

Community-driven enterprise and regeneration review: Invitation to tender

1. Summary

We are looking to work with an external consultant from November 2026 to February 2027 to carry out a review to inform our work on our “community-driven enterprise and regeneration” priority. We estimate the work will take no more than 35 days, and have a budget of around £28,000 including VAT. We’re looking for an organisation or pair/group of consultants with experience in evaluation and research, who are adept at facilitating conversations where a range of views will be expressed, comfortable working with varied sources of information, and can summarise their findings clearly and simply. **Deep knowledge of community asset ownership (land, buildings, energy), community enterprise, and community wealth building is essential.**

If you are available to commit to this, beginning in November 2026, please send a CV (including day rates) and links to your work to communications@esmeefairbairn.org.uk by 5pm on Monday 26 October 2026.

2. Background and context

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation’s strategy was launched in October 2020 and is due to run until the end of 2027. We want to understand what progress our work and funding has made so far, where we are best placed to help drive impact, and whether any shifts in focus or activities could achieve stronger impact.

Esmée’s community-driven enterprise and regeneration priority

We believe local economies work better when local people have a stronger stake in how they operate. Models of economic development which are led by or owned by the community are more responsive to local needs, build resilience and positively contribute to economic equity, nature recovery and social inclusion in a place.

We are currently working towards three long-term outcomes within this priority:

1. An increase in community owned assets and community wealth-building models drives greater reinvestment in local economies, reducing economic inequality.
2. Community-led enterprises are a proven and widely adopted model that underpin fairer local economies.
3. Community-led approaches to the local economy positively contribute to nature and climate

The Community-driven enterprise and regeneration (CDER) priority sits within the Creative Confident Communities (CCC) strategic aim. From 2020 to 2024, CDER had the fewest number of grants in its portfolio across the whole Foundation. Over the last two and a half years, we have been proactively building the portfolio and now have 30 grants under the scope of this review. We have been intentionally funding at two scales: (1) the leading local community organisations in places across the UK who are taking on assets, supporting local social enterprises etc; and (2) the national/regional infrastructure that supports capacity building and policy advocacy in order to build the conditions for wider systems change. We do not grant fund capital costs. We support organisations and partnerships working to develop programmes, engage communities, improve use of data and evidence, advocate for

better policy, undertake public campaigns, and explore ways of leveraging new models of influencing investment and finance. Much of our grant funding goes to support the core costs of an organisation, rather than project focused work.

Below are links to key information on our website about the CCC strategic aim and the CDER priority:

- [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's strategy](#)
- [Community-driven enterprise and regeneration priority](#)
- [Further guidance on our CDER long-term outcomes](#)

Esmée's Social Investment is an important additional tool within our CDER priority and forms part of our wider spectrum of capital approach. Social investment provides greater flexibility in the types of capital and support we can offer, including debt, equity and blended finance, as well as the ability to support organisations with cash-flow financing and capital projects. It is therefore important that this review considers how social investment can complement our grant making approach and how the different forms of capital can work together most effectively to contribute to the CDER outcomes.

- [Social Investment in communities strategy](#)

3. Review questions

This review sits within a wider internal strategic review process taking place across the whole of the Esmée strategy, as well as detailed strategic work we have been undertaking specifically for Creative, Confident Communities. This review needs to fit as part of these, and the successful candidate will receive detail on this work at kick-off.

Within this context, our key review questions for this work are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Sector context | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A brief high-level overview of the wider context and need for our support. Specifically, how has the external context (policy, practice, funding) for this work shifted since 2020?2. What are the biggest opportunities and challenges facing the sector today and likely to emerge in the future? |
| Impact of our approach | <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. What difference is our funding making for organisations and within this sector?4. Would a stronger focus on a particular aspect/activity/issue within this sector help to achieve more? |
| How we fund and the structure of the strategy going forwards | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Are the three outcome areas the right ones for what we are trying to achieve?6. A critical review of how we are funding:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What is funding at the two different scales (leading local organisations and national/regional infrastructure) enabling?b. What type of funding drives the greatest impact in this sector (i.e. grant, social investment, blended finance, delegated grant funding, capital funding, revenue funding, unrestricted funding etc)?c. How should we be working alongside peer funders in this sector (e.g. philanthropy, social investors, government, wider public sector, private sector, high net worth individuals etc)? What are others doing well and where are the gaps that Esmée can/should be filling? |

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|
| | 7. | What are the opportunities to strengthen our cross-cutting commitments to Climate and DEI within this priority? |
| Evidencing change | 8. | How is change and impact best evidenced in this sector? |
| | 9. | Building on this, how should we be tracking/capturing the impact our grantees our making, and how do we understand this at a portfolio level? |

The purpose of this review is to develop practical recommendations to help inform our strategic decision-making going forwards. It is not just a backward-looking exercise. We would like the final output to give clear recommendations on where we should focus future CDER funding, what funding approaches we should use, and how grantmaking and social investment should work better together.

4. Audience

The main audience is our staff and trustees. We may also want to share the review with the organisations we fund, and the wider sector, so they are an important secondary audience.

5. Method and approach

We want this review to bring external challenge and perspective, a) by working with an independent consultant/organisation and b) by going beyond the organisations we support to get the thoughts of people who share our goals but may have different views of how to get there.

The review will involve:

- **Desk research:** this should cover the wider context and landscape and how this has evolved since 2020. Key themes will be agreed. We would expect desk research to be no more than c.15% of the consultant's time.
- **A review of key learning** from Esmée's funding (both grants and social investments).
- **Interviews or group discussions** with key stakeholders including Esmée staff, funded organisations, partner organisations in the sector, peer funders, and public bodies.
- **A validation workshop** to test initial findings with a smaller group of stakeholders, and Esmée.
- **Report writing and editing.**

6. Esmée's role

The review will be managed by Rosa Sulley (Lead Funding Manager in CCC who leads the CDER portfolio) and Penny Nkrumah (Learning Manager), with support and involvement of other colleagues. The communications and learning team at Esmée will provide mid- and end-of- grant learning from grants and social investments, along with funding recommendation documents and progress reports, where useful. We will identify the key stakeholders as part of the project inception process, make introductions, and help with setting up meetings.

We will hold a kick-off meeting with relevant Esmée staff. We would like to review the findings after the initial writing stage, giving time for edits. We will share the report internally, and we will work with our designers to prepare a version for publication if appropriate. If there are substantial edits needed for an external audience, we would agree this with the consultant as an additional cost to this contract.

7. Deliverables and budget

We estimate the work will take no more than 35 days, and our budget is around £28,000 including VAT. Deliverables:

1. Report for our staff and trustees with specific recommendations to inform our future work (max 20 pages)
2. An executive summary giving key learning points for Trustees and the wider sector (2-4 pages of A4)
3. Anonymised notes from interviews, and other relevant useful research shared in rough form.

8. Suggested timetable

The exact plan can be agreed at kick off, but ideally we need a draft report by 5 February 2027 with the aim to finalise by mid-February 2027.

6 October	Invitation to Tender published
Monday 26 October 5pm	Deadline for responses
w/c 2 November	Interviews & Reviewer appointed
Monday 9 November	Kick off meeting and document sharing
November	Desk research/document review
December/January	Interviews/workshops
January	Report writing
5 February 2027	Draft submitted for review by Esmée
19 February 2027	Final report due

9. Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

As Esmée wants to learn as much as possible from the interviews or group discussions with stakeholders, we will need to agree a suitable format so that interviewees can respond honestly (e.g. Chatham House Rules), but so Esmée can fully understand the detail of progress being made. We would discuss this at the kick-off meeting.

If you have any involvement in any work funded by Esmée, let us know so that we can think about how any conflicts of interest can be managed.

10. Registering your interest

If you are available for this project from November 2026 to February 2027, please email us:

- A short note of **no more than 2 A4 pages** outlining your relevant experience for the work, links to examples of your work and a budget breakdown with staff day rates. Please include your reflections on how you would approach the brief.
- In addition, please also attach short and relevant CVs of the individuals who will be undertaking the work, their day rates and any potential conflicts of interest.
- Contact details for the main contact.
- Please send these to communications@esmeefairbairn.org.uk by 5pm on Monday 26 October.