

Festival and Events Fund

Sunderland City Council is committed to enabling and supporting the development of festivals and community-based events that will enhance the arts and cultural offering across the city.

Sunderland City Council intends to continue its support for various festivals and events with grant awards to organisations through our Festivals and Events Fund (“the Fund.”)

The Fund will invite applications in April 2025 and again in September 2025.

The Fund aims to:

1. **Cultivate a Vibrant and Inclusive City** – Advance Sunderland City Council’s vision by fostering a thriving city with accessible, engaging, dynamic, and high-quality cultural events.
2. **Align with Strategic Priorities** – Ensure funded festivals and events contribute to the overarching goals of Sunderland City Council’s Economy & Place directorate and Events and City Projects service area.
3. **Enhance Cultural Growth** – Support the development of festivals and community-based events that enrich Sunderland’s arts, culture, and heritage.
4. **Encourage Innovation and Long-Term Sustainability** – Provide funding to new and existing festivals to foster fresh approaches and create sustainable event models.
5. **Strengthen Community Participation** – Promote local involvement and inclusivity in events that reflect Sunderland’s diverse communities and cultural identity.
6. **Boost Economic and Social Impact** – Stimulate Sunderland’s local economy, enhance tourism, and offer opportunities for skills development within the events sector.

7. **Expand Sunderland's Cultural Reach** – Develop and promote events that not only enhance the city's cultural landscape but also attract audiences from across the North-East.
8. **Support Economic Growth** – Drive local business engagement by increasing footfall and economic activity through vibrant festivals and events.
9. **Engage and Empower Local Communities** – Create opportunities for local residents to actively participate in and shape cultural experiences.
10. **Address Gaps in the Cultural and Tourism Calendar** – Introduce new events or enhance existing ones to ensure year-round cultural vibrancy.
11. **Develop Volunteer Skills and Capacity** – Provide training and practical experience for volunteers to support event delivery and future employment opportunities.
12. **Encourage Financial Resilience** – Maximise external funding and sponsorship opportunities to ensure long-term event sustainability beyond public funding.
13. **Champion Equality and Diversity** – Promote inclusivity by supporting events that celebrate different cultures, backgrounds, and communities.

Objectives

1. **Provide Accessible Funding** – Establish a structured funding mechanism that supports emerging and established festivals and events.
2. **Promote Local Talent and Creativity** – Encourage event organisers to showcase local artists, performers, and cultural practitioners.
3. **Develop Event Industry Skills** – Offer opportunities for residents to gain experience and expertise in event planning, management, and delivery.
4. **Enhance Community Cohesion** – Support events that bring communities together and celebrate the city's diverse cultures.
5. **Encourage Sustainable Practices** – Ensure that funded events incorporate environmentally responsible approaches to reduce their carbon footprint.

6. **Maximise Non-Public Funding Sources** – Encourage festival and event organisers to secure additional funding and in-kind contributions to enhance financial sustainability.
7. **Support Innovation in Event Delivery** – Enable new and existing events to trial innovative formats, audience engagement strategies, and technology-driven solutions.
8. **Promote Economic Growth** – Boost local businesses and tourism through high-quality, well-attended cultural events.
9. **Reflect and Celebrate Sunderland’s Identity** – Fund festivals and events that authentically represent the city’s history, heritage, and future aspirations.
10. **Ensure Measurable Impact** – Require clear evaluation frameworks to assess the success and effectiveness of funded events in achieving the programme’s goals.

This structured approach ensures the Festival & Events Fund contributes to a dynamic and sustainable cultural ecosystem in Sunderland.

Scope of the Fund

A festival or event can be defined as a special programme of themed activities that takes place separately from normal ongoing cultural, community, or heritage programmes. They may be held annually but are confined to a limited amount of time. The Fund will only consider festivals and events that are being planned to take place between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026.

Organisations can apply to the Fund for a maximum of one project.

The Fund is open to the following organisations:

- Charitable organisations, community interest companies and social enterprises, partnerships, and constituted community groups.
- Applicant organisations must have a bank account in the name of the organisation.

The grant funding will be awarded as Minimal Financial Assistance Subsidy under the UK’s Subsidy Control Act 2022, and therefore organisations that have received other public funding of over £315,000.00 cumulated during:

- The elapsed part of the current financial year (i.e. from 1 April), and
- The two financial years immediately preceding the current financial year will be ineligible for any support.

Funding Your Festival or Event

Festival/events should, if possible, demonstrate match funding in cash and/or in kind. No festival/event is guaranteed any funding.

Financial support from the city may be provided as budget-relieving support.

The organiser of the event/festival will provide Sunderland City Council with a completed application and final accounts.

Eligible project costs can include:

- Temporary staff costs
- Equipment hire
- Marketing costs
- Performers' fees and travel costs
- Venue hire
- Licensing and road closure costs
- Picnic boxes and other forms of event catering if offered at subsidised or no cost to the public – and the wholesale costs of these purchases from local businesses is reduced
- Consultancy support around public health & safety, and risk management.
- Website costs and customer relationship management costs if they are related to event promotion, public health advice and updates, sustainable travel options, and regional tourism and shop local campaigns

The Fund will not support the purchase of capital equipment.

Funding Criteria

The Fund will support festivals and events that contribute to some or all of the following criteria:

- The event is a completely new event/festival with a comprehensive business plan; or
- The event/festival is less than five years old in its current format but is looking to include additional activity to improve event sustainability
- New festivals/events may be eligible for seed funding to support their initial setup.
- Seed funding will be provided on a reducing basis year-on-year for a maximum of 3 years in total to encourage financial sustainability.
- Organisations must demonstrate plans to secure alternative funding sources to replace grant support over time.
- A detailed financial plan indicating how the event will become self-sufficient must be included in the application.

Eligibility

Applicants should:

- Demonstrate that the festival/event will meet the objectives and criteria set out above.
- Demonstrate that the festival/event requires funding to:
 - Develop and deliver its activity, or
 - Start a new venture to grow a new audience to make it sustainable
- Have a detailed budget breakdown in place, included with the application, demonstrating a schedule of income/expenditure with evidence of match funding and any contingencies
- Show that the responsible organisation understands the requirements of organising a successful event and has the capacity to deliver the event by way of a completed application form

- Confirm as part of the application that the organisation has not received other public funding totalling over £315,000.00 cumulated over the elapsed part of the current financial year and the two financial years immediately preceding the current financial year.

Conditions

There are a number of conditions that need to be considered before submitting an application:

- Your event cannot have started before your grant is awarded
- Online events or events planned to have a significant online programme are ineligible to apply
- Your application can include 'in-kind' contributions as part of the 50% or more contribution your organisation allocates from its own funds for the festival or event
- Late applications will not be accepted for the Fund
- The decisions reached by Sunderland City Council regarding grant awards will be final and no correspondence will be entered into
- A copy of your organisation's Constitution and most recent annual certified accounts are required with your application to ensure your project meets the governance requirements of the Council
- Organisation must supply their company registration number and their unique tax reference number to be eligible to apply
- New and one-off festivals and events will require some additional information
- The Fund will not support regular or recurring programming in year-round venues
- Events that are principally fundraising-focused are not eligible
- Events that are not open to all members of the community are ineligible
- Funding requests for regularly scheduled sporting fixtures are ineligible

- Successful applicants will be requested to share event information to support regional marketing campaigns. All event marketing materials and campaigns must include City of Sunderland Council's City of Events logo.

Support for Your Events Planning

If your application to the Events Fund is successful, the Council will provide a contact from whom to obtain ongoing support in the planning of your event.

How Your Application Will be Assessed

Applications will be considered by the Festival and Events Grant Awarding Panel.

Applications will be assessed against a framework based on the following criteria:

- Alignment with the objectives and criteria of the Fund
- Financial viability
- Experience in festival/event management or comparable skills
- Evidence of community support
- Robust risk management and public safety planning
- Marketing strategies
- Value for money
- Efforts to reduce the carbon footprint
- Consideration of the cost-of-living crisis impact
- The awarding panel will aim to process applications to the Fund within a four week window. The panel's decision will be final.

How to Apply

For support and assistance with completing your application, please email:

events@sunderland.gov.uk