Partnerships Funding Guidelines

Background

1. This paper contains the funding guidelines for Partnerships Funding**.**
2. Following the Diocesan Finance Review, the Archbishops' Council has allocated **£14m in 2026-28** to Partnerships Funding. The funding sits within a larger investment in People and Partnerships, totalling £47m in 2026-28 and £153m in 2026-34.
3. The purpose of Partnerships Funding is to fund partners and networks to scale up or innovate, to better support the local church in delivering the bold outcomes, and enable the Church's Vision & Strategy to become a reality in local parishes and communities.
4. Partnership Funding should be seen as part of the whole investment in the Vision and Strategy at national level, alongside funding totalling around £400m in 2026-28, including:
    - **Lowest Income Communities Funding** - increased to £133m in 2026-28, this provides ongoing support by formula for the costs of ministry in low-income communities
    - **Diocesan Investment Programme** (main fund) - £236m in 2026-28 for missional plans to deliver the bold outcomes of the Vision and Strategy
    - The wider £47million investment in **People and Partnerships** also includes other streams such as the Ministry Experience Scheme, funding to support additional ordinands, Senior Leadership Development and the Incumbent Development Programme, Lay Ministry development and learning communities, Ministry with Children and Young People, including schools and Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Insight.
5. The funding builds on the 2023-2025 triennium's allocation of £11.8 million which has supported more than 16 partners.
6. This funding will support proposals developed in collaboration with the Vision and Strategy team. Proposals will aim to expand a partner's existing capacity, or resource innovation to overcome critical missional challenges that inhibit the delivery of the bold outcomes.
7. This funding is not aimed at sustaining existing projects or supporting core costs for organisations.

Purpose of Partnerships Funding

8. The purpose of Partnerships Funding is to support the Vision and Strategy's bold outcomes through national cross-cutting investment.

   Partners should seek to embody the Vision of becoming a Church that is younger and more diverse, reflecting the communities we serve, with particular attention to ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background, and geography.

9. The fund seeks to achieve this by funding proposals from partners that:

Children, Young People and Families (CYPF)

- Develop and scale proven approaches that significantly grow existing or start new worshipping communities for children, young people and families, especially those reaching an average weekly attendance of 25 or more, aligned to the national target of 3,000 churches.
- Ensure contextually appropriate discipleship pathways for children and young people, linking early contact points (e.g. toddler groups) with clear next steps and integration into the wider mixed ecology of the Church.
- Provide training for clergy and laity (with Ministry Development) to strengthen CYPF ministry.
- Build and equip a significantly greater number of volunteer leaders for children and youth ministry, aligned to the target of 27,000 new volunteer leaders by 2030.
- Support innovations that address critical missional challenges, enabling promising approaches to be tested, systematised and scaled.
- Enable evangelism, discipleship and formation of young people **online**, with pathways into local church life.
- Develop and scale **sports and wellbeing** ministries that create accessible pathways into worshipping communities and support them in becoming active young disciples.
- **Worship** – support churches to use music and choirs as a way to reach and disciple children, young people and families, and provide training to help churches develop intergenerational worship and new worshipping communities.

Young Adults (18-25s)

- Develop tailored approaches that engage young adults, respond to digital culture, and support transitions from youth into adult faith.
- Create communities and networks that nurture faith and respond to the "Quiet Revival," ensuring the Church is in step with what God is already doing among this generation.

Wider Priorities

- Invest in mixed ecology approaches that establish and sustain new worshipping communities, support parish revitalisation, and strengthen the wider life of the Church.
- Resource missionary discipleship initiatives, including clergy training, lay leadership, spiritual accompaniment, and networks of small group discipleship.
- Fund essential national infrastructure, networks and digital tools (e.g. Estates Evangelism, Everyday Faith) that underpin delivery of the bold outcomes of Vision and Strategy.

10. Partnerships Funding will operate within these principles:

    - **Relational & supportive** – Active partnership with partner organisations, working together to enhance plans for sustainability.
    - **Transparent & honest** – Openness about decision-making processes, financial realities, and seeking the whole Church's good.
    - **Intentional** – Funding is linked to a plan setting out what change is anticipated and how it will be achieved.
    - **Empowering** – Those receiving funding are helped to build capacity so that they can be financially resilient.
    - **Evidence-based and realistic** – decisions about funding are based on high-quality evidence, with the understanding that those closest to the issues often know them best.
    - **Humility, recognising this is God's work** – Recognising success is dependent on God, excited and curious to learn what God will do, and trying to share our own skills with humility.

Eligibility

11. This is a closed fund; applications are by invite only. Organisations will be invited to apply following initial discussions with the Vision and Strategy team.
12. Partners must be able and willing to contribute to the work of the Church of England, specifically the bold outcomes of the Vision and Strategy.
13. Partners must be in good standing with the Church of England and willing to work collaboratively, including through sharing learning for the benefit of the wider church.
14. Organisations can be registered charities, CIOs, companies or other entities. They must hold a bank account in the organisation's name and have appropriate governance structures. Funding can also be awarded to a fiscal sponsor, where organisations don't have an appropriate legal status or financial management.
15. Checks will be undertaken to ensure markers of good governance and management are in place (including confirmation relevant insurances are held, policies are in place and financial records are up to date.) This will include a review of safeguarding policies and procedures.

What is the funding for?

16. Funding can be used for salaries, equipment, resource development, specialist advice/consultancy, monitoring and evaluation and other costs related to the proposed activities.
17. Funding can be used for an organisation's management and administrative costs, but this should be proportional to the activities in the proposal.
18. Funding cannot be for sustaining existing costs or 'business as usual' costs.

Process for submitting a proposal

19. The process starts with an initial conversation with a member of the Vision and Strategy team to explore the concept, and alignment with the Vision and Strategy.

20. Concept Exploration: initially, a series of meetings will explore the concept in more detail. This stage is an opportunity to explore, discern and develop together, and may take several weeks.

21. Concept Review: members of the Vision and Strategy team review the concept, with a decision to proceed to the proposal building stage, or undertake further work on the concept.

22. Proposal Building: further meetings will help shape different elements of the proposal. The partner will write a first draft of the proposal using the template provided, covering alignment with the Vision and Strategy, proposed activities, the theory of change, assumptions and risks, outcomes, learning and discernment, the organisation's track record and sustainability plans.

23. Design Review and Refining: once a first draft of the proposal has been written, a Design Review meeting will be held. This review aims to strengthen the design of the proposal, and how it is articulated, to build a robust proposal. Following the review, the proposal is refined and then submitted to the Board for consideration.

Funding criteria

24. Proposals will be assessed by the SMMI Board using the following criteria:

- Does the proposal have a significant strategic impact aligned with the Church's Vision & Strategy?

  Scaling funding – assess to what extent this proposal addresses a clear gap or barrier that can be overcome that currently inhibits delivery of the Church's Vision and Strategy.

  Innovation Funding – assess to what extent this proposal addresses a critical missional challenge with no obvious solution and currently inhibits delivery of the Church's Vision and Strategy.

  For both, assess whether the scale and phasing of the resources requested reflects the predicted strategic impact.

- Do the plans (mission, people and financial) give confidence that they will effectively deliver the proposed programme of work?

  Assess whether any elements of the plans, or how they work together to scale up work or create wider change, need further development.

- Does the overall capacity described give confidence in delivery?

  Assess whether the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to deliver the proposed plans. Assess whether there is a convincing plan to be time-bound with an agreed exit plan.

Funding levels and payment profiles

25. £14 million is available to award in 2026 – 2028.

26. There is no upper or lower limit to awards. However, in general awards will be £250,000 or above, and under £1 million. For proposals primarily undertaking innovative work, awards are likely to be under £500,000. Funding will cover up to 3 years.

27. For proposals to scale an organisation's capacity, decisions on the amount awarded will take into consideration the organisation's current income levels. This is to promote growth that is healthy and sustainable. As a guide, funding requested should be the equivalent of up to 35% of an organisation's annual income. In exceptional circumstances we may consider up to 50% of the organisation's annual income. There is more flexibility on funding models for awards for innovation.

28. Organisations are permitted to receive more than one award from Partnerships Funding. Each proposal will be assessed on its individual merits against the funding criteria.

29. Funding will be awarded in 3 tranches across 2026 – 2028, therefore funding will be available across 2026, 2027 and 2028.

30. Partners will submit claims for funding in instalments, paid in advance in line with the full funding guidance (provided to partners on award).

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting requirements

31. During project delivery
    - Funded projects will meet quarterly with their V&S representative for informal progress updates and to identify ongoing opportunities for collaboration.
    - Projects will set up internal monitoring processes from the start, to collect the data required for each outcome from the proposal.
    - A more in-depth review process will take place annually, with the project team reflecting on progress against the aims using a template provided.
    - Unexpected challenges or the need to adapt plans are an expected part of project delivery. Partners are encouraged to raise issues with their V&S representative as soon as possible so they can support partners through the change request process.
32. End of a project
    - All project budgets will include funding for an independent evaluation. The learning gathered through this process is key to support the aims of the Partnership Funding, and the wider work of the Vision and Strategy. The Vision and Strategy team will work with partners to incorporate monitoring, evaluation and learning into the proposed activities, and identify a suitable independent evaluator to work with.
    - Learning from projects is expected to be shared. This may include contributing to resources on the Church Support Hub, partners sharing learning with other relevant organisations and attending events organised by the Vision and Strategy team and others.

Governance

33. On behalf of the Archbishops' Council, the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board determines the distribution of funding for dioceses (Diocesan Investment Programme) and partner organisations (Partnerships Funding) in line with the Church's Vision and Strategy.

34. The Board:

- Approves funding proposals
- Ensures effective management of ongoing awards;

- Oversees the impact of the funding through monitoring, evaluation and learning.

35. The Board is also responsible, through monitoring, evaluation and sharing of learning, for overseeing the effective delivery of active funds already allocated.

36. A list of members may be found here.

37. The Board meets four times a year (in February, June, October and December). It considers Diocesan Investment Programme proposals at three of these meetings.

38. The Board decides whether or not to approve the proposal and whether any conditions should be attached to the grant award. The Board may delegate authority to the Vision and Strategy team to assess the detailed delivery plans relating to the proposed investment and any conditions agreed by the Board.

39. Details of all the Board's programme awards are communicated following the Board's meetings and in the Board's annual report.

40. All awards are subject to the National Church Institutions' standard funding agreement which includes compliance requirements around safeguarding, financial due diligence, and data protection.

Support available and next steps

41. A member of the Vision & Strategy team will support partners through the development process, providing advice and guidance at each stage through regular contact and collaboration.

42. As part of the commitment to the principle of *empowering,* the Vision and Strategy team will explore opportunities to support partners with their organisational development. This may include seeking expert advice on issues such as safeguarding, advice from other NCI teams or other opportunities as identified.

43. First steps: your Vision and Strategy contact will be in touch to start the process by exploring an initial concept.