



COATBRIDGE PRIDE IN PLACE

PROJECT CATALYST FUND 2026-27

Guide to the Project Development Journey

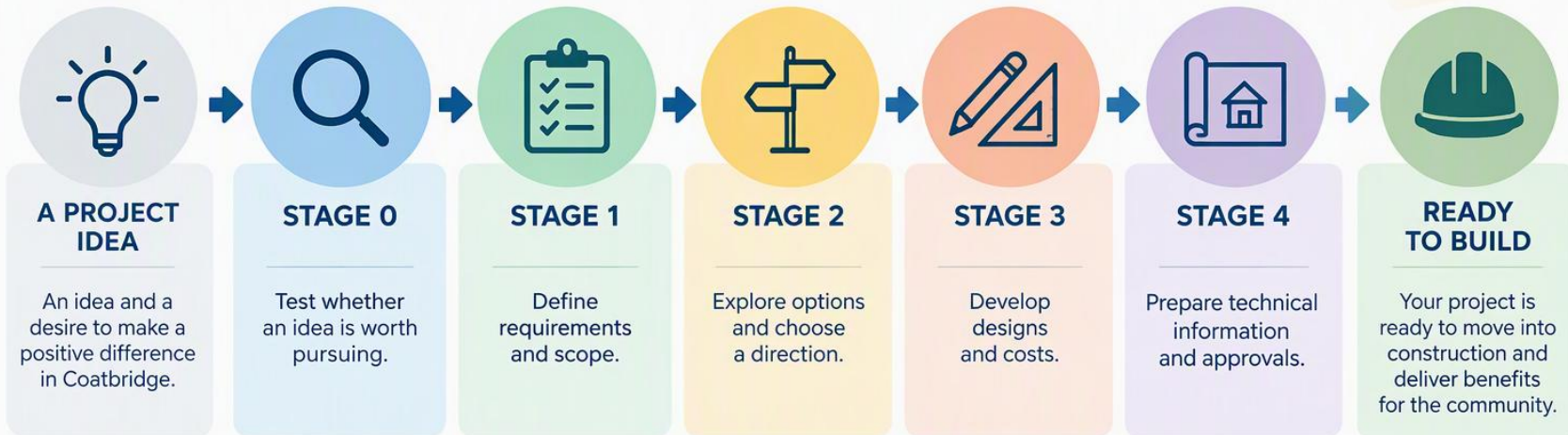




COATBRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARD

PROJECT CATALYST FUND 2026-27

The Project Development Journey



SUPPORTING PROJECTS FROM IDEA TO IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

Projects work best in stages because early on you are dealing with uncertainty. Each stage lets you learn, test assumptions, and decide whether to continue, stop, or change direction—before you commit serious time and money. It's about making better decisions, not dragging things out

If you are considering applying to the Project Catalyst Fund 2026-27, you should apply for funding for the **very next stage** of your project – not everything at once.

- Early-stage development is right if you are still exploring ideas or feasibility
- More advanced development is right if feasibility is proven and you need detailed design or approvals

If you're not sure, talk to us first – we're happy to help you decide.

The Project Catalyst Fund does not require all projects to follow the same path, and groups are encouraged to apply for support that is appropriate to their current level of readiness.

The following describes the stages of development that projects typically go through.

If Your Project Needs To...	Typical Development Stage
Test whether an idea is worth pursuing	Stage 0
Define requirements and scope	Stage 1
Explore options and choose a direction	Stage 2
Develop designs and costs	Stage 3
Prepare technical information and approvals	Stage 4

To help explain these stages we have used the **Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work 2020** to describe each stage of work.

The RIBA Plan of Work provides a useful way of describing project development stages, particularly for projects involving buildings and physical assets. However, it is not a requirement of the Project Catalyst Fund and not all projects will follow these stages exactly.

For more information see: [2020ribaplanofworkoverviewpdf.pdf](#)

EARLY STAGES OF PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

(Developing your idea into a project concept and conducting early development work)

STAGE 0: EXPLORING YOUR PROJECT IDEA

Groups at this stage are likely to have a project idea but need to explore whether this is the right project to take forward—and whether building something is the right answer at all. This stage helps groups to decide what their idea is trying to achieve before any design work really begins.

Stage 0 is about the big picture. At this point, you're not designing a building—you're deciding:

- What problem are we trying to solve?
- Is a building project actually the solution?
- Are there better or cheaper alternatives?

This might include:

- Identifying the **need** that you want to address (e.g. need for more space, need for better facilities, need for local regeneration). Gathering information on need is always helpful at this stage as when you seek funding at more advanced stages, a detailed explanation of need will help you. Need is almost always **best explained using data** and there are a range of sources that you can use for this. Advice and support can be provided to help you with this.

A community survey **doesn't** explain need, but it can be very helpful in explaining **community preferences and priorities**, so gathering information using a survey in addition to gathering data on need is a particularly effective way to explain the reasons for your project idea.

- Exploring different **options**: Should we refurbish? Extend? Build new? or use an existing building differently?
- Considering constraints such as budget, site issues, planning risks and time pressures
- Deciding on whether to proceed, and in what form

By the end of Stage 0, you will have the earliest iteration (version) of your Feasibility Study including:

- A clear definition of the problem or need e.g. "We need more space," "The current building is no longer fit for purpose"
- A range of high-level options
- An initial recommendation on which option appears to make the most sense, and why
- A decision on whether a project should proceed at all

STAGE 1: DEFINE YOUR PROJECT REQUIREMENTS AND SCOPE

Once you've decided your idea is worth pursuing at the end of Stage 0, Stage 1 defines what success looks like, before designers start drawing solutions. This is about deciding exactly what you are trying to achieve and setting a clear direction. This might include:

- **Developing your Brief:** your Brief will include a description of what the building needs to do, a description of who will use it and how, information on size requirements, and a description of your group's key priorities for the building (cost, quality, sustainability, flexibility, etc.). The Brief sets out in writing a shared understanding of the goal.

- **Setting your budget and programme (timetable) at a high level:** This should be a realistic budget range– to avoid designing something unaffordable later – and an outline of timescales as this will help start work on identifying risks.
- **Understanding the site and its constraints:** site information is gathered, planning context is reviewed, known risks are logged (access, services, neighbours, restrictions)
- **Forming your project team:** Key advisers may be appointed (project manager, project architect, project cost consultant)
- **Clarifying your Project Roles and responsibilities:** this is the point where ideas turn into defined work, so clarifying roles and responsibilities early avoids confusion, duplication, and gaps later when decisions and costs start to solidify.

Stage 1 is where we agree what we want, how much we can spend, and what limits we're working within—before anyone starts designing solutions. This stage creates a shared understanding before design begins

By the end of Stage 1, you will have the second more developed iteration (version) of your Feasibility Study including:

- An initial Client Brief
- An initial project budget (realistic but not detailed), outline programme with main milestones and initial risk register is in place
- You have an agreed project structure, setting out who is responsible for what and which advisers are appointed or needed

STAGE 2: EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS AND TEST FEASIBILITY

Stage 2 is where ideas become options, and one preferred direction from these options is chosen. Nothing is fully fixed yet, but proposals are clear enough to compare and choose between. This might include:

- **Creating design options:** One or more design options are developed that show overall layout, scale and massing, how the building sits on the site and how people would use the spaces. These are real proposals, not abstract sketches, but are still flexible.
- **Setting key principles:** your team agrees the big design ideas (principles), such as building form and orientation, overall appearance and character, structural approach, sustainability strategy (at a high level). These design principles guide everything that comes later.
- **Securing early engineering input:** Engineers can help you by testing whether the ideas are realistic, for example can it be structurally sound, can it be serviced properly, and are there obvious risks? This stops impossible designs being chosen.

- **Estimating costs:** A cost consultant can prepare a high-level cost estimate for your options and compare these options against your budget. If an option is unaffordable, it can be adjusted or ruled out early. This helps you shape the direction of travel for your project.
- **Considering your planning strategy:** Your options can be tested against planning policies and constraints, and this might include seeking informal feedback from your local authority's Planners. This enables you to avoid selecting a preferred way design that will be unlikely to secure planning permission.

Stage 2 is where you explore different ways the project could work and agree the overall design direction before developing it in detail. It's about choosing the right idea, not perfecting it.

By the end of Stage 2 you will have the final iteration (version) of your Feasibility Study including:

- Selected one option (or a clear hybrid)
- A completed Feasibility Study
- Your updated Client Brief
- Reached a strong place that enables you to move forward with confidence into Stage 3

Having a comprehensive Feasibility Study that is well developed using the RIBA Stages as your guide can help you develop a clear idea of your project and can help you to communicate this to your potential next stage funders in a credible and persuasive way.

MORE ADVANCED PROJECT DEVELOPMENT STAGES

(Moving From Feasibility Towards More Advanced Stages of Design and Preparation)

Groups with who have comprehensive Feasibility Studies may apply for funding from the Project Catalyst Fund to support more advanced stages of project development. This might be for funding work associated with RIBA Stage 3 or RIBA Stage 4.

STAGE 3: DEVELOP YOUR DESIGNS AND YOUR COSTS

Stage 3 is where your chosen design is properly worked out and tested. This stage makes sure it's buildable, affordable within your expected budget, and compliant before committing to the technical detail and beyond to construction.

At this stage, the design is no longer a sketch or concept. It becomes a realistic proposal that can be properly costed, checked, and approved. This might include:

- **Developing the design:** Room sizes, layouts, and key dimensions are fixed more firmly; the building shape, structure, and main materials are agreed; How people will use the building is fully thought through; and your group should be able to clearly recognise the what the building is going to look like by the end of this stage.

- **Involving specialists:** Engineers and other specialists now develop real solutions, not assumptions, for example the structural strategy (how the building stands up), the mechanical & electrical systems (heating, ventilation, power, lighting), and fire safety, access, acoustics, sustainability, etc.
- **Preparing more detailed costs:** A detailed cost estimate (“Cost Plan”) is produced; the design is checked against your proposed budget; if it’s too expensive, changes can happen now, rather than during construction.
- **Finalising Planning information:** The design is prepared for planning submission (if not already submitted); planning conditions, policies, and risks are addressed; the aim is to avoid redesign later due to planning issues

By the end of Stage 3:

- You will have fixed the overall design direction for your project
- You won’t have a final fixed construction budget—but you will have a more detailed cost estimate (a “**Cost Plan**”) that you had at Stage 2, and this version should be a reliable one
- As client you can now decide if you want to proceed to detailed technical design (Stage 4)

While not part of the RIBA Plan of Work, at Stage 3 or Stage 4, you may be seeking to pursue negotiations to take legal control over the site or premises that your project focuses on.

Some of the costs of this work are also eligible for funding from the Project Catalyst Fund. For a comprehensive guide on this and other project development information see the resources section on the Development Trusts Association Scotland’s Community Ownership Support Service website: [Resources - DTAS Community Ownership Support Service](#)

STAGE 4: PREPARE TECHNICAL INFORMATION AND GET READY TO BUILD

RIBA Stage 4 is about turning an approved design into clear, coordinated technical information so it can be priced accurately and built correctly. By the end of Stage 4, most major design decisions are already locked in. Changes are still possible, but they take longer, cost more and can delay the programme.

This might include:

- **Producing detailed drawings and specifications:** Exact dimensions, levels, and construction details; what materials are used, where they go, and how they’re fixed together; and drawings that are accurate enough that builders can follow them on site. This is no longer about *what the building looks like*, but how it is physically put together.

- **Engineers fully coordinating their designs:** All the technical systems are designed in detail and coordinated, including structure (beams, slabs, foundations), heating, ventilation, plumbing, and electrics, fire safety, acoustics, insulation, drainage, and sustainability measures. Everything must fit together without clashing.
- **Addressing statutory regulations and ensuring compliance:** Stage 4 ensures the building meets Building Regulations, complies with fire, access, and safety requirements and can obtain approvals from Building Control or equivalent bodies. This avoids problems once construction starts.
- **Preparing information for pricing and construction:** The information produced needs to be suitable for **tendering** (pricing by contractors), or for finalising costs if a contractor is already appointed, as this enables a **much more accurate build cost**. Once you reach this point, cost surprises should be limited.

By the end of Stage 4 you will have:

- A fully resolved design: the design approved at Stage 3 is now **detailed and fixed**
- Made all major decisions about layout, materials, systems, and performance
- A complete set of technical information, detailed drawings and specifications that describe exactly how the building is constructed, what materials and products are to be used and how all elements fit together
- Information coordinated between architect and engineers to avoid clashes
- Confidence that your project meets Building Regulations and statutory requirements, addresses fire safety, access, and health and safety obligations and is suitable for Building Control approval
- A “pre-tender Cost Plan” that provides cost certainty (within normal limits) and confidence that the project can now be priced accurately. You may use this as the basis for any final funding application to your funders – funders prefer to receive funding applications that have as much cost certainty as possible.
- Reached a position where tenders can be issued, or a final contract sum can be agreed with a contractor
- An understanding of the remaining cost risks and included a sum in your affordability calculation that provides for these.
- A clear route to construction, so that you have a pathway and timetable for procuring a contractor (if not already appointed) and be in a position to enter into a construction contract and to commence Stage 5: Construction

Congratulations!

By the end of **Stage 4** you will have reached the point where the project development journey ends: your project is now ready to leave the drawing board and become a deliverable construction project!