GBE Community Fund – Stage 1 Guidance

This GBE Community Fund (GBECF) guidance provides an overview of the fund and its purpose, as well as providing specific guidance on questions in the Stage 1 form.

[Go straight to Stage 1 form guidance](#)

About the GBE Community Fund
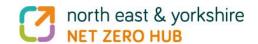
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Overview

The GBE Community Fund (GBECF) is a £5m grant scheme that is a follow on from the Community Energy fund (CEF) with the same eligibility and scope. It is a fund for urban and rural communities to develop community energy projects, including local renewable and low carbon energy projects (such as wind farms, hydro power and rural heat networks, community electric vehicle projects (such as electric vehicle charging points and electric car clubs) and energy efficiency retrofit and advice projects (where there is local need and a gap in existing services and where there is a business model for a sustainable service).

The GBECF funds are for community-based organisations, which are developing projects for the benefit of the local community. Funding is for the development of projects from concept to investable scheme, including the launching approaches to community fund raising. It cannot provide capital funding for the installation of projects themselves.

To be eligible to apply to the GBECF, applications must be from eligible organisations and projects proposals should ensure at least 50% community ownership and must benefit the local community in their final project.

The aims of the fund are to:

1. Increase the level of community and locally owned renewable and low carbon energy assets to make progress towards the Government's net-zero carbon emissions targets
2. Support communities by helping them to reduce energy costs or generate income through community owned energy assets, reinvesting income locally, or services to reduce energy demand.
3. Promote growth through the creation of jobs and volunteering opportunities in the communities where projects are located.

The fund will achieve its aims by removing barriers to investment that are currently preventing the development of community-scale projects.

Projects are encouraged to demonstrate that they will look at identifying opportunities that consider:

- **Innovation:** as defined by Energy Systems Catapult, to innovate net zero through "new technologies, new ways of deploying existing technologies, new business models, new consumer offerings, and new policy, regulation and market design," e.g., using new combinations of technologies to optimise the value of the project.
- **Ambition:** to capitalise the scheme commercially to leverage private investment (from a commercial partner or from the community itself).
- **Share learnings**: to share learnings on process and outputs such as legal documents with other communities across the region. Peer-to-peer mentoring will be supported by the Local Net Zero Hubs ('the Hubs'). The cost of sharing learning can be covered through the Stage 1 grant. Grant recipients for Stage 2 must agree to share their learnings and should cover this cost internally.

We are seeking well-informed project concepts that are community-led and for community benefit, and of a sufficient scale to generate impact and value for money.

What we can support

GBECF grants are not available for capital works, equipment or service delivery, and cannot be used to cover costs incurred prior to the grant offer.
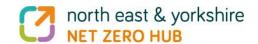
Please note that the amount of funding available to you is subject to subsidy control (see section in guidance below).

Stage 1 – up to £40,000 grant funding

Before applying:

- Applicants must already be incorporated as an eligible organisation (see below).
- You must have undertaken some initial community engagement.
- You should have a specific eligible technology in mind.
- For asset-based projects, you should have a specific site(s) under consideration.

- If relevant, you should have had an initial conversation with your Local Planning Authority about your project concept (formal advice is not required at this point).
- You should already have secured a minimum of three quotes for the work for which you are seeking funding or explain why has not been possible.

Stage 1 grants can pay for professional support to scope project feasibility:

- Basic technical feasibility assessment, including grid connection
- Landowner agreement (Heads of Terms)
- Community engagement
- Public body stakeholder engagement
- Scoping planning issues
- Scoping need for permits, licences and consents
- Finance and business model development
- Project management
- Sharing learning with other community applicants

By the end of Stage 1 grant delivery:

Asset-based projects (referred to as Type A) must have completed a feasibility study compliant with the GBECF Feasibility Report Structure and have a written Heads of Terms with the landowner(s). This should be reflected in your finance and project planning answers. By 'Heads of Terms' we mean a written agreement signed by the landowner stating that they are in principle committed to supporting the project's progress, preferably (though not required) with an exclusivity agreement ensuring project findings will not be used to pursue a private arrangement. At Stage 2, you can seek funds to develop this further into a formal lease or land purchase agreement.

Stage 2 – up to £100,000 grant funding

Stage 2 grants are available for projects that have been found to be feasible, with a good chance of securing planning permission and being implemented, to cover more detailed investigation of the relevant technology, planning applications, advanced landowner agreements and development of a robust business case to attract sufficient investment.

Please refer to the 'GBECF Stage 2 Guidance' for details.

Applicant eligibility

Applications must be led by legally constituted voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in England only. Eligible incorporations types are as follows:

- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Community Benefit Society (CBS or Bencom)
- Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Co-operative Society
- Development Trust

- Pre-Commencement Society
- Registered Charity (including eligible faith groups, sports clubs, etc.)
- Registered Social Landlord (see paragraph below on local authorities)
- Registered Society
- Town or Parish Council

Community ownership

Any project(s) developed through GBECF funding should be designed to be at least 50% community-owned. Applicants do not need to be community-owned at the point of application, but if you are not community-owned then you may need to establish a new eligible incorporated body at a later point that can comply with these requirements.

For this fund, 'community ownership' should ensure that people living locally to the project have the opportunity to influence decisions about the asset's management and/or distribution of benefits – for example, via an accessible membership that gives them voting rights. Ownership models should ensure that a reasonable share of 'community benefit' flows to the local community. However, investment in the project may be raised from the wider community, such as through a national share offer, and benefits can also accrue to those other parties (i.e. through interest payments on their shares). The case for community ownership and community benefit will be assessed on a project-by-project basis based on evidence submitted in the application.

Applications from partnerships

Partnerships are welcome, but you must specify a lead partner. GBECF funds can be passed from the lead partner to supporting partners specified in your application without competitive tender, providing partners are themselves eligible to apply and that an agreement reflecting the GBECF funding terms is established between the lead partner and supporting partners prior to any funds being transferred.
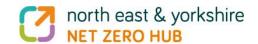
Partnerships with non-eligible organisations are permitted, and good partnerships can help improve your score. However, it is not permissible to pass GBECF funds to non-eligible organisations except through competitive tender or as part of fees payable to public bodies to acquire necessary licencing and permissions.

Applications from local authorities

Local authorities cannot receive GBECF funding for their own costs in any circumstances (except Town or Parish Councils) other than formally required fees (e.g. for planning applications). However, they can lead an application if they are applying in their capacity as a Registered Social Landlord for a social housing-based project, and they can be a supporting partner to an eligible organisation leading an application for any other eligible project. Although the local authority cannot claim their own costs in these circumstances, they can add value to a bid by coordinating work or providing other support or advice.

Applications from schools

Applications cannot be accepted directly from schools. However, a community group can apply for project infrastructure on school sites. For example, the community surrounding a school may form a community group in order to progress a project on their school site, or an existing community group could do this.

Applicants undertaking their own feasibility work

Applicants can undertake and charge to complete their own feasibility work, provided the group can provide assurance that they are competent and have the skills and expertise to do this. Day rates must align with or be less than the going market rate, and that the offer should be comparable with what professional consultants could provide.

Applicants not based in the proposed project locality

Applications from organisations located in a different geographical area from that of the infrastructure or project to be developed can be considered for GBECF on a case-by-case basis if they can demonstrate:

- Support of the community where the infrastructure will be located, and
- Income and benefits generated will flow to the community where the infrastructure will be located.

In these cases, we will look for a clear structure which would ensure the community would benefit from the project and are supportive.

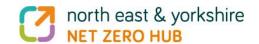**Applicants who have already received Stage 1 and Stage 2 funding**

Additional Stage 1 or Stage 2 applications can be accepted on a case-by-case basis if it is clear that the remit of the project has expanded; for example, the applicant wants to add a battery, and this requires additional Stage 1 funding to work out the feasibility of this, or this requires additional Stage 2 funding to apply for the planning permission for this.

Additional applications should not be for additional funds where the original work wasn't carried out well, such as additional Stage 1 funding to improve a feasibility study which was of low quality. However, it is permissible to apply for funds to revise good quality feasibility studies undertaken prior to GBECF that require updating before the project can move forwards.

If a group is expanding the remit of a site which has already received funding (RCEF, CEF, or GBECF) the funds they receive should be capped at £40,000 for Stage 1 and £100,000 for Stage 2. Value for money will be considered when looking at applications for expansion, checking whether the additional funding is proportional, and the investment is worthwhile.

A community group that has already received funding may apply again for a different project on a different site. These new projects would be eligible for the full Stage 1 and Stage 2 support, providing subsidy control requirements are met (see below).

Project eligibility

GBECF can support projects under two broad headings:

- **Type A** – Community energy asset project (such as renewable or low carbon
- energy, electric vehicles)
- **Type B** – Community energy efficiency or advice project

Type A projects

The following technologies are eligible for funding:

- Anaerobic digestion
- Biogas heat network
- Bio liquids/gas/fuels
- Biomass heat network
- Electric vehicle infrastructure (publicly available, incorporating generation/storage)
- Heat pumps
- Heat pump-fed heat networks (e.g., heat zoning for a village)
- Hydropower
- Solar (photo voltaic)
- Solar (thermal)
- Wind power
- Battery storage

Technologies NOT on this list will be considered on a case-by-case basis and you should contact the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub for advice before applying. These might include bundled work e.g. energy efficiency, grid services, building management systems or demand management.

Type B projects

The following types of energy efficiency or advice projects are eligible for funding:

- Advice targeting fuel poor households
- Advice available to all households, or targeting households that are not fuel poor
- Bulk-buy scheme for energy efficiency measures (multiple households)
- Bulk-buy scheme for renewable and low carbon energy (multiple households)
- Other energy efficiency retrofit programme (multiple households)
- Other renewable energy retrofit programme (multiple households)

You can select more than one option (for example, if energy advice will be open to all, but will also make targeted effort to reach fuel poor households).

Other community-owned energy services models can be considered on a case-by-case basis and should be referred for an initial conversation with the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub before applying.

Scale

The scale of projects eligible for funding will vary according to technology type. In general terms, projects should require planning permission and significant pre-planning development.

Applications based on single buildings will only be eligible if they create an asset that benefits the community beyond meeting the building's own energy needs (such as a village hall that generates enough energy to support an electric vehicle charging point, or exports energy to create a community benefit fund).

Community energy services providing energy advice or retrofit support must demonstrate that they will fill a gap in existing services, that there is local need for the service, and that the project can be sustained over a period of years. Any investment must come from private sources, including charitable grants, and not the public sector. GBECF cannot fund delivery of such projects, only feasibility assessment.

Assessment process

The application form indicates **pass/fail** questions and questions that are **scored**. All other questions are not scored but must be completed. This guidance document explains what we are looking for against each scored question.
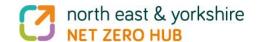
Proposals that do not meet essential criteria around eligibility and subsidy control cannot be funded and will not be fully assessed. This is a competitive process and we cannot guarantee that all eligible applications will be funded.

Applications will be initially assessed by the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub beginning with a high-level check to ensure basic eligibility and completeness. If eligible, your application will then be assessed against our marking matrix alongside due diligence checks.

Weightings will be applied to scores during the assessment process as detailed in the table below:

	Weighting
Section 2: Applicant Capability & Experience	12.5%
Section 3: Feasibility	25.0%
Section 4: Community	25.0%
Section 5: Finance	12.5%
Section 6: Project Management	10.4%
Section 7: Compliance	12.5%
Section 8: Additional Information	2.1%
	100.0%

If your application is complex or requires further information, a decision may be delayed. If your application is incomplete or if you do not respond to requests for information in a timely manner, your application may not be put forward for recommendation.

Following Hub level assessment, your application will then be appraised by the Hub's review panel which will include external sector experts and a representative from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and GBE, who will make recommendations based on their expertise.

The highest scoring and most recommended projects will then be presented to the Hub's Board for a funding decision with final sign-off by Tees Valley Combined Authority as the Hub's Accountable Body.

Depending on the volume of applications received and the need to seek clarification of information, the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub may choose to present applications to the review panel and Hub Board in several rounds to ensure that ready-to-go applications are not delayed while we await information for others.

Funding will be awarded at the discretion of the Hub and its Accountable Body and is subject to the availability of funds and the terms of the offer.

We want projects to succeed. You are encouraged to work with your local Hub for any advice or support needed to develop your application. In some cases, panels may approve applications with conditions, to avoid needing to go through rejection and reapplication if the proposal is nearly acceptable. Projects that are not approved are encouraged to revise their application based on feedback and to resubmit.

Timescales

Please keep an eye on your local Hub's website, or sign up to its mailing list, for any deadlines and further rounds.

Contact

All enquiries about GBECF should be directed to **enquiries@NEYnetzerohub.com.**

Stage 1 Form Guidance

Checklist

There are five Local Net Zero Hubs ("Hubs") across England. You should apply to the Hub where your project will be delivered, and check the application deadlines on their website:

- Greater South East Net Zero Hub (including London)
- Midlands Net Zero Hub
- North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub
- North West Net Zero Hub
- South West Net Zero Hub

The guidance below covers the scored questions only.

Contents:

Section 1: Project Overview

1.2   Organisation Name/Community Group

Please add the name of the lead applicant organisation here.

1.5   Location (pass/fail)

You must have identified a specific site(s) for investigation (for asset-based projects) or defined your intended area of operation (for advice and energy efficiency projects). For assets, we will accept applications to investigate feasibility at more sites than you intend to

develop, but you must have specific sites in mind, rather than pursuing broad feasibility assessment across a wider landscape.

A map is only needed if it will help us to understand your project location – such as projects not located at a single site – or the boundaries of the local area that will benefit.

Describe the project location in your own words, such as the name of the village or neighbourhood where the project will take place.

Point-data on the project location (postcode, latitude and longitude) should indicate where an asset will be located or, if the project will be delivered over a wider area (such as an energy advice project), the approximate mid-point of the area OR (if located within the area) an office address from which the project will be delivered.

Latitude and longitude can be found by right-clicking a location on Google Maps. The format should be (for example): 51.49888, -0.13055

Section 2: Applicant Details

2.3   Organisation type (pass/fail)

You cannot apply to GBECF if your organisation does not fall into one of these categories.

If you are not eligible, you could consider becoming incorporated as an eligible organisation, or partnering with an eligible organisation who can lead your application.

2.5   Skills and experience (scored)

We are looking for evidence that your organisation or partnership involves people with sufficient skills and experience to lead your proposed project.

High-scoring proposals will demonstrate experienced in developing similar energy projects. You can still score well with transferrable skills and experience from other types of activity, but please ensure the relevance is clear.

2.6   Governance (scored)

We are looking for evidence that your organisation has a sustainable governance model with limited risk, i.e. avoiding reliance on a very small number of key decision-makers.

GBECF aims to support community-owned projects. Your organisation does not have to be community-owned to be eligible, but applicants whose governance incorporates community ownership at application stage will score higher.

2.7   Directors or Trustees (pass/fail)

This question will be assessed as part of due diligence.

2.8   Financial management (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that your organisation is in good financial health.

2.9   Partners (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you are working with appropriate partners who will bring added value to your project.

Recognising that not all projects need partners, projects without partners will automatically score 3 out of 4.

Section 3: Feasibility

3.2   Innovation (scored)

We are seeking evidence of innovation as defined by Energy Systems Catapult, to innovate net zero through "new technologies, new ways of deploying existing technologies, new business models, new consumer offerings, and new policy, regulation and market design," e.g. using new combinations of technologies to optimise the value of the project.

Innovation is not required, but innovative projects will score extra points here.

Applications should then answer the relevant section for either Type A or Type B, depending on their project focus.

Type A – Community energy asset project (renewable energy, electric vehicles)

A3.3   Technology type (pass/fail)

If you are proposing an alternative technology under 'Other', we will consider this on a case-by-case basis and you should contact the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub for advice before applying. We want to retain flexibility for innovative ideas and projects that will help advance the aims of GBECF, but want to check your idea is a good fit so that your time is not wasted on an ineligible proposal.

Please note that electric vehicle charging projects will only be considered if they incorporate renewable or low carbon electricity generation and storage.

A3.4   Primary method of distribution

Please let us know the primary method of distribution for your proposed project. If you do not know then please let us know in the text box for 'Other'.

A3.5   Scale (scored)

The scale of eligible projects will vary according to technology type, but in general terms we expect projects to:

- Require planning permission and significant pre-planning development
- Generate sufficient energy to power multiple buildings; this can be used literally to power multiple buildings, or to power other community energy assets (such as electric vehicle charging points) or can be exported (wholly or partly) to the grid.

Please provide a quantitative figure for A3.5a only and use A3.5b to provide additional information (for example if there is a technology mix, or to provide any other context.

A3.6   Technical feasibility (scored)

You do not need have to completed this work, provided it is included in your grant request.

Any existing feasibility report will be assessed for quality and completeness. If your existing feasibility report does not cover all of the elements within the GBECF Feasibility Report Structure, you can ask for funds to fill the gaps. We will not fund new reports to replace poor-quality reports previously funded by GBECF or its predecessors. However, it is permissible to apply for funds to revise sections of good quality feasibility studies undertaken prior to GBECF that require updating before the project can move forwards (This is capped to the maximum available at each stage).

A3.8   Owner engagement (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that the land or building owner(s) is aware of the proposed project and is supportive in principle. You do not need a formal written agreement to apply at Stage 1. (See What we can support for a definition of 'Heads of Terms'.)

A3.9   Consents and permits (scored)

You do not need have to secured any consents or permits at this stage, but we want to see that you have some understanding of what might be required for your chosen technology.

A3.10 Planning permission (scored)

We do not expect Stage 1 projects to have sought planning permission yet. We do expect project applicants to have had an initial conversation with their Local Planning Authority.

Projects will score higher if they have obtained written planning advice that indicates their project has a realistic chance of securing planning permission.

Type B – Community energy efficiency or advice project

B3.3   Project model (scored)

We need to understand in more detail how your project will work. Projects will score higher if they are closely aligned to the aims of GBECF and appear likely to succeed in their aims. Please note that energy efficiency projects for single buildings are not eligible.

B3.4   Gap in services (scored)

We do not want to fund duplication of existing, high-quality services with capacity to support the local community. You will need to show us that your proposal adds value, rather than directly competing with such services for future funding. You should demonstrate awareness of similar schemes available to local people in your answer,

including relevant regional or national services, and any interactions you expect your project to have with other services within its delivery model.

B3.5 Local need (scored)

We understand that every community has need of a sustainable energy transition to tackle climate change, and that the cost of living is affecting people across the country.

In this question, we are looking for reasons why your local community in particular has need of, and is suited to, the community energy service you are proposing. We are interested in projects supporting people in fuel poverty, but also other audiences such as people in poorly insulated homes who are not fuel poor, or high carbon emitters.

Section 4: Community

4.2 Community relationship (scored)

Applications will score higher from organisations that are place-based by their nature, and are working in the locality of their proposed asset or service or can otherwise demonstrate an existing relationship with the local community.

4.3 Asset or project ownership (scored)

The final asset or service must be at least 50% community-owned. Projects that exceed this minimum requirement will score higher, as well as projects that consider inclusivity across the community as part of their ownership model. See 'Applicant eligibility' section above for our definition of 'community ownership'.

If you intend to establish a new incorporated body to manage the project, please give details of your intentions or options under consideration and explain how this will meet the community ownership requirement.

4.4 Community engagement (scored)

Applicants are expected to have already done some initial community engagement, with positive reception. Stronger pre-application engagement will improve your score. We are also looking for robust plans to engage with the community throughout the process, taking into account plans for inclusivity across the community and responsiveness to feedback.

4.5 Community benefit (scored)

Please refer to the aims of GBECF at the start of this document. We want to hear details of expected benefits and how these will be shared within the local community. Higher scores will go to projects with an inclusive approach to sharing benefits or targeting of benefits towards disadvantaged local people, and projects that keep a high proportion of overall project benefits within the local community.

Section 5: Finance

5.2 Why GBECF funding is required (scored)

We are looking for evidence that you have adequately explored alternative funding towards your development costs. You do not need to have secured other funding to score well if you have a good justification as to why this has not been possible.

5.4 Finance plan (scored)

We are looking for evidence that you have realistic ideas about project costs, income streams and funding – estimates and ranges are acceptable for most answers. You should already have firm quotes for the activities for which you are requesting a Stage 1 grant.

Your costs should be exclusive of VAT, unless it is irrecoverable. VAT can make a big difference to costings, so be sure you understand whether your suppliers are charging you VAT or not in their quotes, and whether or not you can recover this VAT.

5.5 Grant request (scored)

We will assess your answer for eligibility and value for money, based on your procurement process outcomes and our wider understanding of typical costs within the sector.

'Other' costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis, to ensure we do not automatically rule out legitimate costs that have not been considered in our own list.

'Other' costs must relate directly to the purpose of GBECF Stage 1, i.e., to demonstrate feasibility of your project concept.

If you believe an advanced payment will be necessary to enable you to start your project, please let us know this.

Section 6: Project Management
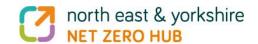
6.1 Project manager (max 200 words) (scored)

We are looking for reassurance that you have an appropriately skilled project manager(s) in place, or robust, realistic plans to obtain one.

It is acceptable for the group to manage the project itself at Stage 1 and to claim costs, and to have more than one person responsible for project management. If this is your approach, we still need details of a named person(s). We recommend you do not exceed two named people to lead project management without clear justification.

6.2 Project plan (scored)

GBECF Stage 1 grants must be spent within 12 months of confirmation of funding. Please construct your plan based on the assumption that successful proposals will have this in place within two months of proposal submission. (Project plans may be reprofiled later if grant awards are unexpectedly delayed.)

We are looking for evidence that you have a realistic timeframe for completing the work detailed in your proposal, covering all tasks for which you have requested funding.

For asset-based projects, you must have completed a feasibility study compliant with the GBECF Feasibility Report Structure and have a written Heads of Terms with the landowner(s) by the end of the Stage 1 grant period, whether or not this is funded via GBECF.

6.3   Risk assessment (max 40 words per box) **(scored)**

We are looking for reassurance that you understand the risks and challenges facing your project and have considered how these might be met. Please complete the table with regard to your <u>whole project</u> from development to build completion and/or service commencement.

Questions you might want to consider, depending on your project type:

- Does my core project team have the time and skills to see this through? Are enough people involved to avoid burnout or project failure if a key person has to step back?
- Do our proposed partners and consultants have a good track record? Are they reliable?
- Is our proposed technology or project model proven and reliable?
- Are there likely to be problems with grid connection, or other permits and consents?
- Are there any planning designations that could cause problems with obtaining planning permission, such as built or natural heritage status?
- Have we taken steps to properly understand need in the community?
- Is the project likely to generate opposition within the local community? How might we avoid this, or tackle it if it arises?
- How reliable are our financial estimates for income and expenditure, and what might affect these?

Projects will score higher if they show good understanding of a broad range of risks, and have considered how these are relevant to your particular circumstances.

Section 7: Compliance

7.1   Procurement process **(scored)**

Projects will score highly for if their procurement approach is well-scoped and has secured at least three quotes for each activity for which you are seeking a GBECF Stage 1 grant. Self-award of funding is permissible, but will score lower and must be justified.

Projects that make no attempt to comply with these requirements will fail. Projects that have not complied, but have given a good explanation as to why not, can still pass.

7.2   Procurement selection **(scored)**

We are looking for evidence that suppliers chosen are suitably skilled and reasonably priced. You do not have to choose the cheapest quote if you can justify your choice, but we are looking for value for money.

7.3 Subsidy control (pass/fail)

We cannot consider projects that do not comply with subsidy control.

The UK subsidy control regime began on 4 January 2023. It enables public authorities, including devolved administrations and local authorities, to give subsidies that are tailored to their local needs, and that drive economic growth while minimising distortion to UK competition and protecting our international obligations. Under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 ('the Act'), Tees Valley Combined Authority is under a legal obligation to design any subsidy to ensure that it complies with the Act.

The Great British Energy Community Fund grant is offered as a subsidy as defined in Chapter 2, Clause 36(1) of the UK Subsidy Control Act (2022). The grant is referred to as 'Minimal Financial Assistance' (MFA).

There is a maximum amount of funding that a company/organisation can receive as MFA, measured over the last three consecutive financial years. For these purposes, we mean the period from 1 April to 31 March in the relevant years. We need to make sure that if we fund your company/organisation, it will not lead to these limits being broken. The limit is £315,000 across certain types of funding.

7.4 Declaration and data protection (pass/fail)

We cannot consider proposals if the applicant does not agree to the terms of the declaration.

Section 8: Additional Information

8.1 Shared learning (scored)

Project applicants are encouraged to participate in shared learning with peers, so this is an opportunity to pick up some extra points. Commitment to shared learning participation may form part of your grant contract.