



Festive Connections Grants Programme 2026



Guidance for Applicants

Christmas can be a particularly difficult time of year for people who may not have family or friends nearby.

Through our **Festive Connections Grants Programme**, the McCarthy & Stone Foundation wants to help local organisations create opportunities for people aged 65 and over to come together, enjoy some festive cheer and feel connected to their community.

We have a **£38,000 funding pot** and expect to support **more than 50 charitable organisations** across England, Scotland and Wales with grants of up to **£750**.

We can fund a wide range of festive activities, from Christmas lunches and community gatherings to transport, activities and befriending initiatives. What matters most is that our funding helps people connect and feel that they are not forgotten during the festive period.

Please read this guidance before applying and check that you meet our eligibility criteria. We want to make the process as straightforward as possible and avoid you spending time on an application if the programme isn't right for your organisation.



Could you apply?

You can apply if:

✓ You are a **registered charity, exempt charity, constituted community group or eligible Community Interest Company (CIC)** operating in England, Scotland or Wales.

✓ Your organisation has an annual income of **less than £250,000**, based on your most recent annual report or accounts.

✓ Your activity will provide connection, social engagement or companionship for people **aged 65 and over** during the festive period.

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✓ Your activity will take place between **1 December 2026 and 2 January 2027.**

✓ Your organisation has less than 12 months of running costs held in unrestricted reserves, unless there is a legitimate reason for holding higher reserves which you can explain in your application.

We do not make grants to individuals.

If you are a CIC, you must be limited by guarantee.

This programme provides funding for a **specific festive activity or project.** We do not provide unrestricted core funding through this programme.

The activity itself can be open to a wider age group, but **our funding must be used to benefit people aged 65 and over.**



What can the grant pay for?

Our maximum grant is **£750**, with no minimum amount.

We want to support activities that create opportunities for people aged 65 and over to connect with others and enjoy the festive period.

For example, funding could contribute towards:

- Christmas lunches or festive meals
- Food and refreshments for a community Christmas event
- Venue hire
- Festive activities, entertainment or crafts
- Community transport to help people attend an event
- Volunteer expenses linked to delivering the funded activity
- Staff costs directly related to delivering the funded activity
- Small Christmas gifts or hampers, where these are provided as part of a wider social connection or befriending activity
- Costs associated with festive befriending visits or activities

These are examples rather than a complete list. If you're unsure whether something is eligible, please get in touch with us.



We're particularly interested in connection

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We recognise that Christmas support can take many forms. However, our funding is intended to help people **feel connected, included and remembered**, rather than simply providing a gift or food parcel.

For example, a Christmas hamper delivered by a volunteer who spends time with the recipient and provides companionship could be eligible.

An application for £750 solely to purchase and distribute hampers, with no social connection element, would be less aligned with the purpose of this programme.

Where you work matters

We will consider applications from organisations working across England, Scotland and Wales.

We want our funding to reach communities where there is a greater level of need, so **priority will be given to applications demonstrating a clear need among the people and communities they support.**

When all other factors are equal, we will prioritise organisations working in areas with higher levels of deprivation affecting older people.

You do not need to be an expert in deprivation data. We simply want to understand who you support, where they live and why there is a particular need for your activity.

Please see **Appendix A** for information about the deprivation measures we use and links to the relevant maps.

How we look at reserves

As our grants are relatively small, we prioritise organisations with limited unrestricted reserves.

We therefore expect applicants to have **less than 12 months of running costs in unrestricted reserves** and a clear reserves policy.

We recognise that there can be legitimate reasons for an organisation holding higher reserves. If this applies to you, please explain the reason in your application. We will

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consider this as part of our assessment rather than automatically excluding your application.

For the purposes of this programme, we define free reserves as your unrestricted funds, minus any tangible fixed assets, programme-related investments or designations.



Applying for a grant

Applications open on **Wednesday 23 September 2026** and close on **Thursday 15 October 2026 at 5pm.**

You can apply here:

[Application Form - McCarthy Stone Foundation](#)

The application questions are designed to help us understand:

- What your organisation does
- Who you support
- What festive activity you are planning
- How many people aged 65 and over will benefit
- Why the activity is needed
- How the Foundation's funding will help
- Your organisation's financial position

A few things to keep in mind

Please check your contact details carefully.

We know you have lots of applications to make, but incorrect contact details can mean you don't receive important communications from us.

Use your registered office address.

If you don't have an office, please use your primary postal address. We do not publish full addresses. Only postcodes are used on our grant map and all data provided to 360Giving is converted to a geocode format.

Please use our divisional map.

You will be asked to identify your region of operation. The relevant link is provided within the application form.

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Keep your answers clear and concise.

We understand you may want to reuse information from other grant applications, which is absolutely fine. Please don't simply copy and paste your governing documents into the answer boxes. We want to understand what you do, who you support and how this particular grant would make a difference.

Bullet points can be a great way to make key information clear.

You don't need to ask for the full £750.

There is no minimum or expectation to request the maximum amount. Tell us what you need and how the funding will be used.

If you need help, please ask.

We are a small team of just two people, but we will always do our best to help with questions about the application process. Please get in touch through the website.



Key dates and timescales

Date	What happens
23 September 2026	Applications open
15 October 2026, 5pm	Applications close
October 2026	Foundation team carries out shortlisting and due diligence
By 23 October 2026	Recommendations agreed by Trustees
By 30 October 2026	Successful applicants informed
Shortly afterwards	Grant payments made
By 6 November 2026	Unsuccessful applicants informed

We will aim to make payments to successful organisations as quickly as possible after confirming the grant.



Feedback

We expect to receive hundreds of applications for this programme.

To help us communicate decisions as quickly as possible, we are unfortunately not able to provide detailed feedback on every application.

We do recognise that feedback can be useful for future applications. If you would like feedback, please ask and we will provide this wherever our capacity allows.

Appendix A: Areas of Deprivation Affecting Older People

Funding is prioritised to organisations demonstrating work in areas with higher levels of deprivation affecting older people.

We use the following recognised measures of deprivation:

England

Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI)

[Income deprivation affecting old people \(IDAOPI\) | Local Deprivation Explorer](#)

Wales

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)

[View map | DataMapWales](#)

Scotland

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

[Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#)

Applications outside these areas are still considered. However, where applications are otherwise comparable, higher priority will be given to organisations demonstrating greater levels of local need.