# **Application guidance**

The Midlothian Carer Community Fund is an initiative led by VOCAL (Voice of Carers Across Lothian) and funded by Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), which aims to distribute direct grants to community organisations. The fund is intended to support community organisations to build capacity and deliver community supports for unpaid carers.

Unpaid carers often experience significant challenges that affect their health and wellbeing, with many facing increased risks of isolation. The 2023 Midlothian Carer Survey highlighted that a growing number of carers are reporting poorer health and a greater sense of loneliness. This is corroborated by Carers UK, who found that 60% of carers have long-term health conditions or disabilities, compared to 50% of non-carers, and 29% of carers report often or always feeling lonely. Support from community groups and local organisations benefits carers and helps them to feel less isolated. According to Carers UK at least 9% of the population are unpaid carers and 60% of people will be a carer at some point in their life.

## Purpose and aims

The Carer Community Fund aims to:

* **Expand support for carers:** Enhance and improve opportunities, choice, and access for carers by increasing the organisation’s capacity to support them, helping them to feel more connected and supported in their community.
* **Build community capacity:** Foster the growth of community groups and organisations by providing financial resources that enable them to develop or expand their support offerings for carers.
* **Promote sustainability:** Encourage the establishment of sustainable support networks that continue to benefit carers in the long term. Applicants will be asked to consider how their projects can maintain operations beyond the funding period.

## Promotion of the fund

The fund will be promoted through VOCAL’s social media and other channels, and partnerships with HSCP and third sector organisations. Direct promotion to Midlothian-based community organisations will ensure broad awareness of the fund.

## Delivery method

VOCAL Midlothian will collaborate with community organisations to identify opportunities to establish local support for unpaid carers. Each organisation will be invited to engage in an outcome-focused conversation with VOCAL’s Carer Community Development Officer before submitting their application. This ensures that applications align well with the fund’s objectives and have a clear path to sustainability.

This fund has been set up to enhance and expand community-based support, aiming to bolster social connections. We will prioritise funding for initiatives that provide peer support groups and other community-based support tailored to the needs of unpaid carers.

We are keen to hear innovative ideas, but some possible areas for funding may be:

* **Peer support groups:** Groups are an effective way to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation among carers. They offer a space for carers to connect with others in similar situations, share experiences, and access specialised support.
* **Inclusive events:** Plan social activities accessible both to carers and the people they care for, allowing them to enjoy outings without the pressure of their caring role.
* **Carer-only activities:** Organise activities exclusively for carers to give them a break and an opportunity to relax and connect with others in similar situations.
* **Training on care skills:** Offer workshops on specific care techniques, such as first aid or health and safety in the home. Provide information and training on stress management, self-care, and coping strategies to help carers manage their mental health.

## Eligibility criteria

VOCAL is committed to supporting as many carers as possible. Local community groups or organisations serving the Midlothian area can apply. Applications are accepted from constituted non-profit community organisations.

Do you already receive Carers Act funding? You will need to consider how your proposals here will build on your ongoing projects.

## Funding priorities

The fund gives priority to initiatives that:

* **Are hard to reach**: Support carers who live in areas of multiple deprivation or rural areas.
* **Promote inclusivity:** Projects that reach diverse communities, such as LGBTQ+ people, migrant and refugee populations, the Black community, South Asian people or any other marginalised groups.
* **Address gaps in support:** Initiatives that fill existing gaps, particularly for underrepresented groups of carers.

## What can be funded?

The fund is flexible in its approach to funding, ensuring it meets the needs of carers. Funding may be used for:

* **Equipment, resources or room hire:** Supporting groups or events and any necessary tools, equipment, or resources required to facilitate group activities.
* **Event delivery:** Costs associated with hosting events for carers.
* **Worker costs:** Hiring sessional workers for specialised activities.
* **Training costs:** Providing training for staff or volunteers (which will directly benefit carers).
* **Volunteer expenses:** Reimbursing volunteers for their contributions (in the delivery of carer activities).
* **Travel expenses:** Covering travel costs for carer attendees if travel is a barrier.

## What cannot be funded?

The following activities or items are **not** eligible for funding:

* **Individual benefits:** Items that benefit only an individual rather than a broader caring community.
* **Religious activities:** Projects focused on religious activities, though religious organisations may apply for non-religious community projects.
* **Large projects:** Partial funding for larger projects that require significant additional funding beyond the scope of this grant.
* **Activities that do not directly benefit carers.**

## Application process

To apply for funding, applicants:

* **Must complete the Carer Community Fund application form:** Provide details on the grant amount requested and the expected outcomes.
* **Must submit required documents:** Include a copy of the organisation’s constitution, public liability insurance, and bank details.
* **Are encouraged to engage in a pre-application discussion:** Applicants are encouraged to have an outcome-focused conversation with VOCAL’s Carer Community Development Officer to ensure their project aligns with the fund’s objectives.

The deadline for applications is midnight on Monday 21 April 2025.

## Funding panel

A VOCAL funding panel will review applications and make decisions. We aim to deliver several funding rounds a year to ensure fair distribution of funds, and this will be determined by uptake. Successful applicants will sign an agreement outlining the terms of the funding.

## Payment of grants

Grant amounts up to £3,000 are available, with the potential for higher amounts depending on project needs and impact. Grants will be paid via bank transfer. Organisations should ensure they provide accurate bank account information in the application form.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Funded groups will be required to report on the outcomes of their projects. VOCAL will provide a template for monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that the impact of the funding is documented. This ensures that the outcomes are measured and the impact on carers is recorded.

## Sustainability of the project

The fund is intended to "seed" initiatives, laying the groundwork for long-term support structures. Sustainability may be achieved through:

* **Volunteer and staff development:** Upskilling volunteers and staff so they can continue to support carers.
* **Partnerships:** Working with other organisations to share resources and expertise.
* **Future funding:** Identifying and applying for alternative funding to ensure continued operation.

## Pre-application discussion

Applicants are encouraged to have an outcome-focused conversation with VOCAL’s Carer Community Development Officer to ensure their project aligns with the fund’s objectives. To make an appointment, please contact caringcommunities@vocal.org.uk or 0131 663 6869.