



Funding Guidelines Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

These funding guidelines applies only to the **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** strand. Please refer to the [Connect Fund website](#) for information on how to apply to our other funding strands.

Who are we?

The [Connect Fund](#) is managed by the [Barrow Cadbury Trust](#) on behalf of [Access - The Foundation for Social Investment](#). The Connect Fund was established as the social investment infrastructure fund. Its objective is to improve the social investment (SI) market in England by supporting and strengthening infrastructure, so it can better meet the needs of charities and social enterprises. By infrastructure, we mean social investment market intermediaries and support organisations, as well as the shared processes, tools, networks and partnerships that enable best practice.

The Connect Fund's funding strands have been developed to align with Access' [strategic objectives](#).

Why is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) a priority?

Tackling inequality and the lack of diversity within the social investment sector has been a key priority for the Connect Fund since it launched in 2017. To date it has funded and championed a number of EDI-focused initiatives that have identified and sought to tackle barriers to accessing social investment experienced by under-served communities and increased the sector's understanding of how systems and processes contribute and lead to inequality. You can read about the projects we have previously supported [here](#).

Covid-19 has exacerbated the inequalities in society and led to worsening outcomes, particularly for people from minoritised communities. While there is greater awareness of the barriers to social investment and an increased appetite to address these challenges, there is still more work to do and it is vital that key stakeholders are able to continue advocating and taking action to create greater equality in the sector.

What will we fund?

1. Continued support for EDI infrastructure operating in the social investment market

The Connect Fund will continue to provide grant funding to support infrastructure organisations and investment intermediaries to deliver projects that will lead to greater equality, diversity and inclusion on both the supply and demand-side of the social investment market.

Key considerations

- We will fund projects that have a practical and tangible impact on the social investment sector.
- Where possible, we will look to support projects that have the potential to address a market challenge at scale, rather than those that focus solely on small-scale interventions.

- Where appropriate, we will prioritise applications from organisations that are led by under-represented groups, such as those that primarily serve Black and minoritised communities, disabled people, members of the LGBTQ+ community and women-led enterprises.

Please note - applications to this funding strand will be considered on a rolling basis.

2. Direct support to implement procedural and system changes

The Connect Fund will provide one-off grants to social investors and fund managers that are looking to implement changes to their existing processes or systems to increase their accessibility to those often excluded from investment.

Key considerations

- We will prioritise applications from those looking to implement changes or recommendations identified through working with the Equality Impact Investing Project, Diversity Forum, or other Connect Fund EDI partners.
- This is a one-off grant to implement practical changes or access support to address accessibility issues. It should not be used for new permanent staffing costs. For example, an appropriate use of this grant would be to cover the cost of investors contracting an appropriate equalities organisation to review its processes for unconscious bias.

Please note - applications to this funding strand will be considered on a rolling basis.

3. Diversifying the advisor market

The Connect Fund wants to see the diversity of the advisor market increased. The advisor market provides a bridge between the supply and demand roles of the social investment sector. Advisors work with charities and social enterprises seeking investment, often providing extra support in areas such as governance, financial modelling or business planning. We want to work with existing Black and minoritised community infrastructure groups and networks to address the current gap, supporting them to engage with this part of the market and increase their capacity to be able to provide social investment advisory support.

This funding strand is not currently open to unsolicited applications. If you are interested in participating, [please contact us](#).

Expected outcomes

We expect all projects that we fund under any of these strands to achieve one or more of the following outcomes:

- More open, fair and transparent access to social investment, leading to increased investment flow to currently under-served parts of the market.
- Action taken to address the barriers faced by organisations led by under-served groups in accessing social investment.
- Greater Board and investment committee diversity, ensuring a diverse range of voices is included at every stage of the social investment journey from fund design and application to decision making and delivery.
- The number of diverse voices in the market is increased and strengthened.

Who can apply?

All Connect Fund applicants must meet **all** the following criteria:

- Your organisation must be based in England.
- Your organisation must be a social investment fund manager or advisor; membership body; sector, place-based, or equalities network; umbrella organisation; voluntary sector infrastructure organisation; or community foundation.
- Your organisation must be incorporated and registered as a charity, social enterprise or have social purpose clearly incorporated into your articles of association with an appropriate asset lock and/or mission lock.

We welcome applications from organisations led by people from Black and minoritised communities, Disabled people, the LGBTQ+ community and women.

Overview of the Process

Please note the application process from EoI to decision usually takes no longer than 8 weeks but it can take up to 4 months depending on the size of the grant request and when it is submitted in our meeting/decision-making cycle.

1. Expression of Interest (EoI)	Submit a short online form outlining the project you are seeking funding for. We can provide initial advice by phone or email if required.
2. Full Online Application	We will review your EoI and if it meets our funding criteria we will invite you to complete a full application. We may contact you to discuss your application in more detail before doing this. You will be required to submit your organisation's financial and legal documents at this point.
3. Full Assessment	We will carry out a full assessment of your project, complete due diligence on your organisation and may meet with you on site or via video call to review your proposal. Please note, if you are a previous Connect Fund grant holder your past track record will be taken into consideration.
4. Decision	We will present our full assessment for decision and get back to you with the outcome and/or feedback. If successful we will send you a grant offer letter and payment schedule for your approval, along with information about the Connect Fund Learning Community and reporting requirements.

Please [contact Connect Fund Programme Officer](#) if you have further questions or to schedule a time to speak with one of us.