

Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Community Grants

Programme – Liverpool City Region, October 2025

Funding Specification and Grant Guidance

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1. Introduction

What is VOLA?

VOLA is a consortium of Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) service providers operating in the Liverpool City Region.

We have been appointed by the LCR Combined Authority to manage this Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Grants programme.

VOLA exists, primarily, to provide a formal structure for supporting the VCFSE sector in the provision of skills and employment support across the city region; promoting, organising and facilitating cooperation and partnership working between VCFSE organisations.

As well as convening and coordinating collaborative delivery of projects amongst our consortium members, we also work with the wider VCFSE sector in the skills and employment arena, for example, through managing grants programmes such as this one.

If you don't already know who we are and want to find out more, please visit our [website](#).

The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Programme

The Government's [Get Britain Working](#) White Paper was published in November 2024. It outlined the Government's plans to reform the employment support landscape with primary aims to:

- Get people back into work if they are outside the workforce
- Give young people access to training, an apprenticeship, or help to find work
- Help people to get a job, upskill, and get on in their career, whether they are unemployed or in employment, alongside clear obligations on people to take up support and do in return everything they can to work
- Support employers to recruit, retain and develop staff including merging Job Centre Plus & the National Careers Service.

The White Paper set out how the Government is investing £240m to trial new ways to get people back into work. This includes £45m to establish eight Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (YGT) areas. The Liverpool City Region has been selected as one of these areas, with the aim of testing new ways of supporting young people into employment or training, by bringing together and enhancing existing programmes in partnership with local areas to reduce inactivity.

The Youth Trailblazer is designed to test, learn and evaluate what works, by:

- Listening to young people – noting what the challenges are and what would help

- Working with employers to create/offer paid work experience, in work support, and to support them to help disadvantaged young people
- Offering employability, wrap around, pastoral and other support to help overcome barriers and personal challenges.

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2. Context

The Liverpool City Region faces significant challenges in the labour market, more profoundly than regional and national averages.

The level of youth economic inactivity is increasing across LCR, as are NEET rates. LCR Combined Authority data indicates that since 2022, proportions of NEET in LCR have increased (+1.1%), and at 4.8% are significantly higher than regional (4.1%) and national rates (3.2%).

Liverpool has the highest proportion of NEET of the six local authorities in LCR at 5.7%, whilst Sefton at 3.5% has the lowest rate, which however, is still above the national average. However, there are areas of disadvantage in all boroughs that are known to have significantly higher levels of unemployment, inactivity and NEET rates than average.

The proportion of young people who are NEET and who are affected by long-term or temporary sickness has also risen in recent years, with over one in four citing sickness as a barrier to participation in 2023, compared to one in 10 in 2012.

Among other things, those who are NEET are:

- 80% more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities
- Nearly twice as likely to have a health condition
- Twice as likely to have no qualifications
- More than twice as likely to be from a disadvantaged background
- More likely to have lower pay, higher unemployment and reduced life chances, along with greater mental health problems later in life.

Being NEET has a significant adverse impact upon an individual's life chances. Evidence shows that both short and especially long-term periods as NEET are strongly linked to poorer outcomes across multiples domains of life.

NEET experiences have long lasting consequences, with people formerly NEET in younger life much more likely to remain disadvantaged, unemployed or in precarious work.

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3. Focus of this Community Grants Programme

This grants programme is aimed at supporting young, **18-21 year old residents of the Liverpool City Region**, who are not in employment, education or training (**NEET**), by providing access to education, training, or employment support.

It will fund a range of inclusive, NEET-focused projects across the city region, which support workless young adults from traditionally 'hard to reach' communities (geographic and thematic) and individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage and/or who are difficult to engage, to overcome personal challenges and barriers; with the overall aim of supporting onward progression to employment, education or skills opportunities, including but not exclusive to:

- Apprenticeships and other forms of work with training opportunities.
- Learning and skills opportunities, such as those provided by local FE colleges, training providers and community learning provision; or
- Employment support such as Ways to Work, Connect to Work, Restart or other local or DWP funded employment support services;

We encourage innovative and flexible approaches that meet specific place-based and thematic needs and challenges.

Grant awards will seek to fill gaps and not duplicate or displace existing activities. This will form part of the assessment process.

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4. Key themes of Community Grant investment

As prescribed by the LCR Combined Authority, the scope of this community grants programme is **limited to the following themes** that grants should focus upon (recognising that themes may be combined and addressed within one grant award):

- Mental health support – including dealing with bereavement support
- Support for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Neurodivergent young people
- Support for those with a record of youth offending and recidivism
- Support for young, single parents
- Support to prevent substance misuse (including those with a highly addictive potential such as Ketamine that have increased in use by particular groups of young people), current drug users, and CPD for professionals working with drug users
- Financial skills and money management
- Team/trust building
- Building soft and communication skills as well as literacy and numeracy needs

- Mentoring/coaching and capacity-building in specific sectors
- Confidence building for targeted vulnerable groups including those experiencing, or with experience of, homelessness
- Support for individuals who experience multiple barriers and disadvantage including at least one of the above

Whilst it is understood that other issues may impact the quality of life of young people, these will not be considered as part of this grant programme.

Note: Care Leavers and Care Experienced Young People – in submitting applications, applicants should note that significant LCR Trailblazer funding has been ring-fenced at a Local Authority level to support Care Leavers and Care Experienced Young People, and that therefore potential duplication and displacement will be carefully considered as part of the appraisal process.

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5. Who is eligible to apply?

Applications are invited from **legally constituted**, VCFSE sector organisations, run on a not-for-profit basis, with an operational base in the Liverpool City Region.

Organisations must have:

- A governing document/ constitution
- A Board of Directors/ Trustees that has more than one member, and is not made up entirely of related family members
- A bank account in its own name with at least two unrelated authorised signatories.
- Been in existence for at least 12 months and be a going concern.

Financial standing, governance arrangements, capacity and capability will be checked through due diligence processes.

The definition of 'VCFSE Sector' is: an organisation run on a not-for-profit basis, including:

- Registered Charity
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- Community Interest Company (CIC) – [see below for CICs Limited by Shares](#)
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Social Enterprise (not-for-profit)
- Other legally constituted Voluntary / Community Group

Legal responsibility and partnership working:

Please note: Organisations must apply in their own right. One organisation cannot apply on behalf of another.

Organisations whose grant applications are successful will be legally accountable and responsible for all aspects of the funded project.

Whilst partnership working is actively welcomed and will be looked upon favourably in assessing applications, the grant applicant will be responsible for any third-party organisation/s, paid or unpaid, who will be working on the project.

Applications will not be accepted from:

- Individuals, or organisations that consist of one family (i.e. organisations whose Board of Directors/ Trustees are made up entirely of related family members)
- Unincorporated bodies that are not a legal entity.
- Statutory bodies, including Parish and Town Councils
- Schools, colleges or universities
- Health authorities, or for activities that should be funded by the health service
- Housing Associations
- Private Companies Ltd by Shares
- Organisations distributing profits to members or shareholders (or whose constitution allows for this, whether or not they actually do it) – [includes CICs Limited by Shares](#)
- Applications to fund religious or political activities (however, faith-based organisations are eligible to apply)
- Grant-making bodies applying for funding to redistribute to individuals or groups
- Organisations/ groups whose sole purpose is to campaign, or organisations seeking funding for any campaigning activity

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6. Funding available

£711,000 is available across the city region, to be allocated in one grant funding round taking place during October and November 2025.

Grants of between **£10,000 and £40,000** are available per application.

All funding must be spent (defrayed, not just committed/accrued) by 31st March 2026.

Applying for more than one grant

Eligible organisations are permitted to submit one or more applications; however, **applications should be specific to each Local authority area** they plan to deliver within.

Each individual, borough-specific application needs to be deliverable/ financially viable as a self-contained project in the absence of success in securing funding in other boroughs applied for.

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7. Applications

Fully completed, signed applications and supporting documents must be emailed to YGT@volamerseyside.org.uk by 11.59 pm, Sunday 9th November 2025.

- Incomplete or unsigned applications will be rejected
- Respect the word counts: answers which exceed these will be capped at the limit
- Do not alter the application form
- Submit the form in Word format only

The application form has eight sections. Sections D-G will be scored by the assessment team.

A. Project Contact Details
B. Organisational Details
• Incorporation date; staff numbers; governance registration number(s); organisational overview; financial information; insurance; policies; compliance (DBS, Data Protection/ GDPR, Procurement)
C. Project Summary
A brief overview of the project. This section will be used to brief a strategic advisory panel consisting of Local Authority representatives and others
D. Full Project Details
• Timescales – expenditure and delivery • What you will do – detailed description of your proposed project, its activities and delivery model, different stages and key delivery milestones • Partnership working • Target groups and engagement approaches • Risks and contingency planning • Monitoring and evaluation (see section 13 of this specification) • Need and Strategic Fit (see section 9) • Experience, capacity, capability and readiness to deliver • Quality • Safeguarding and Prevent (see section 10) • Equality, diversity and inclusion (see section 11) • Outputs & outcomes
E. Project Costs (see section 14)
• Staff costs, participant costs, other project costs

- Overheads - flat rate contribution, calculated as 15% of direct project staff costs - Any match funding, or in kind support – though not essential, this will be looked upon favourably.
F. Other Current Funding
- Details of funding for similar activities - Measures to avoid double funding and double counting
G. Social Value & Environmental Impact
H. Declaration and Document Checklist

Supporting documents:

Your application will not be considered unless you submit the following documents via email by the stated deadline:

- Governing document/constitution
- Most recent annual accounts & annual report

The following will also be required if your application is successful:

Policies & Procedures

- Health & Safety
- Safeguarding – children & young people &/or vulnerable adults (as appropriate)
- Prevent Duty
- Equality & Diversity
- Compliments & Complaints
- Data Protection
- Anti-fraud
- Whistleblowing
- Environmental

Evidence of valid insurance cover

- Public Liability Insurance (minimum £2m)
- Employers Liability Insurance (minimum £5m)

Banking details

- Bank statement/ other confirmation of bank account name (in name of organisation) and at least 2 unrelated signatories.

As part of VOLA's grant funding agreement with the LCRCA, the LCRCA reserves the right to view, at any time, all necessary paperwork in relation to the grant, including financial and delivery records; relevant policies/ procedures; and quality assurance scheme certificates.

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8. Questions

Any questions should be emailed to YGT@volamerseyside.org.uk by 5pm, Wednesday 29th October 2025. We aim to respond to queries within 3 working days.

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9. Strategic Fit

Grant applications should ensure a strategic fit with activities already in place in the Local Authority area where the activity will take place.

Each grant applicant will set out within its application how the activity will be embedded and mapped into existing service delivery and how it avoids duplication, or displacement of existing local activities and services – both mainstream, publicly-funded services, and other provision delivered locally.

Applicants should also consider wider strategic context/ environmental factors, e.g. market changes, cases for change, policy priorities, or emerging local needs.

Applications will be reviewed for local strategic fit by a representative(s) of the Local authority from the borough the application relates to.

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10. Safeguarding & Prevent

Grant recipient organisations working with children or vulnerable adults will be expected to comply with the requirements of the Disclosure and Barring Service.

As this funding is likely to result in an organisation working directly with young people or vulnerable young adults, Grant applicants must ensure they have robust safeguarding policies in place and comply with the [Prevent Duty](#) requirements.

Responsibilities and commitments in this regard will be assessed as part of the application process; and successful applicants will be expected to submit up-to-date Safeguarding and Prevent Policies as part of pre-grant award due diligence processes.

Confirmation of appropriate (Standard or Enhanced) DBS checks with appropriate Barred list checks, in accordance with DBS guidance, will also be required for all personnel involved with the project; and Grant Recipients will be required to provide regular reports on safeguarding VOLA as part of project monitoring processes.

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11. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. Liverpool City Region has an ageing population, and a workforce that has an underrepresentation of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic people; disabled people; people of marginalised genders; carers and those with caring responsibilities.

VOLA's commitment:

VOLA is fully committed to equality, diversity & inclusion (EDI) in all that we do. In developing this grants programme, we have undertaken a robust Equality Impact Assessment to highlight issues, risks and key actions that will be undertaken to ensure that the project is delivered in a way that ensures equality while recognising and allowing for the diverse needs of both grant applicants and the individuals who will ultimately access their support.

We actively welcome applications from organisations working with people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act and/or other barriers to inclusion. We have endeavoured to ensure that publicity channels have reached organisations working with underrepresented groups.

Through the decision making processes, we will ensure, as far as is practically possible, a fair representation of projects focussed on underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities - aligned to the priority groups outlined in this funding specification, e.g. young people with mental health issues, SEND, disability, neurodiversity, offenders, single parents and those with substance misuse issues (including prevention).

Racial equality and support available:

We actively welcome and support the submission of applications from organisations supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

We try and use clear and plain English in all documentation, as much as we possibly can, though some jargon can't be avoided.

We will try our absolute best to support any language barriers people may have that makes it difficult for them to apply. Try and use [Google Translate](https://www.google.com/translating/) and if this doesn't work well for you, please get in touch and we will try and help.

Expectations of Grant Recipients:

Organisations whose applications are successful will be expected to:

- Comply at all times with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010
- Conduct equality impact assessments where appropriate

- Actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and promote principles that support equality of opportunity for all.

Responsibilities and commitments in this regard will be assessed as part of the application process. Successful applicants will be expected to submit an up-to-date Equality & Diversity Policy as part of pre-grant award due diligence processes; and supply demographic equality monitoring data relating to project participants as part of project monitoring processes.

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12. Data Protection and GDPR

Successful applicants will be expected to have appropriate policies in place to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the updated Data Protection Act in 2018, through which organisations are now held more accountable for their technical and organisational measures in relation to their security and protection of data, particularly data that identifies residents (personal data) as required.

As personal data that contains sensitive information (such as names, addresses and other personal details) will be collected as part of community grant evidence, Grant Recipients will be expected to ensure this data is handled appropriately and in line with government regulations on GDPR and data protection principles.

Successful applicants will be expected to submit an up-to-date Data Protection Policy as part of pre-grant award due diligence processes; and supply participant monitoring data as part of project monitoring processes. Data Sharing responsibilities and agreements will be included in the Grant Funding Agreement.

All data, evidence and documents relating to funded projects must be retained for a period of **seven years** from the end of their project. Grant Recipients must ensure that data and documentation is not kept longer than necessary.

Where appropriate, VOLA and Grant Recipients will seek **participant consent** to share their individual personal data for programme reporting purposes.

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13. Monitoring and evidence requirements

Successful applicants will be expected to supply **monthly** data, documentation and evidence to VOLA. Precise requirements are currently being agreed with LCR Combined Authority, but are currently expected to include the following:

a. Participant forms and data:

- Personal information: such as name; address; date of birth; telephone number; email address; NI number.
- Other personal characteristics: such as gender; age; ethnicity; employment status; disability; learning difficulty or health condition; previous educational attainment (basic skills, qualification levels); single parent, experience of the Care system, refugee or asylum seeker; experience of homelessness; or history of offending
- Initial assessments, personal learning/ development plans and progress logs. (TBC)
- Details of any work or further education/ training progressions, or other positive outcomes following participation, including the name of employers, college/ training providers, job title/role, or the course/qualification or support programme, and the start date.

b. Financial records relating to project expenditure:

- Expenditure spreadsheet
- Evidence of staff costs, invoices, receipts and, where necessary, defrayment evidence.

c. An end-of-project evaluation report, by 30th April 2026.

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14. Eligible costs

Grant awards should be reflective of the true costs of delivering the Community Grant activities. Eligible costs include:

- A portion of salary and associated on-costs (employer's pension & [NI contributions](#), plus any other taxable incentives linked to pay) of directly employed staff necessary to operate the Community Grant project
- **Overheads contribution – paid as a flat rate 15% of internal staff costs.** No other indirect overheads cost can be included in project budgets or funding claims
- Participant costs: including travel/ transport; refreshments/ lunch; childcare; equipment or uniforms required for jobs secured; or other reasonable expenses
- Other costs required to deliver the project: materials; small items of equipment, including hardware and software that would reasonably be described as revenue funded; publicity/ advertising; community events; evaluation; Delivery Partner fees; consultancy fees.

In proposing the budget and delivering the activities, it is expected that value for money will be secured. Proposed costs should be reasonable and proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposed project. Value for money will be included in the assessment of applications.

Value Added Tax

VAT which is recoverable, by whatever means, is ineligible, even if it is not actually recovered by the final beneficiary or individual recipient. Irrecoverable VAT can be claimed as an eligible cost, provided the cost/claim can be substantiated by appropriate evidence from the organisation's auditors or accountants, should this be requested by the Grants Team, the LCR Combined Authority, government auditors. or others appointed on their behalf.

If you are unsure about your organisation's VAT status, please seek professional advice.

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15. Timescales: application, assessment and award process & project delivery

Activity/ Milestone	Notes	Timescale
Application launch	Form and guidance available here	Tuesday 14 th October 2025
Online briefings	Book place, or view slides afterwards here	15 th , 16 th & 20 th October
Queries	YGT@volamerseyside.org.uk – we aim to respond within 3 working days	By 5pm, Wednesday 29th October
	Updated Q&As will be published here weekly	
Application deadline	Complete application form and supporting documents emailed to YGT@volamerseyside.org.uk	11.59pm Sunday 9th November
Grant eligibility, due diligence & assessment		By Friday 28 th November
Applicants notified of award decision	There is no appeals process, but feedback will be provided	W/c 1st December
Pre-grant clarification/ conditions & due diligence	Submit any required clarification, plus mandatory evidence to VOLA – policies, insurance, DBS information, bank details	W/c 1 st December
Briefing workshop	Mandatory for all Grant Recipients	W/c 1st December
Grant Agreements issued	Following completion of pre-grant due diligence	ASAP from w/c 1st December
Project delivery commences		ASAP from w/c 8th December
Monitoring returns	Dates to be confirmed	Monthly
Project delivery and expenditure complete		31st March 2026
Evaluation report		By 30 th April 2026

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16. Assessment process and scoring methodology

Eligibility assessment and due diligence:

Following submission, the Grants Team at VOLA will check applications for completeness, (including all required supporting documentation), undertake eligibility checks and necessary due diligence. They may need to contact applicants where eligibility cannot be clearly confirmed, or information or required documentation is missing.

All eligible and complete applications will then be allocated to the assessment team.

Application assessment, scoring and shortlisting:

Assessors use a systematic process to score all applications, taking account of stated evidence of need; proposed impact; quality: compliance and value for money; and the nature, experience, capacity, capability and readiness to deliver of the applicant organisation. Social Value and environmental impact is also considered.

Each application is assessed by a minimum of two assessors. Following this, the assessment panel meets to discuss applications and reach consensus on recommendations to make, including which applications should be considered for funding, for how much, and on what conditions.

Local Authority review of strategic fit:

Applications will also be reviewed for local strategic fit by a representative(s) of the Local authority from the borough the application relates to.

Decision making:

An independent, multi-agency Decision Making Group meets to consider the recommendations and make final decisions, taking into consideration all evidence presented. The group, Chaired by a VOLA Trustee, will involve a range of key stakeholders from across the city region, including a senior officer from the LCR Combined Authority. The composition of the group is currently being finalised, but is hoped to include a Local Authority representative, a senior representative of the borough-based Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS's), a young person's representative, and a member of the LCR Race Equality Hub.

Scoring Methodology

Score	Classification	Definition
0	No response or response not relevant	No, or inadequate response. Completely fails to meet the requirements in relation to the question(s) asked, providing no confidence in applicant's ability to meet the requirements.

1	Poor - unsatisfactory response	Substantially unsatisfactory response. Significantly fails to meet the requirements of the question(s). Inadequate detail provided/ questions have not been answered/ answers not directly relevant to the question.
2	Partial - partially acceptable response but with significant areas of weakness	Weak or unconvincing response. Fails in most aspects to meet the requirements in relation to the question(s) asked. Limited information/ inadequate/ only partially addresses the question.
3	Satisfactory – acceptable response (substantial compliance with no major concerns)	Acceptable response to the question. Meets most of the requirements in relation to the question(s) asked but fails in some areas. Acceptable level of detail, accuracy and relevance, but contains minor weaknesses or lacks clarity in a small number of areas.
4	Good/ very good - fully satisfactory response (fully compliant with requirements)	Robust response. Meets the requirements in relation to the question(s) asked. Comprehensive response in terms of detail and relevance to the question. Proposal provides a high level of confidence in ability to deliver the requirements.
5	Excellent - outstanding response (fully compliant, with some areas exceeding requirements)	Outstanding response. Fully addresses and exceeds all requirements in relation to the question(s) asked. Answers the question(s) with precision and relevance, with no weaknesses identified. Includes innovation and/or added value, exceeding expectations. Proposal provides full confidence in ability to not only deliver the requirements, but also exceed some.

Assessment Criteria and Weighting

Criteria	Weighting	Relevant Questions
Project implementation	20%	D2, D3, D5, D6, D7
Need & strategic fit	20%	D8, D9
Experience, capacity, capability & readiness to deliver	20%	D10
Quality & compliance	20%	D11, D12, D13, F2
Costs and value for money	10%	E1, E2, D4, D14-D19
Social Value and environmental impact	10%	G1, G2

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17. Is there any support or advice available to help us apply?

As referred to in Section 15, online briefing workshops are delivered prior to launching the application window. If you are unable to attend, you can access the slides [here](#).

[Guidance on completing the application form](#) is also provided, containing detailed instructions and helpful hints and tips – [see separate document](#).

For further advice and support, you may wish to speak to a local infrastructure support agency, such as a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), or another partner organisation that might be able to assist.

In order to remain independent and ensure transparency of the process, the Grants Team at VOLA can only offer brief, factual advice on the application process in response to questions raised at the briefing sessions, or via the published email address, and cannot comment on the validity or quality of your proposals/ application.

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18. Payment of grants

Following sign-off of the Grant Funding Agreement, successful applicants will be required to provide a monthly forecast of project costs. Following this, VOLA will pay an up-front payment to help with cashflow for the project. Payments will not be made until a signed Grant Funding Agreement and financial forecast is received.

Subsequent payments will be made subject to confirmation of satisfactory performance and the receipt of required monitoring information and evidence. A small percentage of the grant will be retained until the end of the project to ensure final monitoring requirements are met.

The frequency of payments is currently being agreed with the LCR Combined Authority.

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19. Unsuccessful applicants

Unsuccessful applicants will receive an email from us notifying the outcome, which will include brief general feedback on why your application has been unsuccessful.

Due to the expected high volume of applications and tight timescales to mobilise funded projects, we regret that we are **unable to enter into detailed individual discussions**. Where requested, we will provide more detail feedback, though this may not be immediately after the funding decision is communicated, as priority will be on mobilising funded projects.

There will be no appeal process and applicants will not have the right of appeal. If you are unhappy about any aspect of the process, please discuss it first with the Grants Team at VOLA. If the matter cannot be resolved in this way, VOLA has a formal complaints procedure. In the unlikely event of a formal complaint, these should be emailed to: YGT@volamerseyside.org.uk.

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