



Digital Connectivity in Community Facilities Grants Programme – Liverpool City Region

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – Round 3 November 2023

1. What is the Grants programme focussed on?
2. What kind of organisations can apply for these grants?
3. Who can benefit from the grants?
4. How much money is available?
5. When will the grant be paid & when does it need to be spent by?
6. What can/ cannot be funded through the grants?
7. How do we apply and what documents do we need to submit?
8. What is VOLA?
9. Is there any support or advice available to help us apply?
10. Can organisations apply for more than one grant?
11. How will decisions be made?
12. How soon will we find out the result?
13. What can we do if we are unsuccessful?
14. What will we need to do if we are successful?
15. How will the grant be paid?
16. **Any other questions?** If you have any other questions please get in touch with the Grants Team at ukspfgrants@volamerseyside.org.uk.
Deadline for questions: Wednesday 6th December 2023, 5pm. We will aim to respond within 3 working days.

1. What is the Grants programme focused on?

The Liverpool City Region 'Digital connectivity for local community facilities' grants programme is funded through the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UK post-Brexit successor to the EU Structural Funds programme, ESF & ERDF). It sits in the 'Communities and Place' Investment Priority, under the 'Support for the voluntary and community sector, including digital and financial inclusion' funding strand.

[VOLA Consortium](#) has been contracted by the [Liverpool City Region Combined Authority](#) (LCR CA) to manage this Grants Programme to enable Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector organisations across the city region to apply for funding to improve and/or set up new community facilities that support LCR CA Digital Inclusion priorities.

The overall purpose of the fund is to support VCFSE sector organisations to:

- Improve public-use IT (i.e. computer drop-in) facilities – either open access for the general public, or for specific client groups.
- Create new facilities in priority (digitally excluded and deprived) areas where there is currently no, or sparse digital inclusion provision.

The overall aim of the fund is to:

- Upgrade outdated or poor quality digital devices/ kit and/or improve broadband connectivity, where current kit and/or connections can be evidenced as being poor.
- Increase capacity: purchase more digital devices, where current facilities are insufficient to meet evidenced demand.
- Target neighbourhoods, where there is currently a lack of community-based digital facilities, to help local community-based organisations to set up new ones.

It is **not** about improving an organisation's general IT infrastructure, or providing funding to pay for the direct delivery of digital skills training or any other activities.

[Back to Top](#)

2. What kind of organisations can apply for these grants?

A. Organisational/ legal status

- a. This funding can only be awarded to grass-roots VCFSE sector organisations, run on a not-for-profit basis, with operational (public access) base in the Liverpool City Region. This includes constituted community and voluntary groups, Charities & Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs), Community Interest Companies (CICs), social enterprises and Companies Limited By Guarantee run on a not-for-profit basis.

We may examine public information about Registered Charities, CIOs, CICs, and Companies Ltd by Guarantee which apply. **Private Companies Limited by Shares cannot apply.**

Community Interest Companies (CICs) Limited by SHARES should contact the Grants team prior to submitting an application.

- b. Your organisation must have a Governing Document/Constitution, which we may need to review.

We will not fund organisations whose governing documents allow profits or dividends to be shared among directors and employees. In the case of Companies Limited by Guarantee or Community Interest Companies (CICs) your governing document should **make it clear** that any surplus is reinvested to support the aims of the organisation or other social purposes, and any assets are transferred for public benefit in the event of dissolution.

If you are unsure about your organisation status or have queries around your constitution or governing document please contact the Grants Team for further guidance prior to submitting your application.

B. Other eligibility criteria

- c. Only organisations that have an annual turnover equal to or less than £1.5 million can apply.

- As per the last publicly available accounts, preferably for financial year ending less than 12 months from date of application, if these are available.

- d. To be eligible, your organisation/group should have been in existence for at least 12 months.

- **We will need a published set of accounts for your last financial year** and will also need to see an **Annual Report** covering your recent activities and achievements.

- e. Your organisation must have an independent bank account for payment of the grant.

- f. The grant must be used to fund facilities based in the Liverpool City Region.



Ineligible organisations include:

- Private Companies Ltd by Shares
- Individuals (not representing a group) or groups that consist of one family
- Statutory bodies / public authorities, i.e. Local Authorities, NHS, etc.
- Housing Associations
- Organisations distributing profits to members or shareholders
- Grant making bodies applying for funding to redistribute to individuals or groups
- Political groups

Additional, specific applicant eligibility-related Q&As from previous rounds

Question	Answer
<p>Could the funding be granted to organisations that aren't open every day (e.g. only open 2-3 days per week)?</p>	<p>Potentially, yes. There are no specific restrictions on the opening times of facilities funded by the grants. However, applicants are reminded that it is a competitive process and grants will be awarded based on the relative strength of the evidenced need and proposed impact asserted in competing applications.</p>
<p>Will funding be available to organisations that only provide computer access to their service users, or a specific demographic group?</p>	<p>Yes, organisations working with specific demographic groups (rather than general open access to the general public) are eligible to apply. However, applicants are reminded that it is a competitive process and grants will be awarded based on the relative strength of the evidenced need and proposed impact asserted in competing applications.</p>
<p>If applying for other (non-UKSPF) revenue funding to deliver training sessions (for example) would this funding need to be secured before applying for UKSPF funding for equipment?</p> <p>And if it wasn't secured at the time of applying, would it jeopardise the potential success of the application?</p>	<p>No – applicant eligibility and funding decisions made are not dependent on any other match funding source – whether already in place or currently being applied for.</p> <p>Note: Grants are focused on improving community facilities for people to use computers and get online, not about delivering training. So, the need and proposed impact of investing in those facilities would need to be clearly articulated in your application. However, delivery of training could be a perfectly reasonable future activity to use the facilities for, so long as it didn't effectively close the facility to 'drop-in' users.</p> <p>Feel free to tell us in your application about other things you are planning to help improve your Digital Inclusion services for your local community/ client group (whether secured yet, or not). This could arguably help to strengthen your case for receiving a grant.</p>

Question	Answer
<p>Can one organisation apply on behalf of another?</p> <p><i>Context: should smaller organisations be encouraged to apply on their own, or would it be better for a larger/ more experienced organisation to apply on their behalf?</i></p>	<p>No, organisations need to apply individually. If successful, they would retain ownership of the equipment purchased through the grant and would be directly responsible for the Terms and Conditions of Grant.</p> <p>However, it would be perfectly acceptable for another organisation to help them with their application.</p>
<p>Can organisations apply in future Grants rounds if unsuccessful in a previous round?</p>	<p>Yes – but applicants would need to take on board feedback provided from the previous round to improve their application, otherwise it is unlikely to be successful.</p>
<p>Can organisations apply again in future Grants rounds if successful in a previous round?</p>	<p>Yes – also see section 10.</p>
<p>Our organisation has not got any accounts/ had any financial turnover for several years as it has not been actively operating, but is still technically active on Companies House. Are we eligible to apply?</p>	<p>No – organisations of this nature are ineligible. We can only fund organisations that are a ‘going concern’, that are currently operational, with clear evidence of a recent operational and financial track record, i.e. as per publicly available accounts for the last financial year (<i>or see section 7 for exceptions/ alternatives</i>). Companies House/ Charity Commission registration is not sufficient in itself to be eligible to apply.</p>

[Back to Top](#)

3. Who can benefit from the grants?

Eligible organisations (as in section 2) are themselves the primary grant beneficiaries. End-user beneficiaries must primarily be residents of the Liverpool City Region, but there are no restrictions on other people using your facilities. In terms of members of the public that accesses the facilities funded through the grants, there are no defined criteria or restrictions.

[Back to Top](#)

4. How much money is available?

Grants of between £2,500 - £10,000 are available - do not apply for less/more than this.

The following provisional amounts are available for each borough. This may be subject to change depending in the volume of ‘fundable’ applications from each area.

Borough	Halton	Knowsley	Liverpool	Sefton	St Helens	Wirral	Total
R3 Budget	£29,089	£29,668	£78,499	£38,224	£55,719	£66,303	£297,501

[Back to Top](#)

5. When will the grant be paid & when does it need to be spent by?

We aim to make payments from w/c 12th February 2024 - timescales may vary ([see section 14](#)).

What is the deadline for spending the grant?

As a condition of grant:

- Successful applicants will be expected to spend the grant and have the equipment in place within 3 months of receipt of payment from VOLA.
- Any unspent grant funds after this 3 month period may need to be repaid, in line with the terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement.

The only exceptions to this 3-month deadline are:

1. Where funding is provided for a new/ upgraded broadband line, which incurs an ongoing monthly charge, in which circumstances, expenditure on recurring contract costs can be up to the duration it is funded for (up to a maximum of 24 months). However, expenditure on all other items of agreed equipment funded through the grant will still need to take place within the 3-month deadline.
2. Where exceptional circumstances arise that could not have been foreseen on entering in to the Grant Agreement (e.g. long-term sickness absence of key staff members, significant supplier/ delivery delays, or other significant obstacles beyond the Grant Recipient's control). Should such circumstances arise, Grant recipients should contact the VOLA Grants team at the earliest opportunity.

Future grants rounds

It is currently intended to run up to 2 further grants rounds during 2024, provisionally planned to take place:

- Round 4: April – June 2024
- Round 5: September – November 2024

[Back to Top](#)

6. What can/ cannot be funded through the grants?

Eligible Expenditure

Generic eligible expenditure:

Eligible cost/ expenditure	Comment
Broadband connectivity (min. required speed 30 Mbps)	Installation and ongoing contract costs (2 years max.) Evidence of ongoing payments required. Minimum speed of 30 Megabits per second (Mbps) required to meet UKSPF funding requirements. <i>(Note: 30 Mbps isn't fast - you will likely want faster than this.)</i>



Eligible cost/ expenditure	Comment
Computer devices	<p>E.g. PCs, laptops, tablets, iPads, Chromebooks Consideration should be given to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most appropriate devices to meet evidenced need. - Mixture of different devices – this may help to maximise budget and delivery capacity.
Necessary software/ licenses	<p>E.g. MS Windows, MS Office, anti-virus/ internet security software, assistive or adaptive technology to aid accessibility for people with disabilities. (This list is not exhaustive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where options exist to pay up-front for multi-annual software licenses (after which there is a renewal cost), the maximum period the grant can pay for is 3 years, which must be purchased up-front – it cannot be used to pay for ongoing annual renewal costs. <p>The need for any specialist software beyond that required to make devices operable and cyber-secure must be clearly justified in your application.</p>
Necessary ancillary accessories and equipment	<p>E.g. Wi-Fi Access Points, Wi-Fi boosters, monitors, keyboards, mice, headsets, printers, laptop bags, tablet covers, laptop/ tablet desk security locks, secure storage lockers, charging cabinets. (This list is not exhaustive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must be proportionate – e.g. to value of grant, number of computer devices being funded, facility size. - The need for any specialist ancillary accessories or equipment must be clearly justified in your application.
Supplier configuration and installation costs	<p><u>Reasonable</u> IT support company costs of configuring devices (e.g. installing operating system, software, setting user permissions) and/or on-site installation (e.g. networking, cabling, Wi-Fi solutions).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costs only eligible where an applicant organisation lacks internal expertise to undertake this work. - Cost & extent of work must be clearly stated in your application. <p>Note: Appropriate configuration & installation by a suitably qualified/ experienced person is a condition of grant.</p>
IT suite furniture	<p>Must be proportionate to the number of computer devices, size of the facility & nature of grant being awarded. E.g. if setting up a completely new drop-in facility, it is perfectly reasonable to expect that furniture would be required. For applications focused on upgrading existing facilities, the need for new furniture must be clearly justified in your application.</p>

Additional, specific Q&As raised:

Question	Answer
<p>Can funding be used to buy specialist software (i.e. graphics/ sound software)?</p>	<p>This is not ineligible by default; however, applicants would need to justify the cost by clearly articulating evidence of need and intended impact. For example, if the intended impact supports the genuine development of learning and skills.</p> <p>Software for purely recreational activities will not be funded.</p>
<p>Can funding be used to buy a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TV? - Digital projector/ screen? - Whiteboard - Interactive Digital Display Screen? 	<p>These are not ineligible by default; however, applicants would need to justify the cost by clearly articulating evidence of need and intended impact. For example, if the intended impact supports the genuine development of learning and skills.</p> <p>Equipment aimed purely at recreational activities will not be funded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost/ number requested must not account for a disproportionate amount of the total grant value applied for. - Note: applications for these kinds of items in isolation (i.e. not included as part of a wider application aimed at improving digital connectivity) will not be considered.
<p>Can you apply for equipment that will be used for outreach activities (i.e. taken to other venues) rather than at a fixed location?</p>	<p>Yes - however, applicants need to identify a primary venue at which the equipment would be used for the majority of the time.</p> <p>Applicants intending to use funded equipment for outreach delivery need to state the locations of the intended outreach venues in their application and assert why those venues/ locations need their outreach support.</p> <p>Funding cannot be used to fund facilities or outreach provision that duplicates or displaces existing provision.</p>
<p>Can funding be used to buy secure storage units for laptops/ tablets (including charging storage units)?</p>	<p>Yes – however, costs must be justified and proportionate to the nature of grant being awarded, number of computer devices, size of the facility, etc.</p> <p>Assurance of the ongoing security of assets purchased through the grant is essential. Both the physical and organisational measures employed to ensure the security of funded equipment must be explained in your application.</p>
<p>Can the funding be used to purchase a soundproof pod for private appointments (e.g. online health or benefits-related, etc.)...</p>	<p>Yes – however, due to the typically high cost of privacy pods, funding for this type of equipment needs to be strongly justified, including clearly articulated evidence of need, intended use, impact & value for money. Firm assurances will be required that the equipment will be for public and not business/ staff use.</p>

Question	Answer
...Soundproof pods (continued)	Applications for this type of equipment will be highly scrutinised by the assessment panel and Steering Group. It is unlikely that this type of equipment will be approved for facilities that are infrequently open, or have (or are likely to have) low user numbers. Separate, additional user monitoring data may be required, over and above that required for other funded equipment – TBC.

Ineligible Expenditure

Grants **cannot** be used for projects that **displace, replace and/or duplicate existing Digital drop-in provision in the neighbourhood applied for**. The need for your project must be clearly justified in the application using local intelligence and data provided.

We have created an [online map of existing places where people can go to ‘get online’](#), which includes venues that were funded in previous funding rounds. Use this to see what other facilities already exist in the area you are applying for, particularly where applying to create new facilities. In addition, the LCRCA has provided a spreadsheet to support the application process, which includes Ward-level data about digital exclusion and multiple deprivation for every borough, which is available to download from our [website](#).

For further information on demonstrating need, refer to [Application Guidance Notes \(C5\)](#).

Generic ineligible expenditure:

Ineligible cost/ expenditure	Comment
Previous expenditure/ purchases made	Any purchase made/ expenditure incurred prior to the Grant Award date is ineligible.
Ongoing IT maintenance/ support contract costs	Applicants may wish to consider such support contracts to fulfil ongoing IT support needs, or already have them in place, but these are not fundable through the grant.
Capital building works	E.g. building adaptations.
Staff costs	None whatsoever permitted, including staff time to source, configure, or install equipment, ongoing maintenance, management, or ongoing staff costs associated with assisting service users, whether to resource staffing of drop-in sessions, delivery of IT training, or anything else.
Organisational overheads, including insurance	None of any nature permitted, whether relating to staff, utilities, insurance, or other organisational overhead costs.
Training/ activity delivery (to service users) costs	Costs associated with delivery of digital skills training, or other activities using IT facility are ineligible.



Ineligible cost/ expenditure type	Comment
Training costs (staff/ volunteers)	Costs associated with staff/ volunteer training of any type are ineligible, including training in the use of new devices, or software.
Volunteer related costs	None of any type are eligible.

Additional, specific Q&As raised:

Question	Answer
Can funding be used to buy equipment to lend out to participants?	No
Can funding be used to fund external contractors to deliver training?	No
Can funding be used for staff equipment?	No
Question	Answer
Can organisations apply to install equipment in locations that they use but don't own/lease?	No For clarity, this also includes venues/rooms that you only hire periodically on an ad hoc basis, which is also ineligible.

[Back to Top](#)

7. How do we apply and what documents do we need to submit?

Please email your completed application (using the form provided, unaltered) **and** required supporting documentation, to: ukspfgrants@volamerseyside.org.uk by the stated deadline.

Required supporting documentation:

1. Published set of accounts for your last financial year

- In order to protect public funds, independent inspection, verification or auditing of your Accounts, appropriate to your constitutional status and size of turnover, is required.
- If you consider your group should be exempt from such requirements (e.g. in the case of charities with a turnover of less than £10,000 which are not Companies Limited by Guarantee), OR your organisation has only just been in



operation for 12 months and you do not have accounts available yet, you should contact the Grants Team in advance of submitting your application to check that the form of accounts you propose to submit will be acceptable.

2. Annual Report, covering your recent activities and achievements.

- We need to see your most recent Annual Report to get some broader context of the work of your organisation, its activities and achievements. A Charity Annual Report, Community Interest Company CIC34 Report, or Directors Report and Accounts (providing there is a substantial paragraph on activity and achievements during the year) would all suffice. If you do not already have such a document, regardless of whether you are legally obliged to have one, we require you to submit a brief report (500 words max) covering your activities and achievements in the past twelve months.

[Back to Top](#)

8. What is VOLA?

VOLA is a consortium of Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) service providers operating in Liverpool City Region.

The consortium exists, primarily, to provide a formal structure for supporting the VCFSE sector in relation to learning, skills and employment support across the city region; promoting, organising and facilitating cooperation and partnership working between VCFSE organisations.

Over the last 7 years, VOLA has done a great deal of work in the Digital Inclusion arena. Working closely with the LCR Combined Authority (LCRCA), we both deliver Digital Inclusion services and work strategically to promote and help to address the Digital Inclusion agenda.

VOLA has been appointed by the LCRCA to manage this Grants programme.

Separately to this application process, if you would like to apply to become a member, please visit the membership section of our [website](#).

For clarity, an organisation's status as a VOLA member (or not) has no bearing whatsoever on eligibility for, or funding decisions made in relation to this Grants programme.

[Back to Top](#)

9. Is there any support or advice available to help us apply?

Online briefing workshops are delivered prior to launching the application window. If you are unable to attend, you can access the slides [here](#).

- The '[Technical Tips](#)' slide deck may be particularly useful, alongside this FAQs document and the [Application Guidance Notes](#).

You may wish to speak to a local infrastructure support agency, such as a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), or other partner organisations you know that might be able to assist. The Grants Team at VOLA can only offer brief, factual advice on the application process in response to questions raised via the published email address, and cannot comment on the validity or quality of your proposals/ application.

[Back to Top](#)

10. Can organisations apply for more than one grant?

In the same funding round: Yes, organisations can apply for more than one grant, but only for separate locations/ facilities – multiple applications relating to the same venue/ facility submitted in the same Grants round will not be accepted.

Individual applications must be submitted for each venue/ facility, unless they are 'sub-sites' used for outreach delivery (for further information, see outreach FAQ in section 6).

In multiple funding rounds: Yes, organisations can submit applications in subsequent rounds, whether or not successful in a previous round.

However, repeat funding for the same venue/ facility in subsequent Grants rounds is typically unlikely. Any subsequent application for the same facility funded in a previous Grants round would clearly need to justify the new/ different need and intended impact.

[Back to Top](#)

11. How will decisions be made about which projects to fund?

After the closure of each grant round, the Grants Team at VOLA will check applications for completeness, (including all required supporting documentation), undertake eligibility checks and necessary due diligence. They may need to contact applicants where eligibility cannot be clearly confirmed, or information, or required documentation is missing. All eligible and complete applications will then be allocated to the assessment team, which comprises a VCFSE sector, multi-agency partnership of experienced grant assessors.

Assessors use a systematic process to score all applications, taking account of evidence of need; proposed impact; compliance and value for money; and the nature and track record of the applicant organisation. Each application is assessed by a minimum of two assessors. Following this, the assessment panel meets to discuss applications and reach consensus on recommendations to make to the Project Steering Group, including which applications should be funded, for how much, and on what conditions.

The Project Steering Group (PSG) then meets to consider these recommendations and make final decisions. The PSG involves a range of key stakeholders from across the city region, including senior officers from the LCR Combined Authority, Local Authorities and borough-cased Councils for Voluntary Service/ CVS's (or equivalent).

[Back to Top](#)

12. How soon will we find out the result?

For Round 3, we are aiming to inform applicants of the outcome of their applications by Friday 9th February 2024.

[Back to Top](#)

13. What can we do if we are unsuccessful?

You will receive an email from us notifying you of the outcome of your application, which will include brief general feedback from the assessment panel/ PSG on why your application has been unsuccessful. Due to the expected high volume of applications, we regret that we are **unable to enter into detailed individual discussions.**

If you are unsuccessful, you can apply in one of the future Grants rounds.

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the process, please discuss it first with the Grants Team at VOLA. If the matter cannot be resolved in this way, VOLA has a formal complaints procedure. In the unlikely event of a formal complaint, these should be emailed to: ukspfgrants@volamerseyside.org.uk

[Back to Top](#)

14. What will we need to do if we are successful?

For Round 3, we aim to **issue Grant Agreements from w/c 12th February 2024**, which will include any specific conditions of grant relating to your application/project.

Before your grant is paid, you must:

1. Sign and return your Grant Agreement.
2. Confirm that any pre-payment conditions of grant have been met.
3. Submit required pre-grant monitoring information (this is minimal & straightforward).

Payment timescales will depend on how quickly you provide this information.

Note:

- Grant Agreements must be signed by an appropriate person with the authority to agree to the terms and conditions of the Grant Award on behalf of your organisation.
- You can start spending on your project from the date you sign your Grant Agreement.
- The Grants Team will follow up with you to discuss your project, confirm monitoring requirements, provide guidance and any necessary templates. Continued support will be available throughout the duration of your project.

For further details regarding monitoring requirements, see [Annex 2 of the Application Guidance Notes](#).

Insurance and key policies

Where successful applicants have indicated in their application that, at the time of applying, they do not have the required insurance and/or organisational policies in place (as listed in the application form), it will be a **condition of grant** that these are in place before the project will be funded and any payments are made. We will need written confirmation that any outstanding issues have been addressed and we may request copies of relevant documentation to confirm this.

Subject to capacity, where possible, the Grants Team will endeavour to support any successful applicants to develop required policies where these are not already in place at the time of applying. This will either be through direct assistance, or by referral to your local VCFSE infrastructure support organisation, such as your local CVS.

[Back to Top](#)

15. How will the grant be paid?

Grant funding will be paid **in advance**, via BACS transfer, to the nominated bank account.

One payment of 100% of your agreed project budget will be made once VOLA, as Grant Awarding Body, has received signed acceptance of the Grant Offer Letter/ Funding Agreement and all other required documentation as detailed in this guidance.

[Back to Top](#)