Outdoor Learning Leader Grant

Now open!
Submit your Expression of Interest by 5pm 30 October 2026

The Outdoor Learning Leader Grant supports charities and non-profit organisations who want to employ an Outdoor Learning Leader. The majority of the Outdoor Learning Leader Grant is to be used towards salary and on-costs, but there is also an element of unrestricted funding within the offer.

We know that inspirational role models are key to helping young people form lasting connections with the natural environment through meaningful and sustained outdoor learning experiences. This is why we prioritise charities and non-profit organisations whose approach is to encourage young people aged 4-25 years to regularly enjoy the outdoors and engage with nature. They will educate communities about land, food production and biodiversity; their work will enable society to have a healthy respect for their local environment and drive sustainable behaviour.

How much grant funding will each organisation receive?

- **Up to £20,000** per Outdoor Learning Leader, per year, for up to three years.

What can we fund through the Outdoor Learning Leader Grant?

- **Specific UK locations** – The Ernest Cook Trust is offering this funding through a place-focussed approach within defined geographical areas. The Outdoor Learning Leader Grant is therefore available to organisations located within the following postcode prefixes only (and the work must have a direct benefit to individuals or groups within these areas):

- **Cumbria/Lancashire: CA, LA**
- **Gloucestershire/Wiltshire/Avon: GL, SN, BS**
- **Leicestershire hub area: LE**

Please note that although applications are welcomed from organisations across all the postcodes above, to balance the number and spread of funded organisations, there will be a priority weighting for organisations applying from the Leicestershire and Gloucestershire hub areas.

If you are a charity/not for profit organisation whose work is predominantly within these postcode areas, but your office is registered elsewhere please contact the Grants team to enquire about eligibility. Priority will be given to organisations working within areas of high deprivation.

- **Contribution to salaries** – Organisations can choose whether to allocate the whole grant (ie up to £20,000) towards salary and on-costs or allocate up to £15,000 towards salary and on-costs and up to £5,000 as flexible unrestricted funding to use in other ways to support the organisation.
- **Multi-year awards** – We appreciate that supporting organisations for more than one year is often highly valued by charities to ensure sustainability, provide an opportunity to build capacity and potentially give a more sustained impact. Subject to satisfactory annual impact evaluation reporting, this award will fund continuation of a post up to £20,000 per year for up to three years.
- **Non-Profit Organisations** – We will fund UK-based registered charities, charitable incorporated organisations, community interest groups and non-profit organisations whose vision is aligned with our own. You will need to have a bank account in your organisation's name, a constitution or memorandum of association and a board or management committee of at least three unrelated people.
- **Disadvantage** – We will prioritise work that focuses on support for young people who are from underserved communities. This could include disadvantage for social, physical, economic or community reasons.
- **Equity, diversity and inclusion** – It is vital that applicants consider equity, diversity and inclusion in every aspect of their work.
- **Organisations with good governance** – As part of the Full Application process we will require financial information, a copy of your latest Annual Report plus evidence of your Safeguarding Policy.
- **Organisations with clear objectives** – As part of the Full Application process we will require a job description for the proposed Outdoor Learning Leader role.
- **Evaluation** – There is an expectation for grantees to measure the impact of their work, and the Ernest Cook Trust can support with this process.

Successful applicants will be invited to join the Ernest Cook Trust's network of Outdoor Learning Leaders, OPEN (Outdoor Practitioners Educational Network) sharing best practice, benefiting from CPD and exchanging ideas and skills.

What can't we fund through the Outdoor Learning Leader Grant?

- Schools – schools, nurseries, pre-schools or universities
- Applications from outside the stated UK postcodes
- Individuals
- Retrospectively
- Local Authorities
- Political Campaigns
- Organisations based outside the UK
- Sole Traders
- Anyone who is applying on behalf of another organisation
- Organisations who don't have at least two unrelated Directors or Trustees
- Organisations that are aimed at generating profits for private distribution
- The promotion of religion – Faith Organisations may apply, as long as there is a clear benefit to the local community and not just to those of a particular faith.

"It is such a pleasure for us to now be able to provide a more structured framework for the work we do to teach the many disabled children and young people who visit us about nature, the land and its conservation"

Bendrigg Trust, Outdoor Learning Leader Grant recipient

Application process

Please complete the online application form **by 5pm 30 October 2026,** via this link:

Outdoor Learning Leader Application form Contact us

The process consists of two rounds, both of which are assessed by a staff panel:

- **An initial Expression of Interest**
- **Successful organisations are invited to submit a more detailed Full Application for the ten available Outdoor Learning Leader Grants.**

Outdoor Learning Leader Grant – Frequently Asked Questions

FUNDING

Q1 - Is it possible to apply for a part time post at the full £20k, or does it need to be a full-time role?

The grant award level of £20,000pa has been estimated as approximately half a full-time salary and includes on-costs (eg pension contributions and payroll tax). Whilst we appreciate that not every organisation will wish to employ someone full-time, we would like to see some level of financial commitment from the host organisation. This level of joint funding could however be any amount and is not necessarily expected to be 100% match funding.

Q2 - Can we apply for a salary of less than £20,000 per year?

Yes, you can apply for a grant for any amount up to £20,000pa.

Q3 - Can we apply for funding for more than one post?

Applicants are welcome to apply for more than one grant however, with only 10 awards made annually, it is highly unlikely that your organisation will be successful for more than one award. The Trust will consider the use of this grant to fund a job-share for two employees, but the maximum of £20,000 will apply.

Q4 - Is this a multi-year grant?

Initially the award is for one year for a grant of up to £20,000, however this is a multi-year award and applicants can therefore apply for a grant for up to three years (maximum £60,000), running to March 2030. The subsequent years' grant is only given after receipt of a satisfactory monitoring report.

Q5 - Can the grant be used to fund an existing post holder, or does the grant need to fund a new post?

We would prefer this to be a new post but will consider the funding of an existing employee in a new role.

Q6 - Could the employment of an Outdoor Learning Leader be on a contract basis?

No, the employer needs to be the grant applicant and must pay the salary directly to their Outdoor Learning Leader and not to an external contractor.

Q7 - If my organisation is already in receipt of a salary-funded grant from the Ernest Cook Trust can I still apply?

Yes, but this grant must not be used as match funding for a previously awarded post and must be a distinctly different project or activity and/or located in a new geographical area.

APPLICANT ORGANISATION

Q8 - Does the applicant need to be an environmental or educational organisation?

Not necessarily, as long as the project focus is aligned with the Ernest Cook Trust vision of land and lives thriving together and focuses on outdoor learning, connecting with nature and learning from the land.

Q9 - Does the applicant need to be a registered charity?

You do not need to be a registered charity, but your activities that we are funding must have a charitable purpose. You must be an independent not-for-profit making organisation whose purpose is something other than making private profit for directors, members or shareholders. We will consider applications from Community Interest Companies and companies limited by guarantee.

Outdoor Learning Leader Grant – Frequently Asked Questions

OUTDOOR LEARNING LEADER ROLE

Q10 - Is there an expectation to participate in any impact evaluation?

At the Ernest Cook Trust we use research and evaluation frameworks to ensure our funds are used to best effect. We run a number of specific projects and grant streams, including the Blue Influencers Scheme and The OWL Collaboration (Outdoor Weeks of Learning) where the measurement of impact is embedded in the programme. Evaluation of the Outdoor Learning Leader Grant includes completing an annual monitoring form (circulated in advance) and there may also be 1:1 discussions or focus groups as part of the evaluation process. The sharing of learning, information and research is an important component of the 'funding-plus' element of this grant.

Q11 - What network opportunities does this grant provide?

We have established a network of organisations who are currently in receipt of the Outdoor Learning Leader Grant. The Outdoor Practitioners Education Network (OPEN) runs regular online meetings and is an opportunity to share best practice, training opportunities and peer mentoring support with aligned organisations.

Q12 - Do you require a job description for the Outdoor Learning Leader role?

Yes, as part of the Full Application process we would like to see what duties and responsibilities will be required of the post holder. There is an option to upload the job description document within the online application process.

GRANT PRIORITIES

Q13 - What is your definition of 'disadvantage'?

The priority is to support underserved communities and those with disadvantage. This could be for social, physical, economic or community reasons. For example the project could target young people in receipt of Free School Meals or Pupil Premium, or include those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Children Looked After, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), young carers and those with mental health **problems.** The Trust would like to see projects that include under-represented and minoritised ethnic groups.

Q14 - Do you have a preferred geographical location?

This is a place-focussed Grant within defined geographical areas. The Outdoor Learning Leader Grant is therefore available to organisations located within the following postcode prefixes only, and the work must have a direct benefit to individuals or groups within these areas:

Cumbria/Lancashire: CA, LA

Gloucestershire hub area: BS, GL, SN

Leicestershire hub area: LE

If you are a charity/not for profit organisation whose work is predominantly within these postcode areas, but your office is registered elsewhere please contact the Grants team to enquire about eligibility.

Priority will be given to organisations working within areas of high deprivation.

Q15 - Is the project limited to any particular age range?

The Ernest Cook Trust has a strategic focus on disadvantaged children and young people, their families and communities. We would like the post to be involved in delivery benefit to young people aged 4 to 25, but we are very supportive of inter-generational and community focused projects.

GRANT PROCESS

Q16 - How many applications are you expecting to receive?

This is an extremely popular award with 10 grants awarded per year. In recent grant rounds, the success rate has been around 25%.