



Invitation to Tender

Development of An Cosán's Organisational Strategy 2027–2031

An Cosán invites suitably qualified consultants or organisations to submit proposals to support the development of our next organisational strategy for 2027–2031.

Celebrating 40 years since its establishment, An Cosán works to break the cycle of generational poverty through education, leadership development, early years support and pathways to employment. Our work is guided by the values of connection, compassion and courage, and a commitment to creating lasting change for communities and families across Ireland.

The strategy development process has already commenced internally. We are now seeking an external consultant or team to work alongside the organisation from October 2026, supporting a participatory, evidence-informed and future-focused process that will conclude by 15 March 2027.

The new strategy will set a clear direction for An Cosán's work over the next five years and strengthen our contribution to a more equitable society.

About An Cosán

Headquartered in Tallaght, Co. Dublin, An Cosán, Irish for “The Path”, is an award-winning community education charity. With more than 120 staff and an annual budget of approximately €4.2 million, An Cosán delivers a wide and growing range of services locally and nationally, working with over 1,500 learners, children and families each year.

Our work includes adult education (spanning access, further and higher education), early years care and education, family support and counselling services.

Founded in 1986, An Cosán is recognised as Ireland's largest community-led education organisation. Our work is rooted in community development, learner-centred practice, inclusion and social justice, with a long-standing commitment to creating pathways for those furthest from opportunity.

The next strategy will build on the current 2022–2026 strategy and reflect both organisational learning and a changing external environment. It will also draw on research and engagement activity undertaken during 2026, including research on community-led education, An Cosán's early years model and Lifestart, together with findings from the Participatory Action Research project.

Purpose of the Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is to support An Cosán to design and deliver a robust strategic planning process and to produce a clear, compelling and implementable organisational strategy for 2027–2031.

The successful consultant or organisation will work collaboratively with the Board, CEO, senior management team, staff, learners, families, community stakeholders, partners and other relevant external voices.

The process should be inclusive, practical and energising. It should strengthen ownership within An Cosán and support the organisation to shape its own future, rather than treating strategy development as an external or extractive exercise.

Strategic Context

The strategy development process should take account of:

Progress, learning and outstanding challenges from the current 2022–2026 strategy.



An Cosán's role as a community-led organisation working across adult education, early years, family support, counselling, social enterprise and community development.

The findings of the 2026 research on community-led community education, including its focus on learner-centred, participatory, dialogical and values-led practice.

The findings of the 2026 early years research, Lifestart research, including An Cosán's holistic and community-based approach to early childhood education and care, its links to family support, inclusion and community wellbeing.

Findings and insights from An Cosán's Community Education Forum, planned for Quarter 1 of 2027, will be incorporated into the development of the new strategy.

Insights generated through stakeholder events and any related seminars, webinars or anniversary engagement activity.

Relevant national and EU policy, funding, demographic, social context and funder strategies shaping community education, early years provision, family support and anti-poverty work in Ireland.

Objectives

The objectives of the assignment are to:

Conduct a succinct strategic review of the current 2022–2026 strategy, focusing on key achievements, gaps, risks and emerging priorities, without reopening or repeating work already completed.

Facilitate a participatory strategy process that meaningfully engages the Board, CEO, senior management team, staff, learners, families, community representatives, funders, policy stakeholders and partners.

Synthesise internal evidence, stakeholder input, organisational learning and external research into a coherent strategic framework for 2027–2031.

Ensure that the strategy reflects An Cosán's mission, values, community-led ethos and commitment to educational equality and social change, building on the existing vision and reviewing it only as needed, rather than starting from scratch.

Support An Cosán to identify a small number of clear strategic priorities, intended outcomes and enabling conditions for delivery over the 2027–2031 period.

Develop a proportionate implementation, performance and accountability framework to accompany the strategy, including a small number of meaningful indicators, baseline measures and annual or phased milestones; clear lead responsibility; relevant delivery risks, dependencies and resourcing considerations; and practical arrangements for Board and senior management monitoring and review.

Produce a final strategy document and supporting summary materials that are clear, accessible, persuasive and practical to implement.

Scope of Work

The successful tenderer will be expected to undertake, at minimum, the following work.

1. Inception and Process Design

Meet with the Chair of the Board, CEO and agreed internal project leads to confirm scope, timeline, governance, roles and ways of working.

Review background materials, including the existing strategy, relevant internal documents, available organisational data, and the four 2026 research project outputs.

Propose a detailed methodology and engagement plan for the strategy process, including how the 2026 research and existing stakeholder insights will inform strategy development.

Support the establishment or refinement of a small steering group or reference group, including Board and senior management representation, to guide the process.

2. Review and Evidence Synthesis

Conduct a succinct review of the current 2022–2026 strategy, drawing out headline learning and implications in a focused and time-efficient way.

Synthesise findings from the four 2026 research projects into clear strategic implications for An Cosán.



Review relevant national and EU policy and sector context to ensure the strategy is future-focused and grounded in the realities of the Irish social, education, community and funding landscape.

3. Consultation and Engagement

Design and facilitate an inclusive consultation process with key internal and external stakeholders.

Engage, at minimum, with the Board, CEO, senior management team, staff, learners, families, community stakeholders and selected strategic partners.

Use methods that are accessible, participatory and appropriate for different groups, for example workshops, focus groups, interviews, surveys, facilitated conversations or a blend of methods.

4. Strategic Framework Development

Develop a draft strategic framework that builds on An Cosán's existing vision, mission and values, reviewing and refining these only where appropriate rather than redesigning them from the ground up.

Define strategic priorities, intended outcomes and key organisational enablers for 2027–2031.

Test emerging themes with An Cosán's CEO, Board, senior management team and steering group, and refine them based on feedback.

Develop a concise "strategy on a page", or equivalent summary format, to support internal and external communication and shared ownership.

5. Drafting and Finalisation

Prepare a full draft strategy for review by An Cosán.

Revise the draft following structured feedback from the CEO, senior management team, steering group and Board.

Produce a final strategy document for submission to the Board for consideration and approval by 15 March 2027, together with a summary version and presentation-ready materials.

6. Implementation Considerations

Propose a high-level implementation and performance framework for the first phase of delivery, including suggested outcomes, indicators/KPIs, key milestones, accountabilities, enabling actions and arrangements for monitoring progress.

Support discussion with the CEO, senior management team and staff on what successful implementation will require in practice, including culture, communication, sequencing and review.

Expected Deliverables

Tenderers should include the delivery of the following in their proposal, while also suggesting any improvements they believe would strengthen the process:

Inception note setting out the proposed methodology, workplan, consultation approach, governance arrangements and timeline.

Short review paper or briefing summarising key lessons from the current strategy and the strategic implications of the 2026 research and consultation inputs.

Facilitation of agreed consultation sessions and a concise synthesis of findings from each phase.

A full draft strategy document for feedback and revision.

Strategy on a page summary.

A final An Cosán Strategy 2027–2031, finalised by 15 March 2027 and ready for Board consideration and approval.

A short summary or slide-based presentation suitable for internal and external communication.

A high-level implementation and monitoring framework for years 1-2.

Proposed Approach

An Cosán is seeking an approach that is highly collaborative, creative, inclusive and grounded in community education values.



The process should:

- Build ownership within the organisation rather than outsource thinking entirely to an external provider.
- Be participatory at every level and create space for reflection, learning and dialogue.
- Use plain, accessible language and formats that can be understood by a wide range of stakeholders.
- Balance ambition with realism, resulting in a strategy that is visionary, evidence-informed and implementable.
- Recognise that An Cosán's impact is relational, long-term and community-based, and should not be reduced to narrow or purely transactional measures.
- Respect the significant strategic work already undertaken by An Cosán and focus on building, sharpening and prioritising rather than beginning again from scratch.

Governance and Ways of Working

The consultant will report directly to the CEO, who is driving this process with the Board and senior management team. The consultant will work closely with an agreed internal steering group. This group will help shape the process, facilitate access to stakeholders, test emerging thinking and support timely review of drafts.

The successful tenderer will be expected to provide regular progress updates, flag risks early, and allow adequate time for review and feedback at each key stage. Drafts should be provided in a timely way, with agreed windows for comment and revision built into the schedule.

Indicative Timeline

The timeline below is indicative. Tenderers may propose refinements, provided the final strategy is completed in Quarter 1 of 2027.

- First week of October 2026: Invitation to tender issued.
- By 15 October 2026: Deadline for tenderers to submit clarification questions.
- 27 October 2026, 5pm (Irish time): Deadline for submission of tenders.
- Late October to early November 2026: Consultant appointed and inception meeting held.
- Early November 2026: Document review, process design and steering group arrangements.
- November 2026: Internal consultation with the Board, CEO, senior management team and staff.
- November to early December 2026: External stakeholder engagement and synthesis.
- December 2026: Draft strategic themes and priorities developed and discussed with the Board, CEO and senior management team.
- January 2027: Full draft strategy submitted for review.
- February 2027: Feedback consolidated; consultant prepares a revised draft for final review.
- By 15 March 2027: Final revisions completed and final strategy submitted for Board consideration and approval.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

Selection criterion	Weighting
Value for money, including a clear, transparent and proportionate cost proposal	40%
Demonstrated experience in strategic planning and facilitation	15%
Understanding of community education, social inclusion, early years, community development and/or the non-profit sector	15%
Understanding of the assignment and the quality and suitability of the proposed methodology	15%
Ability to deliver a participatory and inclusive process	5%
Quality of writing and strategic analysis	5%
Capacity to complete the work within the required timeframe	5%
Total	100%

Ownership, Confidentiality and Compliance



All materials produced as part of this assignment will remain the property of An Cosán.

The successful tenderer will be expected to treat all information shared during the process as confidential, comply with relevant data protection requirements, and provide tax clearance documentation as required.

Payment terms will be agreed by contract and linked to satisfactory completion of agreed stages and deliverables.

Tender Submission Requirements

Proposals should be concise and practical, demonstrate a clear understanding of An Cosán's requirements, and include:

- A brief description of the consultant or organisation, including relevant experience and examples of similar strategy development assignments, particularly in nonprofit, community, education, early years or social-impact settings.

- Names, roles and relevant CVs of the people who would undertake the work, identifying the lead consultant.

- The proposed approach and methodology, including how diverse stakeholders will be engaged and how the 2026 research and existing organisational learning will inform the strategy.

- A workplan and timeline setting out key stages, consultation points, draft submission dates and review periods, with the final strategy submitted for Board consideration and approval by 15 March 2027.

- Confirmation that the proposal covers the expected deliverables set out in this invitation, together with any suggested refinements.

- A clear, itemised cost proposal covering all professional fees and anticipated expenses, including preparation, facilitation, drafting, revisions and travel where relevant. VAT should be shown separately where applicable, with the total cost clearly stated.

- Brief statements on confidentiality, data protection and any proposed use of AI or digital tools in delivering the assignment.

- Names and contact details for at least two relevant client references.

- An Cosán welcomes value-for-money proposals that are proportionate to the scale and requirements of the assignment.

Proposals should be submitted as a PDF attachment by email to Lainey Byrne at Operations@ancosan.ie, using the subject line "**An Cosán Strategy**".

The deadline for receipt of proposals is 5pm (Irish time) on 27 October 2026.

Clarification questions should be sent to the same email address by 15 October 2026.

Please do not submit cloud-sharing links.