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## RESEARCH TENDER CALL



## TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

**Project Reference No.: 05-2026**

**Project Title:**

Learning from the social supermarket programme in Northern Ireland

**1. Objective/Knowledge Gap:**

The main objectives of this research project are:

- To assess the programme’s impact on aspects such as financial security, healthy eating, health and wellbeing and engagement with other services.
- To understand the profile of those using the services.
- To identify current best practices, strengths, gaps and challenges in the social supermarket programme
- To propose a standardised approach to capturing data on the Social Supermarkets initiative across all Northern Ireland locations, including capturing quantitative and qualitative data that can inform future approaches.
- To propose recommendations on potential strategies to enable those involved in the programme or embarking on similar programmes throughout the island.

**2. Background**

Social supermarkets (also called affordable food clubs, community pantries or larders) allow their members to buy foods at either significantly reduced prices or as part of their membership (Berri and Toma 2023, McEachern et al 2024, Ranta et al 2024). Social supermarkets in Northern Ireland represent community-based initiatives that provide affordable access to groceries, and in some instances household essentials, and toiletry items to alleviate food insecurity. Embedded within local community organisations, these models extend beyond emergency food aid by offering

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wraparound services such as benefits advice, skills training, and health support, fostering dignity and long-term independence for vulnerable households. Recent data show that 3% of respondents to the Food and You survey in Northern Ireland (Moore et al 2025) reported that they had used a social supermarket in the last 12 months.

The Department for Communities is the primary funder of Social Supermarkets in Northern Ireland following a successful pilot programme which ran from October 2017 to March 2020 (Northern Ireland Assembly 2020). The Department subsequently worked with the 11 local Councils to roll the model out in all council areas. The programme was in response to a recommendation in the Welfare Reform Mitigations Report (Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group, 2016) completed in January 2016 that sought to mitigate the impact of UK-wide welfare reforms in Northern Ireland. This report suggested that ‘Stormont should pilot strategies to tackle food poverty, potentially through a network of community food shops, social stores and supermarkets. As a result, the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland has had access to Welfare Mitigation Funds to implement this recommendation alongside a number of measures to support those impacted by welfare reform / benefit changes. For the impact of the models currently operating to be maximised it is paramount that the current approach to delivery is evaluated. Safefood is proposing to support the department by commissioning a research project to evaluate the current approaches.

This study, conducted in partnership with the Department of Communities, will build on the learnings from the initial pilot programme (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2020). including consideration of the measurement parameters, the format for collecting data including the time intervals. It will be informed by other ongoing work in the area (Beacom and Furey, 2025; British Academy of Management, 2024; Safefood, 2025). The study will set out to identify mechanisms that can be used to determine outcomes of the programme which go beyond individual case studies. The study should also consider the way in which data is gathered to take account of administrative burden and consideration of the use of an application, or digital platform, for delivery organisations to use.

### 3. Approach

It is proposed that the aims and objectives of the research are met by using a mixture of methods drawing on existing data when available. The research should ensure that the outcomes can be

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used by others to monitor the social supermarket programme in Northern Ireland and any social supermarket programme in Ireland into the future.

#### 4. Technical Specification

##### (a) Scope of research

Participant demographics and usage patterns

- Should gather data on socio economic characteristics of users (e.g., age, gender, household composition, income profile, geographic distribution, housing tenure).
- Should include referral routes and participant engagement e.g. duration and frequency to understand differential access and engagement with the social supermarket and available wrap around services.

Impact evaluation

- Assess the effect of social supermarket participation on key outcomes such as food security, key dietary indicators, financial resilience, health and wellbeing, stigma and links with wider support services.
- Establish measurable indicators and metrics that reflect both short-term benefits and long-term outcomes.
- Consider measures of total food used, including the proportion of surplus food redistributed

Best Practice Identification

- Identify successful delivery models and operational approaches across participating organisations and describe best practice internationally.
- Consider digital or application-based systems that streamline data collection, reduce administrative burden, and integrate reporting across delivery partners.
- Consider how data is collected to ensure standardisation across programmes and settings, including data protection, and sustainability.

Evaluation methodology development

- Develop and test a consistent methodology for capturing both quantitative and qualitative data across all Social Supermarket sites in Northern Ireland suitable for future monitoring and longitudinal assessment.
- Propose common indicators, definitions, and data recording templates to allow comparability across locations.
- Identify data sources (administrative, survey-based, or observational) and recommend a feasible reporting system.

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- Define time intervals and sampling strategies for ongoing data collection and reporting cycles.

#### Stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer

- Incorporate input from stakeholders including programme participants, delivery organisations, and policy teams to ensure findings are grounded in lived experience and operational practicality.
- Provide recommendations and tools to support continuous improvement, knowledge sharing and learning.

#### (b) Literature review

- The Applicant shall undertake a focused brief, rapid review of relevant national and international literature relating to accessible food safety education, co-design methodologies, and digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled supports in disability contexts.
- The review must be conducted in accordance with a transparent, structured and reproducible methodology, including clearly defined review questions, a documented search strategy and terms, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a recorded process for study selection, critical appraisal and synthesis. Relevant peer-reviewed and grey literature shall be included.
- The Applicant shall ensure that the scope, depth and quality of the review are proportionate to, and sufficient to support, the project objectives and deliverables within the agreed timeframe. Safefood reserves the right to request supporting documentation evidencing the methodology applied and to require clarification or revisions where the review does not meet these requirements.

#### (c) Qualitative and quantitative work

- A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approaches will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be accessed, managed, analysed and reported. Please note that Safefood will facilitate access to available unpublished data on the evaluation of the social supermarket programme in Northern Ireland to date, as appropriate.

#### (d) Analysis

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- Applicants should demonstrate how they will access and consider existing data sets and generate a new data set which can be used to interrogate the effectiveness of the social supermarket programme in Northern Ireland using optimal parameters and methods.

(e) Data handling and Reporting

- The Applicant shall submit to Safefood an interim written progress report at six-month intervals, detailing progress against each project deliverable. Upon completion of the study, the Applicant shall submit a comprehensive final report collating all outcomes, findings and agreed outputs.
- The Applicant shall maintain complete, accurate and secure records of all data, documentation, forms and electronic files generated in the course of the project and shall retain such records until otherwise directed in writing by Safefood. Safefood reserves the right to request access to or copies of such records where required.

(f) Quality assurance

- The Applicant shall apply appropriate and validated methodologies for all quantitative components of the work, where applicable, and shall clearly specify and justify the qualitative analytical methods to be used.
- The Applicant must demonstrate that all methods proposed are robust, fit for purpose and capable of producing reliable and credible findings. Safefood reserves the right to seek clarification or require revisions where the proposed approach does not meet acceptable quality standards.
- Ethical approval will be an essential component where data collection from participants is involved.

## 5. Proposed Activities/Deliverables

- A comprehensive report detailing methods, findings, insights, published to the Safefood website which sets out a full evaluation of the social supermarket programme which will contain:
  - Evaluation of the current social supermarket programme in Northern Ireland
  - Evidence to inform future policies and initiatives that shape the delivery of food to vulnerable communities on the island of Ireland.

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- Actionable recommendations for those involved in social supermarkets on the island of Ireland.
- A summary guidance document to support future monitoring by practitioners and policymakers.
- Dissemination of report and findings to relevant audiences including presentation at 2 Safefood events:
  - A meeting of the All-Island Food Poverty Network (AIFPN) and/or
  - A stakeholder webinar. The key stakeholders for this work include policy makers; community workers; the Safefood Knowledge Base and researchers in the area.

## 6. Evaluation of Tenders

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables.
- ✓ Research method and facilities.
- ✓ Value for money.
- ✓ Potential for application.
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.
- ✓ Environmental and social considerations.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject area.
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

## 7. Duration of Project

12 months

## 8. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from this link <https://www.safefood.net/professional/research/research-tenders>

They can also be obtained by emailing [research@safefood.net](mailto:research@safefood.net), quoting the project reference number 05-2026. Alternatively, please contact Safefood as per the details below.

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The closing date for receipt of applications by Safefood is no later than **4pm Friday 15 May 2026**.

## 9. References

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