

Building Improvement Grants (BIG): Guidance for Applicants

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Programme overview

Benefact Trust's Building Improvement Grants programme provides essential support to protect and enhance Christian church and charity buildings, ensuring their continued use and the safeguarding of their heritage.

The programme is open to applications from churches, cathedrals, denominational bodies and Christian charities based in the UK or Ireland.

Under Building Improvement Grants, we can support direct capital costs relating to the following types of work:

- Essential, one-off repairs or other capital works to ensure the continued use or viability of a building
- Works or equipment to improve disabled access or meet operational requirements (e.g. essential operational equipment, AV equipment, hearing loops, ramps/handrails, lifts etc)
- Conservation or restoration of historic features (e.g. stained glass, carvings, interior furnishings, clocks, tower bells, organs etc) which contribute to preservation and appreciation of a building's heritage
- Energy efficiency/renewable energy measures (e.g. heating/lighting upgrades, solar panels, etc) which improve the sustainability of church buildings/facilities and enable their continued use
- Aesthetic enhancements (e.g. interior decoration/furnishings or public realm improvements) to improve indoor or outdoor spaces for users

We cannot fund regular maintenance and works normally covered by insurance under this programme.

Please refer to our [Community Impact Grants programme](#) if your project is focused on delivering wider community impact rather than undertaking essential building improvements.

Who can apply

The Building Improvement Grants programme is open to applications from churches, cathedrals, denominational bodies and Christian charities based in the UK or Ireland. Educational institutions, such as schools and theological institutions, are not eligible to apply under this programme, but they may apply to [Community Impact Grants](#) under Objective 4: Schools and educational institutions.

Please note that we are only able to provide funding to organisations which are registered as charities in the UK or Ireland (unless the organisation applying has 'exempt' status, which is restricted to churches).

What we can fund

We can support a range of capital costs which are aligned with one or more of the following areas of work:

- Essential, one-off repairs or other capital works to ensure the continued use or viability of a building
- Works or equipment to improve disabled access or meet operational requirements (e.g. essential operational equipment, AV equipment, hearing loops, ramps/handrails, lifts etc)

- Conservation or restoration of historic features (e.g. stained glass, carvings, interior furnishings, clocks, tower bells, organs etc) which contribute to preservation and appreciation of a building's heritage
- Energy efficiency/renewable energy measures (e.g. heating/lighting upgrades, solar panels, etc)* which improve the sustainability of church buildings/facilities and enable their continued use
- Aesthetic enhancements (e.g. interior decoration/furnishings or public realm improvements) to improve indoor or outdoor spaces for users

We cannot fund regular maintenance and works normally covered by insurance under this programme. Revenue costs are also not eligible for funding under this programme.

We do not normally make retrospective grants for projects or work already undertaken. If you are planning to apply for a project that has already started, please contact us first for a discussion.

*Notes for energy efficiency proposals:

- If you are planning to apply for funding for energy efficiency works (e.g. heating/lighting upgrades, solar panels, etc), you are advised to check your plans with your insurance company first.
- Our application form will ask what advice you have received to inform your energy efficiency proposals. This may be in the form of an 'eco audit', other professional/denominational advice or research you have undertaken.

For more detailed guidance on cost eligibility, see our [Cost Eligibility Guidance](#) in the Appendix.

How often can I apply?

Once you have received funding for a project under the Building Improvement Grants programme, you cannot make another application to the same programme for a period of two years after receiving your grant payment. If you have previously received funding under our General Grants programme, you will also need to wait two years before making an application under Building Improvement Grants.

You may make an application to one of our other grant programmes during this time, as long as the application relates to a different project (we cannot fund the same project under more than one programme).

How much can I apply for?

When completing your application, you will be asked to present the total costs of your project and details of the other funding you have secured, rather than requesting a specific grant amount.

If your project fits the programme criteria, the size of your grant will be calculated by our Grants Officers based on your total project costs and our assessment criteria. We will also take into account deprivation levels where your project is taking place and may apply a deprivation uplift when determining the size of your grant.

We receive a high volume of applications for Building Improvement Grants, and the Trust aims to support as many projects as possible. Grants sizes can range from £750 to £100,000 and are typically a small contribution to the overall project costs. In 2023, a total of 644 Building Improvement grants were given. The average grant size for projects with total costs up to £1m was £3,300. The average grant size for projects with total costs over £1m was £46,000.

Other funding

All applicants will be expected to have secured funding for at least 30% of their total project costs before making an application (it is not possible to submit an application form until this level of funding has been secured). We receive a large number of applications, and this policy helps to ensure that we prioritise our support for projects that are likely to go ahead. Applicants should also have a clear plan for how the remainder of the other funding for the project will be secured (i.e. it should not be assumed that Benefact Trust will cover the entire funding shortfall).

How to apply

Please ensure that you have read this guidance document in full before starting your application form. You may also want to refer to the guidance when you are completing your application form and Project Budget template.

Building Improvement Grants is a rolling programme which is open for applications throughout the year. To make an application, you will need to register on our online application portal and complete this [online application form](#). You will also need to complete a [Project Budget template](#) and submit this with your application.

Once your application has been successfully submitted, you will receive a confirmation email.

If you are not sure which of our grant programmes is right for your project, please contact us for a discussion.

When will I find out if my application has been successful?

We aim to communicate decisions as soon as possible. The average decision time for small grants (up to £10k) is two months. Larger grants (over £10k) take between four and six months because these are considered at Grants Committee and Board meetings which are held throughout the year.

If you are awarded a grant

Please note that all grants awarded by Benefact Trust are subject to our [Standard Grant Terms and Conditions](#). For all grant beneficiaries, this includes a requirement to complete a brief Impact Survey at the end of your project to help us understand and evaluate the impact of our funding.

In most cases, your grant will be paid upfront shortly after your grant has been approved. However, your Grants Officer may discuss alternative payment arrangements with you if appropriate.

For all grant payments, you will be sent a receipt with your payment, which you will need to sign and return to us.

The Trust publishes details of all grants awarded in its Annual Report and Accounts. In addition, the Trust publicises details of various grants on our website, social media and through other publicity material. Our communications team may contact you directly to discuss publicity of your grant.

Your grant should, where possible, be publicised by your organisation (e.g. through social media, on websites or newsletters). There are a range of resources to support you with publicity on our website.

Appendix: Building Improvement Grants Cost Eligibility Guidance

Please read this guidance when you are completing your Project Budget template.

The table below will help you to understand the types of costs which are likely to be eligible for funding under the Building Improvement Grants Programme.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and Benefact Trust reserves the right to decide whether costs are eligible for funding. If you have a question regarding cost eligibility, please contact us at info@benefacttrust.co.uk.

Cost	Eligible	Ineligible
Revenue		
Any revenue costs (e.g. staff costs, training, overheads and costs for other activities)	None	All
Capital		
Building Repair work	Essential, one-off repairs to ensure the continued use or viability of a building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular maintenance Works normally eligible for cover under insurance
Conservation or restoration of historic features	Conservation or restoration of historic features (e.g. stained glass, carvings, interior furnishings, clocks, tower bells, organs, etc) which contribute to the preservation and appreciation of a building's heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular maintenance Work that is not clearly connected to the aim of preserving and promoting a building's heritage Works normally eligible for cover under insurance
Other capital work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works to meet operational requirements Works to improve accessibility (e.g. installation of ramps, handrails, stairlift) Aesthetic enhancements (e.g. decoration, furniture or public realm improvements) Energy efficiency/renewable energy measures (e.g. heating/lighting upgrades, solar panels, etc) 	Organisations undertaking capital works with clear community impact (e.g. new/more accessible facilities for community use or to grow congregations) should refer to our Community Impact Grants programme .
Equipment purchases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment to meet essential operational requirements (e.g. essential vehicles, kitchen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phones for staff or volunteers Equipment which is not considered essential for the building's operation.

	<p>equipment, gardening equipment, etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment to meet accessibility requirements (e.g. AV equipment, hearing loops, reasonable quantities of essential IT equipment to remain in situ after the project) 	
Professional fees	An appropriate level of fees for accredited professionals (e.g. architect, building surveyor, engineer) which are directly related to the design or delivery of eligible capital work.	Fees which are not for appropriately accredited individuals or not directly related to eligible capital works.