

Open and Trusting for Public Agencies

Expression of Interest – September 2026

Overview

IVAR invites public agencies to submit an Expression of Interest for free support to explore Open and Trusting approaches to grant-making. Public agencies across the UK are increasingly looking for ways to work more collaboratively with communities, share power and build trust-based relationships. Grant-making is one of the most practical places to start.

Open and Trusting is about making funding more straightforward, transparent, flexible and responsive, so that funding relationships are rooted in trust and shared purpose.

IVAR is aiming to work with a small cohort of public agencies from across the UK from this Autumn to capture learning and develop practical examples of what Open and Trusting can look like in public agency settings.

We are offering a free one-off workshop to up to six public agencies that distribute grants to voluntary and community organisations and want to reflect on current practice, test practical changes and strengthen relationships with communities. Whether you are just starting to think about how your funding practices could be more relational, or you already have changes underway, we'd like to hear from you.

For those who participate in the one-off workshop and want to go deeper, we will deliver a more in-depth programme of support to test and embed Open and Trusting approaches in practice.

About Open and Trusting grant-making for public agencies

How public agencies fund communities says a great deal about the kind of relationship they want to have with them. Funding can feel transactional, risk-focused, and burdensome, or it can help build trust, strengthen relationships, and support communities in doing their best work. Open and Trusting is a practical framework for making the latter possible.

Built with charities and grounded in eight grant-making commitments¹, Open and Trusting helps funders create funding processes that are more straightforward, transparent, flexible and responsive. At its heart is a simple belief: communities are experts in their own lives and places and should be treated as partners, not just applicants.

[Nearly 200 independent trusts and foundations have already committed to working in this way.](#)

As public services increasingly look to work in more relational, place-based and community-led ways, grant-making is a practical place to start. Funding decisions involve trust, accountability, power and relationships. By applying Open and Trusting to grant-making, public agencies can test new ways of working, build stronger relationships with communities, explore what relational public services look like in practice and generate

¹ See our guide for public agencies: [202508_OT-in-Public-Agencies_Guide_v1.pdf](#)

practical learning that can influence wider community and organisational change. Read more about this on [our blog here](#).

About the programme

Through this programme, we hope to work alongside public agencies to explore how the Open and Trusting commitments can help turn ambitions around relational, place-based and community-led public services into practical action.

The programme has two stages: a workshop for up to six public agencies from across the UK, followed by more in-depth support for up to three.

Stage 1: One-off workshop offer (up to six public agencies)

Six public agencies will be invited to take part in a facilitated workshop with IVAR. The workshop will:

- Introduce the Open and Trusting commitments and how they relate to public agency grant-making.
- Help participants reflect on their current funding processes and relationships with communities.
- Identify practical opportunities for change within existing grants programmes, funds or teams.
- Develop a set of realistic actions that participants can take forward within their sphere of influence.

The workshop is designed as a practical, supportive space to explore ideas, share challenges and identify where change may be possible.

Stage 2: In-depth support offer (up to three public agencies)

Following the workshops, up to three public agencies will be invited to continue into a more in-depth programme of support. Selection will be based on how actively each public agency engages with the initial workshop and the extent to which further support could help them embed Open and Trusting approaches in their grant-making practice. Together, we will support teams to identify a grant, programme, process or partnership where Open and Trusting approaches can be tested, adapted and embedded in practice. This will involve working with IVAR over a period of approximately six months to:

- Apply Open and Trusting commitments to a real grant, process or team.
- Test and implement practical changes.
- Capture learning and evidence of what has changed.
- Build confidence, capability and momentum for longer-term change.

Who can apply?

We welcome expressions of interest from public agencies that distribute grants to voluntary and community organisations, including local authorities, NHS organisations, Integrated Care Boards and other statutory bodies with grant-making responsibilities.

We encourage applications from organisations at all stages of their journey. What matters most is a willingness to learn, adapt and identify practical opportunities for change.

Selection considerations

We want to work with a range of public agencies and do not expect organisations to have already implemented Open and Trusting approaches, though we are keen to hear about

your grant-making journey to date. We are also interested in building a cohort that reflects different places, types of public agencies and starting points.

In reviewing EOIs, we will consider:

- The change you are hoping to make through your grant-making.
- Your readiness to explore and test new approaches.
- Whether there is sufficient organisational support for the work, including a named lead, clear senior sponsorship, and the time commitment available to attend the sessions. We anticipate that the named lead will need to commit approximately one day for workshop preparation and participation, alongside some additional time to coordinate internally and support follow-up activity.
- Whether relevant colleagues are able to participate in the workshop and any follow-up activity.
- The potential for learning from the work to influence future practice and other public agencies.
- We are not looking for organisations that have already adopted Open and Trusting approaches. We are particularly interested in organisations that are curious, willing to reflect on current practice and open to testing new ways of working.

Timeline

Activity	Timing
Expression of Interest opens	2 nd September 2026
Optional one-to-one conversations	9 th September to 7 th October 2026
Webinar to learn more about the programme	28 th September 2026
EOI deadline	9 th October 2026
Selection and workshop planning	15 th October – early November 2026
Outcome of EOI applications received	30 th October
One-off workshop delivery	November 2026 – March 2027
Selection for in-depth support	Following completion of workshops in March 2027

Want to know more?

Join our introductory webinar on 28 September 2026 (11am–12pm) to hear more about Open and Trusting for Public Agencies, the support available, and examples of how public agencies are already beginning to work in this way. The session will include time for questions and discussion.

[Register for Open and Trusting comes to the Public Sector](#)

Want to talk it through first?

We recognise that every public agency operates within a different context and set of constraints. If you would like to discuss the programme before submitting an Expression of Interest, we would be happy to book in an informal conversation. This is an opportunity to explore whether it is right for your organisation and ask any questions you may have.

To book a conversation, please contact: Sonakshi@ivar.org.uk

EOI: Questions

Please respond to the following three questions. We are not looking for perfect answers or organisations that already have everything in place. The questions below are intended to help us understand your context, your ambitions or what you would like to change, and what support might be most useful. There is no formal word limit, but we suggest keeping responses to around 2–3 paragraphs per question.

1. What changes are you hoping to make through your grant-making?

Please tell us:

- *What would you like to change in your current grant-making approach, processes or relationships?*
- *Why does this change matter?*
- *How do you hope the change could benefit communities, voluntary organisations or colleagues?*

2. Who would be involved in this work and who would be accountable for it?

Please tell us:

- *Which teams, roles or functions would be involved?*
- *Who would act as the main point of contact?*
- *Who would provide senior sponsorship, help champion the work internally and support implementation?*

3. What would you most like to achieve through Open and Trusting? You may find it helpful to refer to the Open and Trusting commitments and accompanying guidance² when answering this question.

Please tell us:

- *Which aspects of Open and Trusting already feel familiar or established in your organisation?*
- *Where do you think there is the greatest opportunity for further development?*
- *What challenges or barriers might you need support to address?*

Your answers to this question will not be used as part of the selection process; they are simply a way of helping us understand your starting point and where you would most like support.

Please submit your completed Expression of Interest as a Word document or PDF by Thursday, 9th October 2026 to Lara@ivar.org.uk. We will let you know the outcome by Friday, 30th October 2026.

We look forward to hearing from you and learning more about your experiences, ambitions and ideas for creating more open and trusting approaches to grant-making.

² See our guide for public agencies: [202508 OT-in-Public-Agencies Guide v1.pdf](#)