Ayrshire Rural and Islands Ambition (ARIA) Fund

Main Fund
Applicant Guidance

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V2 May 2025

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Ayrshire Rural and Islands Ambition (ARIA) Fund. The ARIA Fund empowers local communities to address their unique challenges. As part of the Scottish Government's Community Led Local Development (CLLD) programme, ARIA operates through a bottom-up decision-making process, with funding priorities and project selections determined by representatives from the local area who form the Local Action Group (LAG).

Fund Structure

Body	Role
ARIA Fund LAG	Leads the fund and makes all key decisions, including grant allocations
South Ayrshire Council	Acts as Lead Partner, administering funds and managing staff on behalf of the LAG.

This document provides applicant guidance for the main ARIA fund process and **should be read carefully before applying.**

2. Pre-Application Engagement

All applicants must complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) before submitting a full application via the ARIA webpage. The **eligibility criteria** should be read prior to committing to this step. Applications without this step **will not be accepted**.

Please complete and return the application form in **Microsoft Word** format.

3. Key Dates

- **21/05/25**, Fund launch
  25/07/25 midnight - Application deadline.
- Early September- Applications assessed.
- Mid-September - Grant Award Letters issued.
  Note: Projects must not incur spend before this point. Please do not schedule project activity before the confirmed start date.
- **28/02/26** – Final date for submission of claims.

4. Grant Specifications

4.1.   Grant size - **£5,000 to £50,000**.

4.2   Applicants may request up to 90% of total eligible project costs, with a minimum of 10% match funding. However, the final grant award may be lower than requested, depending on the availability of funds and the assessment of the application. In such cases, applicants will be expected to secure the additional match funding from their own or other sources.

4.3   Match funding must:

- Account for at least 10% of total eligible project costs.

- Be in cash, not in kind.
- Be secured at time of application.

4.4   **Grant Payments**

- **Community/Third Sector organisations**: 50% paid upfront, followed by two payments of approximately 25% in arrears. The final 25% is released upon submission of valid cost evidence.
- **Businesses**: payment is made in arrears. The final 25% is withheld until valid cost evidence is provided.

In both cases, the final 25% payment is also contingent upon a successful monitoring visit by a LAG representative (where physical items have been procured) and fulfilment of all reporting requirements. This visit is likely to take place around mid-March 2026.

5. Assessment

Applications will first undergo a technical check by ARIA Fund staff to assess eligibility, alignment with fund priorities, cost accuracy, submission of supporting documents, and other criteria. Applications that best meet the fund's objectives will then be forwarded to the LAG for full assessment.

Eligible Area

The eligible area is rural and islands (Arran and Cumbrae) Ayrshire defined by the ARIA Eligibility Map

Please enter your project's postcode into the search box at the top right hand side of the map to check if it falls within the eligible area. Please note, an organisation does not need to be registered in the Ayrshire eligible area if the project itself is being delivered within it.

Fund Priorities

Projects must align with at least one ARIA Fund priority and one Scottish Government priority for 2025/2026. Applicants should identify **up to two** of the most relevant priorities from each category on the application form. Selecting more than two from either category **may result in your application being penalised.**

ARIA Priority	Objective
Community Wealth Building (CWB)	Community Wealth Building (CWB) is about retaining wealth, jobs, and enterprises in the local area to build more sustainable and resilient rural and island economies. ARIA aims to support communities, organisations, and enterprises to embed CWB principles in their activities and apply them in practice.
Quality of Life	To support communities to maintain a good quality of life for all age groups/capabilities.

Community Led Tourism (CLT) Only available to Third Sector/ community organisations		To support communities to have full ownership and management of their local tourism experience, ensuring the economic benefits of tourism stay within their community.
Enterprise	Rural Enterprise including Community Enterprise	To support rural and community enterprises—particularly in key sectors such as tourism, food and drink, accommodation, and social care—to develop and grow.
	Rural Jobs	To support local people to access jobs closer to home with a higher wage bracket, created/safeguarded by rural/community enterprises.
Net Zero	Climate Change Mitigation	To support projects that contribute to/escalate progress towards net zero ambitions through lowering of carbon emissions.
	Just Transition	To support job transition to the green economy, with rural/community enterprise.
	Climate Change Adaptation	To support the development of the region's natural assets in ways that enhance carbon sequestration, flood attenuation, biodiversity, and local supply chain development. Where applicable, ARIA will complement the work of principal funders—such as NatureScot and Peatland Action—by supporting carbon sequestration activities.

Please see the **Appendix** for project types/examples associated with the ARIA priorities.

Scottish Government Priorities 2024/2025
Eradicating child poverty
Growing the economy
Tackling the climate emergency
Improving public services

Eligible Organisations

- Community groups and third sector organisations with a constitution or legal incorporation. Groups without this status may still apply through a constituted or incorporated parent/sponsor organisation. In such cases, financial details (e.g. accounts and bank information) must be provided by the parent organisation.
- Businesses
- Farms (for non-agricultural activities, diversification projects only)
- Organisations of up to 49 FTE employees. Large organisations of 50 full time employees and over are ineligible.

It should be noted that micro business (up to ten full time employees) applications will be prioritised by the fund but applications from small businesses (up to forty-nine full time employees) will be considered, on a case-by-case basis.

Eligible Activity

The ARIA fund has approximately **£400,000** to allocate in 2025/2026 with only capital funding available this year.

Examples of Eligible Capital Spend
- Community Transport Vehicles (other vehicle support will not be eligible)
- Plant/ Machinery (not including equipment for core farming activities)
- Furniture, Fixtures and Fittings
- Green Energy Equipment
- Improvement to/expansion of existing buildings/facilities
- Improving land, e.g.: landscaping works, playgrounds etc.

Capital spend will be permitted where statutory regulatory requirements e.g. planning/building warrant/listed buildings consent are already in place or are confirmed as not required at the time of application.

Statutory Regulatory Requirements
If any eligible project expenditure requires statutory or regulatory approvals (e.g. planning permission, building warrant, listed building consent, or events licence), copies of these approvals must be submitted with your application. If no approvals are required, evidence confirming this must be provided.

Ineligible Activity

- Expenditure committed prior to the ARIA grant award letter (successful applicants) - expected mid-September 2025.
- Statutory duties.
- Delivery of courses which form part of primary/secondary/tertiary (e.g.: colleges, university) education programmes.
- Staffing costs
- Gifts and hospitality.

- Primary production of food.
- Purchase of land/buildings.
- Financial charges– bank/credit card/loan charges/foreign exchange commission/losses etc.
- Costs involved in winding up a company/organisation.

6. Supporting Documents

The following applicable supporting documentation must be supplied with your application.

Document
Constitution/governing document (if applicable)*.
Incorporation document (if applicable)*.

Financial Information *
 	
Community/third sector organisations:
 	
  • Latest year of accounts (audited/examined if thresholds reached).
 	
Businesses:
 	
  • Latest year of accounts (audited/examined according to regulator thresholds).
  • Sole traders – latest year of accounts plus evidence of HMRC account with Unique Tax Reference (UTR).
  • Management accounts to bridge gap between date of above/present.
  • Business plan

All applicants (Community/Third Sector organisations _and_ Businesses)
 	
  • 3 months' bank statements*[1] (for the account the grant will be paid into and as close to the date of application as possible)
  • Cashflow projections, covering at least one year.
  • Evidence that match funding is in place*
  • VAT certificate where applicable, evidence not needed where not*
  • 1 piece of cost evidence for costs £500 - £1,000
  • 3 quotes for eligible costs >£1000

Statutory regulatory requirements
 	
  • Valid lease/title deeds, in place at least 5 years post project completion.
  • Where lease, landlord permission to carry out works.
  • Evidence Statutory Regulatory Requirements eg: planning/building warrant/event licence in place/not needed.

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[1] *****From parent/sponsor organisation where a smaller organisation applies through this route.

Other Supporting Evidence

- **Need/Demand –** Please provide evidence of project need or demand.
- **Local Support –** Where available, please include **up to two** letters of support.
- **Sustainability and Future Income** - Applicants are encouraged to include information on how the project will be sustained beyond the funding period. This may include expected future income, additional grant funding, or other plans to support long-term delivery and impact. A cash flow forecast should be submitted if available, although this is not mandatory for third sector organisations.

  Please note: All trading businesses must submit a business plan and supporting financial evidence as part of their application.

ARIA Equal Opportunities Form

This form helps us understand how the ARIA Fund is supporting inclusive rural development. Responses will not be used to assess your application but may inform how we monitor and improve reach across Ayrshire. You can also use the final section of the form (Section 7) to highlight any additional ways your project supports inclusion, equality, or diversity.

Appendix

Priority	Objective	Examples (Not Limited To)
Community Wealth Building (CWB) Community Wealth Building is about retaining wealth, jobs, and enterprises in the local area to create more sustainable and resilient rural and island economies. ARIA aims to support communities, organisations, and enterprises to apply Community Wealth Building approaches to their activities.	To support communities, organisations, and enterprises to engage with CWB.	• **Local Procurement** Prioritising the use of local contractors, suppliers, or producers for capital works, events, or equipment—keeping spending within the local economy. • **Community Ownership of Assets** Improving land or buildings for long-term community benefit (e.g. community-run shops, halls, or hubs) that generate income and create local employment. • **Support for Local Enterprise** Creating or expanding locally rooted businesses or social enterprises that provide goods, services, or jobs tailored to rural or island needs. • **Circular Economy and Reuse Projects** Initiatives that reduce waste and generate value locally, such as community repair cafés, tool libraries, upcycling schemes, or food redistribution networks.
Quality of Life This priority focuses on supporting projects that help maintain or improve the wellbeing of people living in rural and island communities. ARIA welcomes initiatives that foster social connection, access to services, and inclusive spaces—ensuring a good quality of life for people of all ages and abilities, particularly in areas where local services or amenities may be under threat.	To support communities to maintain a good quality. of life for all age groups/capabilities.	• **Fit out or refurbishment of community spaces** to support events, activities, and essential local services. • **Installation of equipment** that enables social interaction, group activities, or wellbeing programmes. • **Creation or improvement of shared outdoor spaces**, such as gardens, seating areas, or accessible play zones. • **Capital investment to retain or repurpose amenities** at risk due to reductions in public services (e.g., libraries, post offices, day centres). • **Improvements to digital or physical infrastructure** that increase connectivity, such as public Wi-Fi zones or transport-related works. • **Purchase of tools or equipment** to support local volunteering efforts and community-led service delivery.

Community Led Tourism (CLT) Only available to third sector/ community organisations	To support communities to have full ownership and management of their local tourism experience, ensuring the economic benefits of tourism stay within their community.	• **Capital improvements to community-owned accommodation** facilities, such as bunkhouses, hostels, or hotels. • **Investment in volunteer-run entertainment or events venues**, upgraded to host performances, films, or cultural experiences. • **Investment in community-owned attractions**, such as museums, heritage centres, or cultural landmarks. • **Fit out of visitor retail or café spaces**, offering locally produced food, drink, or crafts managed by community groups. • **Creation or improvement of visitor facilities**, including toilets, shelters, bike storage, or accessible paths. • **Development of trails and interpretation infrastructure**, such as walking routes, signage, and storytelling installations.

Enterprise This priority supports rural and community enterprises to grow sustainably, diversify their activities, and strengthen their role in the local economy—particularly in key sectors such as tourism, food and drink, social care, and net zero innovation.	**Rural Enterprise including Community Enterprise**	To support rural/community enterprises to develop and grow.	• **Investment in amenities/attractions** which will bring added community benefit/business resilience. • **Development of natural assets** to support rural/community enterprise activity, such as path improvements, signage, or infrastructure that supports active travel, outdoor experiences, or environmental education. • **Community-led tourism or agri-tourism initiatives**—including farm-based experiences, rural craft enterprises, or eco-tourism infrastructure.

	Rural Jobs	To support local people to access jobs closer to home with a higher wage bracket, created/safeguarded by rural/community enterprises.	• **Fit-out of Community-Run Digital or Co-Working Hubs** Converting underused buildings into shared workspaces equipped with Wi-Fi, desks, and meeting facilities—enabling local employment, remote work, and microenterprise growth. • **Capital Investment in Food or Tourism Enterprises** to Expand Operations • **Purchasing equipment or upgrading premises** to support increased production, seasonal extension, or service delivery—creating or safeguarding jobs in key rural sectors. • **Adaptation of Buildings for Social Care or Wellbeing Services** Refurbishing community-owned premises to deliver localised care services, therapy, or respite care—generating employment in a growing rural sector with year-round demand.
Net Zero	**Climate Change Mitigation**	To support projects that contribute to/escalate progress towards net zero ambitions through lowering of carbon emissions.	• **Installation of energy efficiency measures** in community buildings (e.g. LED lighting, insulation, air source heat pumps) • **Purchase of e-bikes, cargo bikes or bike shelters** to encourage active, low-carbon travel in rural areas. • **Installation of electric-vehicle (EV) charging points at community facilities** to support low-carbon transport options in rural areas.
	Just Transition	To support job transition to the green economy, with rural/community enterprises.	• **Purchase and installation of renewable energy systems** (e.g. solar PV, wind, battery storage) for community-run buildings • **Investment in local growing infrastructure**, such as polytunnels, irrigation systems, and composting equipment • **Green technology upgrades** for social enterprises or local businesses offering new low-carbon services or training.

| Climate Change Adaptation | To develop the region's natural assets which would enhance carbon sequestration/flood attenuation/ biodiversity/local supply chain development | • **Peatland restoration**. ARIA will complement the work of principal funders—such as NatureScot and Peatland Action—by supporting carbon sequestration activities.

• **Tree planting or native woodland creation** to support biodiversity, carbon sequestration and eco-tourism.

• **Investment in local food and drink supply chains** that improve climate resilience and reduce dependency on long-distance imports—such as processing, storage, or distribution infrastructure. |