



Open call grants Application guidelines and assessment criteria 2025-2026

Introduction and overview

As one of the three intergovernmental pillars of the Commonwealth, the Foundation operates within that critical space between government and the people. The Foundation works to bring the voice of civil society into all aspects of governance, supporting civil society's engagement in shaping the policies and decisions that affect people's lives.

The Foundation's vision is of a Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies. Our mission is to contribute to that vision by:

- Supporting the active and constructive participation of Commonwealth citizens in all aspects of their governance
- Nurturing the growth of vibrant and free civil societies in all Commonwealth countries
- Advancing the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth

The Foundation's [Strategic Plan 2021-2026](#) is strongly linked to the [Commonwealth Charter](#) and its values and aspirations. It also seeks to reflect and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDGs 3, 5, and 13-16, including all relevant targets focusing on participation in decision-making at all levels. The strategic plan identifies three thematic areas of focus: (i) health justice; (ii) climate justice; and (iii) freedom of expression. Gender is a cross-cutting theme. Civil society projects that aim to advance these themes will be supported through this call for applications. See section five for further information on our thematic areas.

Who is eligible to apply?

1. The applicant must be a not-for-profit civil society organisation (CSO) registered in an eligible Commonwealth Foundation member country (see [here](#) for the list of eligible member countries).
2. Newly registered organisations (those that have been registered and operating for less than three years) are not eligible to apply.
3. The proposed project must be implemented in the country of registration. Projects can be implemented in one or more eligible Commonwealth Foundation member countries and can have a national, sub-national, regional, or international remit. In multi-country projects, strong local participation in project implementation is required (see further information on partnerships below).
4. The project must seek to facilitate change through constructive engagement between civil society and decision-makers, including civil society participation in policy development and decision-making, within one or more of the Foundation's priority themes (see below).
5. The applicant organisation must have a minimum of three years' demonstrable experience working on participatory governance and advocacy within the area/theme(s) of the proposed project.
6. The total grant amount requested must be a minimum of £15,000 or between £15,001 and £30,000 per year, and for a maximum of two years. (Note there are different requirements depending on the requested grant amount, see further "How to apply", below).
7. The requested grant amount should not exceed 70% of the applicant organisation's total annual income, averaged over the past two years.
8. The annual income of the applicant's organisation, averaged over the past two years, must be less than £2.5m.
9. The project proposal must address at least one of the Foundation priority themes.
10. The project proposal must demonstrate appropriate integration of gender considerations. For example, the applicant may use the findings of gender analysis to inform the design of the project and/or ensure allocation of adequate resources to effectively address gender equality in the project cycle.
11. Applicant organisations that are currently implementing or have recently completed a Commonwealth Foundation Grant but have not received their final payment, are not eligible to apply.
12. Proposals must relate to projects that are expected to begin after the 1 August 2026 and before the end of September 2026.

Note 1

Only applications meeting the above eligibility requirements will be considered.

Note 2

The Foundation appreciates that CSOs interested in applying for a grant may already be doing significant work that falls within the parameters of this grants call and that would benefit from support for expansion and/or continuation of that work. We are therefore willing to consider

supporting initiatives that are not ‘new’ but are rather an additional component or extension of an existing initiative. This should be made clear in the application.

Note 3

The Foundation welcomes partnerships to enhance the scale, depth, and breadth of the proposed work. Only the lead applicant organisation, and not the partner(s), needs to satisfy the core eligibility criteria. Partners might be informal groups, social movements, individual artists or advocates whose contribution to the project will increase its impact. If any proposed partners are registered organisations in the country of implementation, their registration certificates should also be provided as part of the application.

Note 4

The Foundation believes art can create meaningful social change. We welcome applications from organisations that use art and creative advocacy to achieve policy change.

How to apply

You will first need to login and create your Survey Monkey Apply account to complete and submit an online application form. Only completed applications that have been submitted using the online application system will be considered.

All applications must include the following additional documentation:

1. A logic model (only using the template provided).
2. A copy of the organisation's registration certificate. This should be a clear scan of an official registration document provided by the relevant authorities in the country where the applicant organisation is registered. If the registration certificate does not clearly state that the organisation is not-for-profit, please add other documentation which can be used as evidence of your organisation's not-for-profit status (for example, articles of association). When the original registration certificates are not in English, shortlisted applications can be expected to be asked to provide a certified translation.
3. A document outlining the names, roles, and responsibilities of your organisation's board members or trustees including contact details. (Trustees are individuals appointed to oversee the governance, management, and administration of the organisation.)
4. If your organisation is based in India, you should be compliant with the Foreign Contribution Registration Act (FCRA) or have preparations in place to obtain a valid FCRA registration certificate to legally receive charitable funding from outside sources.
5. For grants of £15,000 per year: The applicant organisation may choose to submit either the latest audited accounts or a copy of the organisation's most recent annual accounts. Annual accounts must include a balance sheet, a profit and loss statement and notes about the account. They must be signed off by the organisation's Board or its principal executive officer. Audited accounts or annual accounts must not be older than December 2023.
6. For grants exceeding £15,000 per year: a copy of the organisation's most recent audited accounts is required. Note that audited accounts must include both the accounts and the opinion of the external auditor who has certified them. They must be signed off by the auditor and the organisation's Board or its principal executive officer. They should not be older than December 2023.

Exclusions

The Commonwealth Foundation will not fund:

- Attendance at training courses, workshops, and conferences unless as part of a larger project funded by the grant.
- Academic study or research unless as part of a larger project funded by the grant.
- Publication of books and films, unless they are part of a larger project applied for under the grant (note that this provision does not apply to a creative element of any grant, as detailed below).
- Exchanges between developed countries.
- Activities that are solely targeted at building the capacity of government officials and/or the private sector. If the project requires activities such as training of government officials, funding for such components should be separately sourced.
- Projects that focus on service delivery (for example, the Foundation will not fund activities such as the distribution of medicines, construction of facilities, and installation of water pumps).

Priority themes for this call:

The Foundation is currently focusing its work on three priority themes: (i) health justice; (ii) climate justice; and (iii) freedom of expression. We support initiatives that encourage and lead to meaningful and constructive engagement between civil society and government, including civil society participation around policy development, policy implementation and decision-making relevant to these three themes.

Applications **must address one or more** of the three priority themes. Possible areas of focus within the themes are set out below. Note that this is not an exhaustive list but rather a set of examples to demonstrate the range of possible areas of focus. All applications are required to demonstrate how they intend to integrate considerations of gender into their project design and implementation.

Health Justice

Support civil society to engage meaningfully with government on:

- Universal health coverage.
- Realising the right to health: better availability, accessibility, quality, participation and accountability in health services and delivery.

- Programmes and policies that focus on social determinants of health as part of the inclusive right to health.
- Challenging systemic discrimination in health systems and promoting equitable access to health services for marginalised groups and those with special needs.
- Promoting the participation of marginalised groups and those with special needs in decision-making processes.
- Promoting health and well-being by combating communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Equitable access to essential medicines.

Freedom of expression

Support civil society to engage meaningfully with government on:

- Advancing a legal and regulatory environment that protects and upholds freedom of expression for all.
- Advancing a legal and regulatory environment that promotes the freedom, growth, and vibrancy of civil society.
- Promoting access to information and transparency in governance, including through a free and independent press, robust freedom of information laws and their practical application.
- Advancing civil society engagement in national, regional and/or international mechanisms and processes to promote freedom of expression (for example, national human rights institutions; Universal Periodic Reviews).
- Promoting art and creativity as means of advocating for and raising awareness of freedom of expression.

Climate Justice

Support civil society to engage meaningfully with government on:

- Ensuring representation, inclusion, and protecting the rights of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
- Addressing the social, political, and economic root causes of climate injustice.
- Strengthening the voices of those most affected by the climate crisis in multilateral and national spaces.
- Ensuring that the voice, agency, and leadership of young women and men are at the centre of policy discussions and decision-making at all levels.
- Advocating for corrective justice for environmental harm, including compensation mechanisms, access to justice and effective remedy, and legal empowerment.
- Ensuring accountability and effective remedy for human rights harms caused by climate change.
- Developing, reviewing, improving, and monitoring laws, policies and practices promoting climate justice.

- Exposing and addressing the factors that contribute to the increased vulnerability of social groups to the consequences of climate change.
- Exposing and addressing negative social and distributional outcomes of climate change mitigation policies and/or encourage support for the development of pro-poor mitigation approaches.

Thematic and cross-cutting intersections

The Foundation's three themes overlap and connect in myriad ways. For example, freedom of expression and protection of the free flow of information are critical to ensuring meaningful progress on health justice and climate justice.

Applicants are encouraged to explore the intersections between our three themes when developing their proposals and, where appropriate, to consider addressing more than one.

For example, a project could focus on using freedom of information legislation to ensure access to reliable information on the state of the environment or to promote government accountability in relation to climate laws and policies. Another project might focus on the links between climate change and health and how these can be addressed at the national level in ways that make a difference to vulnerable groups.

Gender as a cross-cutting theme

The Foundation's commitment to supporting the constructive participation of citizens in their governance, and to nurturing the growth of vibrant and free civil societies is informed by a recognition that social structures and systems are not neutral. Rather, they operate in and are shaped by power dynamics that too often reflect and perpetuate inequality and discrimination. We understand that gender inequality is a major challenge to our vision of a Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies and are committed to integrating gender considerations across our work and the work we support. To that end, we ask all applicants to demonstrate an understanding of how gender operates within their chosen theme/s and show how they will integrate that understanding into their project.

For example, a persuasive project proposal that seeks to promote free access to healthcare for workers in the informal sector would likely demonstrate an understanding of how gender affects access and what this means in terms of different needs and priorities. That same proposal would also likely demonstrate an understanding of how gender in this setting intersects with other forms of discrimination (for example, how race or age impacts on the hurdles facing women workers seeking to access healthcare services) that are different from those faced by other female informal workers; and how that understanding informs the project.

Participation of young people

While not a formal cross-cutting theme, young people are central to the Foundation's mission and its vision for a future Commonwealth of equal, just, and inclusive societies. Applications are encouraged from youth-led organisations working on constructive engagement.

Small and vulnerable Member States

The Commonwealth Charter explicitly affirms the role of the Commonwealth as a champion of small states and a special duty on the Commonwealth to support and advocate for the interests of small states as well as those that are otherwise vulnerable. Applications from civil society organisations in small and vulnerable states that are members of the Foundation are strongly encouraged.

Note that applicants from small and vulnerable states whose projects are not selected under this open call may be contacted to discuss other potential funding opportunities.

Assessment criteria, shortlisting, and approval process

The assessment criteria for applications are as follows:

1. The applicant organisation meets all eligibility criteria.
2. The applicant organisation must have a good track record of advocacy work.
3. The application provides a clear description of the problem that the applicant is seeking to address.
4. The application provides a clear explanation of *how* the applicant plans to address the problem and contribute to its resolution.
5. The applicant organisation provides good evidence of consultations with beneficiaries.
6. The application makes a persuasive case for the proposed approach to the problem. Is the approach timely? Is it relevant? Is it feasible?
7. The applicant organisation demonstrates that it has the capacity to undertake the project and complete it successfully within the stipulated time.
8. The applicant's organisation demonstrates serious commitment towards gender equality.

Applications open at 12pm BST on 16 September 2025 and close at 1pm BST on 23 of October 2025.

Only shortlisted applicants will be contacted by the end of February 2026 and invited to provide further information in support of their application including a detailed project budget.

If you have not been contacted by the end of February 2026, it means that your application has not been shortlisted.

Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the result of their application by the end of June 2026, and it is expected that grant agreements will be concluded soon thereafter, allowing for implementation to begin in the third quarter of 2026 (August-September).

Monitoring and reporting of projects

Successful applicants will be asked to develop a monitoring plan for their project. The Foundation will provide guidance and support to grant partners with their monitoring plan.

Reporting schedules will be agreed between the grant partner and the Foundation and set out in the grant agreement.

Questions

Organisations interested in submitting a grant application are invited to consult our frequently asked questions document for any additional information and to make sure that they also check the additional documents that have been provided.

All additional documentation can be found at commonwealthfoundation.com/grants.

If these documents do not contain an answer, please email the Foundation at cfgrants@commonwealth.int and we will reply as soon as possible.

Before proceeding with any application, please check that your country is eligible. The full list of eligible countries can be found at: commonwealthfoundation.com/grants.