Building Better Opportunities

A summary of our partnership requirements

What is Building Better Opportunities?

Building Better Opportunities aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion for the most disadvantaged people in England.

Funding will be available in most areas of England over the next four years, with the money coming from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Big Lottery Fund.

We will provide funding under ESF Thematic Objective 9 (promoting social inclusion and combating poverty) with a specific focus on projects that address the root causes of poverty that create barriers to work, so more people move closer to or into employment.

Our programme is just one strand in a range of funding opportunities that will be available across England through the European Social Investment Fund (ESIF) Growth programme. To find out more, go to the Government website www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding

Making an application

Applicants will need to respond to one of the project outlines we'll publish on our website. These documents will set out what we want projects to achieve and may be targeted at particular areas or groups of people.

Each project outline will address specific priorities that have been identified by local ESIF committees convened by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). There's more information about these on our website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/esf

Working in partnership

Most of the funding opportunities that will be available through the project outlines are better suited to partnership working.

Partnership working is encouraged because:

- ✓ One organisation working on its own is unlikely to have the breadth and depth of experience to tackle the multiple and complex issues faced by those most in need.
- ✓ Involving other organisations helps generate new ideas or can extend the scope or diversity of work that can be delivered within the project.
- ✓ Local organisations working together often have the reach and expertise to make the greatest impact.
- ✓ Better coordination of different types of provision within a single partnership structure can lead to more effective service delivery tailored to an individual's needs.
- ✓ Smaller organisations may be most effective for delivering certain types of provision, but may not have the scale to deliver the entirety of a project on their own.
- ✓ Partnerships have access to a wider range of skills, resources and solutions.
- ✓ Cross-sector partnerships may be essential for sharing information between different providers.

To work effectively, partnership working must be grounded in open and honest communication; and respect for the experience and knowledge of each particular organisation.

Applying as a partnership

Where other organisations are involved, one organisation will submit an application on behalf of the partnership. We call this applicant the 'lead organisation'.

Organisations can be involved in more than one application, either as a lead or a partner. However, lead partners might set their own requirements on partners' involvement in other applications so please check local requirements with the lead partner.

Lead organisations
The organisation that completes and submits the stage one application to us will have legal responsibility for all funding we award and be financially accountable for any money that is distributed to partners. It will be the lead organisation's responsibility to manage the partnership to avoid any financial loss due to reporting or evidence information not being provided.

Lead organisations will have:

- ✓ a clear vision for responding to the priorities of the local area, backed up by appropriate expertise
- ✓ a proven track record of managing complex projects, relative to the size of the partnership and the amount of money involved
- ✓ good connections for ensuring a wide cross-section of organisations are able to get involved
- ✓ strategies for managing and coordinating the partnership throughout the planning, set-up and delivery of the project
- ✓ the resources to respond to the development needs of individual partners in the partnership's formative stages.

Though not essential, it would be beneficial if lead organisations have some experience of European funding already as that will help set the expectations of what's involved.

A lead organisation does not necessarily need to deliver frontline activities. We recognise that reporting on European funding can be complex, so a lead organisation that can effectively coordinate all partners to comply with ESF reporting requirements could be an appropriate managing body. In these situations, the lead organisation would not be able to apply a flat management fee, but would be able to claim for all eligible costs incurred in their management role.

At stage two, the lead organisation will submit to us a draft partnership agreement that will formalise the responsibilities and relationships between partners. If we make an award, all of these organisations will then sign this partnership agreement before the project can begin.

Partnership structures
We're open to different partnership models where these meet our requirements for how they should be set up and run.

- ✓ Any organisation that will have a formal delivery role must sign the partnership agreement. This is because they will use some of the money and will therefore have responsibility for ensuring our reporting requirements are being met.
- ✓ The lead organisation that submits the stage one application form to us must be a legally constituted body in its own right. For a consortium, a single organisation would need to be identified or a new organisation established.
- ✓ If the applicant is a new organisation, we'll need to understand how the people managing it have the expertise, capacity and capability to lead the project successfully as this new organisation is unlikely to have a proven track record in its own right.
- ✓ In order for a consortium to be a partner in the project, they must be a legally constituted body. Otherwise, each individual organisation that makes up the consortium will need to separately sign the partnership agreement.

At stage one, we will ask the lead organisation to send us a partnership structure diagram which shows the roles and relationships between the organisations involved. Any changes to partners must be discussed and agreed with us beforehand.

Procurement
Any organisation that will have a formal delivery role in the project (using expenditure paid for by the grant) must be named on the partnership agreement. If during the course of the project, opportunities are identified for small discrete services, these can be procured by the lead organisation in line with Public Procurement Regulations.

Partnership agreements

We expect all members of the partnership to be in place at the point the lead organisation submits the stage one application to us. If there are changes after this, these will need to be discussed with us beforehand.

If projects are successful at stage one, we will need to see a draft partnership agreement as part of the stage two application. This sets out the responsibilities of each organisation that will be involved in co-ordinating, delivering and monitoring the project.

The main areas a partnership agreement should cover are summarised below.

Purpose or aim of the partnership
The aim of the partnership and how this links with your aims of your project.

Lead organisation
Details of the lead organisation that will be responsible to us for delivering the project, reporting to us and meeting our terms and conditions of grant.

Partner organisations
The names, addresses and contact details of all the organisations that are signing up to the agreement.

Financial and contractual arrangements
Details of the services to be delivered by the partner organisations, how often and how payments will be managed. Include a statement that the lead organisation will be responsible for all funds, in accordance with the evidence requirements we will put in place. Provisions on how responsibility for any financial losses will be fairly attributed within the partnership.

Roles and responsibilities
The main roles and responsibilities of each organisation in the partnership. Make clear which tasks and services each partner will be responsible for delivering. Set out the reporting structures and any contractual management involved.

Policies and procedures
This should cover all policies and procedures that are required by law or are relevant to the project, such as health and safety, equal opportunities, sustainable development and the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Administration, meetings and record keeping
Explain who is responsible for setting up meetings, how often they will happen and what records will be kept.

Monitoring and reporting
How monitoring information will be provided by the partner organisations to enable the lead organisation to complete regular progress reports for us, and which performance management methodologies will be used to monitor progress of the project and participants.

Communication
How communication within the partnership will be handled, the methods that will be used and who will be responsible for promoting the project.

Branding and publicity
This must be in accordance with Big Lottery Fund and European Social Fund guidelines.

Changes
How changes to the agreement or disputes will be managed.

Duration
The agreement will need to run for at least as long as our grant agreement with the lead organisation. Include a provision for the lead organisation to terminate the agreement if for any reason we need to suspend or terminate the grant.

Sustainability
How the benefits of the partnership will be sustained.

Signed declaration
All partners must sign the declaration.

The partnership agreement must refer to, or include, our terms of conditions of grant. By signing the declaration, all partners agree that these terms and conditions will take precedence if there is conflict between ours and any others that might be included. We’ll provide a draft of these terms and conditions when we launch Building Better Opportunities.

Delivering the project

European funding comes with specific delivery and monitoring requirements that must be carried out by all lead organisations and partners.

Throughout the delivery of project, we'll need to be checking five things:

- ✓ The project is on track to meet its targets and outcomes, including its expenditure profile.
- ✓ The project is addressing specific ESF cross-cutting themes, relating to sustainable development and gender equality.
- ✓ All of the expenditure has been for eligible costs, with full evidence provided, and that Public Procurement Regulations are being followed.
- ✓ Everyone who is benefiting from the project is eligible to receive support.
- ✓ The branding and publicity guidelines are being fully implemented.

We'll provide detailed information on these areas when we launch the programme. In the meantime, please talk to organisations that have experience of managing European funding to get an idea of what is involved.

If lead organisations are not able to provide the information and evidence we ask for throughout the delivery of the project, this could have serious financial repercussions for both them and their partners. If errors are found within this evidence, we may have to recover funding that has been paid or spent. It is therefore extremely important that partners understand and are committed to these requirements from the outset as they will be subject to the same financial risks. The partnership agreement is used to lay down these requirements in how partners will operate.

We've provided a summary of some of the key responsibilities for lead organisations and partners below.

Role of the lead organisation

- ✓ Establish procedures for distributing funding to other organisations in the partnership in a fair manner.
- ✓ Implement policies for ensuring evidence requirements are shared between partners.
- ✓ Ensure there is a good level of engagement with target participants so the project remains responsive to their ideas and needs.
- ✓ Collect and retain original receipts and invoices for each item of expenditure spent by partners, together with other forms of evidence like timesheets and job descriptions.
- ✓ Collect and maintain an up-to-date database of all participants on the project, including their equality characteristics and around 30 other personal indicators (such as age, family circumstance and current level of education).
- ✓ Put into practice robust and transparent performance measures, linked to clear progression routes for learners and the newly employed, tracked for up to six months after participants have left the project.
- ✓ Evidence all learning achievements or a participant's progression to employment, including certificates or letters of appointment.
- ✓ Ensure the cross-cutting themes and the branding and publicity guidelines are being implemented throughout the delivery of the project.
- ✓ Report to us regularly on the progress or achievements of the project, including being available for visits by us or auditors even after the project has ended.

Role of partners

- ✓ Ensure funding is being spent on eligible costs alone, with evidence of this expenditure retained and then passed on to the lead organisation.
- ✓ Collect accurate entry and exit information on each participant, so that the eligibility of these participants can be proven and the impact of the project can be monitored.
- ✓ Maintain a participant record for each individual enrolled in the project, which brings together all of the evidence of their progression through the project together with other key information like their start and end date.
- ✓ Embed the cross-cutting cutting themes within the day-to-day delivery of the project.
- ✓ Publicise that the services being delivered are supported by ESF, taking every opportunity to include references and logos.
- ✓ Ensure that any activities clearly add value and do not duplicate provision that can be arranged locally through existing institutions or interventions.