

FUNDING GUIDE 13: Local Authorities and Funding

It is possible that your Local Authority will have funds to assist you with your project, whether funds are required for maintenance or repair to your church building or for assistance with your churchyard.

Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a Local Authority (whether at county, district or parish council level) to contribute towards the maintenance, repair or adaptation of churches on the basis that the expenditure would be in the interests of, and bring benefits to, some or all of the inhabitants of the area. There is an upper limit and other conditions on the amount that local authorities can spend each year in this way but it is worth enquiring. The church is often one of the chief local cultural assets and tourist attractions, as well as a local community facility, and so you can confidently present your project as being in the interests of the community.

Parish councils (which are often responsible legally for carrying out maintenance to closed churchyards) may be prepared to make an annual grant towards the upkeep of open churchyards and, given sufficient prior warning for budgeting purposes, may be able to do the same for maintenance of the church building itself.

Local Authorities may also be prepared to fund a project if it matches one of their aims. For instance, if they want to do community work in a deprived, densely populated area and you have a building in the area that can be adapted for the purpose. In such cases you and your Local Authority become stakeholders in the project. This can be a win-win situation, where you get repairs and alterations done and the Local Authority fulfil their aims. It is, however, important that you are clear as to what they wish to do and how long they will be involved. It is wise and good practice to have properly minuted negotiations before the project begins. *It is also worth contacting your County Council and Regional Development Agency to see what funds they have available for projects in the area.*

Statutory Grants

Statutory means that the grants come from the government or a local body such as the local or *county council*, Health Authority or Education Authority. Money is made available to voluntary groups for work that the government or local agencies have identified as necessary.

Regeneration/Economic Development Initiatives

Other sources of funding available are those for regeneration and economic development of areas. These are usually only accessible through LSP (Local Strategic Partnerships) formed between Local Authorities and the community and business sectors.

Enquiries for funding are best preceded by some low-key lobbying as opposed to a letter addressed impersonally. A good starting point is your local district/borough councillor who will be aware of what is available. Your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) is also a good source of information.

Some key policies you should be aware of before approaching your local authority for funding include Best Value and Local Compacts. As well as grant opportunities, funding opportunities from local government agencies include the delivery of public services under contract and asset transfer.

Background to the Compact

The Compact is an agreement that improves relations between the Government and voluntary and community groups for mutual advantage. It is a way of working in partnership in an attempt to get it right together, rather than getting it wrong alone. There are a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that it works effectively, including its own mediation scheme and Ombudsman.

Local Compacts aim to improve relationships between voluntary and community sectors and local government locally through the sector, councils and other local bodies. Typically, Local Compacts involve the Local Strategic Partnership and also sign up all local public bodies along with voluntary and community groups.

Themes

All Local Compacts usually share the following themes:

1. Funding
2. Consultation
3. Volunteering
4. Black and Minority Ethnic organisations
5. Community groups

The Council's Timetable and Process

Work on the preparation of capital and revenue estimates starts in September/October for the financial year commencing the following 1 April. The Government's contribution, known as 'The Rate Support Grant', is usually confirmed in December and budgets are prepared which go to the Policy & Resources Committee and/or the Finance Committee for approval and submission to the full Council in February/March. This practice will vary from authority to authority and it is wise for you to make it your business to know exactly what happens in your own authority.

For a council to include provision for a major item in its estimates, particularly a capital project, detailed information is required the previous summer/early autumn. Applications for small grants towards revenue expenditure can normally be made in writing at any time of year but an application at the beginning of the financial year is likely to stand more chance of success. Notably, many authorities have a rolling programme or priority system which, although possibly covers several years, may be amended annually if priorities or other circumstance change.

Help In Kind

It is always worth remembering that local authorities may be able to provide 'help in kind' rather than financial funding. These may include; nominal rent for a community centre; mandatory and discretionary rate relief; use of equipment (such as photocopier); technical and professional help (e.g. producing publicity or legal advice).

SOME TIPS

▪ Network with similar organisations

You may find that there are larger groups than can act as an umbrella group for disability, age, mental health, carers, women, youth, early years, learning disability, etc.

▪ Know your contacts

Know who to contact to access funding in relation to size of grant required and the nature of your project.

- **Keep up to date**

Many communities publish their own free papers and newsletters. Get your group put onto mailing lists that advertise grants and other opportunities. Your local CVS(Council for Voluntary Service), Local Authority or Rural Community Council should be able to help. Use the internet and local government websites to search for the latest information.

- **Seek guidance**

Seek help and guidance to complete applications. The funding officer with your Diocese and many CVS and local authorities will also be willing to assist. Don't be afraid to contact the funders directly and discuss your application with them.

- **Give all the relevant information every time**

Do not take for granted that the funder knows your church or what you do. Read all documentation provided by funders and ensure all essential information is forwarded with the application.

- **Supply documentation**

Back up your application with documentation that provides evidence of the need for what you propose to do. If the funder allows, provide letters of support, research and survey findings, figures and statistics. Include any publicity material that you have produced about your organisation.

- **Consider partnerships** (*See also FG7*)

In order to build credibility consider working in partnership with other groups. This may improve the service you wish to offer and collaborative working demonstrates commitment, planning and your willingness to work with others. Partnership work can also show value for money in delivery projects.

- **Copy all documentation**

Before forwarding your application, copy all documentation and file for reference purposes. This will be useful when funders contact you with queries regarding your application.

- **Keep funders informed**

With successful applications gather evidence and success stories and forward these to the funder. This shows your ability to deliver what you said you would deliver and may assist you in future bids.

- **Be proactive**

Access the right people. Access the right guidance. Access the right funds.

Some helpful Websites:

☞ www.governmentfunding.org.uk This site provides some relevant information and allows you to do a funding search

☞ www.LocalGovernment4Me explains the structure, role and remit of local government in the UK

☞ www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/ NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations); or call 0800 2 798 798