

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Invitation to Submit Project Bids

Communities and Place – Digital Inclusion Feasibility Study

Call Ref. TVCA UKSPFCP001



**LEVELLING
— UP —**

March 2023

Introduction

Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) is seeking bids from organisations wishing to deliver activity as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

Please read the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus and the additional guidance which can be found [here](#) prior to making an application. The Prospectus provides detailed information on the objectives of the Fund, the types of activity it intends to support and the management of the fund.

You should also review the information on the TVCA website including the UKSPF evidence base and Tees Valley UKSPF Investment Plan - [found here](#).

Background

The UKSPF is a central pillar of the UK Government's ambitious Levelling Up agenda and a significant component of its support for places across the UK. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025,

The UKSPF will support the UK Government's wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK by delivering on each of the levelling up objectives:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging.
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest.
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost.
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

UKSPF forms part of a suite of complementary levelling up funding. It builds on the competitive Levelling Up Fund and Community Ownership Fund through long term, stable funding, allocated to all places. Its mix of revenue and capital funding can be used to support a wide range of interventions to build pride in place and improve life chances. These can complement Levelling Up Fund capital projects, strategic Freeport investments or community-level Community Ownership Fund projects, as well as existing employment and skills provision.

The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) was created in April 2016. The purpose of the Combined Authority is to drive economic growth and job creation in the area. TVCA is a partnership of five authorities; Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees, working closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership, wider business community and other partners to make local decisions to support the growth of our economy. Under the devolution deal with Government, TVCA have taken on responsibilities previously held by Westminster

and Whitehall, for transport, infrastructure, skills, business investment, housing and culture and tourism. In 2021, the people of the Tees Valley re-elected their Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, who chairs the Combined Authority.

The TVCA [Strategic Economic Plan](#) sets out the area's ambition to drive the transition to a high-value, low-carbon, diversified and inclusive economy and sets out the ambition to unlock a net additional 25,000 jobs by 2026.

Tees Valley Combined Authority as Lead Authority for UKSPF in Tees Valley has worked closely with partners through a new UKSPF Local Partnership Group, together with existing networks and advisory groups, to develop the [UKSPF Tees Valley Investment Plan for 2022-2025](#). This sets out plans for investment of £46.3 million across three UKSPF priority areas,

- Communities and Place - £24.7 million
- People and Skills - £8.6 million
- Supporting Local Business - £13 million

Tees Valley has taken a strategic approach to prioritisation and activity within all three areas is interlinked. Funding has been targeted where there are gaps in current activity to not duplicate but complement other funding sources and invest where it can have the biggest impact in this 3-year period.

The Communities and Place priority area includes an opportunity to explore ways to increase digital inclusion across Tees Valley, with £500,000 dedicated to funding a Digital Inclusion Feasibility Study in 2023/24.

The Covid pandemic demonstrated the vital role of digital technologies. Many activities related to work, education, leisure, and access to public services, moved from the physical to the virtual world and are expected to remain. The need for reliable, affordable internet connectivity, appropriate digital equipment, and digital skills to use this equipment surfaced rapidly.

Digital exclusion is a rapidly increasing issue, especially amongst low-income communities. Digitally excluded people can lack skills, confidence, and motivation, along with having limited or no access to digital equipment and affordable connectivity. Research for the UK Digital Strategy suggests that there are important barriers to digital inclusion, including:

- access to digital equipment
- access to affordable and reliable digital connectivity – the ability to connect to the internet and go online
- basic digital skills – the ability to use digital technology
- confidence – some people fear online crime, lack trust or don't know where to start online

- motivation – not everyone sees why using the internet could be relevant and helpful
- design – not all digital services and products are accessible and easy to use
- awareness – not everyone is aware of digital services and products available to them.

The Tees Valley Digital Strategy, published in 2022, sets out an ambition to become the UK's first truly Smart Region, using world-leading digital infrastructure and innovation to create opportunities for all residents and businesses. To realise this ambition along with our ambitions for Communities and Place, it is important to ensure that Tees Valley residents are not left behind through digital exclusion, and that the benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available to everyone. This will require addressing the barriers listed above and finding sustainable solutions.

The USKPF will be used to fund a Tees Valley Digital Inclusion Feasibility Study. This feasibility study will be an assessment of the practicality and viability of a project to reduce digital exclusion within Tees Valley and would be expected to include a practical pilot. Match funding is encouraged to increase value for money and reach of the pilot scheme.

The feasibility study would be expected to deliver the following:

- A definition of digital inclusion in relation to the submission, a description of which recognised barriers this study is expected to address, backed up by local evidence as to why these have been chosen.
- A holistic solution to address the multi-faceted challenge, recognising the complex nature of the challenge. Solutions which address more than one barrier will be encouraged, e.g., access to devices, affordable connectivity, skills, and support. Consortium applications are encouraged.
- Evidence of potential impact to reduce digital exclusion, particularly among deprived communities by addressing one or more of the recognised barriers.
- A definition of the geographical area the study will cover, with evidence as to why this has been chosen, and proof that this may potentially be scaled up in the future to cover the wider Tees Valley area.
- Proof of sustainability beyond the initial project funding.
- A practical pilot as part of the study.
- An evaluation of the impact of the study and practical pilot.

TVCA has been designated as a lead authority by the UK Government. As a lead authority, TVCA is responsible for:

- management of the funds
- issuing this invitation
- receiving bids
- assessment of bids

- paying grants to successful projects and managing their performance

Full details of the role of lead authorities can be found in the UKSPF Prospectus.

Indicative Timeline

Call Opens	2 nd March 2023
Call Closes	31 st March 2023
TVCA assessment of bids	14 th April 2023
Recommendations to Local Partnership Group	17 th April 2023
TVCA funding decision (in accordance with TVCA Assurance Framework)	21 st April 2023
Applicants notified	24 th April 2023
Project financial completion	31 st March 2024

Who can apply?

Legally constituted organisations that can receive public funds can apply for UK Shared Prosperity Funds. Individuals cannot apply.

Project applicants could include, but are not limited to: private, charitable, voluntary, and community sector organisations/consortiums, universities, colleges, and local authorities.

What type of bids are we looking for?

Projects must deliver activity that is in line with the Tees Valley UKSPF Investment Plan and align with the Communities and Place – E14: Digital Inclusion Feasibility investment priority.

The majority of funding available through the UKSPF is revenue funding, therefore projects should be predominantly revenue based.

We are seeking to contract with one lead organisation for the full value of the call (£500k). Consortium bids are encouraged in order to address the complex nature of the Digital Inclusion challenge. Consortium members should be named within the application and the lead organisation clearly identified.

Bids that deliver across priority areas identified in the Tees Valley UKSPF Investment Plan are encouraged.

Match funding is not mandatory however applicants are encouraged to explore their options in terms of the provision of match funding as this will increase value for money and impact of the Fund.

All projects must be financially complete by 31st March 2024

Payment Terms

Payments to applicants/delivery bodies will be quarterly in arrears following submission of a grant claim to TVCA.

Local Priorities

In ranking/selecting the bids, TVCA will prioritise those that have the greatest potential to deliver against the [Tees Valley Digital Strategy](#) ambition:

“By 2032, we will be the UK's first truly Smart Region – using world-leading digital infrastructure and innovation to create opportunities for all residents and businesses”

To realise this ambition along with our ambitions for Communities and Place, it is important to ensure that Tees Valley residents are not left behind through digital exclusion, and that the benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available to everyone.

Geographic Coverage

Activity can be undertaken in the following areas:

- Darlington
- Hartlepool
- Middlesbrough
- Redcar and Cleveland
- Stockton-on-Tees

Applicants are encouraged to develop submissions which can be scaled to a regional Tees Valley delivery.

How Bids Will be Assessed

As the lead authority TVCA will manage the funds and assess all bids in accordance with the [Assurance Framework](#). Bids will be assessed against:

- the gateway criteria e.g., eligibility of applicant to apply, eligible activity etc – bids that fail to meet these criteria are ineligible support and will be rejected.
- the extent to which they meet the objectives of UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the relevant investment priority.
- the extent to which bids would support the delivery of local priorities identified in the Tees Valley UKSPF Investment Plan.

Scoring Criteria can be accessed [here](#).

TVCA will enter into a formal funding agreement with successful bidders.

TVCA Separation of Duties Policy

Where TVCA staff provide support during the development of a proposal there will be a formal Separation of Duties policy in place and those staff members will have no involvement in the assessment process.

Submitting a Bid

Bids must be submitted using the TVCA UKSPF Investment Proposal Form, which is available [here](#). Bids submitted in any other format will not be accepted. The assessment of bids will be based on information provided in the Investment Proposal Form only. Please do not attach appendices or include links to websites.

Bids must be submitted to TVCA using this email address:
UKSPFsubmissions@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk

Bids must be submitted by **31st March 2023**.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a competitive process and TVCA will not enter into discussions with bidders.

Due Diligence

In order to ensure that projects can move forward quickly Lead Authorities must undertake due diligence on private sector, charitable and voluntary organisation applicants during the assessment of applications and be satisfied that the applicant is genuine, and has the financial standing and sufficient capacity to deliver the proposed activity.

By submitting a bid, applicants are providing authorisation for TVCA to carry out this due diligence in the form of a credit check.

Monitoring and Evaluation

All proposals will be required to set out how and when monitoring and evaluation will be carried out and if successful they will be required to develop a full Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Project performance will be monitored against agreed targets and milestones.

Annex A – Core Output/Outcome Indicators

The outputs and outcomes linked to E14 as listed in the [UKSPF Interventions, Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs – England](#) are:

- Indicative output – **Number of feasibility studies supported.** We would expect this funding to support one feasibility study into digital inclusion in Tees Valley.
- Indicative outcomes – **Increased number of projects arising from funded feasibility studies.** This funding is expected to increase the number of digital inclusion projects in the Tees Valley.

In addition, we would expect the Digital Inclusion Feasibility study to have the following outcomes:

- A positive impact on digital inclusion in Tees Valley
- Decrease the number of Tees Valley residents digitally excluded
- Show a measure of commercial sustainability beyond the initial project funding
- Show possible scalability to cover the wider Tees Valley area if it doesn't already.