

ACE GUIDANCE NOTE 1

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING TO ACE

This guidance tells you about the Achieving Community Empowerment (ACE) Support Programme, what it is, who can apply for it and how you can apply.

It is set out in the following sections.

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- 1 WHAT IS ACE AND WHAT CAN IT BE USED FOR?**
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SECTION I: WHAT IS ACE AND WHAT CAN IT BE USED FOR?

The ACE Programme is designed to provide hands on, developmental support to community groups so that they can improve their skills and confidence to carry out community activity and become more effective organisations. This is important because the more effective a community organisation is, the more likely it is to be able to influence decisions made about their community and improve the quality of life for local people.

The support provided will help groups to make thorough assessments of the needs and issues they want to tackle, create project plans to address these needs, identify who can help to carry out the plan, assess what changes have taken place as a result of group activities and, what has been learned from the experience.

The ACE Programme is paid for by the BIG Lottery Fund and is managed by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). You can apply for support for your group to SCDC, our contact details are contained in section 6. You can also look on our website for more information about SCDC and what we do:

- www.scdc.org.uk

The BIG Lottery Fund has invested in the ACE Programme because it recognises that community groups who want to bring about positive changes in their own communities often require support to do the things that will make those changes happen. BIG has funded SCDC to provide hands on support to community groups so that they can help communities get actively involved in decisions that affect them and improve their circumstances. If you are involved in a community group, whether to campaign for improvements or provide services to your community, we can help support your group to develop additional skills and understanding so that you are more likely to achieve the changes that your group and the wider community will benefit from.

By providing this kind of support to community groups, ACE will not only benefit communities but it will also meet the Scottish Government's priorities to ensure communities feel more empowered and able to influence decisions which affect their lives.

If you want to know more about this, please read the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Action Plan. You can look at this document using the following website.

- www.scotland.gov.uk

SECTION 2: WHO IS ELIGIBLE AND WHO GETS PRIORITY FOR ACE SUPPORT?

We can provide support to 12-14 groups per year for four years. This means that 50 groups in Scotland will directly benefit from ACE support over the lifetime of the programme.

ACE support is aimed at community groups, including the following.

- Local representative groups such as residents' organisations, community councils or community projects funded by local partnerships
- Social groups such as youth groups, mums and toddlers or religious groups
- Other common interest groups, such as organisations which represent disabled people, young or elderly people, or ethnic-minority communities

We are particularly interested in applications from groups who are facing new challenges or in 'transition'. This could include groups who are experiencing a 'dip' in their progress or who are becoming a different type of organisation from what they were previously. We are also interested in groups who find it difficult to get support from local agencies or workers as we consider these groups most in need of the support that we will provide.

If you want to get support, you will need to show that the issue/s your group wants to do something about:

- really matters to people in your community;
- is something you can realistically do something about and have an influence on
- won't negatively affect other members of the community.
- will help to involve members of your community and make things better.

With this in mind, ACE gives priority to community groups who want to work on issues that will:

- be supported by the group members and wider community
- involve the wider community;
- improve the group's confidence and skills;
- provide lessons that could be useful to other communities; and
- achieve positive change in your community.

Many types of groups are eligible for ACE support, but they *must* all:

- be set up to benefit the public;
- be not-for-profit groups/organisations;
- be able to demonstrate the group does not have access to the same *kind* of support from local workers or agencies as they would get from the programme, and explain why this is the case

Please note that it is not necessary for your group to have a constitution or a bank account. That is something that we can help you with should you be successful with your application.

SECTION 3: WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WILL WE GET?

The programme is designed to support groups over the time it might take to realistically achieve changes in the community. Whilst we recognise this will vary (quite a lot!) depending on what your group wants to achieve, we will provide dedicated support over approximately one year, although other elements of support will carry on for longer, for example all groups who participate in the programme will be invited to attend our annual learning exchange events to share experiences and learn about other groups.

The type and stages of support you will receive if your application is successful are:

Setting up your support

To begin with, ACE will give you access to a Development Manager who will provide you with the support required to help your group over the year. This translates into at least 10 days per year.

SCDC has a team of Development Managers who all have knowledge and experience of the methods that can best help communities make improvements and achieve positive change in their communities. All of the team is experienced in working with community groups and providing them with the support they need.

The amount of support we can give you will depend on what you are trying to do and what support your group needs. If you are successful in applying to ACE, the Development Manager from SCDC will arrange a meeting with your group to discuss your needs with you and agree what the support time is for.

Hands on developmental support

The bulk of the support you will receive through the ACE programme comes in the form of a series of developmental workshops. These workshops are designed to help your group think through what it hopes to achieve, how this can be done, who can help you, and how much progress you have made. There are four clear stages to think about.

Stage 1 – Assessment

Assessment workshops will look at the nature of needs, issues and problems that your group is dealing with, what their effect is on the community, how they are experienced by local people, what causes the problem, whose interest does the problem meet, what are the barriers and opportunities for change, who is responsible for the issue, what level of understanding of the issue is there, and what further information may be needed.

Stage 2 - Planning

Planning workshops will look at the specific changes your group wants to bring about, and how they would be measured, assess alternative possible courses of action and methods, consider how to engage and involve as many people as possible, consider environmental and ethical dilemmas, how to work together and with others, and how to feed back reports on progress.

Stage 3 - Doing

Doing workshops will focus on the particular support that may be needed as plans are put into effect. They may involve training, organisational advice, support in organising events, or trouble-shooting discussion. Their primary aim will be to support the organisation to be effective, inclusive, recognised, accountable and well managed.

Stage 4 - Review

Review workshops will take an overview of progress and achievements, and seek to understand the reasons for any aim that had failed. They will review both the extent to which the group's desired changes have been reached, and the ways this has been done. The key aim will be to learn and share lessons.

All group members will receive a copy of the ACE support manual. The manual is focused specifically on the needs of community groups of all shapes and sizes and follows the stages set out above. It contains lots of information that will help your group achieve its goals.

Mentoring Support

Once you have been awarded ACE support, the Development Manager will provide you with mentoring support in between the staged workshops detailed above. You will be in regular contact with the Development Manager to review your progress. You can also ask this person for more advice if you need to.

The mentor's role is to continue supporting your group do what it agrees it will do, and *not* carrying out the community activities on your behalf.

Learning exchange programme

As the programme develops, and more groups are involved, there will be lots of information for people to share on what they are doing and what their ideas and experiences are. Group members will be invited to attend an annual conference to meet each other and talk about their group. We will help support people to do this and share their learning with each other.

We will also ask all groups to give us information about themselves and what they are doing so that we can put this on our website. This means that other groups in Scotland can learn from what you do and other staff that support community groups can get information that might help them support groups in their own area. The website will also include other information that might be helpful to your group.

SECTION 4: HOW DOES THE APPLICATION FORM WORK AND WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DO WE NEED TO PROVIDE?

The application form is set out in different sections which relate to the kind of information we need to assess your group's application. The sections are summarised below.

A – CONTACT DETAILS

So that we can contact you!

B – ELIGIBILITY

The answers to these questions will help us decide whether or not you meet basic criteria for the ACE programme. We need to know who your group is and whether you are set up in a way that does not have a negative effect on other people in the community you work with. We describe this as being 'set up for the public good'.

C – MONITORING

It's important that we gather information on all the groups who apply to the ACE programme so that we can check we aren't missing anyone out who may benefit from the support. The answers to these questions will help us create a picture of who is applying and who is not, and may result in us changing the way we advertise the programme. The information you provide will be shared with other people like the BIG Lottery Fund but this will be done anonymously – meaning we will provide them with statistics but not under the names of the groups.

D – YOUR GROUP

The purpose of this section is to let you tell us about your group so that we can make a thorough assessment of your application. This section is quite lengthy but that's because we want to learn as much about you as possible so that it helps us make decisions about the kind of support you need and would benefit from. The questions in this section are focused on:

- ❖ What your group is about and what it aims to achieve;
- ❖ What kind of things you have already been working on;
- ❖ What issue or issues your group is interested in and want to do something about;
- ❖ What resources you have to carry out your activities

E – THE SUPPORT YOUR GROUP GETS

An important part of assessing your application is finding out what kind of support you need and from whom. We want to prioritise groups who don't have access to the kind of support ACE will provide, or who may have had support removed for whatever reason.

The answers to these questions will help us decide if ACE support is for you, or whether there is other support we can signpost you to that will better help your group.

F – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you find that having answered all the questions in the previous sections, there are still things you want to tell us about, you can write this here. This could be any information you think might help us assess your application, or that provides us with useful background information

we haven't thought to ask you about! You may decide not to fill in this section if you have answered all previous questions fully.

G – NAME AND ADDRESS OF REFEREES

Referees are people who can support your application for support and/or talk to us about your group if we need more information. They can range from local workers you have had some contact with, or members of other groups that know who you are and the work that you do. If you are unclear about who would be a suitable referee contact us and we will help you decide.

Remember to talk to your referee before you send us your application and ask their permission to provide their contact details. You should also advise them that we may contact them to discuss your application form as part of the assessment process.

DECLARATION

Finally, we ask that you sign your application form under the 'Declaration' part of the form.

We have also included a checklist at the back so that you can make sure you have completed the form as fully as possible. Remember you don't have to be a constituted group to get ACE support, but if you do have a set of rules or a constitution please send that to us with the form.

SECTION 5: HOW WILL YOU ASSESS OUR APPLICATION FOR ACE SUPPORT?

We want to make sure that we consider all applications equally and fairly. Three qualified members of the ACE team at SCDC will assess your application. They will do this separately and only compare notes afterwards. First, they will consider whether your organisation is eligible for ACE support. If it is, we will then decide whether to give your application high, medium or low priority. SCDC always use the conditions set out in section 2 of this guidance. If we are not sure about something, we may contact you for more information before we make our decision. If we feel your group is eligible and your application is ranked highly we will arrange to come and meet with the group to discuss your group's fit with our criteria and the anticipated impact of the ACE support. We will then make our final decision on who should be awarded support in this year of the programme. We will rate each application in one of the following categories:

- ❖ Your group is not eligible for support but thank you for applying
- ❖ Your group is eligible but more suited to other support programmes – we will signpost you to get support from other support programmes
- ❖ Your group is eligible for support and it is a strong application but other groups' applications are stronger – we will invite you to apply again next year
- ❖ Your group is eligible and it is a strong application meeting most if not all of our criteria – we will award you support

SCDC will give you feedback, in writing, whether your application is successful or not.

If your application is not successful and if you are an eligible organisation, you can apply again. If you are thinking of applying again, we strongly recommend that you first use the feedback we give you and use this to help you complete your next year's application.

PLEASE REMEMBER:

We are expecting a high number of applications so it is important that you try to answer all questions in the application form so that it helps us make a decision about your group. If you are not sure about a question after reading the guidance please contact us to ask about it and we will try to help. We will use the application forms to short list a number of suitable groups and arrange an interview with them before making a final decision.

When we have made a decision about whether or not your group gets support, these decisions are final. If you are unhappy about the decision you can write to us explaining why and we will try to explain further the reasons for the decision, however there is no right to appeal the decision. If you think you have been treated unfairly or your application was not assessed properly you can write to us explaining the reasons you think this was the case and we will write to you explaining how this can be formally dealt with.

SECTION 6: HOW DO WE APPLY FOR ACE SUPPORT?

If you have read this guidance and you think your group would benefit from ACE support please send us your completed application form. This can be sent via email or by post to:

**The Scottish Community Development Centre
305 Baltic Chambers
50 Wellington Street
Glasgow
G2 6HJ.**

Phone: 0141 248 1964

Fax: 0141 248 4938

E-mail: aileen@scdc.org.uk

You should return your filled in application form, along with any other documents we have asked for, like your constitution if you have one, to the above address.

The deadline for applications is **Monday 12th September**. If you are struggling to complete the form before this date, contact us and we will talk to you about why this is and how we can help.

