

Celebrating Equalities Community Choices



What is Community Choices?

Community Choices is a [Participatory Budgeting](#) (PB) process. This way of allocating money gives groups and organisations an opportunity to show how their project can make a difference, and allows members of the community to make the decision on how the money is spent. Community Choices therefore provides a real opportunity for local people to have a direct input into how public funding is spent to address local issues or improve their communities. It aims to improve the overall wellbeing of individuals and families by addressing key issues facing the community.

This project is a pilot as part of the wider development of Community Choices in West Lothian. A budget of £25,000 has been allocated.

Celebrating Equalities Fund - Focus

Local community organisations are invited to submit a funding bid for a project that will:

‘help to promote and improve good relations between individuals, groups and communities with protected characteristics in West Lothian’

The protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act are: *Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Sex; and Sexual Orientation*. More information can be found [here](#).

- **For applications to be eligible they must include an element of education or awareness raising around the protected characteristic(s) your project is focussing on.**
- **Please note that Community Choices will not fund the continuation of existing activity or ongoing running costs for your organisation.**

More detailed criteria are provided on page 2 of this guidance.

Who can apply?

In order to apply for funding, you must;

- be a constituted voluntary or community organisation or registered charity.
- have a bank account in the name of the group or organisation, with two signatories who are not related or live at the same address.
- demonstrate how your idea or project addresses at least one of the priorities stated in this guidance.

What can the funding be used for?

Only costs directly associated with the development and delivery of a new project will be funded. The list below is not definitive but gives some examples.

We can fund	We can't fund
✓ Equipment	✗ Contingency costs, loans, endowments or interest
✓ One-off events	✗ Electricity generation and feed in tariff payments
✓ Small land or building projects	✗ Political activity
✓ Staff costs	✗ Fundraising activity
✓ Training costs	✗ VAT you can reclaim
✓ Transport	✗ Statutory activities
✓ Volunteer expenses	✗ Existing activities and ongoing running costs
✓ New services	
✓ Partnerships	

What should your project address?

This fund is intended to enhance relationships between different groups and celebrate the diversity in our West Lothian communities. It can be used to raise awareness of the work that your organisation does or educate the wider West Lothian community about the issues faced by certain groups or communities.

You must therefore demonstrate that your project or idea relates to one or more of the nine protected characteristics of **Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Sex; and Sexual Orientation** and meets one or more of the criteria detailed below (we would encourage projects to address as many of the criteria as possible). **It will not fund the ongoing or day to day activities of your organisation.**

- Bring communities together at in-person or online events, or via joint projects (physically, spiritually, culturally)
- Raise awareness and celebrate differences to promote and improve community cohesion
- Encourage and promote positive relations between people from different backgrounds within neighbourhoods
- Encourage collaboration and joint working between local groups and organisations
- Consider and help tackle the unique prejudice and discrimination experienced by people with multiple protected characteristics
- Raise awareness and increase involvement of under-represented groups

How much can we apply for?

You can apply for any amount up to £5000.

How to apply

To apply for funding, you must complete and return an application form by **Sunday 10 September 2023**. The form is available on the Community Choices [webpage](#). Please email completed application forms to WestLothianCommunityChoices@westlothian.gov.uk. For more information or support please contact Laura Wilson (laura.wilson2@westlothian.gov.uk).

Please note that a summary of your project will be provided to local people, to give them information on which to base their vote. Please therefore ensure that you fully explain the positive impact your project will make. Projects are also asked to submit a photo to accompany their application.

Information sessions

Two information sessions will be held for groups and organisations that want to find out more about the process. These sessions will be advertised once dates and locations are confirmed.

Who decides how the funding is spent?

Projects will initially be reviewed by council officers to ensure they meet the application criteria outlined below. The information on the projects that meet the criteria will be posted on our webpage and publicised and West Lothian residents will then be invited to vote on the projects they would like to see funded. Voting will take place over a four-week period via a variety of channels (in person event, online survey and ballot boxes in key community locations) and it is anticipated that funds will be released to successful projects in November 2023.

Assessment Criteria

The following criteria will be used in checking eligibility of applications
Be a constituted voluntary or community organisation or registered charity
Have a bank account that has two signatories who are not related or live at the same address
Not already in receipt of monies from the Council for the project or idea; applications should be for new activity, not for the continuation of existing activity
Demonstrate how your idea or project meets one or more of the six criteria above (also detailed on the application form)
Demonstrate that the project includes an element of education or awareness raising around the protected characteristic(s) the project is focussed on
Demonstrate what difference the project will make
Demonstrate who will benefit from the project
Be able to deliver the project within 12 months

Monitoring of projects

Projects will be monitored to ensure that they achieve what they set out to. Successful projects will be asked to report on progress six months after receiving the funding. A final update will be required after one year, which will include a financial report on the spend in relation to your application and the return of any unspent funding from the project.

Next Steps

Once you have submitted your application, West Lothian Council will:

- ✓ confirm we have received your application
- ✓ assess your application against criteria; if we need to clarify anything about your application we may contact by email
- ✓ inform you that your application meets the initial criteria
publicise the webpage for online voting to encourage local people to vote
- ✓ count and verify the votes cast
- ✓ inform you if your project was successful in getting enough votes to receive funding. If so;
- ✓ send you a formal letter of award and release the funds

You will then:

- ✓ send an update on activity and spend within six months of receiving the funding; and
- ✓ provide a final update after one year of receiving the funding.

For more information or support please contact Laura Wilson
(laura.wilson2@westlothian.gov.uk).