



INVEST Technical/Backstage Programme FAQs and Criteria

Please make sure to read this document carefully before submitting completed applications.

Timeline

- **Deadline for application submission is Wednesday 22nd October 2025 at noon. Late applications will not be accepted.**



1 Background

Theatre and Dance NI (TDNI) is the sole support and representative professional membership organisation for theatre and dance in Northern Ireland with key goals to connect, support development and advocate for our artists and the industry.

Since 2017, TDNI have gathered evidence linking the sustainability of NI's cultural sector to the introduction of direct support for freelance artists. This programme has been shaped throughout by this extensive consultation as well as evaluation with artists, freelancers', sectoral stakeholders, and former participants.

The Technical/Backstage Programme is a strand of Theatre and Dance NI's INVEST programme, specifically designed to support early-career or freelance professionals working in technical theatre, dance, and production roles.

This opportunity is aimed at those building technical expertise through hands-on learning, industry exposure, mentoring, and tailored development activity. The bursary enables participants to identify specific areas they wish to develop and supports them with financial resources and professional guidance to do so.

The programme is shaped by ongoing consultation with freelance artists and technical practitioners across the sector and is informed by years of evaluation and feedback.

2 Frequently Asked Questions

When is the deadline?

Wednesday 22nd October 2025 at noon.

Where do I submit my application?

Please submit your application to invest@theatreanddancenl.org

Who can apply?

- Based in Northern Ireland
- Working or aspiring to work in roles such as: lighting, sound, stage management, costume, digital production, technical design, AV, rigging, etc.
- Aimed at those developing or diversifying their skills
- Must be a member of Theatre and Dance NI. You can join here.
- We actively welcome applications from underrepresented communities, including but not limited to D/deaf, disabled, neurodivergent, LGBTQIA+, and global majority artists.

Who cannot apply?

- Those living and working outside of Northern Ireland.
- Those in full time education (students) and / or training.
- Full time employees of funded organisations, production companies, venues or community groups.
- Theatre and Dance NI staff and board members.
- Belfast City Council or Arts Council of Northern Ireland staff or board members.

This is an individual development fund — you cannot apply on behalf of a company, team, or group.

What will I do on INVEST?

- Practical, hands-on experience across a range of festivals, theatre, and dance venues across the island of Ireland.
- Specialist training in lighting, sound design, and stage management.
- One-to-one guidance and support from the Theatre and Dance NI team and professional contacts across the UK, Ireland, and internationally.
- Tailored, one-to-one mentoring with senior experts in technical theatre and production.

As part of the programme, TDNI will schedule several professional development training sessions. Most sessions will be held in person in Belfast. Some sessions have been pre-designed, and others will be co-designed with participants. While participants are advised to attend all sessions where possible, it is required you attend a minimum of six.

How is the Technical/Backstage Programme different from the INVEST and Fellowship programmes.

Unlike the INVEST and Fellowship bursaries, this strand does not provide a bursary as a lump sum. Instead, participants will gain hands-on, real-world experience by working alongside professionals in venues, at festivals, or within production settings. You will be **paid for your time** while developing your skills on the ground, giving you the opportunity to learn directly within a live working environment.

Will I be assigned a mentor?

This bursary will include mentoring as part of your development plan. You are encouraged to identify a **potential mentor or technician you'd like to learn from** — even if you haven't worked with them before however it is not essential as TDNI can help connect you with someone based on your interests.

How long is the programme?

The programme will run from October 2025 and conclude no later than July 2026.



Where will I need to be?

Most sessions will be held in person in Belfast. Mentor sessions will be held either in-person or online. There may be opportunity to travel to venues/festivals outside of Belfast. If this happens, TDNI will cover the cost of travel and accommodation.

When does the programme take place?

Successful participants will be notified by the end of October 2025. The programme should conclude no later than July 2025.

I work for an organisation, can I apply?

This programme is designed for independent creatives only. If you are part-time in a creative role within an organisation, you are still welcome to apply if you can show that the professional development activity benefits your independent practice rather than the organisation or your role within the organisation. In addition, participants will be expected to attend compulsory sessions, so we urge you to consider this upon submission. You cannot apply if you are employed full time within an organisation.

I have had a bursary from Theatre and Dance NI before – can I apply again?

Yes, however you must have completed your previous evaluation report.

If you have been a previous participant in the INVEST programme, you are not eligible to apply. If you applied to the programme in the past and were unsuccessful, you may reapply.

Do I have to apply using the application form?

You can apply using the application form or submit a pre-recorded video/audio file for questions where this is stated on the application form. Use **WeTransfer** or **Dropbox** to share your video/audio file. Please make sure the link/s are working before your submission. If you are applying via pre-recorded video/audio, submit your link under each relevant question on the digital application form.

How will I provide evidence of my development as part of the programme?

This is a publicly funded programme. Participants will be required to share their experiences, processes, and progressions with Theatre and Dance NI, their mentor and their fellow INVEST artists. Please indicate clearly in your application how you intend to report your progress.

Is my information kept private?

Yes. All information provided to Theatre and Dance NI will be held in strict confidence and is held solely to evaluate your application. Information about Bursary recipients will be shared publicly with the approval of the Artist.

I've read the guidance and FAQ but still have a question. What should I do?

If you have any further questions, please contact invest@theatreanddancenl.org.

3 Criteria for decisions

What is the INVEST panel looking for?

The INVEST panel will select the applications that best deliver the stated mission of the programme:

- Support a diverse group of artists to develop their careers and practice.
- Support artists in the longer term to create and produce work to the highest professional standards.
- Support artists to develop and sustain their careers.

A good application will give a snapshot of your current creative practice and the professional development you wish to undertake through INVEST. We encourage you to be realistic about what can be achieved.

The panel will make their decision based on the information provided. The decision-making process will be evidence-based. It is important to include all details in the application and support material.

Please do not assume that the selection panel have any prior knowledge of you or your work. If the programme is oversubscribed, you may be required to attend an interview with the selection panel. This would be no longer than 30 minutes.

4 Decisions

The Expertise

Additional advice will be sought if a particular form of arts practice is believed to be outside the panel's expertise.

Successful applications

Successful applicants will receive a contract from TDNI, and payment of 70% once relevant signed paperwork has been received. The final 30% will be paid at the conclusion of the programme (July 2026). All payments will be processed within 30 days (about 4 and a half weeks) on receipt of an invoice.

Unsuccessful applications

We will let you know by email before the end of October 2025.

