



2026 IDEAS ACADEMY APPLICANT GUIDE



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DCC

The National Call for Applications
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1. Introduction

Ireland faces complex social challenges that our current systems are struggling to solve – and it is the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society who are often the most affected.

Since 2004, Social Entrepreneurs Ireland has been empowering high-potential, entrepreneur-led organisations to tackle these pressing issues and drive meaningful, lasting social change.

To date, we have supported over **660 social entrepreneurs across the island of Ireland** and we do this in two ways:

1. We identify individuals with unique insights and scalable solutions to social problems

2. We provide them with the funding, training, and connections needed to grow their impact

We are the home of social entrepreneurship in Ireland. What sets Social Entrepreneurs Ireland apart is that we don't just back ideas - we back the people behind them, at every stage of their journey to impact.

We stand alongside people like you, so you can test new approaches, innovate boldly and pursue impact with confidence. Our support ensures that promising ideas and visionary leaders are not left behind.

Belonging is at the heart of everything we do, creating a space where you can connect, learn and grow together.

Through tailored mentorship, expert training, strategic funding and a vibrant peer community, we equip social entrepreneurs with the skills, networks and resilience they need to lead with impact.

By nurturing both the people and their ideas, we help turn ambitious visions into tangible, transformative impact.

We welcome applications from people of all backgrounds and we are committed to providing equal opportunities regardless of gender identity, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or religion.
(Equal Status Acts, 2000-2018).



The Ideas Academy gave my business partner and me the space and structure we needed to move our idea from a vague concept to something ready for piloting. The cohort was wonderfully diverse and it was inspiring to learn alongside other social entrepreneurs on a similar journey. I would recommend the Ideas Academy to anyone with an early-stage idea who lacks confidence or the headspace to develop it.

Beca Wistreich

Leveraging Impact Measurement
for Systems Change

The Ideas Academy 2025



The Ideas Academy gave me confidence, clarity and community. SEI helped me transform MindMatters into a purpose driven, scalable social enterprise I'm proud to lead.

Justin Nolan

MindMatters

The Ideas Academy 2025

2. The Ideas Academy

Participants on the Ideas Academy will be supported to clearly articulate, refine and progress their solution. You will gain skills such as design thinking, pilot planning and pitching to help you move from idea to action. You will also deepen your understanding of social entrepreneurship while surrounded by like-minded people at a similar point in their journey.

From the application process, we will be selecting up to **30 of the highest-potential social entrepreneurs to progress to the 2026 programme**. The programme will be delivered both in person and online in 2026 with 5 in-person events including a selection workshop, a launch, two mid-programme events and graduation.

On the Ideas Academy you will:

DEVELOP YOUR LEADERSHIP BY:

- Gaining an insight into the social entrepreneur journey
- Beginning to identify as a social entrepreneur - if you don't already do so
- Increasing your confidence and belief in yourself as the best person to action this idea
- Developing skills to tell your story as a founder and social entrepreneur

BUILD CAPACITY BY:

- Deepening your understanding of the problem and refine your solution
- Developing an action plan to pilot/test your idea, including how to measure impact
- Understanding how to pitch your idea gaining pitching experience and feedback
- Applying for a portion pilot funding and further support from SEI at the end of the programme

CREATE A NETWORK BY:

- Building supportive relationships with peers on the programme, as well as making connections to people who become your champions, advisors and mentors.

If this seems like a good fit for you, apply to the Ideas Academy today to join us in creating lasting social change in Ireland!

3. Programme Structure

The Ideas Academy 2026 is a transformative 12-week journey (September – November) delivered through a hybrid model of in-person workshops in Dublin and interactive online sessions. The programme is designed around three core pillars: Problem/Solution, Piloting, and Storytelling. If you are offered a place on the Ideas Academy in 2026 you must be willing to commit to attending all programme activities to successfully complete the programme.

Provisional programme dates for 2026 are listed below – please note these will be confirmed once participants are selected. The estimated time commitment required is **3-6 hours per week** for the duration of the programme from September - November.

THE SUMMER FOUNDATION (June – August)

The journey begins with an **In-Person Launch in Dublin in June**. Following this, participants move into an independent research phase:

- **Self-Led Activity:** Throughout July and August, participants carry out their own stakeholder mapping and empathy research.
- **Independence:** Please note that there are no scheduled SEI group activities during these two months; this time is for you to engage directly with your community and gather the insights needed for Phase 1.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY (September - November)

From September to November, the schedule becomes more structured, involving:

<p>PHASE 1: PROBLEM/SOLUTION (SEPTEMBER)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full day workshop – In person• Online 1.5 hour group discussion• Peer group sessions• Actions and work arising from workshops	<p>PHASE 2: PILOTING (SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full day workshop – In person• Online 1.5 hour group discussion• Peer group sessions• Actions and work arising from workshops
<p>PHASE 3: PITCHING (OCTOBER/NOVEMBER)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Half day storytelling workshop – online• Online 1.5 hour group discussion• Mock Pitching day – in person• Peer group sessions• Actions and work arising from workshops	<p>SEED FUNDING (NOVEMBER/DECEMBER)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invitation to apply for seed funding• Shortlisted applicants invited to pitch for a portion of seed funding with a panel of judges

4. What we expect from you

Social Entrepreneurs Ireland invests significant time and resources to provide a wide range of opportunities to everyone who participates in our Ideas Academy programme. As with so many programmes and training opportunities, the more effort you put into the Ideas Academy, the greater the benefits you will gain.

Everything we do is designed to help you strengthen your skills as a social entrepreneur and develop your solution towards the pilot stage. We really want you to succeed! In return, we expect the following from you:

- **Full participation and attendance** on core programme support elements, outlined above, in order to successfully complete the programme and avail of other opportunities.
- **Open-minded, professional, and collaborative engagement.**
- **Willingness to participate in group events and share knowledge.**
- During the programme you will be expected to complete a number of **surveys primarily the pre-programme, post-module and post-programme surveys.**



5. Selection Timeline

Open Applications: 23rd March - 20th April 2026

You can apply to the Ideas Academy by filling in an online application form. Details on how to apply are outlined in the section 'How to Apply'.

Ideas Academy Participant Selection: w/c 18th May 2026

Applicants will be informed of the final outcome of the selection process in early June.

Ideas Academy Launch: June 2026, Dublin, in-person

If you are selected to the programme you will be invited to take part in the Ideas Academy Lunch event in Dublin in June..

6. What are we looking for?

The Ideas Academy works with ambitious budding social entrepreneurs who are ready to kick start their projects. It is suitable for people with ideas at either the ideation or piloting stages.

Does that sound like you? We hope so!

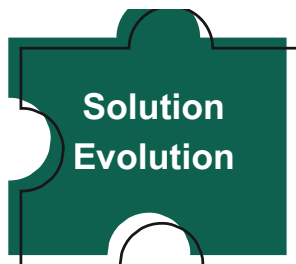
We want to make sure that you are applying to the programme that best aligns with where you are in your journey. We also want to ensure that you have the time, capacity and commitment needed for the programme.

Please be assured that we embrace diversity and focus on the quality of the solution, not the standard of language. Throughout the application process, we aim to understand your story, your understanding of the social or environmental issue, the evolution of your solution and why now is the right time for you to apply to the Ideas Academy. There are three key areas that make up our evaluation criteria and these are outlined below:



1. Solution Fit

A strong solution starts with a deep understanding of the problem. We want to see a clear grasp of both the broader issue and the specific challenge you aim to address, including the affected group(s) and the barriers they face. Your idea should outline a clear plan to tackle these obstacles effectively.



2. Solution Evolution

We want to understand how you plan to implement your solution/idea and any steps taken thus far. For example, we're interested in understanding what a pilot plan would look like for your solution. We are looking for evidence of research and your drive to develop your solution/idea.



3. Spirit of a Social Entrepreneur

Tell us your story—what drives you to create social or environmental change? We're looking for passionate, determined leaders with a clear vision for their solution. Share why you're the right person to lead this project and make a lasting impact.

8. Selection Preparation

BEFORE YOU APPLY

1. Learn About the Ideas Academy

Before applying, **review this guide and explore our website** to fully understand the Ideas Academy, including the **time commitment** involved. Participation in selection events and the programme itself is **mandatory**, so ensure you're ready to engage fully.

2. Check Your Eligibility

Verify that you meet the eligibility criteria outlined in this guide. You can also learn more about who we support through the Ideas Academy by visiting our website.

3. Take Your Time with the Application

Give yourself plenty of time to complete your application before the deadline on 20th April 2026 (**midnight**). Our online system allows you to **save your progress and return to it later**. Once you sign up and save your application for the first time, **all changes will be saved automatically**.

Tip: Before submitting, we strongly recommend **seeking feedback from a friend, colleague, or mentor**. A fresh perspective can help strengthen your application.

4. Attend Our National Call Information Event – Lunchtime session – 31st March, After-work session - 2nd April 2026 (*not mandatory*)

Join us to find out if the Ideas Academy is right for you! This session will cover:

- Eligibility criteria and what stage of development is best suited for the programme.
- The types of support offered to help social entrepreneurs grow.
- Insights from current participants on how the programme has helped them scale their impact.

Can't attend live? A recording will be available on our website after the event. Follow us on social media for updates and registration details.



What supports does Social Entrepreneurs Ireland offer to help with the application process?

Information Session - Lunchtime session (1 to 2pm) – 31st March, After-work session (6 to 7pm) - 1st April 2026

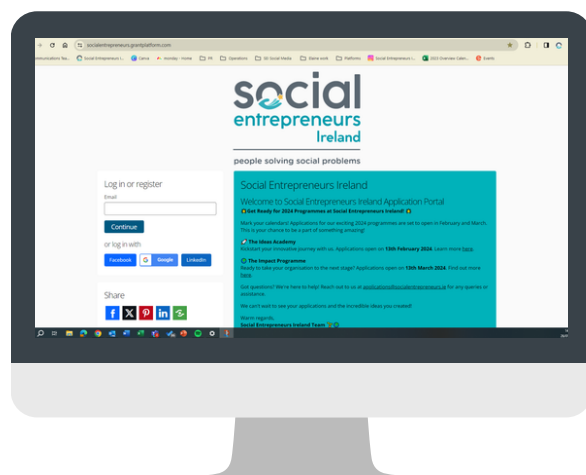
9. How to Apply

All applications must be submitted online using our online application form.

Please access socialentrepreneurs.grantplatform.com to login/register and create your application. You can find all the details you need to enter the application process on our website at socialentrepreneurs.ie.

You will be asked to create a profile and login details, you can then log into your application at any time during the selection process period (23rd March - 20th April 2026). **Please note:** we have created video guides to help you register and login - see links below.

- [1. How to Register on Good Grants](#)
- [2. How to Apply on Good Grants](#)



After submission you will not be able to amend your application, so please ensure you have reviewed your work carefully before submission.



Please check out the [Frequently Asked Questions section on our website](#) for any queries on the programme or the application process.

If you have a problem with your application or a specific question not answered in this guide, you can email applications@socialentrepreneurs.ie or call 01-685-3919 and we will do our best to answer you.

Before going into the actual application questions, you will have the option to submit your responses in written form or as voice recordings. This choice, designed to make the application process more accessible, will apply to all questions and cannot be changed once you begin. You will need to choose the format that best allows you to express your ideas clearly.

10. Eligibility Criteria



Please read our eligibility criteria to ensure that you are eligible to apply to the Ideas Academy.

If you have been on our Ideas Academy prior to 2022, you are eligible to apply again with the same project as the programme's focus has changed since then. The Ideas Academy 2026 will be very focused on piloting your project.

If you have been on our Ideas Academy on any year previously, you can apply again at any time with a NEW idea.

YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION MUST

- Be aged 18 years or over at the time of applying. If applying as a partnership, all applicants must meet this requirement.
- Have a strong personal insight into or a deep understanding of a social or environmental problem
- Have identified a social or environmental problem and have a high-potential solution to tackle it.
- Be the person/people leading on this idea/solution – the main driver(s) and decision maker(s).
- Have a solution whose primary impact focus is in Ireland.

YOUR TIME COMMITMENT AND EXPECTATIONS WITH THE IDEAS ACADEMY

- You must be willing to commit to full attendance for all of the core workshops sessions on the Ideas Academy and other events such as:
 - attending mandatory Selection Process and key Programme events (such as the launch) outlined in this programme guide.
 - engaging with the programme for the equivalent of 3-6 hours per week during the months of September - November

Note: Social Entrepreneurs Ireland does not support research projects, party-political projects, or projects with an explicit religious or faith-based agenda. Projects motivated by personal beliefs but open and accessible to all communities are eligible.

11. Application Questions

SOLUTION FIT

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Q1. Describe the social or environmental problem you are trying to address.

Please focus on the description of the broad problem, providing detailed information on the nature of the problem and its root causes. Provide data or evidence to illustrate the extent and severity of the problem where possible. *(250 words)*

Q2. Who is your primary target population? Describe their daily reality, the specific challenges they face, and the systemic barriers (personal, social, economic, or policy) currently preventing this problem from being solved. *(150 words)*

YOUR SOLUTION

Q3. Describe the solution you have developed to address the problem. Please provide a detailed description of the solution, its key components and how you are delivering it. *(200 words)*

Q4. How do you plan to find, reach, and engage your primary beneficiaries or target population? Please be as specific as possible about your 'outreach strategy.' For example: Will you use social media, physical community spaces, or specific local networks? If you plan to collaborate with existing organisations (like schools, NGOs, or local councils) to connect with your target group, please mention them here." *(200 words)*

POTENTIAL IMPACT

Q5. Please describe changes you believe the target population/ beneficiaries/ environmental markers will experience after and as a consequence of receiving your solution. *(300 words)*

Q6. Who else is working in any way to tackle this problem in Ireland? Explain how your proposed approach is different or fills a gap left by others (such as government, non-profits, or the private sector). *(150 words)*

SOLUTION EVOLUTION

Q7. Tell us about what have you done so far and how has that allowed your idea to evolve? *(300 words)*

11. Application Questions

SPIRIT OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Q8. Tell us your 'Why' and your 'How.' What personal, voluntary, or professional experiences drive your commitment to this cause? How do your unique skills, strengths, and networks make you the right person to turn this idea into a reality? (200 words)

Q9. Why is the Ideas Academy the right next step for you and your idea right now? (150 words)



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