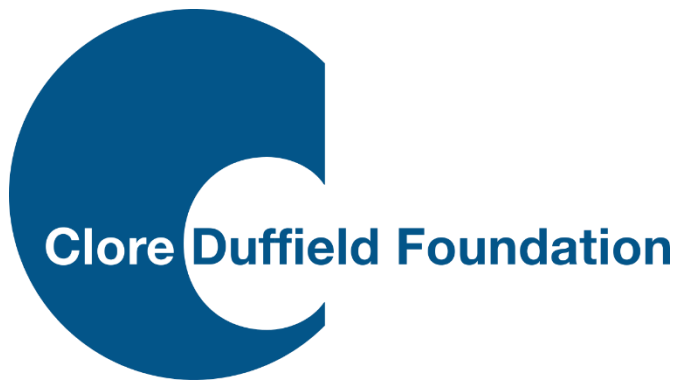




Clare School Choirs and Singing Programme

Grant guidance

Overview and aims

What does it take to create school choirs and singing groups that are effective, inclusive and sustainable?

There is some excellent work in school singing in England, but it is patchy, and school choirs have declined over recent years. The Clare School Choirs and Singing Programme aims to address this, recognising that:

- Given the right conditions, school singing can be open to every young person who wants to sing and pursue excellence at every level, developing each of them from wherever they start. School choirs thrive when they live within a school culture of singing.
- Short-term projects rarely generate understanding, deep impact or sufficient legacy.
- Schools and teachers are stretched, and singing is not always a priority.
- Confidence and expertise are inconsistent, among teachers and sometimes among visiting practitioners.
- Areas of greatest need – whatever the cause – are sometimes overlooked.

This programme will support partnerships between skilled practitioners and teachers, working alongside each other, with the aim of building lasting confidence and capability in schools.

We want to hear from organisations about where they have identified need, and what their vision is for making school choirs and singing take root and last.

The programme aims to:

- Support the creation and development of sustainable school singing that is open to everyone and musically ambitious, with routes for those who want to go further.
- Work with schools to build a broader culture of singing.
- Explore what it takes to build successful choirs and singing in different contexts, and how that work is sustained beyond the funding.
- Develop the practice and reach of the grantees.
- Generate practical, evidence-informed learning across the national cohort, and produce a published resource for the sector.

What the programme will fund and when

One cohort of between five and ten projects, each funded for three years.

Grants awarded of £50,000 to £100,000 a year, for three years, for organisations working with groups of state-funded schools in England on school choirs and singing.

Applicants will be looking to work with groups of schools where there is a need for growth in choirs and singing, and will have expertise and a strong track record in this type of work. (N.B. by 'choir' we mean any musical singing group).

Funded projects will be confirmed in spring 2027, with project delivery plans developed during the summer term, and project delivery commencing in autumn term 2027.

Funded projects will form a national cohort that meets and shares across the three years and produces a published resource for the sector.

Apply online at forms.cloud.microsoft/e/GB8EH7d96w. Applications close at midday on **30 October 2026**.

Contents

1. Eligibility.....	3
2. Addressing need	4
3. Grant principles	4
4. The national cohort, and what taking part involves	5
5. What we mean by workforce development	6
6. What we will fund, and what is unlikely to succeed.....	6
7. Applying for the grant.....	8
8. How applications are assessed	11
9. Reporting and learning.....	11
10. Timeline, deadline and contact.....	13

1. Eligibility

To be eligible for this funding you need to:

- Be a charity or operate on a not-for-profit basis
- Have experience of working in schools
- Plan to work with at least three state-funded schools in England
- Have at least one lead partner school with a named contact
- Have met, or spoken substantively with, a headteacher or another senior leader at a lead partner school

Who can apply

Organisations working on a not-for-profit basis, with expertise and a track record in supporting choirs and group vocal work in schools. Depth of expertise matters more than scale or national profile, but experience of working in schools is essential.

Most applicants will be professional music organisations working in schools – choirs with outreach programmes, community music organisations, local authority music services, music education hubs, etc. Most will be registered charities, although we can also accept CICs, companies limited by guarantee and local authority services.

If your organisation is not a registered charity or local authority service, tell us on the form how you are constituted and how you operate on a not-for-profit basis, including any relevant registrations.

Schools and school groups may apply as lead applicant. That includes Designated Lead Schools for Music, Multi-Academy Trusts and fee-paying schools such as cathedral schools, where they have the expertise and are equipped to lead outward-facing work at a scale that represents a step-change in their context. What we are looking for is choral expertise, not simply reach across schools. Where that expertise sits outside your organisation, tell us who you intend to partner with. The schools you work with must all be state-funded, and a fee-paying applicant's own pupils are not part of the project.

Schools

Your project must work with at least three state-funded schools in England – primary, secondary, or both. An all-through school counts as one school. Fee-paying schools are not eligible as one of these schools.

One or two of these schools will be your 'lead partner schools': the ones you have talked to in depth, that have helped shape what you are proposing, and that will likely help drive the project and be fully supportive throughout. Their role is to help lead the project across the group of schools, not only within their own. You will need at least one lead partner school at application stage. You may know the other schools less well at this stage, and we will ask only where you've got to with your communication with them.

The application form has space for up to seven schools in total. If your project involves more, tell us in your project summary.

Before you apply

You will need to have met, or substantively spoken with, a headteacher or another senior leader at your intended lead partner school before you apply, in person or online.

It needs to be more than an email exchange or a phone enquiry; we are looking for appetite from potential school partners, and how you can demonstrate that. The application form will ask for a named contact at your lead partner school. You should let your lead partner school contact know that we will get in touch with them if your application reaches the second stage.

2. Addressing need

Need in this context is the gap between the singing these young people currently have and the potential provision they could have. It takes different forms, and most applications will describe a combination. What matters is that the need is specific to these schools and this area. What doesn't count is a wish simply to expand your existing work.

The need might arise from a combination of the following:

Levels of existing activity: singing that barely happens, or once was strong and has fallen away, or reaches only a few with no route in for anyone else, or stops at a particular point such as the move to secondary.

Pupil circumstances: socio-economic disadvantage, communities whose musical traditions are not reflected in what is offered, or schools where language or confidence make singing hard.

Place: rural isolation, cold spots where little operates, or areas with a strong community singing culture that has no connection to the schools.

Capacity and culture: no one confident to lead, or a school where singing is for the musical few.

Levels of disadvantage in the schools you propose to work with will be part of how we assess need. We do not set a threshold, and need takes other forms — but if the schools you name are relatively advantaged, tell us what the need is.

3. Grant principles

Sustained investment. Three-year funding, not short-term project grants.

A relational approach at every level. Genuine partnership between organisations and school leaders, and between practitioners, teachers and young people. Young people's ideas should be taken seriously – in the repertoire, in how the group runs – so that the singing belongs to them and not only to the adults running it.

Ambition – a vision of what singing in these schools could become, and a credible route to reaching it. We are interested in what you would do differently given three years and real resource, not in extending exactly what you already do to more schools.

We are not expecting you to have solved in advance the challenge you want to address. What we are asking for is a serious ambition, an honest account of the need, and evidence that you have begun the groundwork.

A learning programme. Funded projects are expected to reflect honestly on what works and what doesn't, and to share that learning through the cohort.

Sustainability of the work. Created through continuing partnership and evolving over time, so that it has a solid future.

Grants are paid annually in advance, at the start of each year of delivery. Payment of the second and third years is subject to satisfactory progress.

No match funding is required. Funding from other sources is welcome, and you can tell us about any existing resources, partnerships or activity you would bring to the project.

4. The national cohort, and what taking part involves

The funded projects will form a national cohort, convened by the Foundation. Taking part is a requirement of the grant.

In practice that means:

- Nominating two senior people from your project to take part in the cohort throughout the three years. They should be closely involved in the work rather than representing it from a distance, and able to speak with authority about how the project is going and what it is learning.
- Taking part in an online session in the summer term of 2027, before delivery begins, where the funded projects meet for the first time, share initial plans and evaluation questions, and agree how the cohort will keep in touch between meetings. This is additional to the twice-yearly pattern below.
- Meeting as a cohort twice a year – in person once a year, with an online session in between at around six months. You should budget for travel and accommodation for your two nominated leads to attend the in-person meeting, and we would encourage you to bring school staff with them where you can.
- Including school staff in the cohort. The online session should include teachers or leaders from your schools, and from more than one school where you can.
- Hosting visits from the Foundation and its advisers, arranged through your nominated leads.

- Sharing experience honestly with the other funded projects, including what has not worked.
- Contributing to a published resource for the sector, developed across the three years.

The programme's central question is: *What does it take to create school choirs and singing groups that are effective, inclusive and sustainable?* The published resource is the answer the cohort builds, and it is the reason the Foundation is funding a small number of projects for three years rather than many for one.

5. What we mean by workforce development

Building the skill, confidence and capability of the people in the participating schools who will sustain the work once the funding ends. This usually means teachers: the primary generalist lacking musical confidence, the music coordinator, the secondary music teacher. It may also include teaching assistants, support staff, senior leaders, or others working with the school such as music service or hub staff and local freelance practitioners.

Your own practitioners should develop through this work too, and often the most valuable development happens when they and teachers learn alongside each other. We would be interested in your ideas about how this might work.

We are not prescribing a model. Training, mentoring, co-working, observation, coaching, shadowing, resource-building, peer networks and simply working side by side can all count. What matters is that it is sustained, that it starts from where people actually are, and that the schools are more capable at the end than at the start.

6. What we will fund, and what is unlikely to succeed

The grant may be used for:

- Practitioner fees and expenses – visiting leaders, choral directors, workshop leaders, accompanists and other musicians.
- Teacher and practitioner development – training, mentoring, co-working, observation, support.
- Teacher release and cover costs.
- Project coordination and management – up to 10% of the grant value, for staff time directly attributable to planning, managing school relationships, programme administration and staff time spent on cohort activity.
- Resources and materials, including essential equipment where justifiable.
- Performance and sharing, including venue hire.
- Travel and transport – practitioner and teacher travel, transport for pupils, and travel and accommodation for attending cohort meetings.

The grant will not fund:

- Capital expenditure.
- Core organisational running costs not attributable to the programme – rent, utilities, insurance, governance, fundraising, general marketing.
- Activity already fully funded from another source. In-kind contributions from existing work are welcome, but you should show how the element funded by this grant is distinct from them.
- Projects, travel or activity outside England.

What is unlikely to succeed:

- A proposal for exactly the same work in more places.
- An established model applied without adaptation to the area/need.
- Teachers as spectators, or not engaged at all.
- Need asserted rather than identified.
- Initiatives with no legacy or lasting impact.
- Singing used as a means to something else, where the music itself is incidental.

If you are unsure whether your idea fits, please get in touch via info@cloreduffield.org.uk before you spend time on an application.

How the budget is assessed

We do not have a view about how your budget should be divided (other than the 10% cap on coordination and management). Projects will differ, and what makes the work possible in one place will be less relevant in another. In a rural area, transport may be the largest single cost and the reason the project can happen at all. Elsewhere it may be cover costs, or the number of practitioner days needed to reach schools with no musical capacity of their own. What we look for is that the budget follows from the project you have described, and that you can explain why the money is where it is.

Fair rates of pay

The Foundation expects practitioners to be paid at fair rates. This will be looked at when first-year budgets are developed with funded organisations, rather than at application stage.

VAT

Some of your project costs will carry VAT. Where you cannot recover it, include it in your budget figures — we can fund irrecoverable VAT as part of the grant.

The grant itself is outside the scope of VAT, so please do not add VAT to the total you are requesting.

7. Applying for the grant

Process

There are two stages:

Stage One is a written application, submitted through our online form by midday on 30 October 2026. It asks for information about your organisation, the schools you propose to work with, an indicative budget, and a set of written questions. Applications are assessed against the criteria set out under 'How applications are assessed' below, with moderation by an independent advisory group.

Stage Two is an interview, with no second written submission required. If you are invited, you will meet with the Foundation's Director and programme consultant for around an hour in February 2027.

More organisations will reach Stage Two than the five to ten projects we can fund. Final decisions will be made by the Foundation's trustees in spring 2027, on the recommendation of the interview panel.

Please note that we are a small team and cannot offer feedback on unsuccessful Stage One applications. Organisations that reach Stage Two will receive a short written summary of the panel's view.

Information webinar

We are holding an information webinar on Tuesday 29 September 2026, 1.10 to 1.50pm. Register [here](#). Most of the session is given over to your questions. Please read this guidance before attending, and tell us when you register what you would like covered: we will group the questions we receive and take those first, then take further questions live. The opening part of the session is recorded, the question and answer part not. If you cannot attend, email us and we will send you the recording. Questions that are useful to others will be added to the frequently asked questions during the application window.

What you need in place before applying

As well as your project plan, you will need to have had a proper conversation with at least one school before you apply – your lead partner school. The point is to establish that the appetite is real: that the school wants this, that someone in the leadership team as well as the music lead will support it, and that they can give you some sense of what they would put into it.

For the other schools in your project, we ask how far you have got. Some may be firmly behind it, some interested, some identified but not yet approached.

We expect at application:

- At least three schools named individually.
- A meeting with at least one (your lead partner school).

- Some indication of what your lead partner school would contribute, even if provisional, e.g. staffing, time, space, funds, help with recruiting other schools.

Not expected at application:

- Signed agreements or memoranda.
- School timetable changes already made.
- Governor approval.
- Financial commitments from schools.

The form cannot be saved part-way through and returned to, so please prepare your answers using the Word version of the form and paste them in when you are ready. If you are signed in to a Microsoft account you can save a copy of your response after you submit.

What the form asks for:

Organisation. Name, legal status, registration number if you have one, address, website, and a contact name, role, email and telephone number.

Finance and staffing. Turnover in your last financial year, and whether you are VAT registered. Total staff FTE, and approximately how many of your staff and how many freelancers would work in schools on this project.

Schools. For each lead partner school: name, postcode, local authority, phase, %FSM, the name, role and contact details of the person you have spoken to with permission for us to contact them, and how far that conversation has got. For each of your other schools: name, postcode, local authority, phase, %FSM, and how far you have got with them.

You can check school details at [Get Information about Schools: get-information-schools.service.gov.uk](https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk). The form has space for up to seven schools in total, of which one or two are lead partner schools. Please name any additional schools in the project summary.

Delivery partners. Name, role in the project, and the nature of the relationship – or tell us that you would deliver this entirely yourself.

Budget. The amount you are requesting for each of the three years – these need not be equal. A broad breakdown of expenditure for year 1. Any in-kind contribution your organisation would bring, described rather than valued. Whether the project depends on funding from another source.

Declarations: Three, all mandatory: that your schools are state-funded and in England, that your project involves at least three schools, and that you commit to taking part in the cohort, the evaluation and the reporting.

Questions with word limits

Each question has a limit, shown with the question. The form counts characters rather than words, so both are given: the character limit is what the form enforces, and the word figure is a guide for drafting. There are nine questions, around 2,300

words in all. The form will not accept more than the limit, so draft your answers where you can see a count and check before pasting them in.

The name of your project. *Character limit: 100*

Tell us about your project

Describe:

- The schools involved
- What you propose to do
- Funding requested

Character limit: 1,400 (about 200 words)

Why these schools? What is the need and context?

Describe:

- Current singing provision in and around the school
- Why more hasn't happened already – capacity, funding, access, or that nobody has taken it on
- What is the need you are addressing
- Why this matters for these young people

Character limit: 2,800 (about 400 words)

What is your ambition and how will you achieve it?

Tell us what you would go after, not what feels safe. Describe:

- What would be different after three years
- What kinds of groups and what kinds of music-making, who they are for, and who leads them
- How the work grows and changes across the project
- What makes this a step-change, for these schools and for you

Character limit: 2,800 (about 400 words)

How will you build an offer that is open to everyone and pursues excellence at every level?

Tell us how your programme will:

- Engage a wide range of young people.
- Reflect and respond to young people's voices.
- Develop musical skills and artistic excellence.
- Create appropriate pathways for progression and leadership.

Character limit: 2,100 (about 300 words)

What have schools told you and how will you work in partnership with them?

Describe:

- Key messages from discussions with schools
- School commitment and contribution
- How their views have influenced your proposal

Character limit: 2,100 (about 300 words)

How will teachers, schools and practitioners become more capable through this work, and how will you ensure the impact is sustained?

Tell us:

- How teachers and practitioners will develop their skills, confidence and leadership,

and learn alongside one another.

- What schools will be able to do by the end of the project they cannot do now.
- How singing will become embedded within the culture of the school.

Character limit: 2,100 (about 300 words)

Why are you the right organisation to deliver this project?

Describe:

- Relevant experience
- Evidence you can sustain a project of this size for three years
- Why you are working with any delivery partners
- What you hope to learn and contribute to the national cohort

Character limit: 2,100 (about 300 words)

Tell us about your budget

The main costs and the thinking behind them, and whether it changes across the three years. *Character limit: 700 (about 100 words)*

8. How applications are assessed

Applications are assessed against six criteria:

1. School partnership and commitment
2. Need and context
3. Vision, musical ambition and step-change
4. Applicant's ability to deliver
5. Workforce development
6. Inclusion and progression

The application form shows which criterion each question relates to.

Cohort balancing

Some considerations are cohort-level and partly out of any individual applicant's hands: geographic spread, phase, transition work, diversity of context and disadvantage, etc. All funded projects must be strong on the criteria. Beyond that, we will be looking at the shape of the cohort as a whole, so a strong application may not automatically be funded. Balancing is applied at the final selection stage, after interviews.

9. Reporting and learning

Reporting. Funded organisations report twice a year. We will agree with you in advance what to look out for as the work develops. Reports cover progress against the plan agreed for that year, what has changed and why, and what you are learning.

Evaluation. We will work with the grantees during the summer term 2027 to create a shared evaluation framework, and will suggest data collection tools for it. This

includes gathering a baseline picture of singing in your schools before delivery begins, which later years are measured against.

Each project then carries out its own evaluation using the common framework, so that findings can be read across the cohort. We expect data collection to include responses from practitioners, teachers and pupils, either in the form of surveys or interviews. You are not asked to design an evaluation approach before applying, and it is not assessed at application stage.

Learning. Funded projects contribute to a digital resource published by the Foundation for the sector, developed across the three years. There may also be lighter sharing of what the cohort is learning at the end of years one and two.

10. Timeline, deadline and contact

Applications open	21 September 2026
Information webinar	29 September 2026, 1.10-1.50pm
Applications close	Midday, 30 October 2026
All applicants told the outcome of stage 1	December 2026
Interviews	2 and 9 February 2027
Awards confirmed	Spring 2027
Planning with funded organisations	Summer term 2027
Delivery begins	Autumn 2027

A list of frequently asked questions is published alongside this guidance and updated during the application window. If you have a question about the programme or are unsure whether your idea fits, please get in touch at info@cloreduffield.org.uk before you spend time on an application, or tune in to the information webinar on 29 September. A recording will be available afterwards – it will not include the Q&A, but we will update the Frequently Asked Questions document where relevant.

Application form:

Apply online at forms.cloud.microsoft/e/GB8EH7d96w. Applications close at midday on Friday 30 October 2026.

The form cannot be saved part-way through, so prepare your answers using the Word version of the form downloadable from cloreduffield.org.uk and paste them in when you are ready.