



THE ROYAL  
COUNTRYSIDE  
FUND

## Guidance Notes

### Autumn 2023 Grant Round: Supporting Rural Communities

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## Introduction

The RCF supports projects that make a difference in rural communities across the UK with grants of up to £25,000 over two years. Applicants must be from properly constituted, not-for-profit organisations with an income of less than £500,000.

We support projects taking place in villages and towns in rurally isolated areas, where access to service is poor. Projects must be community led, pursuing solutions that improve the viability and resilience of their community.

Successful projects will achieve one or more of the following programme aims:

- Support people to resolve existing and emerging community issues, circumstances, and priorities in their locality
- Build rural community resilience
- Develop innovative and replicable projects
- Enable leadership and community planning
- Improve the economic or social resilience of a rural community
- Reduce isolation for people living in rural areas through improving service provision
- Create a self-sufficient rural community fit for the future.

The outcomes RCF seek to achieve through our grant programme include:

- Reinvigorating or developing community networks
- Improving the health and well-being of socially isolated people
- Creating a legacy of support and promoting community spirit and cohesion
- Communities supporting one another through volunteering opportunities
- Promoting a greener economy by encouraging people to travel less and utilise locally grown and crafted products.
- Rural Communities are more resilient
- Successful community-led solutions

We are particularly interested in supporting fledgeling ideas and projects, so do please engage with us through the form on our website [Speak to the team - The Royal Countryside Fund](#).

For inspiration, and to see some examples of the fantastic projects we have previously supported, please visit our website [www.royalcountrysidefund.org.uk](http://www.royalcountrysidefund.org.uk). Our [Village Survival Guide](#) contains some brilliant case studies and is an invaluable tool for community organisations to use when planning projects.

We are extremely grateful to players of People's Postcode Lottery for their continued support, which has enabled us to offer this funding.



## How much?

You should apply for as much as you need to complete your project, **to a maximum of £25,000**, to be spent over a period of up to two years.

## For what?

We know that the challenges faced by rural communities are wide ranging, so there are no strict criteria on what you can apply for (other than what is outlined below). However, **you must demonstrate demand for the project from the community it will be serving**. Grants are heavily assessed on this factor, so if you cannot currently demonstrate this effectively, we recommend spending time gathering this information and applying in the next funding round. **Applications which cannot evidence widespread community support, will not be progressed.**

We would also like applications to demonstrate how community leadership is driving projects forward, but please note we cannot retrospectively fund activity that has already taken place.

The following criteria will be considered when awarding our grants:

- Does the project meet the programme aims, as stated above?
- What is the need for this project, and are the community engaged and supportive of it?
- Is there significant demand from the local community? Have you demonstrated this?
- Is the evidence provided directly related to the project being proposed?
- Who will benefit from this project? And is it accessible to all in your community?
- Is your proposal clear, realistic, and achievable within the timescale stated below?
- Does your project offer value for money?

Please note that there are some things we cannot fund (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Purchase of buildings or land.
- Planning permission/ building regulations (including design and planning consultants).
- Building projects where planning permission is not yet in place.
- Projects taking place in a location where the purchase/ rent agreement is not complete.
- Statutory requirements.
- Technical energy projects where a specialist funder might be more appropriate.
- Projects where our contribution makes up less than 10% of the total cost of the project.
- Projects that aim to promote a religion.
- The purchase of food or refreshments.
- Working capital - the liquid funds available to meet your daily business expenses.
- Re-granting – where the funds will be transferred from you to other organisations or individuals.
- Loans.
- Projects where there may be other, more appropriate funders with a better understanding of the issue. For example, those dealing with:
  - domestic violence
  - migration
  - dementia or elderly care
  - healthcare or mental healthcare provision.

While we can consider applications for village hall and other community asset renovation projects, you will need to clearly demonstrate why this project is needed; that there is no similar provision provided by other assets in your community; and that there is demand from the local community to have this work done. The evidence required here must be from the wider community, not just from the applicant themselves.

If you are applying for funding for an asset on council owned land, you will need to demonstrate support from the council for the project and a commitment from them to provide long-term maintenance. If your project is successful in receiving funding, we will request a letter from the council evidencing this.

### Who?

Applications are encouraged from properly constituted, not-for-profit and community-led organisations in rural areas with a turnover under £500,000 per year, that can demonstrate how beneficiaries will be drawn directly from the local rural community.

RCF is only able to fund up to 15% of grant applications made to us in each funding round. We recognise that our strength lies in funding specific projects in rural areas for which we have the specialist knowledge and understanding to make informed funding decisions. We want to be the most appropriate funder for our projects and be able to provide support to our recipients where required.

We appreciate the time it takes to write funding applications, so we want to be as transparent as possible with our criteria.

With this in mind, we have updated our eligibility requirements as follows:

Types of organisation that we are unable to fund. These include (but are not limited to):

- Care Farms or similar projects where the beneficiaries are drawn from a larger area than just the local community.
- Local Authorities, including Town and Parish Councils.
- Hospitals and Schools.
- Private companies and individuals.
- Youth clubs.
- Uniformed groups such as scouts, guides and sea cadets.
- Sports clubs and associations.

### Community Need and Deprivation

As a rural funder, the RCF recognises that deprivation is often hard to quantify through the usual statistical measures. However, we want to direct funding where it is needed most. Therefore, applications from areas of deprivation, or those that can show how the project will benefit those most in need within an area of wealth disparity, will likely be prioritised over those from more affluent areas.

### Rurality

While the RCF does not impose strict limits on population size, we focus our support on remote rural areas, where the project is required due to a lack of alternative services in that locality. Therefore, applications from small villages and towns, or rurally dispersed areas, will likely be prioritised over those from larger towns, which may be better served.

We appreciate that some larger towns (over 4,000 people) may still be underserved and distant from urban and per-urban hubs. If your community falls into this category, we recommend [contacting the grants team](#) to discuss prior to starting an application.

### Where?

We are open to applications from across the UK and particularly encourage applications from Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we accept applications from all parts of the UK and applications will be assessed on their own merit.

### How long?

We will be awarding funding for projects for up to two years' duration. Projects do not have to start immediately, but all projects must be completed by **January 2026**.

### When will the grant be paid?

All grants will be paid in two instalments, generally equating to half the amount in each, with the first instalment paid at the end of January 2024 (depending on the applicant returning the grant agreement and all other requirements being in place). Please consider how this might impact your project if there is a large amount of early-stage capital expenditure.

For all grants, we will require an interim progress report and a final report.

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## Important Tips for Writing your Application

Answer all questions on the application form as openly as possible. We are expecting a great deal of interest and will rely on the information you've given us. Please do not send us any supplementary information other than that which is requested in the online application form.

Completing the application form will not guarantee that your project will be funded. We usually receive many more applications than we can fund, and so you should be aware of the competition. If you are unsure whether your project meets the criteria, please contact us first via the [online form](#).

### Section 1: Applicant Details

This section is to collect all the relevant information about your organisation and the named person who will be responsible for the project.

### Section 2: Project Overview

This section is your opportunity to tell us all about your project, including how you have identified that it's needed, and how you will deliver it.

We are looking for projects that can demonstrate there is need and demand for their project within the local community. You will **need to provide evidence** of this using data relating directly to your target community and project. Please do not use generalised statistics or

reports, for example, those talking about the rise in social isolation in the UK. **We want to know about your community.**

You could demonstrate the need and demand for your project through the following:

- Survey data where respondents have been asked whether they want the project (ensure you include the sample size e.g. we surveyed 100 people from the community and 85% stated they supported XYZ project).
- Survey data where respondents have been asked how much they value and use the community asset for which you are fundraising.
- Testimonials from a wide range of community members, groups or organisations stating the need and support for the project.
- Examples of previous, similar projects you have run and the impact these had on the local community.

Remember to ensure the **evidence relates to your specific project** and the need for it, not just your organisation or the issue at hand.

Projects that benefit the whole community rather than a small sub-section are preferable. If your project only reaches a small number of people, tell us about the depth of the project and the impact it will have on the lives of participants. Consider how this may affect the wider community. Are there secondary benefits to them that might not be immediately apparent?

We are looking for all projects to demonstrate '**additional benefits.**' You can think about these in terms of direct beneficiaries e.g., those taking part in the proposed activity and secondary beneficiaries e.g., those who live in the community who may benefit from the activity taking place.

For example:

Direct beneficiaries: a training programme where 10 people from a low-income group are offered horticultural skills and qualifications. This training increases their ability to find work and play a more active part in the local economy.

Secondary beneficiaries: as part of their training, the group reinvigorate the local common which was previously in an unusable state; because of this, other community groups can now utilise the space and an annual summer fête will take place, increasing community cohesion.

### Section 3: Your Project Activities and Outcomes

**Activity** – When you are planning a project, one of the main steps is to define the activities required to bring that project to the point of completion. You can do this by creating a list of the activities. For example, if you were planning a training event you might:

- Appoint a project lead
- Agree training content
- Recruit 20 volunteers to support delivery
- Create and disseminate 200 promotional materials
- Reach out to the local community to attract potential participants
- Run 10 training sessions for 50 participants

- Evaluate and report

**Desired Outcome** – key to understanding outcomes is to focus on the benefits to your beneficiaries that come from the activity, service or project, not items that will be purchased. Think about what will happen because of the activity? What benefits or changes will there be?

Types of outcomes could include:

- 40 local children have a better understanding of rural issues
- 70% of participants have a greater knowledge of traditional wood carving techniques
- 100 people from the local community met someone new

**Date of completion** – When will this activity be completed by?

When telling us about your activities and outcomes, try to use numbers as much as possible, as in the examples above. Make sure to split out your activities, rather than putting them all in one row together. The application form allows you to add as many new rows as you like.

## Section 4: Project Finances

**Total cost of project:** please include the total cost of the project (even if you are applying to RCF to part fund your activity). Keep in mind that RCF's contribution must make up at least 10% of the total cost of the project.

**Itemised breakdown:** it is important that you clearly state what you want the RCF to fund, item by item, as this is what will be included in your grant agreement should your application be successful.

If the cost of your project is more than the amount requested from RCF, you'll need to tell us where the rest of the funding is coming from. Please tell us the amount, the name of the funder, and the date you expect the outcome (if not already secured).

You will need to send us a copy of your organisation's latest accounts which include details of annual income – we won't be able to consider your application otherwise. If you are a new organisation, we will accept a set of management accounts or budgets from your accountant.

## Section 5: Long Term vision

How have you ensured that the project is sustainable in the future? It is important to RCF that once our funding has concluded, your project or organisation can continue to thrive and support the needs of your local community. Tell us how your project will be financially secure in the long-term.

We are keen to understand how you work with other community groups and organisations in your local area, do you share resources or learning and ideas? This is an opportunity to demonstrate how you are connected with others in your rural community.

## Section 6: Project Risks

All projects have risks, and we will expect you to have identified these and considered how you will mitigate them. This will demonstrate good project management and will indicate that

your organisation understands what's needed and what could possibly prevent your project from being successful. Please make sure you add a new row for each risk.

The environmental impact may not be relevant for all applications, but there is usually some way in which a project can be managed to reduce its environmental impact.

## Section 7: References

Please provide the details of two referees who would be happy to be contacted regarding your application. These should be people who know and understand your organisation, **but are not directly involved in it**. They should be a working professional, local councillor etc. using a business / work email.

## Section 8: Declaration

Please make sure that you include the details of two signatories from your organisation.

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## How to submit your application

When the round opens, a link to the application form will be available on the website: [www.royalcountrysidefund.org.uk/grants](http://www.royalcountrysidefund.org.uk/grants)

You can save your application as you go along, before you submit and we strongly recommend doing so. We also suggest drafting your answers in a separate document just in case something goes wrong. There is a PDF version of the questions available on the website to help you do this.

Once you have opened the link on our website, you will see an eligibility quiz which, once completed, will take you to the application form.

To save your application and come back to it later, you will be asked for your email address and to create a password (please keep a note of your password). You will then be sent a link to your application form via email. **Please re-access the form via the link in your email, rather than from the website.**

Once you are happy with all your responses, please press 'Review & Submit'. Please note, your application will **not** be submitted when you press 'Review & Submit'. You must review your application and submit on the next page.

You will be alerted if any questions have been missed. You will then be taken to a page where you can review your entire application and save a copy by pressing 'print' at the bottom.

On the 'Review your Response' page you **MUST** click the 'confirm' button at the bottom of this page to finalise your response, otherwise your application will not be submitted.

You will receive a notification on screen and an email once your application has been received (please check your spam/ junk folder)



**Applications close on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at midday.**

The online form will be taken down at midday on the closing date. We are unable to accept applications in any other format. We therefore recommend you get your application in as soon as possible.

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## Talk to us about your project

We know it can be helpful to discuss your project before applying. To arrange a call, please submit your details via this [online form](#). We do ask that you use the form to contact us rather than emailing or phoning. This will allow us to provide you with better, more informed guidance.

Please note that we are a small team, so may not be able to respond to you immediately. If you contact us via email or phone to discuss your project, you will be re-directed to the online form.

Once you have submitted your application, you may not hear from us until the end of our assessment process. Please try to refrain from phoning or emailing to check on your application – we will get back to all applicants as soon as the grants have been agreed. You may also need to check your spam/ junk email folder, as unfortunately emails from our grant management system sometimes end up here.

We will let you know the outcome of your application by the **week commencing Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023**. Successful applicants will receive a phone call.

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## How we make funding decisions

RCF staff experienced in assessing and awarding grants will consider the applications as they arrive with us and will ascertain whether the application is eligible.

All eligible applications are assessed twice against a set of scoring criteria, using the information provided in your application. The top-scoring applications will then be considered by our Grants Sub-committee, which is comprised of RCF trustees, independent members, and the Executive Director. They will make the final decision which is then ratified by the full Board.