Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund

Year 6 | Frequently Asked Questions | September 2026

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About the Fund

What organisations can apply for the fund?

The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults provides grants to small, grassroots community groups and organisations, including voluntary or community organisations, registered charities, groups or clubs, social enterprises and community councils.

The Scottish Government recommends that most grants in each local area should support small to medium-sized organisations with annual incomes below £1 million, ensuring grassroots organisations remain the main focus.

National and large organisations with an income over £1 million are not excluded but will only be funded by exception where an identified need cannot be met by grassroots, community-level organisations.

Can unconstituted groups apply for the grant?

Unconstituted groups can apply for small-value grants. They must identify a host partner to hold the funds on their behalf. Alternatively, VCEL can support groups to become constituted.

What are the main priorities of the fund, and must projects meet every priority?

Projects should select and clearly evidence one of the following priorities:

1. **Suicide Prevention** – local projects that foster socio-emotional life skills, early identification and emotional support for anyone affected by suicidal behaviours.
2. **Loneliness and Isolation** – opportunities for people to connect, build trusted relationships and revitalise communities, particularly for at-risk groups.
3. **Poverty and Inequality** – projects that alleviate the impact of the cost of living on mental health and wellbeing, particularly for lone parents; families with a disabled family member; families with three or more children;

minority ethnic families; families whose youngest child is under one; and mothers aged under 25.

Applicants must explain in the application narrative how their project addresses the selected priority.

Which disadvantaged or at-risk groups should activities target?

Applications must demonstrate how they will address the needs of one or more key groups, including:

- Women, particularly young women or those affected by male sexual violence
- People with long-term conditions or disabilities, including neurological conditions and learning disabilities
- People from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Refugees and people with no recourse to public funds
- People facing socio-economic disadvantage
- People experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages
- People with a diagnosed mental illness
- People affected by psychological trauma, including adverse childhood experiences
- People who have experienced bereavement or loss
- People disadvantaged by geographical location, particularly in remote and rural areas
- Older people aged 50 and above
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
- Young people aged 16–24

Partnership working is strongly encouraged. Collaboration can increase reach and impact, improve efficiency through shared resources, reduce overlap and help identify unmet community needs.

Projects and Funding

What types of projects can be funded?

The Fund focuses on adults aged 16 and over and supports projects that help whole communities or community groups, making a difference to individuals' lives.

Projects must meet the Fund aims. Eligible community-based initiatives should promote and develop good mental health and wellbeing and/or mitigate and protect against distress and mental ill health among adults.

Both new and existing projects can be supported. Projects funded previously through the CMH&WB Fund may apply again, except those already receiving multi-year funding for Years 5 and 6. Applications should clearly show how the work will develop from previous rounds, for example by increasing reach and accessibility.

Projects must have a specific local community focus, identify the communities served by postcode and operate only within the East Lothian local authority area.

What can the fund pay for?

The Fund primarily supports operational and revenue costs, including volunteer expenses, one-off fixed-term staff costs and equipment needed to deliver activities.

Applicants may request capital expenditure for construction, refurbishment or the purchase of buildings, amenities or vehicles where the benefits clearly contribute to Fund outcomes. The maximum capital award is £2,000. This limit does not apply to small equipment items, which can be included as equipment costs.

Can young people be involved in delivering a project?

The Fund supports beneficiaries aged 16 and over. Young people may volunteer in a project, but beneficiaries must be aged 16 or above. Where young people help deliver an activity, adequate support and child-protection measures must be in place, with evidence provided in the application.

Can training be included in bids?

Yes. Applicants should consider training activities because capacity building is an important part of the Fund. Training may be available free of charge or may need to be purchased from an external provider.

What is meant by partnership working?

All applications should demonstrate awareness of partnership working. As a rule of thumb, the larger the grant request, the more strongly partnership working should feature.

The panel will look for:

- Research into existing providers or groups in the target locality
- Discussion with groups doing similar work to avoid duplication
- Identification of gaps in provision
- Recognition of shared goals or plans
- Proactive steps to initiate or strengthen collaboration before applying
- Joint bids, partnership agreements or staff from different organisations working toward shared outcomes

Do not submit only a list of organisations you know or work with. Give practical examples, such as co-delivery, joint communications, shared staff roles or premises, strategic planning, participation in partnership groups or shared volunteers.

Can the Fund support existing projects?

Yes. Existing projects should explain how learning from previous years will be used to develop and improve the offer. The Fund mainly supports operational and revenue costs needed to deliver activities.

Can previously funded projects apply again for Year 6?

Organisations awarded multi-year funding for Years 5 and 6 are not eligible to apply again for Year 6. Organisations awarded one year of funding in Years 1–5 may apply in Year 6 for a new or continuation project. The Fund will seek a balance between existing and new projects.

Continuation applications must:

- Show clear evidence of impact and progression
- Explain how the project will develop further
- Report separately on previous activities
- Avoid overlap with Year 5 funding; Year 5 activity should finish before Year 6 begins
- Spend the award within 12 months of receiving it

Applicants continuing a previously funded project may submit one item of evidence, such as a case study, focus-group feedback, survey findings or collated wellbeing measures. If the same staff are involved, applications must distinguish additional hours and clearly allocate activities to the relevant project and funding year.

Can the fund be used for clinical and specialist mental health support?

The Fund is primarily for community-based support and prevention. Recognised therapeutic treatments may form part of a project, but the Fund is not intended to replace funding for direct clinical interventions such as counselling or CBT. Broader community support should complement clinical care.

Where community organisations also provide counselling or therapeutic treatments, appropriate governance must be in place, including adequate support and supervision for staff and volunteers.

Decisions, Conditions and Reporting

How and when will funding decisions be made?

- Applications will be checked as they are submitted.
- Eligible applications will go to an independent scoring panel.
- Decisions will be made in December 2026.
- Applicants will be notified in January 2027.
- Payments will be made by the end of March 2027.

What is the timescale for using the grant?

Year 6 funding covers the 2027–28 financial year. Awards must be spent within 12 months of receipt.

Can the grant be used as match funding?

Yes. The Fund is expected to be oversubscribed, and joint submissions are encouraged as they may strengthen a project's chances of success.

Can churches and religious bodies apply?

Yes, provided the project is consistent with the Fund's aims. Funding cannot be used for religious or campaigning activities, and activities must not be restricted to members of the faith-based organisation.

Are there any conditions for this round?

All funded organisations must add or update their project details on the ALISS database and VCEL's Locator Directory. VCEL can provide support if needed.

What is Minimal Financial Assistance, and why must applicants complete this section?

Minimal Financial Assistance is a provision within the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022. It does not apply directly to this Fund, but due diligence is required for all applications. Although projects are unlikely to constitute a subsidy, this check ensures compliance with subsidy control rules.

What reporting is required?

Small grant recipients will complete a form describing activities and achievements with key figures; photographs are welcome. Medium and larger grant holders will be expected

to provide case studies, key figures or statistics, stories and photographs, as well as mid-term and final reports.

Evaluating impact	
Delivery against plan	Describe planned and actual activities, numbers of activities and participants, and the main beneficiaries. Maximum 350 words.
Achievements and difference made	Explain achievements that demonstrate a difference to individuals' mental health and wellbeing. Maximum 500 words.
Outcomes and evidence	Use the outcomes stated in the funding agreement. For each outcome, describe evidence-gathering methods, whether it was achieved and the indicators of success.
Challenges and changes	Describe problems that slowed progress, prevented outcomes or required changes. Maximum 350 words.

Applications and Support

Where can I find the application form, and how do I apply?

All information is available on the VCEL website. The Fund opens for applications on **Thursday 17 September 2026** and closes at **5.00pm on Monday 2 November 2026**.

Further information and support

VCEL wants the application process to be accessible to small and inexperienced organisations. Contact us as early as possible if you need help understanding the criteria, discussing eligibility, requesting an accessible format or identifying capacity-building support.

Contact VCEL
Email: funding@vcel.org.uk
Website: www.vcel.org.uk