OPEN CALL GRANTS 2026-2027
APPLICATION GUIDELINES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
INDIVIDUAL ORGANISATION GRANTS

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The 2026–2027 open call marks an evolution in how the Foundation supports communities, collectives and creative practitioners—the fabric of our civic ecosystem across the Commonwealth—reflecting our renewed strategic direction and a deepening of our commitment to civil society.

In June 2026, the Foundation's Board of Governors approved a new five-year strategic plan, in which we have refreshed our vision and mission, refined our priorities, and adapted our structure to strengthen our commitment to advancing the interests of the people of the Commonwealth.

The Foundation's **vision** is of a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies where everyone can live in dignity and freedom. Our **mission** is to contribute to that vision by supporting civil society, grassroots communities and creative actors to turn dialogue into action; to connect people and governments and strengthen their capacity to protect and advance democracy and human rights.

The Foundation's strategic plan 2026–2031 is grounded in the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter. It identifies three strategic impact areas: (i) freedom of expression; (ii) economic inclusion; and (iii) climate and environmental justice. The plan defines a sustained focus on 'small states' and 'gender and intersectionality' as cross-cutting priorities and further emphasises the importance of ensuring that our approaches resonate with young people's vision for the future of the Commonwealth. The UN Sustainable Development Goals will continue to guide our work, including relevant targets that promote inclusive and participatory decision-making.

The Foundation welcomes applications from civil society: grassroots communities and creative actors seeking to advance meaningful change across our three strategic areas. We will prioritise applications that can demonstrate change through a) constructive engagement with governments and other decision-makers, b) the use of creative practice to influence public discourse, decision-making, policy or behaviours in pursuit of positive social, cultural, or political change (creative advocacy) and c) successful integration of our cross-cutting priorities and work on the intersection of our three strategic areas.

2026–2027 open call is structured around two complementary grant streams:

1. **Collective action grants** – Supporting networks, coalitions, alliances and platforms of civil society actors, including creative collectives, to enhance civic participation to promote change in relation to our strategic impact areas. Through this new stream, the Foundation seeks to strengthen and sustain participation, encourage joint action, and to enhance the scale, depth, and breadth of the proposed work.
2. **Individual organisation grants** – Supporting civil society organisations, including creative organisations, to deliver standalone projects that aim at achieving policy change and contribute to the aspiration of the people of the Commonwealth, aligned with our strategic impact areas to deliver the proposed grant.

INDIVIDUAL ORGANISATION GRANTS

Who is eligible to apply?

1. The applicant must be a not-for-profit **civil society organisation** or **creative organisation** registered in an eligible Commonwealth Foundation member country. The list of eligible countries can be found at: commonwealthfoundation.com/grants.

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 may be implemented in one or more eligible member countries and may have a national, sub-national, regional or international remit. For multi-country projects, strong local participation by organisations, communities and other relevant actors in each country of implementation is required. See further information on partnerships below.

4. Creative organisations should submit a small selection of previous or current work to demonstrate their creative practice and relevance to the project.

5. The project must seek to advance at least one of the Foundation's strategic impact areas (freedom of expression, economic inclusion, climate and environmental justice) through constructive engagement between civil society and governments or other decision-makers and/or the use of creative practice to influence public discourse, decision-making, policy or behaviours in pursuit of positive social, cultural, or political change.

6. The applicant organisation must have a minimum of three years' demonstrable experience relevant to the proposed project and strategic impact area. This may include experience in participatory governance, constructive engagement between civil society and decision makers, experience of using arts and creative expression to influence narratives, policy, or public discourse. All applicants should demonstrate significant experience of working in the communities where their proposed project will be delivered. We welcome applications from creative practitioners proposing the use of creative advocacy to advance changes in our strategic impact areas.

7. The grant requested must be a minimum of **£15,000 and a maximum of £30,000** per year**, for a maximum of two years.** (There are different requirements depending on the requested grant amount; see 'How to apply', below).

8. The requested grant must not exceed 70% of the applicant organisation's total annual income, averaged over the past two years.

9. The applicant organisation's average annual income over the past two years must be less than £2.5m.

10. The project proposal must demonstrate how gender and intersectionality have informed its design and will be integrated throughout implementation. Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of how gender interacts with other factors—such as age, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status and geographical location—to

shape people's experiences, opportunities, participation and access to rights and resources.

11. Organisations that are currently implementing a Commonwealth Foundation grant or have recently completed a grant but not yet received their final payment are not eligible to apply.
12. Proposals should relate to projects that are expected to begin between **1 August 2027** and **30 September 2027.**

Notes

1. Only applicants meeting all the above eligibility requirements will be considered.
2. The Foundation recognises that organisations interested in applying for an **individual organisation grant** may already be undertaking significant work that aligns with the purpose and strategic impact areas of this grant stream, and could benefit from support to expand, deepen or continue that work. We are therefore willing to consider projects that are not entirely new but build on, extend or introduce an additional component to an existing initiative. **If your organisation is not a creative organisation, a creative advocacy component added to an existing or ongoing project will not be considered for funding. We understand that creative organisations are entirely dedicated to creating, presenting, supporting, developing art and culture.**
3. The Foundation welcomes partnerships that aim to enhance the scale, depth, reach or impact of the proposed work. Only the lead applicant organisation, and not its partner or partners, is required to meet the core eligibility criteria. Partners may include registered civil society or creative organisations, grassroots or community-based groups, informal groups, social movements, networks, artists, storytellers, creative practitioners or advocates whose knowledge, experience or contribution will strengthen the project. Applicants should clearly explain the role and contribution of each partner. Where a proposed partner is a registered organisation in a country of implementation, its registration certificate should also be submitted as part of the application.
4. For the purpose of the open call, **'creative advocacy'** is defined as the intentional use of creative practices to influence public discourse, policy, behaviours, or decision-making in pursuit of positive social, cultural, or political change.

How to apply

Only applications that have been submitted using the online application system will be considered. Log in and create your SurveyMonkey Apply account to complete and submit an online application.

All applications must include the following documentation:

1. A **logic model** (you must use the template provided).
2. A copy of your 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). Organisations are eligible to apply if they operate on a not-for-profit basis and are registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) or another recognised not-for-profit legal structure. When the original registration certificates are not in English, shortlisted applications will be expected to be asked to provide a certified translation.

3. **Creative organisations** should submit a small selection of previous or current work that demonstrates your creative practice and relevance to this opportunity.
4. 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.) If you do not have these, please upload relevant governance structure, including roles and responsibilities.
5. 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.
6. **For grants of £15,000 per year**: you may choose to submit either the latest **audited accounts** or a copy of your organisation's most recent **annual accounts**. Annual accounts must include a balance sheet, a profit and loss statement and notes about the accounts. They must be signed off by your organisation's Board or its principal executive officer and not be older than December 2024.
7. **For grants exceeding £15,000 per year: a copy of your 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 your organisation's Board or its principal executive officer. They should not be older than December 2024.

Exclusions

The Foundation will **not** fund:

- Attendance at, or hosting of, training courses, workshops, conferences or events 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 or films, unless they are part of a larger project funded by 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 distribution of medicines, construction of facilities, and installation of water pumps).
- Creative projects that do not aim for social or political change
- Activities that promote hatred, discrimination or violence; or those that endanger participants or communities.
- Electioneering or partisan political communications.
- Activities that primarily generate private profit or that do not demonstrate a clear public interest or advocacy outcome.

Strategic impact areas

Applications **must address one or more** of the three strategic impact areas. Examples are provided below: **note that this is not an exhaustive list**. All applicants are required to demonstrate how they intend to integrate considerations of gender and intersectionality into their project design and implementation.

Freedom of expression

- Advancing a legal and regulatory framework that protects and upholds freedom of expression, association, assembly, and access to information, to challenge laws used to stifle dissent, and promote self-regulatory mechanisms for the media and civil society
- Promoting access to information, information literacy 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 digital rights and inclusion, protecting women and youth from online violence and reducing gender bias in artificial intelligence (AI)
- Removing barriers to public participation in matters of public interest and advancing open civic dialogue
- Promoting public information ecosystems that ensure public decision-making is based on credible and well-documented information (for example, community documentation, monitoring of environmental harms)

Economic inclusion

- Promoting initiatives to strengthen regulatory frameworks to reduce socio-economic inequalities, including income inequality, and support equitable access to resources,

assets, services, and opportunities

- Promoting programmes and policies that protect and strengthen labour rights, including against forced labour in all its forms
- Promoting the participation of women, youth and marginalised groups to ensure their needs are reflected in economic policy and decision-making, including in development planning, budgeting, and public expenditure tracking
- Promoting policy reforms that advance sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneurship, inclusive economic opportunities, and decent jobs, particularly for young people and marginalised groups
- Advocating for systemic reforms that prioritise health and wellbeing as an integral component of inclusive economic policies
- Advocating for policies supporting the growth (and recognition) of creative industries [music, film, performance arts, etc] to create sustainable livelihoods (creative economy)
- Fostering economic inclusion through youth-led initiatives

Climate and environmental justice

- Addressing the social, political, and economic root causes and impacts of climate and environmental injustice, particularly on marginalised groups, and communities
- Promoting the representation and participation of those most affected by the climate crisis and environmental injustice in climate policy and decision-making and ensuring the protection of their rights
- Developing, reviewing, improving, and monitoring laws, policies and practices promoting climate and environmental justice
- Promoting policies and programmes that support a just, clean energy transition that protects the rights and livelihoods of affected communities, including those most marginalised
- Promoting localised and indigenous knowledge, solutions and practices to influence environmental policies and promote sustainability
- Promoting accountability, access to justice, and effective remedy for environmental and climate-related harms and human rights violations

Thematic intersections and cross-cutting priorities

The Foundation's strategic impact areas overlap and connect in myriad ways. Applicants are encouraged to explore their intersections: for example, a project could focus on using freedom of information legislation to ensure access to reliable information on the state of the environment, climate finance, or to promote government accountability in relation to climate laws and policies.

The strategic plan 2026–2031 defines two cross-cutting priorities: 'small states' and 'gender and intersectionality' and further emphasises the importance of ensuring that the Foundation's programme delivery resonates with young people's vision for the future of the Commonwealth.

Gender and intersectionality

The Foundation's commitment to inclusive participation recognises that social structures and systems are shaped by power dynamics that can create and perpetuate inequality, discrimination and exclusion. Understanding how different and overlapping forms of inequality affect people is essential to supporting inclusive participation and ensuring that marginalised voices are represented in public dialogue and decision-making.

Applicants are required to articulate how gender and intersectionality will be integrated throughout the project. This may include identifying and addressing barriers to participation, ensuring that the project is informed by differing perspectives and experiences, and allocating resources to support inclusive participation.

For example, a project promoting economic inclusion could consider how gender and other forms of inequality affect access to employment, social protection, and other essential services. This understanding could inform which groups participate in the project, the barriers it seeks to address and the policies or practices it aims to influence.

Small states

The Foundation is committed to tailoring its approaches to the varying needs and distinct challenges faced by Commonwealth small states, including economic vulnerability, limited resources, institutional capacity and disproportionate exposure to climate change and environmental degradation.

We seek to strengthen the participation of civil society, grassroots communities and creative actors, amplify issues that disproportionately affect small states and support their engagement in public discourse and policy processes at national, regional and international levels. Applications from eligible civil society and creative organisations in Commonwealth small states are strongly encouraged.

A note on young people

Young people remain central to the Foundation's mission and its vision for the future of the Commonwealth. Many young people face structural inequalities and barriers that limit their opportunities to influence public dialogues and decisions that affect their lives and futures.

The Foundation recognises young people as agents of change whose perspectives, leadership and lived experiences can help shape responses to pressing issues, including inequality, exclusion, climate risk and democratic erosion. We seek to support meaningful youth participation that goes beyond representation or consultation and enables young people to contribute to public discourse, policy processes and decision-making. Applications from youth-led organisations are encouraged, as are projects that strengthen young people's agency and leadership.

Safeguarding

The Foundation is committed to ensuring all activities supported through its grants programme protect the safety, dignity and wellbeing of the people involved. Applicants are expected to identify any safeguarding risks associated with their proposed project and explain how these risks will be prevented, managed and responded to. Safeguarding measures should be appropriate to the nature of the project, the people involved and the context in which activities will take place.

The use of AI

Note to Applicants

The Foundation's grants programme exists to support civil society and creative voices to constructively engage in policy processes; to help people to participate in and transform the policies and systems that shape their lives. We are conscious that many potential applicants are drawn to these tools to prepare applications more quickly and with less effort.

The Foundation would like to advise prospective applicants to use AI merely as a support tool for editing, grammar, research, improving readability, and summarising.

The Foundation values proposals that are grounded in the knowledge, experience and perspectives of the communities affected, not generic narratives. Consequently, applications must still demonstrate organisational understanding of the problem being addressed, institutional knowledge of the community being served as well as the organisational journey to grow and create change for beneficiaries.

The Foundations assessment process remains centred on human judgement, expertise, and decision-making, to preserve the integrity of the process. The use of AI tools will neither disadvantage nor advantage applicants in our assessment process.

Good applications are grounded in verifiable evidence, real lived experience in the thematic area, genuine community engagement, realistic planning, and the insight that only comes from the organisation's direct experience, learning and knowledge.

Assessment criteria

Eligibility

- The applicant organisation meets all eligibility criteria.

Relevant experience and track record

- The applicant organisation demonstrates a track record of advocacy work.

- Assessment of the portfolio of creative actors and its ability to influence public discourse.

Clarity and significance of the issue

- The applicant provides a description of the problem that the project is seeking to address.
- The applicant provides an explanation of how the project will address the problem and contribute to its resolution.

Relationship with communities and target groups

- The applicant organisation provides evidence of consultations with beneficiaries.

Effectiveness of the proposed approach and organisational capacity

- The application makes a persuasive case for the proposed approach to the issue. Is the approach timely? Is it relevant? Is it feasible?
- The applicant organisation demonstrates that it has the capacity to undertake the project and complete it successfully within the stipulated timeframe.

Gender and intersectionality

- The applicant organisation demonstrates a commitment to the integration of gender and intersectionality throughout the project implementation

Key dates

23 September 2026	Applications open at 1pm BST
26 October 2026	Applications close at 1pm GMT
End February 2027	Shortlisted applicants will be contacted and invited to provide further information in support of their application, including a detailed budget. **If you have not been contacted by the end of February 2027, it means that your application has not been shortlisted.**
End June 2027	Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the result of their application. Grant agreements for successful applications will be concluded soon thereafter to allow for implementation to begin in the third quarter of 2027.

Monitoring and reporting

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

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

Support with your application

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

Organisations are invited to consult our 'frequently asked questions' for further information.

Organisations may email cfgrants@commonwealth.int with any queries that are not covered within these documents.

The Foundation receives a large number of applications each year and is therefore unable to provide individual feedback for unsuccessful applicants.