



southeastern

Customer and Community Improvement Fund 2026-2027

Funding Guidance



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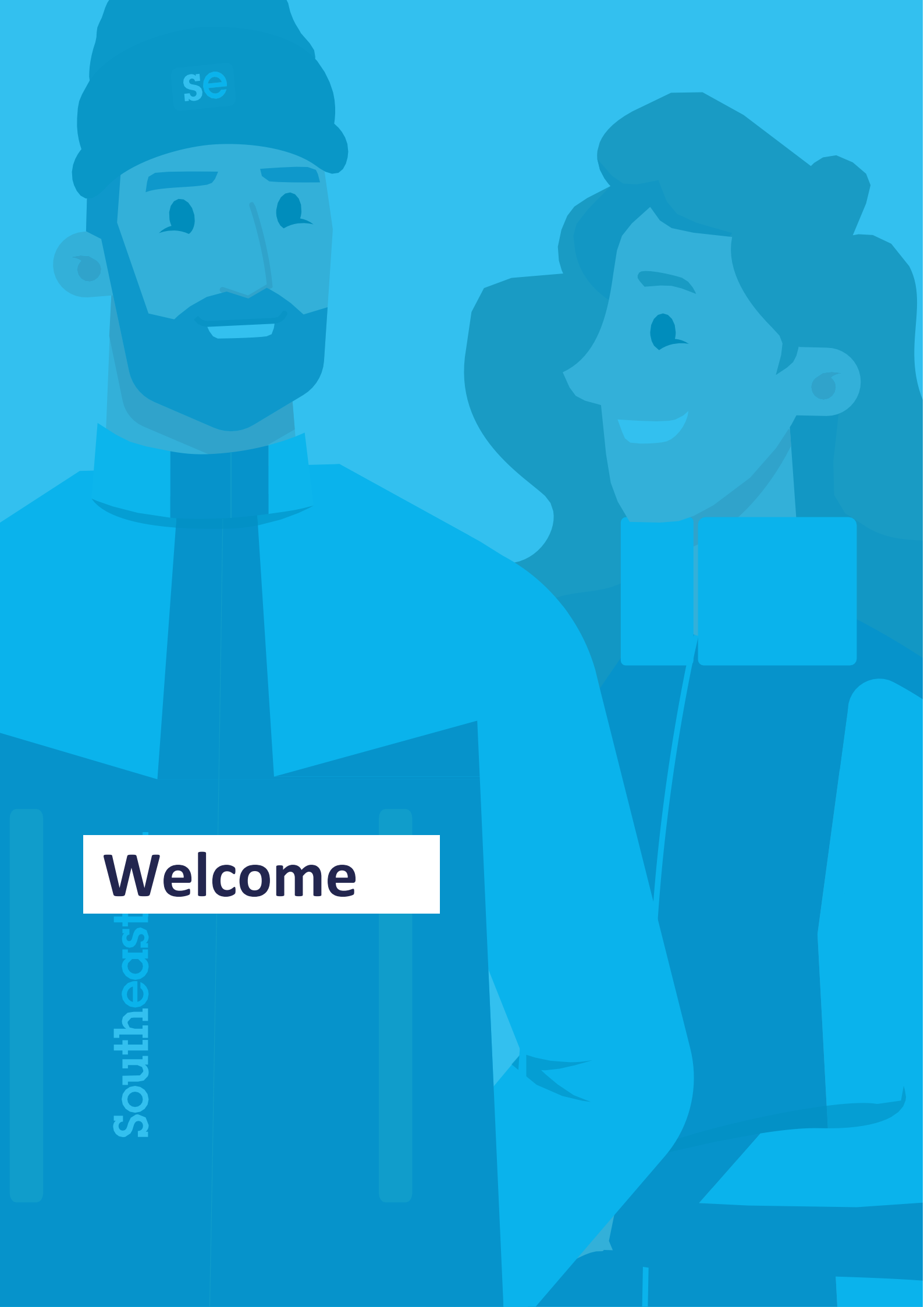
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An illustration in shades of blue and white. On the left, a man with a beard and a cap with 'se' on it, wearing a high-visibility vest, holds a large white sign that says 'Welcome'. To his right, a woman with curly hair is smiling. The background is a solid blue color.

Welcome

We are delighted to announce the launch of the FY2026-2027 South Eastern Railway Customer and Community Improvement Fund (CCIF). This is an exciting initiative aimed at supporting projects that enhance and make our local rail services more sustainable, promote development and well-being through equal opportunities, help reduce economic and social inequality, and foster social mobility.

At South Eastern Railway, we are committed to building a better, more reliable and sustainable railway and a thriving future for our region. Our commitment as a purposeful business is to work together to secure a thriving future for our railway and the communities we serve. As part of this commitment, we became UK's first rail operator to publish Social Mobility Action Plan, clearly setting out our work to date as well as the future opportunities to do more.

This handbook outlines what the CCIF is, the type of projects that we are aiming to support, plus the ones we cannot support, the application process and next steps.



What is the Customer And Community Improvement Fund?

South Eastern Railway's Customer and Community Improvement Fund (CCIF) is an initiative dedicated to supporting projects that bring about local rail improvement, foster social mobility, and deliver social value to the communities we serve.

To date, the Fund has supported a total of 24 projects with over £500,000 of funding over the last two years. You can read an example from one of the previous projects we have supported [here](#).

We are excited to invite proposals for projects to be considered for funding in the 2026/2027 Financial Year (FY) which must be completed by 31 March 2027.

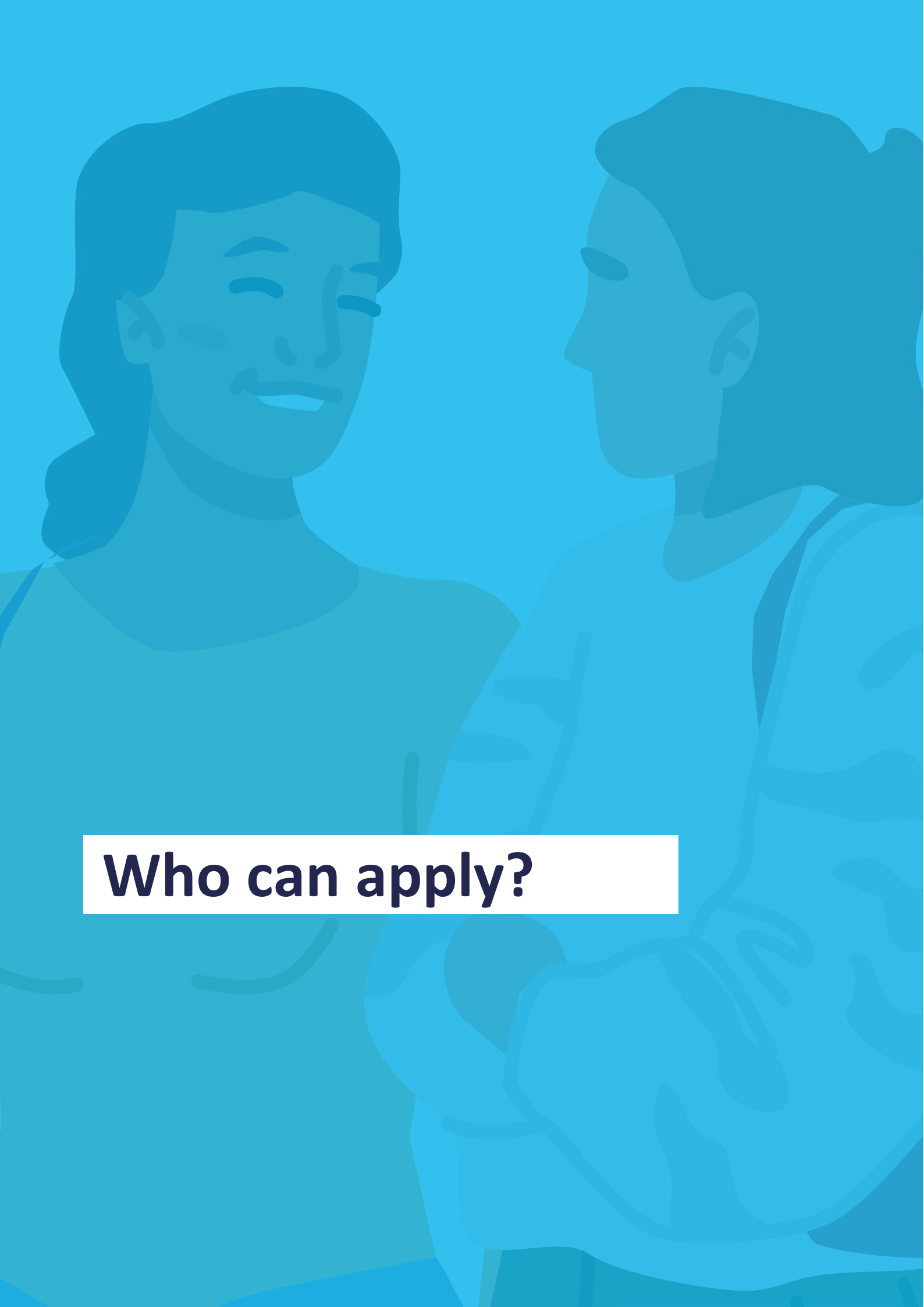
A successful bid should clearly demonstrate how the project will achieve at least one of the following goals:

- Foster growth and development by enhancing local skills and employment opportunities.
- Build healthier, safer and more resilient communities.
- Improve and make our local rail services more sustainable.
- Achieve equality through diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, bids should both demonstrate strong community involvement and support and explain how the proposed benefits will continue after the project ends.

Social Mobility promotes fairness and social progress of people through equal opportunities, regardless of the socio-economic background of their parents, their gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, birthplace, or other circumstances beyond their control (OECD, 2024).

Social Value is the value created by an organisation through its financial and non-financial day-to-day activities in terms of the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital created and the environment.



Who can apply?

We welcome applications from Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), councils, societies, rail user groups, registered charities, schools, colleges and universities, voluntary organisations, business partnerships, community interest companies and community groups, and other types of not-for-profit organisations.

We are looking for initiatives that benefit communities served by one or more of our stations. Please see our [route map](#).

Proposed projects must align with one or more of the following categories:

1. Local skills and employment

Projects that promote growth and development opportunities and ensure that everyone has access to opportunities to develop new skills and gain meaningful employment.

Ideas for possible projects: promoting the rail industry as a positive career choice, vocational skills training for young people, local next generation talent development, supporting people experiencing disadvantage in the job market, etc.

2. Healthier, safer and more resilient local communities

Programmes building stronger and deeper connections with the local community. Increasing awareness of rail safety, promoting well-being and mental health, reducing anti-social behaviour and trespass, fostering relationships and encouraging active collaboration within communities.

Ideas for possible projects: Eco Cycle Hub to encourage exercise and healthier living, cookery lessons to foster healthier nutrition, improving wellbeing of elderly people, youth outreach programmes to target young people at risk of antisocial behaviour or suicide around train stations, etc.

3. Sustainable railway

Ensuring the places where people live, and work are cleaner and greener, and helping secure the long-term future of our planet. Promoting rail travel and walking and cycling links to/ from stations, improving information/ wayfinding to make using rail easier for customers, and ways to encourage carbon reduction.

Ideas for possible projects: Information Points to promote public transport use, creating networks of ecosystems around trains stations to improve air quality, provide a new habitat for wildlife, enhance biodiversity, programmes for habitat restoration and for promoting a local culture of nature connection, cycle hubs, etc.

4. Inclusion and diversity

Programmes to promote groups that are under-represented in the southeast or wider rail industry workforce. Improving the rail experience of people with disabilities and other specific needs. This includes both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.

Ideas for possible projects: forum theatre for young adults with disabilities, self-esteem course for vulnerable women who would like to go back to work or education but suffer from low confidence and self-esteem, supporting vulnerable women leaving prison, family outings for disabled children, etc.





What makes a successful bid?

To be eligible, projects must:

Location:

Benefit communities served by one or more of our stations. Please see our [route map](#).

Benefit:

Deliver a tangible benefit to customers or the community and align with one or more of the categories outlined previously. Projects addressing multiple categories will be viewed more favourably.

Timeline:

Be realistically deliverable and completed by 31 March 2027. When preparing your delivery plan, ensure you include adequate time for project initiation, including start-up agreements and, where relevant, have obtained any necessary permits and permissions prior to the start of the project.

The CCIF will not fund projects that:

- Provide a commercial return to South Eastern Railway or the bidding organisation.
- Create direct revenue for South Eastern Railway or develop something that South Eastern Railway is expected to deliver under its service agreement contract with the Department for Transport.
- Support organisational overheads, including ongoing salary costs not directly related to project delivery.
- Develop feasibility studies for new services, new railway lines/routes or new stations.
- Sponsor events or award evenings.

Funding amount:

You can apply for a grant between £1,000 and £50,000. Match funding isn't a requirement but will be looked at favourably for schemes with a higher overall value.



Application Process

Applications open 31 October 2025 and will close at 23.59 on 31 December 2025. Any applications prior to and after the deadline will not be accepted.

1. Eligibility check

- Ensure your project aligns with one or more of our funding areas.
- Review what can and cannot be funded.

2. Prepare your proposal:

- Project description – 1500 characters (including spaces)
- Project scope – 3000 characters (including spaces)
- Project objectives, activities, deliverables/KPIs, and risks
- Main beneficiaries
- Level of local/ community support for the project
- Budget outline: Breakdown of the total cost of the project, even if the total amount of the project is not covered by this fund
- Project timeline: Breakdown month by month of the key activities and timescales over the timeframe of the project

3. Submit your application:

- Fill out and submit the online application form.

4. Review and decision:

- Applications are reviewed by our Assessment Committee.
- Bidders will then be advised of the outcome of their application.



What happens next?



Applications will be reviewed and shortlisted by an assessment committee from South Eastern Railway.

Bidders will then be advised whether they have been successful. Due to the volume of applications we receive, we're unfortunately not able to provide feedback to everyone.



Scoring for bids

We will use the following criteria to evaluate funding bids:

- **Alignment with CCIF categories** – The project should bring improvements and benefits for one (or more) of the defined categories.
- **Addressing social value** – Bids should identify who in the community will benefit and how their project will deliver social value.
- **Level of community engagement/support** – Bids should identify how well supported the project is from members of the community and its beneficiaries.
- **Accurate costings** – Bids should have itemised delivery costs. These can be estimates but should be as accurate as possible.
- **Deliverability** – Bids should have clear objectives and a plan of action outlining how the objectives will be met and how the project will be delivered within the funding period.
- **Legacy** – Bids should identify, where possible, any lasting benefits to the community or individuals involved

Timelines for your application

- Applications open: 31 October 2025
- Applications close: 31 December 2025 at 23.59 GMT
- Bids reviewed: January – February 2026
- Successful bids informed: March 2026
- Grant agreements signed and funding released by 1 April 2026
- All projects completed: 31 March 2027

Need help?

We look forward to receiving your innovative proposals and working together to create a lasting positive impact on our communities. Our team is ready to assist with any queries you may have throughout the application process. If you have any questions, please contact

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