CRITERIA

STRONGER FUTURES FUND

A FUND BY
BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Stronger Futures Fund

Funded by:
BLCF
Bedfordshire & Luton Community Foundation

With support of:
The Steel Charitable Trust

Partners:
Bedfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner
be active

INTRODUCTION

The Stronger Futures Fund supports the sustainability of Bedfordshire based charitable organisations by offering multi-year unrestricted funding to help organisations focus on their strategic development, planning and building capacity. The fund is open to organisations delivering preventative and early intervention services to Bedfordshire residents. The fund will contribute to work that will support the financial stability, over 3 years, for charitable organisations with a strong track record (minimum 3 years) of delivery and a priority will be given to those supporting residents living in Luton. This fund builds on learning from previous Stability Fund rounds, which have supported organisations in developing their core and sustainable development plans.

OBJECTIVES

The Stronger Futures Fund supports charitable organisations committed to equity and fairness, and those which are addressing priorities outlined in **BLCF's Strategic Plan**https://blcf.org.uk/about-us/strategic-plan/,. The funds priorities are to address the following:

- Poverty,
- Wider determinants of health,
- Mental health
- Climate change
- Supporting children and young people (age 0-25)

HOW MUCH CAN GROUPS APPLY FOR?

Grants of up to £10,000 per year, for a maximum of three years, are available for up to ten organisations. Bedfordshire based organisations may apply, but priority will be given to organisations supporting communities in Luton.

For organisations applying against our Luton priority that are based outside Luton, at least 50% of your organisation's beneficiaries must be from Luton.
Funding will be ring-fenced for at least one organisation engaged in physical activity.
The programme will run from March 2027 to March 2030.

How the funding can be used

The unrestricted funding can be used towards core costs, as well as activities that help strengthen and develop your organisation for the future. This could include expert support, learning and development, skills and training, governance, business planning or developing fundraising strategies.

Core costs are essential running expenses, such as rent, utilities, insurance and staff costs, which enable your organisation to operate rather than being linked to a specific project or activity.

If you are applying for core costs

If you intend to use the funding towards core costs, you will be asked to provide information about your organisation's current financial position and your plans for longer-term financial sustainability. This will include:

- information about your current financial position and operating budget;
- information about the status of, and plans for, any restricted or designated reserves;
- operational plans and a financial forecast covering the next 12 months, together with an indicative plan for longer-term financial sustainability.

Smaller community groups may provide a simplified budget or plan showing projected income and expenditure for the next 12 months.

If you have any queries, please contact us at grants@blcf.org.uk

PEER LEARNING:

Successful grantees will start with an idea of what they think they need to help them be more sustainable but through peer learning support they will be able to explore these ideas and better understand what support will have the greatest impact after the 3 yrs. Grantees will be expected to:

- Be part of a **Peer learning network** (supported by BLCF) providing space to share ideas, challenges, and opportunities across the cohort of funded groups.
- Be **open and transparent with their data** and learning across their peer groups and with BLCF contributing to a detailed impact report to be shared with donors.
- Demonstrate a willingness to **collaborate** with other organisations where this supports better outcomes for residents.
- Engage positively with **support and development opportunities** offered through the programme and partner organisations.
- Contribute to a **story of change case study by BLCF** to illustrate the ways VCFSE can deliver long term change and, where they can't, identify the barriers still faced.

The programme will also offer 1-2-1 support to help organisations understand their barriers to sustainability and support their engagement in the programme.

WE FUND

Registered charities and other not-for-profit groups making a positive difference to people in the community (i.e. community groups, sports groups, PTAs etc with the appropriate governance structure in place).

You need to be able to demonstrate that you are/have:

- Bedfordshire based organisation with a strong track record of delivery
- For our Luton priority, organisation who have a strong track record of delivery to Luton residents for a minimum of 3 years. If your organisation is based in Bedfordshire but outside of Luton at least 50% of your organisations beneficiaries must be from Luton).
- An annual income of more than £40,000 and less than £250,000 within the last financial year.
- A constitution or other governing document.
- A committee of at least 3 unrelated Trustees / Directors (no-one with 'significant control').
- A comprehensive safeguarding policy for adults and children.
- A comprehensive equity, diversity & inclusion / equal opportunities policy.

If your organisation is a social enterprise (including CICs) there is specific guidance available **here.**

WE DO NOT FUND

- Organisations based outside of Bedfordshire.
- Groups with 3 or more active BLCF grants (each of which are above £5,000). Eligible organisations may also apply for and be in receipt of additional 3 grants where the value is less than £5,000.
- Groups with incomplete monitoring requirements or a history or not meeting grant conditions.
- Individuals.
- National organisations (unless clear local benefits).
- Private Limited Companies (except Community Interest Companies - CICs - limited by guarantee).
- Profit-making organisations.
- Organisations or activities that promote political parties or religion. (We do fund activities that demonstrate wider public benefit).
- Professional marketing / advertising (unless you can demonstrate that this is only to publicise the funded work to engage beneficiaries).
- Professional fundraising.
- Retrospective costs.
- General appeals or sponsorship.
- Animal welfare, unless the activity directly benefits people.
- Trips (excluding respite care) and / or fundraising events.

KEY DATES / PROCESS

- 09/11/2026 Fund launch, organisations invited to complete application.
- 15/12/2026 Deadline for full applications (12pm midday).
- 23/02/2027 Decision-making panel meets.
- Early March 2027 Applicants notified of outcomes.
- Late March 2027 Funds paid to successful applicants.
- April 2027 Programme begins.
- March 2030 Programme ends.
- April 2030 Final report submitted.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Please provide the following with your application:

- **Governing document** – constitution, memorandum and articles, articles of association or set of rules.
- **Annual accounts** – your most recent signed accounts and/or management accounts, audited or independently examined where required.
- **Trustee/director details** – names, roles, any relationships between trustees/directors and any potential conflicts of interest.
- An explanation of your **current financial position and operating budget**.
- Details of any **restricted or designated reserves**, including plans for their use.

- **Operational plans and financial forecast** for the next 12 months, plus an indication of your longer-term financial sustainability. Smaller community groups may provide a simplified 12-month income and expenditure budget/plan.
- **Bank statement** – dated within the last two months, in the organisation's name and correct address, with at least two unrelated signatories.
- **Equal opportunities policy**.
- **Safeguarding policy**.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Successful applicants will complete interim and end-of-grant monitoring reports, including how the grant was spent and evidence such as receipts. We will also ask about your progress, outcomes, learning and any challenges.

Please consider how you will:

- measure progress against your aims and objectives;
- collect quantitative data (numbers) and qualitative information (stories/case studies);
- capture feedback and learning, including what went well and what you might do differently;
- gather relevant partner feedback; and
- capture outcomes and learning from the Peer Learning Programme.

We will contact successful applicants to discuss progress and arrange visits to support learning and development. Further details and reporting dates will be provided.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

All applications are assessed against the fund criteria and include due diligence checks (more information here). Applications that meet the criteria will be considered by our panel of local volunteers, whose decision is final.

We encourage applicants to explore other funding opportunities. Your local Community Voluntary Service (CVS), including CVS Bedfordshire, can provide funding advice www.cvsbeds.org.uk

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and expect applicants to share this commitment.

If you have any queries, please contact us at grants@blcf.org.uk