

NCCSI Thriving Leaders Programme – Participant Criteria

The [National Competence Centre for Social Innovation \(NCCSI\)](#) Thriving Leaders Programme is delivered by Genio, Rethink Ireland and Mantra Strategy in partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The programme is designed to give social innovation leaders protected space to step back from day-to-day demands, strengthen their leadership practice, learn from peers and think differently about how they lead.

The programme will support two cohorts based primarily on where participants are in their own leadership journey:

Thriving Leaders – Growing as a Leader

For people who are building their experience and confidence in senior leadership and developing the skills to move from doing and managing to leading effectively through others. You typically have five or less years in Senior leadership roles.

Thriving Leaders – Leading at Scale

For experienced senior leaders who are navigating greater responsibility and complexity and want to create more space for strategic leadership. You will explore how to build leadership capacity around you, lead more sustainably, and deepen your understanding of systems thinking and how you navigate the complexities of your role when there are no simple solutions. You will typically have five or more years' senior leadership experience.

The stage, size or age of an organisation will not determine which cohort is the right fit. Participants may come from organisations at very different stages. The primary consideration is the **individual's leadership experience**, current responsibilities and the leadership challenges they are navigating.

What participants can expect

Participation is free of charge. Over the three sessions, participants will receive:

- Protected time and space to step back from day-to-day pressures and reflect strategically on their leadership and organisation.
- Practical support matched to their leadership journey, from delegation, prioritisation and developing a team for those growing as leaders, to building leadership capacity, succession, leading through change and working with the State and other system actors for those leading at scale.
- A peer network of 10 - 15 leaders from across Ireland at a similar point in their leadership journey.
- Expert facilitation from Mantra Strategy's experienced leadership development facilitators.
- A voice in policy and investment: insights from the co-creation workshops will inform a recommendations report for funders and government, and the NCCSI's wider work on funding schemes and social investment.

- 6-month access to Mantra's Thrive Platform, including tools and resources to support leadership development, wellbeing and organisational growth.

Who Can Apply?

The programme is for people who:

- Meet the criteria for either **Thriving Leaders - Growing as a Leader** or **Thriving Leaders - Leading at Scale**, as outlined below.
- Are currently working within a social innovation, social enterprise, charity, or a community initiative.
- Can commit to attending all three core programme sessions and participating fully in the programme (see dates below) including travelling to Dublin and another county for the two in-person sessions associated with their cohort (locations will depend on geographical spread of participants in each cohort).
- Are willing to engage openly with peers, share learning and contribute to a confidential and supportive learning environment.
- Currently in a role with formal leadership responsibility for people, not a project or purely technical lead role.

Who Cannot Apply?

- Individual contributors or senior experts without formal reporting lines.
- Consultants, coaches or trainers who work in this space and would be using the programme for business development.
- Applicants whose primary goal is a credential, or who aren't yet in the role (aspiring leaders).

Applicants should review the two cohort profiles below and apply for the cohort that most closely reflects where they are in their leadership journey now.

Cohort 1 - Thriving Leaders – Growing as a Leader	Cohort 2: Thriving Leaders – Leading at Scale
For people building their experience, confidence and capability in senior leadership and learning to move from doing and managing to leading effectively through others.	For experienced senior leaders who want to step back from operational demands, build leadership capacity around them and create more space for strategic leadership as responsibility and complexity increase
This cohort is likely to be right for you if: • You typically have five years or less in senior leadership. • You have responsibility for people, programmes, services and/or organisational decisions.	This cohort is likely to be right for you if: • You typically have more than five years in senior leadership. • You lead at least one layer of managers or leaders (e.g. 3+ direct reports who themselves manage people)

- You are continuing to build your confidence and capability in a senior leadership role.
- You want to build greater confidence in yourself and your leadership.
- You are learning how to step back from doing everything yourself and lead more effectively through others.
- You want to become better at delegation, prioritisation and developing your team.
- You are developing your ability to think and act more strategically rather than being consumed by day-to-day delivery.
- You want to better understand your own leadership style and the impact you have on others.
- You would value a safe space to ask questions, test ideas and learn alongside leaders at a similar stage.
- Can name a specific transition you are making (e.g. from expert to leader, from team lead to head of function)

- You hold significant responsibility for organisational direction and decision-making.
- You have substantial experience of leading people, programmes, services and/or an organisation.
- You are navigating increased responsibility, complexity, growth or change.
- You find yourself pulled into operational delivery or firefighting when you need to be focusing on longer-term priorities.
- You want to move from being the person who holds or drives everything to leading effectively through others.
- You want to strengthen leadership capacity and accountability across your organisation.
- You are thinking about succession and developing the next generation of leadership.
- You need more space for strategic thinking, longer-term decision-making and/or systems leadership.
- You want to find more sustainable ways of leading while managing significant responsibility and competing demands.
- You would value a trusted peer group with whom you can confidentially test ideas and explore the realities of senior leadership.
- Can name a specific scale challenge (e.g. too many decisions routing through them, succession gaps, risk of burnout)

Selection Process:

In order to create a suitable learning environment, we aim to have a **maximum of 15 participants** per cohort. As such, we will be selecting participants based on:

- Your fit to the cohort profile
- Clarity on leadership challenge
- Openness to peer learning
- Opportunity to apply the learning
- To ensure a diverse sectoral mix, we will also allow just one participant per organisation to participate in each cohort.

Closing Date:

Please complete the application survey by **5pm on 30 October 2026**.

Programme Commitment

Participants must be available to attend all three core cohort sessions.

Cohort 1 - Thriving Leaders – Growing as a Leader	Cohort 2: Thriving Leaders – Leading at Scale
Session 1: In-Person (Dublin TBC) Thursday 19 th November 2026 10.30am-3.30pm Dublin Location (TBC)	Session 1: In-Person (Dublin TBC) Thursday 26 th November 2026 10.30am-3.30pm Dublin Location (TBC)
Session 2: Online Thursday 14 January 2027 10.30am-12.30pm Online	Session 2: Online Thursday 21 January 2027 10.30am-12.30pm Online
Session 3: In-Person (TBC) Thursday 4 March 2027 10.30am-3.30pm Location (TBC)	Session 3: In-Person (TBC) Thursday 25 March 2027 10.30am-3.30pm Location (TBC)

Participants should only apply where they can commit to attending all three sessions, as continuity across the programme is important to both individual development and the peer learning experience.

For further information visit <https://rethinkireland.ie/nccsi/>