

Lead the Change

Programme Guidelines March 2026

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Programme Guidelines

About the programme

Lead the Change is a new, three-year initiative launched by BBC Children in Need, in partnership with Co-op Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Henry Smith Foundation, Joseph Levy Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Postcode Justice Trust, UK Community Foundations and The National Lottery Community Fund. The programme supports young people to play a leading role in strengthening relationships, fostering understanding and building belonging in their communities.

Research shows that many young people feel disconnected, less heard by decision makers, and increasingly cautious about expressing themselves - especially online, where exposure to harmful or misleading content can be common. Combined with financial pressures facing families and communities, these factors can deepen isolation and weaken young people's sense of belonging.

Lead the Change responds by investing directly in youth leadership, community connection and opportunity. The programme enables youth-led projects, creates safe spaces, strengthens relationships across communities, and helps young people build skills, including navigating online information and shaping positive narratives.

What the Programme Aims to Achieve

Lead the Change aims to:

- Strengthen community connection and safety.
- Empower young people as leaders, storytellers and changemakers.
- Support young people to build digital literacy and challenge harmful narratives.
- Increase opportunity through skills and leadership pathways.
- Build a national movement for youth-led connection and change.

Key details

- **Grant amount:** £123,353 per organisation
- **Grant length:** 3 years
- **Grant type:** Project grants
- **Location:** to support the aims and delivery of work in Croydon which meets the criteria set out below.
- Applicants will be required to demonstrate the strength of youth leadership and voice within their organisation, relevance to target communities (young people impacted by xenophobia, racism, and islamophobia) and programme aims, safeguarding and trauma-informed practice, capacity to deliver and sustain impact and a commitment to the [six principles of high-quality youth social action](#). We particularly

welcome applications from organisations led by people most impacted by xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia.

- You can apply if you are already funded by BBC Children in Need or a community foundation, but you cannot apply for the same work that is already funded (or any work already funded by another organisation).
- You can only apply for and hold one Lead the Change grant.
- Each community foundation will award one or two grants only, most will award one grant

Who Can Apply

Lead the Change is open to registered not-for-profit organisations in the UK that:

- **Meet The London Community Foundation's [eligibility criteria](#), see below for full guidance**
- Have an annual turnover of no more than £2m, unless you are a domestic abuse refuge or hospice
- Have at least three trustees/members of the governing body
- Deliver work in one of the 27 target places (for London this is Croydon)
- Work with children and young people aged 18 years and under
- Work in the heart of their communities and are trusted by young people
- Work in and are based in one of the eligible areas (for London this is Croydon)
- Put the voices, experiences and skills of children and young people at the centre of everything they do, from design to delivery
- Can demonstrate strong safeguarding and trauma-informed practice
- Are keen to keep learning about and developing their work with children and young people
- Have at least three unrelated board/governing body members

What the Programme Will Fund

Lead the Change will fund work that strengthens local relationships, builds confidence and belonging, and gives young people the tools to lead change.

We are keen to fund organisations that will support young people to drive positive change in their communities informed by local priorities. Projects could include:

- Safe spaces for young people to meet and connect – youth clubs, sports, creative and cultural spaces.
- Youth-led community action and resilience – co-designed projects, leadership development, intercultural initiatives to bring people together.
- Pathways to opportunity – skills development, mentoring, training and connection to training or apprenticeships.
- Narrative change and digital literacy – tackling misinformation and disinformation, storytelling and youth-created content.

What the Programme Cannot Fund

- Core costs (reasonable evidenced overheads are OK as part of the budget for your project application)
- Individuals
- Organisations without adequate safeguarding, governance or financial processes
- Companies limited by shares or any profit making non-charitable entity
- Local authorities, schools, NHS bodies, hospitals, prisons or other statutory agencies
- Housing Associations
- CICs limited by Shares (or any non-charitable CIC)
- Work that statutory bodies have a duty to fund
- Medical treatment or research
- Pregnancy testing or advice, information, or counselling on pregnancy choices
- Work promoting religion or political parties, or any political activity or direct lobbying
- Political Parties

- Awareness-raising work, except where targeted at children or young people most at risk
- Capital costs for large items, renovations, refurbishments or building projects (small project related capital items are acceptable, but cannot form a significant portion of the budget)
- Bursaries, sponsored places, fees, or similar costs
- Trips abroad or any activity taking place outside of the UK
- Holidays
- Retrospective costs (any work that has already taken place, or costs incurred, prior to the date of your grant offer letter)
- Unspecified expenditure
- General appeals, endowments or debt repayment
- Projects unable to start within three months of the grant award date
- Projects already funded through other means
- Any activity that is already being funded through another CF or CIN grant. We cannot fund the same activity twice. All applications should clearly demonstrate that they are either for different work, or for work with a different cohort of children and young people

What Applicants Must Demonstrate

- Close alignment with the aims of Lead the Change
- A track record of working within their community and ability to show how their project will create meaningful, measurable change for local children and young people.
- The strength of youth leadership and voice within their organisation (in design and/or delivery and/or governance)
- Relevance to target communities (young people impacted by xenophobia, racism, and islamophobia) and programme aims.
- Safeguarding and trauma-informed practice, capacity to deliver and sustain impact and a commitment to the [six principles of high-quality youth social action](#)
- We particularly welcome applications from organisations led by people most impacted by xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia.
- Strong local connections, including lived experience, community leadership, or volunteer involvement from the children, young people, and families they support
- Capacity to deliver safely and sustainably

Application Process

[Click here to apply – this link will be added on 8th April]

Stage 1: Expression of Interest (EOI)

Opens: 8 April 2026

You will have a minimum of 3 weeks to submit your EOI. The closing date will be published when applications open. It may vary depending on the community foundation hosting the fund.

The EOI is short. You'll be asked for basic organisational information, a brief overview of your proposed work, and initial safeguarding confirmation. You will be contacted by mid May if you have been invited to make a full application.

Stage 2: Full Application (Invitation Only)

Invitations sent to successful applicants in May.

You will have at least four weeks to complete the full application and you'll be told the deadline when you receive the invite.

Full applications ask for more detail about your project, youth leadership, safeguarding, governance, finances and delivery plan. You will hear the outcome in mid-late August.

If You Are Funded

- You will receive a grant letter and funding agreement.
- Projects are expected to start as soon as possible.
- You will join a national learning community and take part in shared learning and youth-focused activities.
- Your Community Foundation will support you with monitoring and reporting.

How to apply:

You must be operating in **Croydon, London** to apply via **The London Community Foundation**. If you meet all of the criteria above, click here to apply (link to be added 8th April)

If you are working in one of the other places, click here to see how to apply [insert link to UKCF website].

FAQs

Q: I already have a grant with BBC Children in Need – can I apply?

A: Yes, but not for the same work.

Q: I already have a grant with my local community foundation. Can I apply?

A: Yes, but not for the same work.

Q: I have a member of staff in a post that is part funded already. Can I apply for funding for the other unfunded part of the post, so that they can work on my eligible project?

A: Yes – you will need to provide evidence to support this with your application.

Q: My organisation delivers work in one of the places but isn't based there, can I apply?

A: We expect most organisations we fund in this programme to be small community organisations which both work in and are based in the places we are targeting. We will prioritise organisations that meet both of these aims. In places where there are lots of youth organisations that are based in the place directly, an application from an organisation outside of that place is unlikely to be successful.

However, if your organisation delivers in one of the target places with less youth provision overall (or no relevant youth provision located directly in the place), is locally rooted and connecting with your community, and is located close to but not *directly in* the place your application will still be considered. We recognise that there are some areas with less youth provision overall, or where organisations are spread over a larger distance due to their rural nature. You will need to be able to show a strong connection and track record in that place. If you think this might apply to your organisation, contact the local community foundation to check if you are eligible.

Q: My organisation is not eligible to apply because we are not registered, can we apply via a host?

A: Applications from host organisations will be accepted where this is the most impactful way to meet the aims of the programme, and where there is a demonstrated need for this way of working (for example, a smaller organisation is the only one trusted by a particular community). The host must be co-delivering the work (not simply passing the funds on), take the lead on delivery, and takes full responsibility for adhering to the terms and conditions of the grant including the finance, governance and safeguarding, for the lifetime of the project.

Q: My organisation wants to work in partnership with others, can we apply together?

A: All applications must be made by one organisation. One organisation can apply as a “host” to work with up to two other organisations, where they can demonstrate that this approach is the most impactful way to meet the aims of the programme. The host must be co-delivering the work (not simply passing the funds on) and takes full responsibility for adhering to the terms and conditions of the grant including the finance, governance and safeguarding, for the lifetime of the project.

LCF's Core eligibility criteria

(i). Who can apply?

- **Eligible Legal Structures** – there must be a signed governing document in place appropriate to the legal structure which includes an asset lock (or equivalent clause), and the purpose of all funded activities must be charitable (not for profit):
 - Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
 - Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) - may also be registered as a Charity or a Community Interest Company Limited by Guarantee (CICLG)
 - Trust
 - Unincorporated Association
 - Community Benefit Societies (CBS). Ideally, the CBS will also be registered as charitable with HMRC, however, this is not essential.

(ii) Applicants must have

- **Governance:** You must have **at least three unrelated members*** legally responsible for the governance of the organisation; Trustees/Directors/Management Committee as appropriate to your structure. *Please note that **this refers to the highest level of governance**, a Management Committee that sits below a board of Trustees (e.g. charities, CIOs) or Directors (CLG or CICLG) does not count towards this.
- **Bank account:** A bank account in the same name as the organisation applying with a minimum of two unrelated signatories must be in place by the start of the grant.
- **Safeguarding:** You must have a safeguarding policy in place that has been **reviewed in the last year** and is dated. The policy must also meet LCF's minimum requirements – please see <https://londoncf.org.uk/apply/lcfs-safeguarding-checklist>
- **Previous LCF funding:** You cannot have any outstanding monitoring due for any previous London Community Foundation grants at the time of application. You can still apply if you have an open grant with the London Community Foundation as long as you are not overdue for any reporting requirements. If you are unsure about your previous London Community Foundation grant status or monitoring requirements, please contact applications@londoncf.org.uk.
- **Registration:** If the income for charitable purposes is more than £5,000 at the point of application, organisations must have submitted an application to register to Charity Commission or the relevant regulator (e.g., Companies House, CIC regulator or Financial Conduct Authority).
If the LCF grant will take the organisation over £5,000, please visit [this website](#) for guidance on setting up a charity, including information on legal structures.

(iii). Relevant exclusions

- The grant funds cannot be used for activities where people are excluded on the basis of religion, sexual orientation, sex or ethnicity (unless the issue is group-specific).
- There must be no personal benefit attached to the grant.
- The organisation must not have two years of late submissions to the Charity Commission / Companies House within the last two completed financial years.
- The organisation must not have two years of net current liabilities within the two most recent completed financial years.
- Organisations where Trustees are paid are not eligible unless evidence of approval is provided from the Charity Commission and/or this arrangement is referenced in the governing document.
- If you are unsure whether your proposed project and/or the expenditure requested meets the aims of the programme, please contact us prior to submitting your application.