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**Digital Divide:**

**Guidance for Applicants**

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1. **Digital Divide Grants**

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is utilising its Skills Funding to address Digital Exclusion, supporting the connection between Voluntary Community Sector organisations and Adult Community Learning / Further Education institutions to develop a resident progression routeway in line with the Digital Blueprint.

The provision (in line with [Skills Funding Guidance](https://www.wmca.org.uk/documents/productivity-skills/skills-programme-documents/)) will be targeted at individuals who are aged 19 or over and digitally excluded

WMCA are commissioning grants of between £80,000 and £142,857 to organisations who can demonstrate their ability to deliver outreach and engagement activity to those residents in the target group and support 60% of the cohort to Adult Community Learning or Accredited learning funded through Adult Education Budget. Focussing on introducing residents to Digital Skills, encouraging residents to engage with the wider Digital Skills offer.

Please ensure you have reviewed the Digital Divide Aims & Objectives fully to respond to the ambitions of the funding opportunity.

Applications will undergo an evaluation and scored as detailed in section 4 of this guidance.

1. **Who can apply?**

This grant application is designed for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations working directly with the community supporting residents of the West Midlands Combined Authority to include Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Organisations applying for Digital Divide Grant funding must meet the following criteria:

* its objective is the pursuit of a public service mission linked to the delivery of the services; and
* its profits are reinvested with a view to achieving the organisation’s objective, and where profits are distributed or redistributed, this should be based on participatory considerations.

Organisations must be registered on the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKRLP) and hold a UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN) to process data through Individualised Learner Records (ILR). Applications for new organisations can take 15-20 working days, follow this [link](https://www.ukrlp.co.uk/) for more information and to register.

1. **Eligibility Criteria/Documents required**

Organisations should meet all requirements set out in the Digital Divide Aims & Objectives document. In order to undergo the Eligibility Assessment, organisations must be able to provide a minimum of 3 years financial accounts and evidence of appropriate insurance where stated. Failure to provide documents requested will result in a Fail. Documents should be submitted with the completed application.

1. **Application & Evaluation process**

All Digital Divide funding applications will go through an evaluation process undertaken by WMCA.

On submission, applications will undergo an eligibility assessment which will operate on a Pass/Fail basis. This applies to Section 2.0 Questions A – L.

For organisation who pass the eligibility assessment, the Business Case & Financial Management will be evaluated to assess how well the response can support the WMCA’s Aims & Objectives for Digital Divide. The Business Case & Financial Management comprises of 10 questions and accounts for 100% of the score. A minimum score of 3 (Satisfactory) is required for each question 1 through to 10. If a response scores below 3 in questions 1 through to 10, it will fail the evaluation. This applies to Section 3.0 and 4.0 of the Application Form.

The evaluation of Business Cases & Financial Management will be scored using the following table.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Score | Meaning | Assessed As: |
| 0 | No response | Absent or does not meet the criterion. |
| 1 | Very Poor | The response is of very poor quality, with very poor understanding of the criteria and requirements. Response has major shortcomings and/or clear deficiencies. |
| 2 | Poor | The response is of poor quality, demonstrating poor understanding of the criteria, requirements, and poor capability of satisfying the objectives, with weak evidence of deliverability. |
| 3 | Satisfactory | The response is of satisfactory quality, clearly demonstrating a satisfactory understanding of the criteria in all areas, requirements, and capability of delivering the project to satisfy the objectives |
| 4 | Good | The response is of good quality, clearly demonstrating a good understanding of the criteria, requirements, and capability of delivering the project to satisfy the objectives and adds value in a number of areas. |
| 5 | Very Good | The response is of very good quality, clearly demonstrating very good understanding of the criteria, requirements, satisfying objectives and capability of deliverability and adds significant value in all areas. |

The weighting applied to each question is detailed below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Section | Question | Weighting |
| 1.0 | N/A | Not scored |
| 2.0 | A - L | Pass/Fail |
| 2.0 | M-O | Not scored |
| 3.0 | 1 | 10% |
| 3.0 | 2 | 15% |
| 3.0 | 2 | 10% |
| 3.0 | 4 | 10% |
| 3.0 | 5 | 15% |
| 3.0 | 6 | 10% |
| 3.0 | 7 | 10% |
| 3.0 | 8 | 5% |
| 4.0 | 9 | 10% |
| 4.0 | 10 | 5% |

The weighted score for each question will be calculated by dividing the score awarded for the response by the maximum score (5) and then multiplying that figure by the % weighting for the question. Please see worked exampled below.

e.g. Q1 – weighting (10%) score awarded (4) maximum score (5)

4 / 5 = 0.8

0.8 x 10% = 8

**Weighted score = 8%**

Once all applications have been scored, organisations will be ranked by total score in a ranking table for each Local Authority (LA) area.

WMCA will award the full funding requested to the two highest ranking organisations in each WMCA constituent Local Authority area. If the total available funding in each LA area is not awarded following this, WMCA reserve the right to award the remaining funding to the next-highest ranking organisation in that LA area until the total available funding is allocated.

The lowest ranked organisation in each LA area to be awarded an agreement may not be awarded their full requested funding, as it will be dependent on the remaining funding available.

**Response Requirements**

WMCA requires proposals to meet the mandatory requirements set out at Section 5 of the Aims and Objectives document. The following matters will be considered in assessing the responses:

Q1 – The project addresses the need identified in the aims & objectives

Q2 – The response describes activity across 4 main elements:

1. Engagement
2. Stabilisation
3. Learning
4. Progression

Q3 – The response:

1. Describes how the activities will be delivered
2. Demonstrates links between the activities and the aims and objectives
3. Includes locations of delivery
4. Demonstrates measures to safeguard vulnerable adults

Q4 - The application:

1. Provides a mobilisation plan to deliver the offer from project start date detailing project set up activities
2. Describes planned management and staffing structure
3. Sets out the skills, knowledge and expertise of staff who will deliver the contract
4. Details of any plans to sub-contract a proportion of this grant to support residents and any associated fees?
5. Describes Contingency arrangements in place in the event of reduced resources

Q5 – Application describes

1. The engagement methods used to engage with organisations current target group and how it will extend to other groups
2. Grass roots referral network in place
3. How learners are identified and supported to meet their learning plan including those facing challenges.
4. Preparation for next steps of learner journey re progression to further learning

Q6 - The organisation must demonstrate all necessary steps are taken to provide equal access to learning opportunities and service delivery in accordance with equality legislation.

Q7 - Proposal has demonstrated:

1. number of learners expected to engage, stabilise, enrol and referred
2. Minimum 60% of residents progressing to further learning
3. Volumes in line with aims & objectives

Q8 - Project has carefully considered and identified implementation and delivery risks with ranking. There are corresponding and appropriate mitigations for managing key risks. There are arrangements in place for managing and escalating risks within the organisation.

Q9 - Organisation has provided a detail profile/listing of all eligible expenditure that will be incurred. The project proposal unit cost per learner demonstrates value for money. Funding proposal has not been top sliced for oncosts. Costs relate to 87% of the funding requested in the response

Q10 - Organisation has provided a detailed summary describing their processes for monitoring expenditure, financial systems, responsibilities and monitoring progress against delivery targets

1. **Eligible costs**

87% of the grant requested per learner will be paid in equal instalments based on identified costs, in compliance with our aims & objectives and will be paid monthly in arrears.

Successful grant recipients will be required to profile costs & submit eligible costs on a monthly basis. Details of ineligible costs are as follows:

1. contributions in kind.
2. capital expenditures and spending on the purchase of assets, for example buildings, furniture, fittings. This includes the purchase of information technology that is treated as capital expenditure for accounting purposes.
3. depreciation, amortisation, or impairment of fixed assets owned by the organisation.
4. input VAT reclaimable by the organisation from HM Revenue and Customs.
5. interest payments or service charge payments for finance leases.
6. gifts
7. entertaining (which for this purpose means anything that would be a taxable benefit to the person being entertained, according to current UK tax regulations);
8. statutory fines, criminal fines, or penalties.
9. any activities that are not related to the provision of basic numeracy skills provision; and/or
10. any activities that the Organisation or Authority would otherwise be able to access free of charge.

**Section 4.0** of the application form requires applicants to demonstrate all eligible costs for the delivery of the project. Eligible costs totals should be equivalent to the value of the grant being requested in **section 1.0** of the application minus 13% for referrals starting on accredited training.

1. **Next Steps**

Before application forms are completed and submitted, please ensure you have read all relevant documents which include but are not limited to;

[West Midlands Digital Roadmap](https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4468/west-midlands-digital-roadmap.pdf)

[Digital Skills Blueprint](https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/ujed23yb/digitalblueprint_guide_v0-3.pdf)

Digital Divide Aims & Objectives

[Skills Programme Documents](https://www.wmca.org.uk/documents/productivity-skills/skills-programme-documents/)