reconsidered. Our Secretary will put your appeal request to the next Committee meeting for consideration. A letter will then be sent advising you of the outcome.
9. If you believe the procedure for reconsidering your case has not been properly followed you may send a written complaint to:
The Chairperson
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
38 Hill Street, Belfast, BT1 2LB.
10. The Chairperson will investigate your complaint and send you a final decision in writing.

Further information

If you'd like further information on the Trust, to clarify the funding criteria or the application procedure then please do not hesitate to contact NIHACT:

T: 028 9023 0446 **E:** nihact@nifha.org