

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL COMMUNITY GRANTS FUND GUIDANCE FOR PANELS – 2025/26

What is the purpose of the Community Grants Fund panel?

The Community Grants Fund (CGF) is a grants scheme provided by City of Edinburgh Council, which aims to encourage small scale activity that will benefit local communities. Grants of up to £5,000 are awarded to constituted voluntary and community groups across 13 separate neighbourhood areas in the city. Each area receives an allocation of funding to distribute at the start of the financial year and then makes awards via a panel, of which there are 12 across the city. In Leith, an alternative approach known as participatory budgeting is used as part of the '[Leith Chooses](#)' initiative. This is based around a public vote.

The role of the panel is to make recommendations about which organisations should receive a grant, in line with local needs and priorities. Panels are community-led, with members including ward councillors, community council members and individuals from local community organisations. Panel members act as representatives of their group, organisation or constituents. They should put the needs of the people they represent first when making recommendations about which projects to fund.

The amount of money available for each neighbourhood area is based on the number of people who live in that area. Some neighbourhood areas are made up of one ward, others are made up of two wards. In single ward areas there is less money available, whereas in double ward areas (of which there are four – one is allocated by public vote instead of by a panel) the total amount available for the panel to allocate is larger. Some panels only meet once a year, while we anticipate others may require two meetings to allocate the full budget. It's important that panels allocate all of the funding as any unspent funds cannot be rolled over into the next financial year. Once all the funding has been allocated, no further panel meetings take place that year.

How are CGF panels formed?

Membership of the panel is confirmed at the beginning of the new financial year, when participants are invited to come forward for that year. Only those who respond to the invitation and complete the relevant forms will be confirmed as panel members for the year. Any elected members or community council representatives who do not opt into joining a panel will still be able to find out what awards were made as these will be published on the [Community Grants Fund website](#). This information can also be provided upon request from the Community Empowerment and Engagement Team (CEET).

Dates within a set timeframe are then agreed between panel members and the Council officer.

Each panel meeting is [facilitated by a panel member](#). At the start of the financial year, panel members are invited to volunteer to facilitate a funding panel meeting. Panel members are expected to take turns at facilitating. This means that each meeting will be facilitated by a different member. This will allow more people to develop the skills and experience needed to convene a grants panel and community meetings more generally. Officers will attend panel meetings to provide information and support to enable effective decision-making but will not facilitate the meeting. Officers will also provide training and support for facilitators. There will also be opportunities for panel members from across the city to meet, debrief and reflect together.

What is the role of the facilitator?

The facilitator's role is to:

- Keep to the agenda
- Give every member an opportunity to have their say and feel heard
- [Manage conflicts of interest](#)

The facilitator must attend facilitator training. This is to support them to feel confident in their role and to fully understand their responsibilities and the support available to them.

What is the process for making funding recommendations?

The ideal number of people to have on a funding panel is between 6-8 people to reflect a range of different perspectives, whilst keeping the process manageable for those involved in facilitating the discussion. The maximum number of members possible on a CGF panel is 15. Meetings with fewer than three members in attendance will be cancelled and, where possible, rescheduled.

Recommendations are made by consensus, and all panel members should have an equal say in coming to a final agreement. Panel members will be asked to complete a simple scoring sheet ahead of the funding panel meeting. This will be used as a guide to facilitate discussions and to justify recommendations.

The approach taken towards assessing grant applications varies a lot within the funding sector and there is no single right way. CGF panel members use their local knowledge to make recommendations about which applications best meet the needs of their community. As this is a Council fund, we ask that all panel members have regard for the Council's funding objectives:

- Create good places to live and work
- Ending poverty in Edinburgh
- Becoming a net zero city by 2030

The CGF is relatively small, meaning that not all applications can be successful. This can sometimes make it tricky for panel members to decide on what to recommend. The following questions can be used to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of an application:

- Has the applicant given a good description of the project and provided sufficient detail about the proposed activities?
- Who else is doing similar and could the project duplicate existing work that is planned or already underway? This is where local knowledge can be very useful.
- Is there enough evidence that the project would provide community benefit, either for a targeted group within the community, or for the community as a whole?
- How many people are likely to benefit and are the suggested benefits clearly illustrated, as well as being realistic?
- Is the project well organised, with evidence of a clear plan for delivery?
- Is the cost breakdown reasonable, proportionate, clearly explained and evidenced?
- Does the applicant have the capacity to deliver the project, or do they need some additional support to think things through in more detail?
- Could financial support for the project be delivered from other grant streams or through fundraising activities (e.g. by seeking donations)?

When making recommendations, panel members should be mindful of unconscious bias to ensure that decisions are made fairly and equitably.

Once consensus is reached, the panel's recommendations are passed to the Head of Service for the Council's Community Empowerment and Engagement Team (CEET) for final approval, as the Council has a responsibility to ensure that the CGF budget is used appropriately across the city. In the rare instance that the Head of Service does not approve a panel's recommendation, this will be discussed with the panel before notifying the applicant.

How are panels supported?

Each local fund is administered by a Council officer who has been allocated to the fund for that financial year. The officer ensures that all the necessary administration and due diligence work is completed before sharing redacted applications with panel members. Applications will be shared at least one week before the panel takes place.

Council officers do not participate in making recommendations because the CGF is a community-led fund. The role of the officer is to provide panels with all the information they need to make a recommendation, and to support the facilitator by taking and sharing a record of the meeting.

Training is provided for all panel members and additional training will be given to those facilitating meetings.

What are the responsibilities involved in being on a CGF panel?

All panel members are responsible for:

- Attending training and induction sessions – this is essential for panel members to attend in order to participate.
- Communicating respectfully and giving equal weight to each other's strengths and knowledge.
- Familiarising themselves with the CGF guidance and understanding the purpose of the fund.
- Reviewing applications in advance of attending panel meetings and coming prepared with comments.
- Attending meetings either in person or via Microsoft Teams. Where this is not possible, submission of comments to the CGF officer is required at least one working day in advance of the panel. A template for this will be provided on request. Alternatively, a member of the same organisation can attend provided that the officer is given sufficient notice to ensure they are properly briefed ahead of the meeting.
- Maintaining confidentiality about the applications that are assessed and any recommendations made during panel meetings. The outcome of a meeting should not be discussed until an officer has notified all applicants.
- Bringing local knowledge and expertise to bear on the process of making recommendations throughout the year, for instance through knowledge of the applicant or similar organisations/initiatives operating locally.
- Local promotion of the fund, with any enquiries being signposted to communitygrantsfund@edinburgh.gov.uk.
- Declaring an interest before any meeting at which there may be a potential conflict of interest in relation to any of the grant applications. A declaration of interest form must be submitted ahead of the meeting. Further information on this can be found below.
- Completion of an equalities monitoring form at the start of each financial year.

The Council's CGF (CEET) team are responsible for:

- Checking that each application meets the CGF eligibility criteria.
- Carrying out due diligence on all applicants and working with the facilitator to ensure that conflicts of interest on the panel are managed properly.
- Providing panel members with the redacted applications and meeting papers at least one week before the panel takes place.

- Ensuring that the papers include:
 - An agenda
 - All redacted applications
 - Information about previous awards to applicants
 - Details of the total fund available, awards to date, and balance remaining
- Share a record of the meeting with the panel.
- Monitoring of all grants made from the CGF.
- Promotion of the fund in local areas as well as city wide.
- Provision of training and capacity building activities for applicants and panel members.
- Other work related to the implementation and development of the CGF.

How are conflicts of interest managed?

A conflict of interest is a situation in which an individual has competing interests or loyalties that could influence their decision making. It is to be expected that conflicts of interest will arise from time to time when working on the CGF. This is because of the locally focused nature of the fund and the fact that panel members may already have connections to projects that are applying for money.

If a panel member has any private or personal interest in an application that is due to be discussed, they must declare it in writing prior to attending. This should be done using the form supplied by the CGF officer when the redacted applications are sent out.

The panel member will be expected to fully withdraw from discussions about the application in question. Depending on the nature of the conflict, they may be asked not to attend the panel meeting at all. Alternatively, officers may ask panel members to leave the meeting for the full duration of the discussion related to that application. This also applies to any follow-up discussions that occur when agreeing on final recommendations. The Council officer will advise on how best to manage conflicts of interest that arise and will ensure that the guidance around this is followed.

Are there any other important points to note about being a CGF panel member?

Managing competing demands for limited amounts of public money at a local level can present panel members with some difficult dilemmas. Therefore, open mindedness and a willingness to consider different viewpoints are essential for this role.

The Council is grateful to the all the volunteers who give their time to be part of the CGF and who contribute towards its implementation across the city each year. The input of local people helps to ensure that the fund is more community-led and responsive to local needs and priorities, now and in future.

Checklist for panel members		
	To Read	To Complete
Start of financial year (April)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CGF guidance document • Panel guidance document 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact details of panel member inc. name of organisation and mobile number • Equalities monitoring form (standard CEC) • Training for panel members • Training for facilitators as necessary
One week before the panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda • Redacted applications and information about previous awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration of Interest form • Comments in Absentia form - on request • Scoring sheet
After the total is allocated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of all projects funded, and amounts given that year 	