Westminster VCS Core Funding Programme Prospectus 2023

* Please make sure you also read the Application Guidance document for details on what to expect in the application process.

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# 1. Introduction

I am very pleased to introduce the first round of the Westminster VCS Core Funding Programme. The voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Westminster does an amazing job in supporting local people, providing essential services and empowering local communities with knowledge and skills. When we launched the Fairer Westminster strategy and delivery plan, we made a clear commitment to empower the local VCS. We are committed to working in partnership with the sector to deliver our ambitions of a Fairer Westminster.

This programme is the council’s first sector-wide core funding programme. In May 2023, we launched our VCS Investment Strategy 2023-2028 that sets out our intentions and committed actions to better invest in and partner with the local voluntary sector. The strategy highlights the responsibility of the council to promote the stability and vitality of the VCS beyond its traditional project funding and contractual arrangements. It commits to the council playing a role in building capacity in the VSC, and recognises core funding as an important enabler to this.

By developing a core funding programme, we want to change the landscape of support that the council provides to the VCS. We are keen to see the sector grow so that we can ensure that all communities in Westminster have strong organisations to turn to. This means making core funding accessible to small and medium sized organisations who are often expert in providing services led by and targeted at diverse communities.

With the challenges that we, residents, and community organisations are facing in current times, we are excited to be able to open this 3-year programme that gives the opportunity to look forward and strengthen the vital work that the voluntary sector does in Westminster.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who took part in our engagement conversations, both in the development of the VCS investment strategy and in the development of this funding programme. And above all, I want to thank every individual and organisation working hard for our City. You are the fabric of Westminster and a vital part of what makes it a great place to live, work and visit.

*Cllr Nafiska Butler-Thalassis*

*Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector*





# 2. Critical information

## Minimum criteria for applicants

To be able to apply for this funding, your organisation must meet the following criteria:

* The charitable objects of the organisation must align with the Fairer Westminster Strategy. This can be [viewed here.](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj9yfun-fn_AhUMzKQKHV3DABQQFnoECBkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.westminster.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2Fdocument%2Ffairer-westminster-strategy&usg=AOvVaw1Aei5xLHfsgjK5l1__Ndup&opi=89978449) The strategy sets out the council’s priorities to build fairer communities, fairer housing, fairer environment, fairer economy, and a fairer council.
* Organisations applying must have an annual expenditure of no more than £450,000. This is to be based on the last year of published accounts.
* Applicants must be registered charities, CIOs or community interest companies (CICs). However, any organisation with more than a £200k annual expenditure must be a registered charity.
* Organisations should be registered and physically based in Westminster, providing services to Westminster residents. Organisations that are not registered in Westminster but have an established service for Westminster residents in the borough, can also apply but may not be prioritised.
* Organisations applying must have been fully operational (and delivering services to Westminster residents) for at least 12 months prior to applying.
* Organisations must have prior experience with receiving grant funding (either from the council or any other funder).

## Grants available

This is a 3-year funding programme. The total amount committed by the council to this fund is £1 million per year, totalling £3 million for the full three-year programme.

There will be one application window in 2023 in which organisations should apply for 3 years of funding. The amount requested should be an equal amount for each year, for example, £10,000 per year for 3 years (£10k x 3), totalling £30k for the total time period.

The table below shows you how much you can apply for depending on the size of your organisation.

**NB** Organisations must not apply for more than 50% of the total value of their yearly expenditure. For example, if your annual expenditure is £20,000, then you should not request more than £10,000 per year in your grant application.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Size of organisation  | Amount requested per year | Total amount requested for the three years |
| **Organisations with an annual income of less than £200,000** | Up to £15,000 | Up to £45,000 |
| **Organisations with an annual income of £200,000 - £450,000** | Up to £30,000 | Up to £90,000 |

## Important note on part funding

Successful organisations will receive the amount they request, as detailed in the 3-year cost breakdown submitted with the application. Therefore, unless an exceptional circumstance, this programme will **not** offer part funding. Organisations are therefore encouraged to be intentional with their budgeting. Please seek advice from your partners or from One Westminster at support@onewestminster.org.uk if there are costs you would like to include that you are not familiar with. This will help to ensure that they are as accurate as possible.

## Key dates

The anticipated timeline for the application, deliberation and award process is:

Stage 1: Launch

* The programme opens for applications on Monday 20th November 2023.
* Online information events will take place online on Thursday 16th November 2023 and Thursday 23rd November 2023. Contact support@onewestminster.org.uk for more information.

Stage 2: Application period

* Online applications will be open for 5 weeks, from Monday 20th November 2023 until Friday 22nd December 1pm.
* Individual support with your application will be available from One Westminster throughout the application period.

Stage 3: Decision-making

* A panel of multi-disciplinary council staff and community reps will assess applications over the months of January and February.
* We aim for provisional offers to be made to successful grantees at the beginning of March 2024. This provisional offer will then be subject to a due diligence process.

Stage 4: Grant award

* Following due diligence processes, we aim to have grant payments processed by the end of April 2024.
* This will be accompanied by formally signed grant agreements.

## How to apply

* Applications must be completed online. Applications will be open from Monday 20th November 2023.
* Visit [www.westminster.gov.uk/vcs-core-funding](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/vcs-core-funding) to apply. If, for accessibility reasons, you require the application form in an alternative format, please contact communitypartnerships1@westminster.gov.uk.
* In addition to the programme prospectus, please remember to also read the Application Guidance document before applying. The Application Guidance provides information on what to expect in the application form and how best to complete it.

## Need help with your application?

One Westminster are able to support applicants. Please contact them directly at support@onewestminster.org.uk.

For technical details on the funding programme, please contact the council at communitypartnerships1@westminster.gov.uk.

# 3. Purpose and aims

## Aims of the programme

The aim of this programme is to support small to medium sized VCS organisations to **strengthen, stabilise and grow**, being better able to consistently support wide-reaching communities to a high standard.

A key intention of this fund is to support organisations that work with Global Majority (BAME) communities and other marginalised groups such as (but not limited to) those with disabilities, **and** that are also led by them. We also intend to prioritise organisations **led by and for** people with lived experience related to the charitable objectives at hand, for example, where working to support people that have experienced a particular disadvantage.

## What changes we want to see as a result of this funding

We appreciate that this funding will have different impacts on different types of organisations, depending on the need and use of funding requested. However, to achieve the key aims of the programme, we expect to see changes in at least one of the following areas as a result of the grant received:

* Services or activities are more stable and consistent and may have been able to expand or grow
* Finances are healthier and/or additional external funds have been successfully bid for (compulsory outcome)
* Strategic planning, good management, governance and/or appropriate systems are better embedded in the organisation
* Staffing or volunteer recruitment, retention or skills are improved

# 4. What can be funded

Organisations should think carefully about what would help them to strengthen, stabilise or grow, in order to best serve local communities. The main areas that will be covered by this fund are as follows:

* **Staff costs relating to the effective running of the organisation**​

This could include fundraising, planning and thinking, financial management, IT and digital, marketing, communications and engagement, partnership working, human resources, general administration. It can also include existing staff posts that are not currently funded properly, such as CEOs and administrators. ​

* **Costs related to organisational development​**

This could include training or learning opportunities, IT systems, brand development, partnership/networking events, developing co-production structures or approaches, strategy development, or impact measurement systems. These can include consultants’ fees.​

* **Costs related to strengthening or scaling up an existing activity or service ​**

This is where an organisation needs funding to deliver an existing essential community service/activity in the longer term so that the service does not need to stop and start under alternative project funding.

* **Running costs that, being covered, allow the organisation to focus on any of the above​**

This could include rent, bills, or essential equipment. This relates to ongoing costs that the organisation often struggles to cover, or new running costs that will enable the organisation to grow, for example, if an organisation is seeking to settle in a new premises for the first time.

**NB** Across all applications, organisations are strongly encouraged to think about including fundraising costs (e.g. bid writing staff/fees) when submitting.

The following areas will not be funded under this programme:

* 100% equipment costs (equipment costs can be included in the applications as a running cost but should not be the sole costs)​
* Building repairs​
* Capital projects (such as landscaping or building works)​
* Emergency costs ​(such as debt or legal fees for open cases)
* New projects or services that are not already running

# 5. Eligibility and requirements of applicants

## Eligibility criteria

In summary, the fund is open to voluntary and community sector organisations that are already delivering services in Westminster to Westminster residents. This means not-for-profit, non-governmental, community-based organisations that are value driven and reinvest surpluses into charitable objectives.

**We will accept applications from the following types of voluntary and community sector organisations:**

* registered charity
* community-interest company (only if has an annual income of less than £200k)
* charitable incorporated organisation

**Your organisation must:**

* have charitable objects that align with the Fairer Westminster strategy
* have been delivering services to Westminster residents for at least the last 12 months
* have prior experience receiving grant funding
* be constituted and have a bank account in the organisation’s name
* have at least two directors or trustees that are not related to each other
* not distribute any of your surpluses or assets through share dividends to individuals or shareholders
* not be a political, government or local authority body
* not provide services or activities whose aims are religious or political in nature (please note that charities that are faith-based can still apply - their activities must be community-oriented)
* not be under any criminal or safeguarding investigation

## Important note on expectations

The Westminster VCS Core Funding Programme cannot meet all types of VCS need and is not intended to be a ‘first time’ funding opportunity. Westminster City Council provides other sources of funding which may be more appropriate for new or not yet well-established local community groups. Visit our website for further information [Grant funding opportunities | Westminster City Council](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-community/grant-funding-opportunities) Westminster’s VCS infrastructure organisation, One Westminster, also has details of a wide range of other funding opportunities currently available [Funding Opportunities | One Westminster](https://www.onewestminster.org.uk/organisation-support/funding-opportunities).

# 6. Applications and decisions

## Apply online

Applications must be completed online when applications open.

## Partnership applications

You can submit an application for core funding in partnership with another organisation. This can only be accepted where there is an existing relationship or existing shared delivery of a service.

We encourage organisations to think about how funding could help them secure shared resource, where appropriate. For example, if 2 or 3 different organisations needed support with financial management, they may seek to bid for a grant to fund one full post for a finance manager that works across all the organisations in partnership.

## Decision-making and assessing

A panel of multi-disciplinary council staff and community reps will shortlist applications and come to a consensus on which will be funded.

Applications will be largely assessed against the following key areas:

* The breadth and depth of your impact on Westminster Communities
* The difference the funding will make to your organisation
* The clarity of your vision for the future of your organisation

## Due diligence

Following the offer of a grant, Westminster City Council will carry out checks to make sure that the information given in the application form is accurate. Applicants will be asked to produce all documents and other evidence mentioned in the application. See the Application Guidance document for what to expect in the application form and once grant offer is made. If all the checks are satisfactorily passed, a final grant agreement will be made and funds released.

# 7. Ongoing relationship

Westminster City Council wants to maintain and build high-quality relationships with organisations that are funded. The intention of the council is to create a relationship with grant-holders based on a culture of collaboration, open dialogue and trust.

This includes:

* giving feedback on monitoring forms
* bringing organisations together to promote learning and exchange
* signposting organisations to access support and information when needed
* informing organisations about Westminster’s strategies, policies and developments relevant to the work they do

All organisations that receive a grant must agree to:

1. be open, transparent and co-operative
2. complete monitoring and other required forms in a timely manner
3. comply with additional requests for information, including from external evaluators if required

## Monitoring requirements

Successful grantees will be asked to complete a short baseline survey on receipt of the grant. They will also be asked to have a phone call or a visit with a council officer during the year over the 3 years. After years 1, 2 and 3, grantees will be asked to submit an annual report on the use and impact of the funding to date. These reports will be designed to track the success of the intended outcomes laid out at application stage, and any other unintended outcomes. The reporting template will be provided by the local authority. Grantees may also be asked to attend peer-learning meetings to discuss organisational progress and reflect on the effectiveness of the funding programme as a whole.

# 8. Data sharing

The Westminster VCS Core Funding programme will work across internal council departments and other funders in the city to maximise our investments and work together for the good of the sector and the city. Shared data across funders can be used to help decision-making, identify gaps in provision and better target support for organisations. By applying to this fund, you agree to allow data about your organisation to be shared with other funders. No personal data will be shared, and it will be stored securely in line with our [privacy notice](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/data-protection).