

North East Economic Inactivity Trailblazer VCSE Small Grant Programme

The Fund

In December 2024, the Mayor secured the North East Combined Authority (NECA) as an [Economic Inactivity Trailblazer](#) to improve the support available to those who are inactive due to ill health and help them return to work.

The North East Economic Inactivity Trailblazer VCSE Small Grant Programme (the Fund) will provide grants to charities and voluntary groups for projects that improve residents' health and wellbeing and helps them move into work, education or training.

The Fund will gather evidence of best practice and focus on engaging economically inactive residents, delivering integrated support, and with particular attention to women, young people, neurodiverse residents, social housing tenants, and those receiving primary care for mental and physical health conditions.

Fund aims

The Fund aims to support activity that helps residents who are economically inactive and living in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods to move into work, education, or training, including through activities that improve health and wellbeing.

All funded activity must be complete by 31 March 2026 and grantees will be expected to attend at least one online session to share learning and insights to inform future programmes and activities. Grantees will also need to collect and share data from their work, including details of residents participating in the programme.

What will the fund support?

The Fund can support a broad range of projects and activities that helps residents who are economically inactive and living in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods.

Examples of activity include:

- Community engagement, reaching out/engaging with those residents across their neighbourhoods who are economically inactive. This could be in person or via digital engagement.
- Providing wrap-around support to enable residents to move closer to mainstream provision. This could include upskilling staff to provide additional advice, extending support to new areas out-of-hours or digital support.
- Promoting to all residents the importance of work to help people to live healthier and more independent lives. This could include activities such as work-experience, mentoring and coaching.
- Enhanced activity to support residents with poor mental health and well-being challenges. This could include mental health first aid training for staff, as well as

direct support to individuals which builds on social prescribing models, or exploring new ways to measure wellbeing as part of service delivery.

- Providing referral pathways for residents into current employment support provision. This could include preparing participants to access services e.g., navigating transport options
- Building relationships with and between local services. This could include activities like building local provider forums, communication channels or generally engaging with different services.
- Developing resources and tools which help residents to respond to identified local needs. Activities could include developing a local transport map, service directory, health and wellbeing tools or case studies which promote education and employment opportunities, co-designed with local residents.

Who can apply

Applications can be submitted by voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations that fit our [standard eligibility criteria](#) and:

- have an annual turnover of no more than £1.5 million
- are based and working within the region
- demonstrate an understanding of the mission critical neighbourhoods

How much funding is available?

The fund has £855,000 to distribute and will make grants between £40,000 and £70,000. We expect to make approximately 16 grants.

Eligible areas

Grants will support activity that helps residents of Mission Critical Neighbourhoods identified in the [Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods](#) (ICON) The neighbourhoods are:

Newcastle

- Elswick
- Benwell
- Heaton South
- Byker
- Walker South
- Walker North

North Tyneside

- Percy Main

Northumberland

- Blyth Cowpen
- Blyth Town
- Ashington Hirst
- Widdrington, Lynemouth & Hadston
- Ashington East
- Newbiggin

Sunderland

- Hendon & Docks
- Town End Farm

County Durham

- Easington & Hawthorn
- Horden
- Shildon
- Shotton and Haswell
- Blackhall
- Coundon North
- Spennymoor East & Ferryhill West
- Bishop Auckland South
- Peterlee East
- Murton North & Parkside
- Newton Aycliffe West
- Stanley South

Monitoring and reporting

In line with the 'test and learn' principles of the Trailblazer programme, the Fund aims to capture and share insights from delivery that improve understanding of innovation within the VCSE sector.

It will also support the training, knowledge, and resources required to sustain this long-term. This information will be used by NECA to develop future opportunities which aid capacity building in the sector.

As part of the learning, successful applicants will be expected to attend at least one online session to share learning and insights to inform future programmes and activities. Successful applicants will be given further details.

The expected outputs and outcomes for the fund are:

Output	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of residents supported to engage in job searching.• Number of residents supported to develop skills (life skills, employment skills)• Number of economically inactive people engaging with keyworker support services• Number of residents reached.• Number of employers receiving support• Number of socially excluded people accessing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of residents accessing employment• Number of residents progressing into education and training• Number of residents sustaining employment• Number of residents progressing in work• Number of residents with improved employability skills

Successful applicants will need to collect data from their work, including details of residents participating in the programme. Data will need to be collected and shared monthly with the Community Foundation/Point North.

You can see a data collection template [here](#).

How to apply

To apply, you need to complete our online Expression of Interest (Eoi) form available via the call for applications on our website.

Your Eoi should:

- demonstrate your understanding of the issues in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods, how your project will address them and the aims of the Fund
- include your previous and/or current experience of working with communities in Mission Critical Neighbourhoods
- provide a realistic number of beneficiaries you feel you can support between November 2025 to 31 March 2026

- confirmation that you are able to collect, secure and share the data outlined in the data collection spreadsheet here
- include a detailed budget for the activity, including contributions to core running / management costs for the organisation (up to 15% of the total grant)

The budget can be included in the EoI or uploaded as a separate document

Timeline

- 10 September 2025 – The fund closes for applications at midnight
- October 2025 – Applicants notified of the outcome/grant offers sent
- November 2025 – Delivery to begin
- 31 March 2026 – Delivery ends and all funds spent
- April 2026 - Final reporting must be provided