

## Big Society Fund 2011 – 12

### GUIDANCE NOTES

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#### WHAT IS THE BIG SOCIETY FUND?

The Big Society Fund is a small grants scheme, funded by Essex County Council (ECC), to build capacity within the network of voluntary organisations, socially significant enterprises, neighbourhood groups, town and parish councils and community interest groups that enrich civic life in Britain. It is designed to fund community activities that:

- create, procure or develop new community assets;
- enhance existing community assets; or
- create or sustain initiatives or services that strengthen the community that exists in our towns and villages.

Throughout cuts in government funding, ECC has endeavoured to protect grant funding to community groups. It recognises, however, that as public budgets diminish, there is a risk that many communities will see reductions in grass-roots funding. In this context, it is vital that the grant funds that remain are flexible to the needs of community organisations and can help to build capacity in civil society.

The Big Society Fund has been designed to provide small grants to a wide range of bodies including community groups and associations, charities, voluntary groups and socially significant enterprises. It has been designed to be as flexible and as responsive as possible to the needs of the community. It allows for grants to be given quickly to meet immediate need, whilst placing over 50% of awards under the control of local communities.

#### WHAT DOES IT FUND?

Projects seeking funding should take account of ECC and Essex Partnership priorities including tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, improving local environmental features, access to services and supporting communities. Details of ECC priorities can be found at [www.essex.gov.uk](http://www.essex.gov.uk).

The Big Society Fund is split into capital and revenue grants. The assets, activities and initiatives that capital and revenue awards can fund are indicated below:

**Capital costs** – eligible areas of expenditure could include community, social and recreational facilities, village halls, community transport initiatives\*, land purchases, playground equipment, environmental works and any related feasibility, design and planning work.

**Revenue costs** – eligible areas of expenditure include short-term payments for the rental of premises, salary payments, publicity materials, sessional workers, venue hire and volunteer expenses. Local projects and/or services in rural areas or villages which benefit the community or plans to improve the commercial viability of a socially significant business will also be eligible.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive. It has been prepared to give a flavour of the kind of things that the fund will support. The Big Society Fund has been designed with flexibility in mind, however, if you are concerned that your project may not be eligible to apply for, or are unsure whether you require capital or revenue funding, please contact the Grant Co-ordinator (contact details can be found at the bottom of page 6).

We recognise, of course, that the Big Society Fund is one potential source of project funding among many. Part and parcel of our work to assess bids to the Fund will be to investigate alternative sources of grant funding that might better meet the needs of applicants.

## WHO DOES IT FUND?

Applications are invited from bodies which are properly constituted, Essex-based and broadly representative of their local community or neighbourhood. Although not an exhaustive list, this may include:

- Town and parish councils or parish meetings;
- Neighbourhood committees;
- Residents' Associations;
- Faith groups;
- Community Groups and Voluntary Organisations;
- Private enterprises operating for or providing social benefits<sup>†</sup>;
- Universities, colleges, schools or PTAs;
- Military establishments; and
- Hospitals, health authorities and hospices.

In exceptional circumstances, private individuals undertaking activities which provide social benefits can be considered for awards.

The Big Society emphasises the role of civil society as an alternative to state provision, as such, no grants will be made to public bodies to fund actions which they are legally obliged to perform.

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\* Applications for a vehicle for a single-use group will not be considered. Any application for a minibus or similar transport should be made by a community transport group and must include details of how many groups will use the facility, with a timetable if possible.

<sup>†</sup> This includes social enterprises and Community Interest Companies (CICs). Please note that this scheme is not intended to be anti-competitive. Only businesses which are the only business of that type in the community will be able to apply for a grant.

## QUALIFYING CRITERIA

- The project should have the support of the town or parish council where this exists, or in unparished areas, another appropriate, constituted community group should be the sponsor.
- Evidence that matched funding has been investigated or secured must be provided with the application.
- The Big Society is about taking greater responsibility for our choices and for our communities. As such, all projects applying to the Big Society Fund should look to attract matched funding.
- All projects should have the potential to add value to other work being undertaken in the locality and, ideally, have been identified in local 'health checks' or parish plans.
- The project should improve and/or protect the social, environmental or economic well being of the locality where the funding is to be spent.
- Evidence that the project meets local needs and that there is community support for the project in question must be provided.
- The applicant should be able to demonstrate that:
  - it can meet any ongoing revenue costs (for capital awards); or
  - it is financially viable.
- The facility or project should be available to all sectors of the local community and must not be political or religious in nature. Applicants should provide evidence of community access, need and use.
- If the grant is made to a private enterprise and this is sold within two years of receipt of the grant ECC may seek to recover a proportion of the total grant paid.
- If the grant is made to improve a community asset and this is sold into private ownership within two years of the grant, ECC may seek to recover a proportion of the total grant paid.
- All funds awarded must be spent by 31 March 2013.

Successful applicants must agree to work with the County Council in promoting and publicising their initiative. When any funded project is complete, recipients of any awards must contact the Grant Co-ordinator (contact details on page 6) to discuss arrangements for press coverage or launch events.

## PROJECTS THAT ARE NOT ELIGIBLE

Although this is not an exhaustive list, grants will not be made for the purposes of:

- the promotion of religion;<sup>‡</sup>
- the promotion of political ideals;
- work that has already taken place or for which an order has already been placed;
- activities which a statutory body is responsible for;
- animal welfare;
- support for HE/FE students' living costs;
- items that mainly benefit individuals (for example, equipment that is not shared);
- projects that cannot be maintained due to high ongoing costs or the need for specialist skills;
- VAT or other taxes which can be recovered.

## ASSESSMENT OF BIDS

All other applications will be judged on their merits and on the evidence of strong community support and need. However, the way that bids are assessed and the timescales for this assessment will depend on the type of funding sought.

Applicants can choose to apply for funding under one (or more) of three pathways. These are as follows:

- Big Society Community fund (capital) – awards are assessed by a Big Society Judging Panel. 75% of all capital awards from the Big Society fund will be made under this pathway (over 50% of all funds awarded).

Judging Panels will be comprised of a group of relevant local representatives; typically representatives from District Associations of Local Councils, Residents' Associations (or similar) and the District CVS. The Panel will be chaired by either the Chairman or Mayor of the District/Borough Council, who will not have voting rights.

- Quick response capital funding - awards will be assessed 'in-house' by ECC members and officers. 25% of all capital awards from the Big Society Fund will be made under this pathway; and
- Quick response revenue funding which is to be assessed 'in-house' by ECC members and officers. The time taken to assess grant applications will depend on the amount of funding sought.

These pathways for 2011-12 are summarised in the table below.

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<sup>‡</sup> While religious groups may not apply for funds in order to promote their respective ideals, they are welcome to apply in order to deliver community initiatives.

Finding pathway	% of Big Society Fund:	Assessed by:	Timescales
Community Fund (capital)	52% (75% of all capital awards)	Big Society Judging Panels	Assessed in February 2012
Quick response capital	17% (25% of all capital awards)	ECC	Assessed within <b>4 weeks*</b> of receipt of application
Quick response revenue	31%	ECC	Assessed within <b>4 weeks*</b> of receipt of application

*\*In practice, applications will be assessed as quickly as practicable within the 4 week period.*

There are no limits to the number of time applications can be made to any of the funding pathways. Moreover, the success or failure of an application does not preclude an applicant from applying again to the same funding source, with a strengthened application, within a single financial year.

**All requests for community funding will be subject to a maximum application of £15,000. All requests for quick response funding will be capped at £10,000.**

**Where grants are sought to help to improve the sustainability of privately owned for-profit enterprises, grants will generally be capped at £5,000 (revenue) and £10,000 (capital). Match funding will be a formal requirement of all grants to private interests. Higher grants will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.**

In all cases, regardless of the assessing body, the following will be considered:

- The applicants' aims or the aims of the organisation that the applicants represent;
- The aims and objectives of the project;
- Community need for the project and how this has been proved;
- The total cost of the project and the amount of grant requested;
- How the local community will benefit from the project;
- Details of other funding secured / applied for; and
- The arrangements for project management

The County Council reserves the right to reject or alter a grant recommendation, but this right will only be exercised in exceptional circumstances, and in consultation with the applicant. A grant offer will be withdrawn if it becomes apparent the proposal will not be initiated, if monies are not used for the projects original purpose or are not used in line with the grant criteria. Please note that the Big Society Fund will only make payments when invoiced are received.

Following the decision meeting, contact will be made in writing in order to inform the applicant as to the success of their application, including any special conditions that might have been attached to the award.

## TIMESCALE AND APPLICATION PROCESS

In the first instance, you should complete the Expression of Interest Form, and emailing or posting it back to the Grant Co-ordinator. The Grant Co-ordinator will then assess the project and will either send you the relevant application form, or contact you to discuss the project further. In this way, you may also be signposted to other potential funds to help with your project.

In the case of the Big Society Community Fund, the judging panels will convene in February 2012 to make capital funding decisions. The exact date for each district area will be published in due course.

Under no circumstances may a grant be used for any other purpose than that identified in the Terms and Conditions that will be issued.

## SOME SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF FUNDING

ECC website: [www.essex.gov.uk/grantfunding](http://www.essex.gov.uk/grantfunding)

**Essex Community Foundation:** 01245 355947 [www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk)

**Essex Environment Trust:** 01245 265555 [www.essexenvironmenttrust.org.uk](http://www.essexenvironmenttrust.org.uk)

**Barclays Spaces for Sports:** 0121 236 8565

**Awards for All:** maximum grant of £10,000 every two years [www.awardsforall.org.uk](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk)

And of course the **Big Lottery Funds** – various schemes [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

**For Further Information on the Big Society Fund please call  
01245 437887 or e-mail [bigocietyfund@essex.gov.uk](mailto:bigocietyfund@essex.gov.uk)**

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