

Parish Accessibility Fund 2026-28

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Overview

The **Parish Accessibility Fund** is a grant-fund offered by the Committee for Ministry of and Among Deaf and Disabled People (CMDDP) through the Disability Project. The key criteria for the grant is that approved projects convincingly demonstrate that they will enhance accessibility and inclusion for those who are Deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent.

The CMDDP exists to further the mission of the whole Church by enabling the full participation of Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in the worship, witness and ministry of the body of Christ in all its rich diversity. It affirms the dignity of each person as made in the image of God with gifts both to give and to receive. Its remit forms an integral part of shaping the church as a place of flourishing for all and an instrument through which the Good News of Jesus Christ can be seen and proclaimed.

In an exciting new phase beginning January 2026, and funded through the Archbishops' Council, the CMDDP is aiming to extend its pilot Grants Scheme which was active for parishes in the Northern Province from 2024-2025, and to achieve these outcomes and benefits:

- a) Between 60 to 80 large grants, up to the value of £50,000 each, are awarded for approved accessibility projects designed and implemented by and in parishes within the Province of Canterbury, bringing clear benefits to Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in those parishes;

- b) Up to 150 small grants, of up to £5,000 each, are awarded for accessibility projects in parishes in the same geographical area, enabling large numbers of PCCs to consider how to increase accessibility and inclusion in their parishes;
- c) Through effective evaluation and reporting of completed projects, we are able to widely communicate the message that small-scale projects can bring significant benefits to disabled people;
- d) Other parishes become encouraged to take similar action even without applying for support from the Grants Scheme;
- e) Events and training resourced under the scheme bring greater levels of awareness of and attention to accessibility within the Church.

Applicant eligibility

The PAF is open to parishes (whether PCCs, BMOs or Local Ecumenical Partnerships) within dioceses forming part of the Province of Canterbury, and to chaplaincies in the Diocese in Europe.

In effect, parishes within the following dioceses are eligible to apply for funding at the scheme launch:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| • Bath & Wells | • Lichfield |
| • Birmingham | • Lincoln |
| • Bristol | • London |
| • Canterbury | • Norwich |
| • Chelmsford | • Oxford |
| • Chichester | • Peterborough |
| • Coventry | • Portsmouth |
| • Derby | • Rochester |
| • Ely | • St Albans |
| • Exeter | • St Edmundsbury & Ipswich |
| • Gibraltar in Europe | • Salisbury |
| • Gloucester | • Southwark |
| • Guildford | • Truro |
| • Hereford | • Winchester |
| • Leicester | • Worcester |

There will be a limit on the total value of awards made under the Large Grants Stream within any one diocese. This will be to work towards an even distribution of funding across the total geographical area. This means that over time, diocese names may be withdrawn from the above list for eligibility under the Large Grants Stream, when the funding cap for that diocese has been reached.

See “Further Information” for details on how this will be communicated over time to potential applicants.

Funding Details

The PAF is split into two grant streams: **Large Grants** and **Small Grants**.

Large Grants:

- The total grant fund available is £3m.
- This will be distributed to parishes in each of the 30 member dioceses of the Province of Canterbury from 1 April 2026 to 31 December 2028, or until the fund is exhausted.
- A funding cap of a total value of £100,000 shall apply for distribution to parishes within each diocese.
- The maximum value of any one grant is £50,000.
- No parish may apply twice to this funding stream, except where the approval panel has indicated this may be acceptable in an outcome letter to the parish.

Small Grants:

- The total grant fund available is £750,000, to be distributed to parishes in each of the 30 member dioceses of the Province of Canterbury from 1 April 2026 to 31 December 2028 or until fund exhaustion.
- There shall be no funding cap on the number of grants or total value awarded to parishes within any one diocese.
- The maximum value of any one grant is £5,000.
- A parish may not apply twice to this funding stream for work within the same project proposal.
- The total project cost for a proposal under this scheme shall be no more than twice the amount of funding sought. For example, if £5,000 is the funding applied for, the total project cost shall be no more than £10,000.
- The minimum application value shall be £1000. Proposals below this value are deemed too low-value to be considered under this scheme.

Grant duration

The grant is issued prior to associated work and in anticipation of budget costs (“front-loaded” rather than retrospective).

The project duration should be no more than 2 years after the start date.

The project start date should be no more than 12 months after funding approval (date of the outcome letter).

Eligibility: costs

Eligible costs are defined as follows:

A PAF grant may cover:

- Capital costs, with some exceptions;
- Architects' fees, planning permission fees, and other professional fees where these are part of the total project proposal;
- Fees for services rendered by individuals where these are part of the project proposal, for example, BSL interpreter fees for an interpreted event for Deaf attendees;
- Costs for repairing existing installations which have degraded over time and would otherwise cease to function, where the parish can demonstrate a strong and convincing reason why their own funds are not used for the required maintenance of their installed facilities.
- Contingency amounts for capital costs only
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A PAF grant will not cover:

- Salaries or regular BSL interpreting fees;
- Architects' fees, planning permission or other professional fees where these are on a standalone basis with no project proposal. In essence, the PAF will not fund preparatory work in its own right, before a project has been properly considered and designed;
- New or improved wall-mounted or large-screen displays;
- Improvement, repair or installation of lighting systems;
- Installation of sound system components which are not a necessary part of an induction loop (hearing aid loop);
- Any work which has already been carried out: no retrospective funding is available under this scheme.

Eligibility: buildings

Proposals for work on and within the following buildings are eligible:

- Church of England consecrated church buildings and licensed places of worship (including those which are the subject of sharing agreements or ecumenical partnerships) serving parishes in the eligible geographical area.
- A community hall is considered an eligible building if it is within the ownership of the PCC or chaplaincy and in use to promote the mission of the church.
- Eligibility extends to the churchyard and other spaces surrounding eligible buildings.

Ineligible buildings:

- other buildings or structures in the churchyard or curtilage of eligible buildings which are not in ecclesiastical use;
- cathedrals; churches and chapels which are the responsibility of private owners or institutions;
- churches that are not within the diocesan structure of the Church of England and not within the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe;
- non-Anglican places of worship;
- closed and closing churches.

Application Form

There will be a two-phase launch for the Parish Accessibility Fund in 2026.

In **Phase 1, from 1st April 2026**, the application form will be available for download from the Church of England website, from the designated officer-in-charge in each eligible diocese, and from the Disability Project team by email.

Applications are to be submitted by email to the Disability Project team.

In **Phase 2, from 1st May 2026** subject to confirmation, the application form will be available and submittable through the Grants Management System (GMS), a portal for applying for grants offered by the National Church Institutions.

The Phase 1, email-based route will however also continue to remain available to parishes where the GMS is inaccessible due to lack of internet access, lack of technical confidence, or accessibility considerations.

A template Budget spreadsheet will be provided. This must be used to indicate the likely cost of the project, broken down appropriately into items of expenditure. This must also include any other funding being sourced to deliver the whole project. The other funding must be listed with that fund name or a descriptive phrase, as an income figure. This might be, for example, own parish resources, a restricted donation, or funding from another grant stream.

This means that the balance of the budget spreadsheet must show the funding applied for under the PAF.

All applications must be supported by:

- An accessibility audit, carried out within the last 12 months, which clearly demonstrates the need which the project proposes to address. An approved accessibility audit template will be made available, though other formats may be accepted.
- A copy of the latest Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) reports, including the full financial statements.

- Any architects' sketches which have been created within the project design, which must be annotated with all relevant dimensions and ramp gradients.
- Any photos or informal layout sketches which will illustrate the need for your proposal or its design intention. Such sketches can be very useful for an approval panel to better understand the context and ideas described in words in the narrative.

Application process

- The applicant may find out about the PAF through a variety of information sources, including national webpages, Diocesan newsletters, or word-of mouth.
- An interested parish may find out more about the scheme and discuss the features of their potential project through their Diocesan Officer in Charge (OiC). The OiC will be fully trained in the requirements and process of the scheme and be able to give general guidance to the applicant on what a strong application to the scheme would look like.
- In Phase 2, the OiC may point the applicant to the Grants Management System (GMS), a new portal providing an overarching and consistent route to applying to funds offered through the National Church Institutions. They may provide very general guidance on how to register with this system and access any further help required.
- They may also, upon request, provide the Word-based application document and assist with delivering completed applications with all supporting documentation to the Disability Project team.
- The OiC does not have any role in approval or rejection of any individual application to the PAF, though they may provide further information to the Disability Project team relating to the parish's application. This may include, for example, the views of the Diocesan Advisory Committee towards an existing or potential faculty application.
- The OiC will have full knowledge and awareness of the availability of Large Grant funding, with respect to the amount of funding left under the cap of £100k for their diocese.
- The GMS will also show this information for each funding round.
- An applicant may choose to apply to the PAF without consultation with the diocese, if that is their preference.

Decision-making Process

“*Funding round*” is the term which will be used for the period leading up to a grants panel, during which applications may be submitted up to a certain maximum total value. Panels will occur at approximately 2-monthly intervals.

Dates will be publicised on the GMS and the information page at the Disability Project webpages. OiCs will also have full information on the schedule.

For 2026, provisional agreed dates for the Large Grants panels are as follows:

- 20th April
- 1st July
- 6th August
- 26th October
- TBA December

Note that the applications window for a grants panel will close 10 working days prior to the panel date.

Information on the dates of Small Grants panels meetings will be available through the Grants Management Portal from 1st May.

The grants panels will refer to the published assessment framework when assessing applications. They may raise queries on applications and the Disability Project team will then seek to resolve these queries either with the OiC or directly with the applicant, through email and telephone contact.

A decision of the grants panel may be approval, approval subject to pre-requirements, or rejection.

An outcome letter will be sent, and a grant agreement created which will require two authorised signatories from the PCC.

Procurement and finance checks may take place as required by due diligence processes at the National Church.

Payment of the grant may therefore take place several weeks after the decision of the panel.

To illustrate:

- If an applicant applies 2 months before a funding round, must resolve various queries from the approval panel, and then has some logistical delays in completing signatures and finance checks, the time from application to grant payment could be 16-20 weeks.
- If they apply just prior to the deadline, submitting a strong application which is then directly approved, and respond readily and promptly to all emails and

notifications regarding the legal and finance processes, the time from application to grant payment could be 6-8 weeks.

Repeat and multiple applications

Large Grants stream

- No parish will be eligible for more than one award from the Large Grants stream. Any subsequent applications to this stream from a previously successful applicant parish will be rejected without panel consideration.
- If an application is rejected, but the panel considers that a revised submission would be accepted for consideration, this will be specified in the outcome letter.
- If this is not stated, the parish should not re-apply.

Small Grants stream

- A parish may apply for up to two awards from the Small Grants stream, where each proposal can be clearly seen as a separate project in its own right, rather than an attempt to increase the total value awarded for a single project composed of multiple smaller elements.
- The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that this is the case.
- A parish which has received an award from Large Grants may also apply to Small Grants for a different and separate project.

Expectations and Responsibilities

Applicants who are granted an award should note the terms and conditions as listed in the grant agreement.

In particular, project managers should note that financial records for their expenditure on the approved project should be kept in appropriate detail.

Project managers must comply with our interim reporting and end reporting requirements. These reports will request confirmation that the budget has been spent as anticipated, and invite reflection on to what extent the expected benefits and outcomes have been achieved, or are likely to be achieved in the near future.

Enquiries and support

Guidance on the Parish Accessibility Fund can be accessed at this webpage:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/barrier-free-belonging/parish-accessibility-fund>

Parishes may also wish to contact their Diocesan Officer in Charge. The name and email address of that person is shown on this page.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/barrier-free-belonging/parish-accessibility-fund/parish-accessibility-fund-resources>

General enquiries can also be made to this email address.

disabilityproject@churchofengland.org