



Connecting Futures

Helping young people engage in and benefit from
new opportunities in Sunderland

Summer 2025 Application Pack



A Time of Opportunity

Sunderland is undergoing major redevelopment and huge amounts of inward investment is creating a vibrant and creatively active city, with an array of exciting opportunities for local people. When it comes to music, arts and culture, Sunderland is emerging as a leader, and being awarded Music City status shows the belief in our amazing local talent. This, alongside other major developments such as Crowns Works Studios, Culture Quarter, Sunderland Riverside and the International Advanced Manufacturing Park spark a new era of opportunity and represent a once-in-a-generation chance to improve residents' lives and build a future full of hope.



Our aim is to support local young people under the age of 25 to positively engage, connect with and ensure they see the new opportunities as being 'for them'.

We have funding available to connect young people in Sunderland to those futures. In particular we want to help young people who experience disadvantage in terms of access to opportunities and are **inviting grant applications from experienced organisations** to provide a range of activities that will help raise awareness and aspirations, build confidence and help move those young people into new opportunities.

Programme Objectives

In collaboration with local stakeholders and funders, The Rank Foundation is developing the 'Connecting Futures' programme to raise young people's awareness of emerging opportunities, build their confidence, encourage them to view these as being 'for them' and make the connection. We want to let young people know more about the growing opportunities for a range of jobs in creative industries, help them to access experiences within these and other sectors and enable their progress towards further education, training, volunteering, work placements, self-employment, etc.

What Are We Looking for?

We want to support local initiatives that develop and deliver a targeted approach to engaging disadvantaged young people, including those who are of school age, NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) care-experienced and/or at risk of involvement in anti-social behaviour, violence, offending, or exploitation. We recognise that **wider family members may benefit from outcomes** of these initiatives – although they are not the primary target audience.

Target Groups

We want to support disadvantaged young people aged between 12 and 25, which could include:

- Those of school age, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Care-experienced, at risk of involvement in anti-social behaviour, violence, offending, or exploitation





Your application should...

Offer young people a range of options/structured activities

Tell us specifically who you plan to work with/support, how you will reach and capture their interest, and what services you will provide that will enable them to engage in and progress. Your proposed delivery methods might involve group work, one-to-one support and/or bespoke individual support. It could include, but is not exclusive to, work to improve life skills, arts, engagement, confidence building, tailored training, industry insights/taster days, opportunities to progress towards work or self-employment through education, training, volunteering and/or work placement.

Support young people to identify and fulfil their aspirations

Building resilience, overcoming obstacles and improving access to education, training, and employment opportunities, providing assurance and inspiring family members to increase their awareness of and access to opportunities.

Encourage young people to consider self-employment

Progressing ideas around their strengths, hobbies and transferable skills, providing the tools, knowledge, and encouragement they need to build sustainable businesses and achieve financial independence. This might include access to training programmes, mentorship, funding opportunities, and networking events. Helping to develop key skills such as business planning, marketing, and financial management. Empowering aspiring young would-be entrepreneurs to take control of their future careers, contribute to the local economy, and create innovative solutions to meet existing and emerging market needs.

Priority Areas

Acknowledging that we have limited resource, the local Connecting Futures Working Group has agreed that projects should focus on those areas in close geographical proximity to major developments. We encourage applications that focus on three geographical areas:

Sunderland West

Washington

The Coalfields

Applicants should specify which area they will target/deliver activities in, as well as their experience and rationale for delivering in those areas. We expect to make awards that cover each area.

We want to support projects that

- Directly **contribute to our ‘Connecting Futures’ goals and achieve** practical results.
- Directly **connect young people with new opportunities** in emerging industries such as the TV & film, music, arts & culture sector, advanced manufacturing, etc.
- Engage young people in project design and **demonstrate ‘meaningful involvement’** throughout (**See Page 5**).
- Add to, **not duplicate or compete with**, existing activity provided by the applicant or other organisations in those areas.
- Are **delivered in a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment**, developing a non-threatening brokerage between young people/residents and the local opportunities/employer base.
- Have a **robust monitoring and evaluation framework** to demonstrate measurable impact. We may be able to support successful applicants to participate in Upshot monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

What is ‘Meaningful Involvement’?

This is about developing thoughtful and effective ways to involve individuals, people with lived experience, and communities to improve understanding and guide processes and decision making. It means consistently listening to communities and ensuring their hopes, fears, and ideas lead to meaningful action.

We believe this approach will make the work more impactful and empower young people to shape their future. Charities and public services increasingly recognise the value of lived experience in designing better services and solutions that truly meet people’s needs.

You should demonstrate you do/will involve young people in:

Design - Of programmes, projects, and activities.

Decision-making - E.g. governance, strategy, management, operations, recruitment, etc.

Delivery - Services and activities, outreach, engagement, specific roles like volunteers & peer mentors.

Research - Evaluation, peer research, quality assurance.

Voice - Awareness-raising, advocacy, influencing, media.

We don’t expect organisations to demonstrate all of the above, but a good proportion...

Tell us how your service users can get involved and how you support that. People can influence in different ways, from sharing quick ideas to taking on bigger roles like joining a decision-making board. Some may choose to do more over time as their confidence grows, while others may take part in one or two activities and then step back.

Who Can Apply?

We want to support Sunderland-based organisations and will consider applications from:

- Established youth/community organisations, not for profits and registered charities.
- CICs can apply but must have three or more Directors that are not related to one another.
- Registered organisations must be up to date with governance requirements/regulations such as filing annual returns.

Your organisation must have:

- A constitution, set of rules or articles of association*.
- A Management Committee or Board of Trustees. (With at least 3 unrelated individuals.)
- A bank account in your organisation's name. (with at least 2 unrelated signatories.)
- Adequate safeguarding and data protection arrangements.

*You will be required to upload this as you complete your application.

Who Can't Apply?

We will not consider applications from:

- Privately owned, profit-distributing companies or limited partnerships.

Applications from Sunderland-based organisations not yet in receipt of Rank Foundation support are encouraged. Contact us if you are unsure about eligibility.

What Can We Fund?

The following costs are eligible and can be requested:

- Staff costs. (e.g. paid sessional workers or volunteer expenses.)
- Events. (e.g. 'see it & believe', 'behind the scenes' sessions.)
- Training - Informal, formal, personal development, vocational, etc.
- Trips, visits, travel costs. (but not travel outside the region.)
- Materials and small items. (e.g. activity packs, office equipment.)
- Contribution toward core costs. (e.g. venue hire, rent, utilities, overheads.)
- Continuing current activities, improving them, working in new ways - as long as they meet our 'Connecting Futures' objectives.
- New activities or one-off initiatives. (e.g. manufacturing industry taster days for young people excluded from mainstream education.)
- Networking events, shared knowledge and learning.

What Can't We Fund?

The following are not eligible costs and should not be requested:

- Activities that have already taken place.
- Statutory services and activities that replace government funding.
- Activities where a profit will be distributed for private gain.
- Religious activities.
- Gifts in kind - except items necessary for services, eg. bus fares.
- Travel outside the region.

When Should I Apply?

Applications will open on Monday 11st August and will close at 3pm on Friday 12th September 2025.

[We cannot accept applications received after that time.](#)

Outputs

We want our funds to support projects that make direct connections, have measurable impact, improve young people's lives and life chances. **How you deliver your project is entirely up to you, but you could elaborate on;**

How many young people you will engage and support throughout the project lifespan?

How many young people you might enable, for example, to;

- Participate in 'see it & believe it' events.
- Participate in creative industry/emerging sector taster days.
- Participate in music, arts, cultural activities or events.
- Participate in confidence building and personal development.
- Participate in informal life skills and/or employability training.
- Participate in vocational, self-employment or business training.
- Progress towards further education, training or work placements.
- Engage actively in their community or become a volunteer.
- Enter into employment or self-employment.

The local Panel will be interested to know whether/how your project might form connections with emerging industries, employers, schools, colleges, etc. to support the project **(See 'Some Useful Links' on Page 8).**

Some Useful Links

[Grierson Trust](#) - [Into Film](#) - [MAC Trust](#)
[National Youth Theatre](#) - [North East Screen](#) - [Screen Skills](#)
[Sunderland Music City](#) - [Gentoo Apprenticeships](#)
[National E-Sports Academy](#) - [Links for Life](#)
[Connect to Work](#) - [Sunderland Short Film Festival](#)

Outcomes

We want applicants to tell us what benefit and impact your proposed project will have. For example you might tell us, by the end of the project, how many young people report.

- Increased awareness of new opportunities.
- Increased awareness of how to engage in new opportunities.
- Increased self-confidence.
- Increased aspiration to engage in new opportunities.
- Improved emotional health and mental well-being.
- Increased life, creative, vocational or employability skills.
- Take-up of new opportunities.
- Feeling more connected to their community.
- Feeling more positive about their futures.
- Feeling more positive/likely to engage in education or training.
- Feeling more positive/likely to engage in new industry/employment.

In order to gauge to what impact 'Connecting Futures' programme is having, successful applicants will be asked to report on progress toward stated targets. We offer successful applicants access to [Upshot](#) monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

Monitoring & Evaluation

We would like you to tell us how you plan to monitor the impact of your work, the tools and methods you will use to undertake this and what plans you have regarding evaluation. Successful applicants will be required to submit a final evaluation report summarising how delivery plans worked, what outputs and outcomes were achieved, case studies, and lessons learned, to be shared with stakeholders.

To ensure the programme delivers measurable impact, we expect grant recipients to use a mixed-method evaluation model:

Session Attendance Logs

These will track levels of engagement, attendance consistency, and programme drop-out rates.

Baseline and Endpoint Surveys

Standardised questionnaires, youth progress trackers will be issued at the start and end of each young person's involvement.

Individual Case Studies

For selected participants, we will document personal journeys, providing qualitative insights into their development and challenges.

Stakeholder Feedback

From young people participating in the funded work, parents, teachers, youth workers, and partner organisations to triangulate evidence of progress.

Beneficiaries Voice

Regular focus groups and anonymous suggestion boxes will be used to adapt session delivery to meet emerging needs.

The Application Process

Applicants are strongly advised to:

- Read the guidance/help notes as you complete your application.
- Think carefully about what you want to apply for/how much you need.
- Using the **Application Resource** linked [here](#), draft your application in Word before transferring it to the online form.
- Answer all questions fully, incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications will be scored based on postcode proximity to priority areas **(See on Page 4)**.
- Upload your governing documents and accounts by 3pm on Friday 5th September as part of application submission.

The Assessment Process

The Rank Foundation will:

- Undertake financial and governance due diligence on all applications and reject applications which fail to meet the criteria or are incomplete.
- Forward eligible applications that pass due diligence to the local panel.
- Endorse panel decisions.

The Local Panel will:

- Receive anonymised applications.
- Assess and score applications using a weighting/scoring system.
- Review scores and agree on which applications to award funding.
- Advise Rank Foundation which applications are approved or declined.

The panel will not see any financial or governance information about the applicant. Care will be taken to ensure the process is a fair and reasonable.

Terms and Conditions of Grant

Before completing and submitting the application form, please ensure that your organisation can meet Rank Foundation's standard Terms and Conditions of Grant by checking this [link](#).

Programme Budget

The overall 'Connecting Futures' programme budget is £500,000 over two years. We aim to fund projects that can deliver a programme of support starting early Autumn 2025 until late Summer 2027. No funding is available beyond that point.

Grant Size & Payments

We will consider grant applications up to **£30,000** per year, to a maximum of **£60,000** over the two year period. We may, in exceptional cases, make one or two larger awards.

Programme Timescales

11th August 2025

Application window opens.

October 2025

Local grants panel decision.

12th September 2025

Applications window closes.

October 2025

Grant payments & launch.

September 2025

Due diligence & assessment.

Autumn 2025

Networking event (required).

Successful Applicants

If your organisation is awarded a grant over two years, it will be paid in two tranches, as follows:

Year 1 Payment one will be made when we have received and checked your signed grants acceptance/terms and conditions.

Year 2 Payment two will be made on receipt of a satisfactory Year 1 monitoring report within specified timescales. The report should demonstrate adequate progress towards agreed targets.

Networking Event

Successful applicants will be invited to attend a Connecting Futures networking event in Sunderland during Winter 2025. Attendance will be mandatory as this will be a key opportunity for programme development and forming connections with potential collaborators and support.

RankNet Participation

Successful applicants will automatically receive an email invite and may nominate one other member of your organisation to become a member. RankNet is our online community membership platform, where members can connect with each other, grow their own network of support and share stories, ideas and learning.



Click [here](#) to apply.

Applications will close at 3pm on
Friday 12th September.

Contact us

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