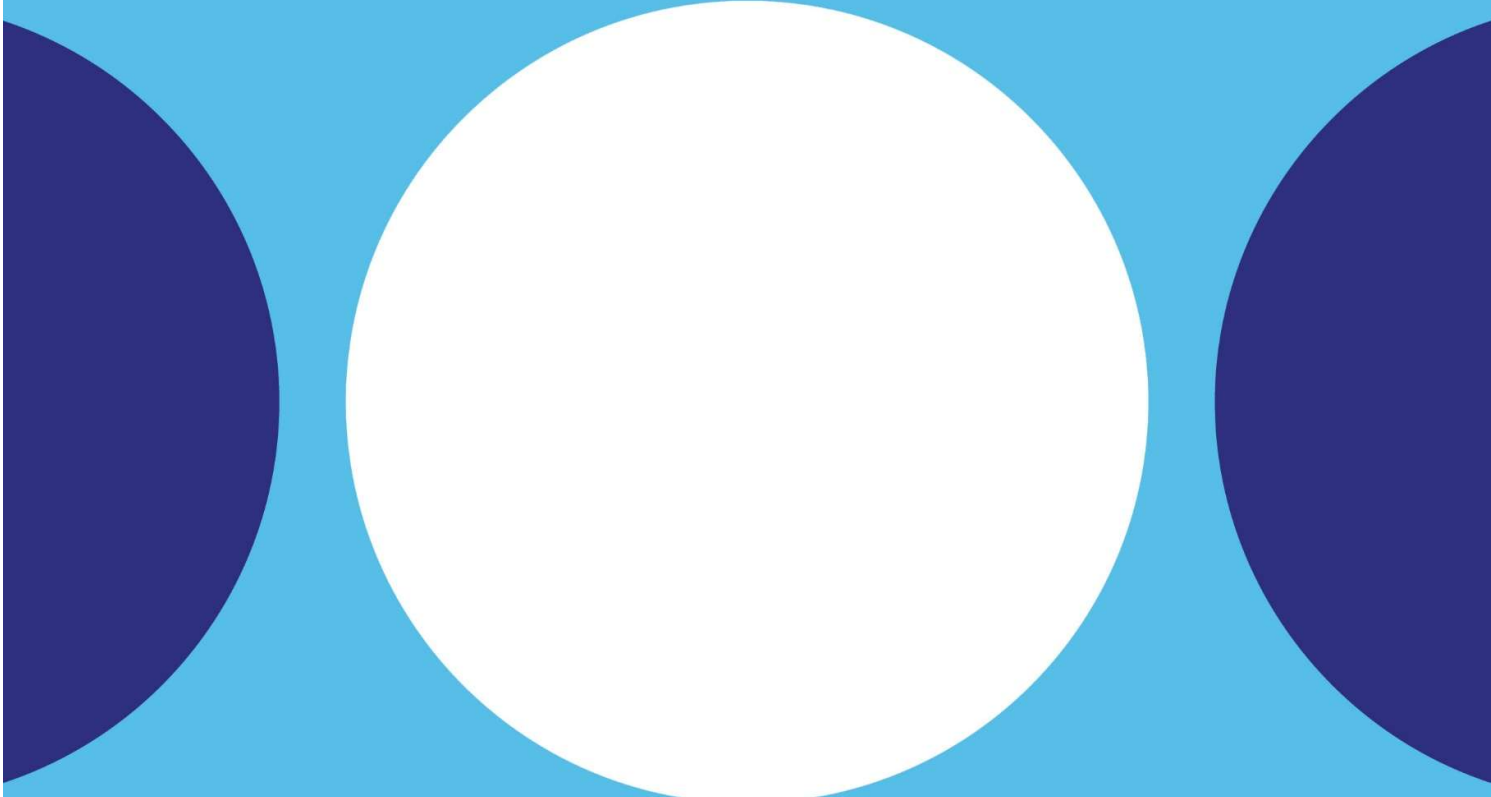


Helping local government
build stronger communities.



LGA Submission – Inclusive Communities Fund

31 August 2026

Introduction

About LGA South Australia

LGA South Australia (LGA) is the voice of local government in South Australia, representing all 68 councils across the state and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara.

Recognized under the *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)* as a public authority, LGA exists to promote and advance the interests of local government. It also has prescribed functions under 29 other South Australian Acts of Parliament, reflecting its important role within South Australia's broader system of government.

LGA provides leadership, support, representation and advocacy relevant to strengthen the capacity of councils and help them deliver for their communities.

As a trusted voice for the sector, LGA advocates for policies and partnerships that enable better outcomes for councils and the communities they serve. Local government is a vital partner in government and an essential part of the solution to the challenges facing South Australia.

By working together, across local government, state and federal government and with our communities, we can create stronger, healthier and more connected communities and make a meaningful contribution to the wellbeing of South Australians.

Acknowledgement

LGA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout South Australia and pays its respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and the rich contribution that First Nations people continue to make to our society. LGA operates on Kurna land and our work extends across many First Nations communities within South Australia.

We acknowledge that local government can learn from the deep feelings of attachment that First Nations people have to country and respect this relationship in the delivery of services to communities.

LGA is committed to strengthening connections between First Nations people, councils and the broader community as the peak body for local government in South Australia.

LGA Policy

LGA has worked with our member councils to adopt policy positions, based on robust research and evidence base, to recognise their roles and identify how local government can be an important partner in government.

Policy Statement 3.4 – Community Services

Local government acknowledges that providing tailored support services for community groups with specific needs is key to creating equitable, cohesive communities, and that reinstatement, maintenance and increases in funding for these activities from federal and state government is vital to councils providing ongoing services.

Policy Statement 3.4.4 – National Disability Insurance Scheme

Local government recognises that the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) represents a major shift in the way that disability services are delivered and is concerned that new provisions may not be adequate. Local government shall continue to lobby federal/ state governments to ensure nobody 'falls through the gaps' as a result of these reforms.

Policy Statement 3.4.5 – Disability Inclusion Action Planning

Local government recognises the benefits of Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIP) and ensuring adequate provisions for those with a disability are put in place. Local government shall continue to lobby for adequate resources to carry out the new statutory services contained in the Disability Inclusion Act 2018.

Policy Statement 3.4.6 – Access and Inclusion

Local government recognises the imperative in ensuring all individuals can access community services and facilities to tackle issues contributing to social exclusion. Councils shall continue to explore and implement strategies through planning and community functions that promote access and inclusion for all individuals.

LGA Recommendations

1. That a dedicated local government funding stream be established to support place-based inclusion initiatives, build organisational capability, strengthen partnerships with disability-led organisations, and deliver lasting accessibility and inclusion outcomes across local communities.
2. That the Fund designers consider a dedicated amount of funding quarantined for regional, rural and remote areas to ensure equitable access and outcomes.

3. That the Fund support access to disability inclusion and universal design expertise, tools and resources, accessibility audits, co-design support and funding for infrastructure improvements.
4. That the Fund supports genuine, paid participation of people with disability and disability-led organisations in decision-making, while enabling regional collaboration, shared resources and communities of practice to build lasting inclusion capability across councils and community organisations
5. The Fund should support partnerships that are sustained, adequately resourced and centred on lived experience, with a strong focus on co-design, capability building, shared decision-making and long-term organisational change
6. That the Federal Government consider funding a program model, like the Victorian Building Inclusive Communities program and replicate it across all jurisdictions to:
 - ensure consistency in community capacity building and
 - support local government's ability to build the capability of community organisations through community development approaches (e.g. sporting clubs, arts groups), at the whole-of-community level to deliver disability inclusive and accessible services that complement and leverage other government initiatives.
7. That the Fund support practical, non-service delivery initiatives that improve accessibility and inclusion outcomes. Priority should be given to initiatives that build long-term capability, remove participation barriers, and create lasting community-wide inclusion. Examples include:
 - accessibility infrastructure and equipment, accessibility audits and expert advice, workforce and volunteer training, co-design and community engagement activities, community awareness programs, and small grants to help organisations implement accessibility improvements and inclusive practices
8. That the Fund supports approaches that embed accessibility and inclusion into council planning, policies, programs, service delivery and decision-making processes to ensure inclusive practices become part of everyday operations and are sustained beyond the funding period.
9. That the Fund provide flexible funding with simple, proportionate application and reporting requirements, clear assessment criteria, and support for regional collaboration and co-design. Furthermore, funding arrangements should minimise administrative burden, avoid mandatory co-contributions, and focus on long-term inclusion outcomes, capability building and sustainable organisational change.

Our Submission

LGA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Inclusive Communities Fund Consultation.

This submission responds to the key consultation questions outlined in the Discussion Paper and provides recommendations to support the successful implementation of the Inclusive Communities Fund (the Fund).

Specifically, the submission addresses:

1. What support, resources or changes would help organisations become more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities?
 - How could community organisations partner with disability-led organisations to achieve this?
2. What activities should the Fund support, given that it will not pay for service delivery?
 - For example, staff training, advice on how to make services more inclusive, or other accessibility changes.
3. What role could local governments play in supporting community inclusion?
4. What is the best way for community organisations to build meaningful and lasting inclusion?
 - How can we make sure the benefits of the Fund continue after the 3-year funding period ends?

Background

The Australian Government will invest \$200 million over three years to create the Inclusive Communities Fund which aims to give people with disability more opportunities to be involved in their communities.

The Fund will support participation in activities such as sports, arts, recreation, culture, and volunteering. This could include joining a sports club, theatre group, community garden, multicultural organisation, volunteer group, or other local community activities.

The Fund is intended to run for 3 years, from 2026–27 to 2028–29 and is expected to start by June 2027.

Feedback

What support, resources or changes would help organisations become more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities?

Dedicated funding stream

LGA would welcome the establishment of a **dedicated local government funding stream** within the Fund, recognising councils' unique role in driving disability inclusion and supporting the delivery of locally responsive initiatives over the three-year funding period.

A dedicated funding stream would enable councils to address accessibility barriers, strengthen organisational capability, and deliver sustainable, community-wide inclusion outcomes. Funding should be flexible and accessible to councils of all sizes, support meaningful co-design with people with disability, and encourage regional partnerships and collaboration to maximise impact.

State and territory local government associations, supported by ALGA and a national Community of Practice, could help coordinate implementation, share lessons and evidence, and provide the Commonwealth with a national picture of the Fund's impact.

Key benefits include:

- Improving the accessibility of community infrastructure, services and public spaces.
- Building council capability and embedding inclusion into long-term planning and Disability Access and Inclusion Plans.
- Strengthening regional coordination, community participation and partnerships with disability-led organisations.
- Supporting smaller organisations and communities that may have limited capacity to access funding directly.
- Addressing council resource, funding and expertise gaps.

Recognition for regional and rural areas

Member feedback emphasised that the Fund should be designed to ensure equitable access for regional, rural and remote communities by recognising the higher costs associated with travel, workforce constraints and access to specialist expertise. Councils suggested dedicated funding allocations or **assessment weighting** for these communities, alongside flexible, multi-year funding arrangements that enable long-term planning and delivery.

Feedback also highlighted the value of **regional partnerships**, shared resources and regional access and inclusion facilitator models to maximise impact across multiple communities. Members noted that application and reporting processes should be simple and proportionate, with additional support available for smaller organisations and councils.

There was strong support for funding approaches that **respond to local circumstances**, including the needs of high-growth areas, and for ensuring projects are co-designed with people with disability and disability-led organisations.

Supports, resources and changes

Members' feedback noted that to become more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities, councils and organisations need **practical expertise, dedicated inclusion resources, funded staff capacity, meaningful co-design mechanisms, and accessibility infrastructure improvements** to move from disability inclusion commitments to sustained, measurable outcomes.

This includes access to disability inclusion and universal design experts, accessibility audits and assessments, and tailored advice to identify and remove barriers across facilities, communications, events, websites and organisational processes.

Meaningful **involvement** of **people with disability** and **disability-led organisations** is critical. Support should enable co-design, participation in decision-making, advisory groups and planning processes, with appropriate remuneration for lived-experience expertise.

Funding for **accessibility infrastructure** and equipment is also important, including upgrades to community facilities, sensory spaces, accessible toilets, transport, recreation equipment and other physical improvements that increase the level of participation.

Place-based models, including shared resources, regional communities of practice, and funding models that allow resources and expertise to be shared across councils and community organisations, can further help organisations access expertise and build capacity more efficiently.

LGA recommendations

1. That a dedicated local government funding stream be established to support place-based inclusion initiatives, build organisational capability, strengthen partnerships with disability-led organisations, and deliver lasting accessibility and inclusion outcomes across local communities.
2. That the Fund designers consider a dedicated amount of funding quarantined for regional, rural and remote areas to ensure equitable access and outcomes.

3. That the Fund support access to disability inclusion and universal design expertise, tools and resources, accessibility audits, co-design support and funding for infrastructure improvements.
4. That the Fund supports genuine, paid participation of people with disability and disability-led organisations in decision-making, while enabling regional collaboration, shared resources and communities of practice to build lasting inclusion capability across councils and community organisations

How could community organisations partner with disability-led organisations to achieve this?

Member feedback highlighted that the most successful partnerships move beyond one-off consultation and focus on co-design, shared leadership and long-term collaboration. Embedding lived experience in planning, decision-making, service design and delivery helps ensure inclusion initiatives are practical, meaningful and sustainable.

The Fund should be sufficiently flexible to support different implementation approaches such as the examples listed below.

- **Co-design and advisory partnerships** - where people with disability and disability-led organisations are actively involved in planning, policy development and decision-making through advisory groups, reference groups and working groups. South Australian (SA) examples include the Onkaparinga Regional Disability Network, Community Disability Reference Groups, and other council advisory groups that inform council planning and policy development.
- **Capability-building partnerships** - where disability-led organisations provide training, mentoring and organisational development support. Member examples include:
 - City of Onkaparinga's partnership with JFA Purple Orange to strengthen disability inclusion knowledge and capability, and
 - the Sport4All model, where Inclusion Coaches with lived experience support councils, clubs and schools to improve inclusion practices.
- **Community participation and inclusion programs** - jointly delivered to increase social participation, recreation and community engagement. Member examples include:
 - Cycling Without Age, Abilities Unleashed events, inclusive community festivals and celebrations, and the Mount Barker Disability Expo.
- **Employment, volunteering and leadership pathways**, creating opportunities for people with disability to contribute as volunteers, leaders and advisors and examples include:

- Minda's partnership with the City of Marion to create volunteering pathways in community gardens, youth transition and skill-building initiatives, and mentoring opportunities that support people with disability to lead community initiatives.
- **Specialist inclusion partnerships**, focused on the needs of particular communities. Examples include:
 - the Onkaparinga Dementia Friendly Alliance and partnerships that have supported the development of dementia-friendly communities through collaboration with disability-led organisations.
- **Community events and awareness partnerships**, bringing together councils, disability organisations, service providers and community groups to promote inclusion and build community awareness. Examples include:
 - Mount Barker District Council's International Day of People with Disability celebrations, co-designed and co-funded with local disability service providers, community organisations and sporting bodies to host inclusive events such as the I CAN celebration and All Abilities AquaFest.
- **Arts, culture, sport and recreation partnerships**, using creative and recreational activities to foster inclusion and participation. Examples include:
 - the **EveryBody Dance project** involving Mount Barker District Council, Australian Dance Theatre and disability sector partners.
 - Inclusive sport and recreation initiatives delivered through programs such as **Sport4All**.

These examples demonstrate that the most effective partnerships recognise disability-led organisations as equal partners, appropriately value lived-experience expertise, and involve people with disability throughout the design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives. This approach helps build organisational capability, strengthens community connections and leads to more sustainable inclusion outcomes.

Another example of successful partnerships in practice was the Victorian **Building Inclusive Communities Program** which funded dedicated disability inclusion roles in councils for 17 years, demonstrated the value of place-based delivery, flexible funding and strong collaboration between state and local government and community organisations, providing a proven model for building local inclusion capability across Australia.¹ Unfortunately, the BIC program wound up following the rollout of the NDIS in Victoria.

¹ Inquiry into social inclusion and Victorians with disability - Submission S131, MetroAccess South Division: Bayside Peninsula & Southern Melbourne.

Helping local government build stronger communities.

Funded roles would enable access and inclusion officers to coordinate initiatives, build partnerships and drive long-term organisational change. Training, mentoring, toolkits and practical guidance are needed to strengthen staff and volunteer capability and build lasting inclusion practices.

LGA recommendations

5. The Fund should support partnerships that are sustained, adequately resourced and centred on lived experience, with a strong focus on co-design, capability building, shared decision-making and long-term organisational change
6. That the Federal Government consider funding a program model, like the Victorian Building Inclusive Communities program and replicate it across all jurisdictions to:
 - ensure consistency in community capacity building and
 - support local government's ability to build the capability of community organisations through community development approaches (e.g. sporting clubs, arts groups), at the whole-of-community level to deliver disability inclusive and accessible services that complement and leverage other government initiatives.

What activities should the Fund support, given that it will not pay for service delivery? For example, staff training, advice on how to make services more inclusive, or other accessibility changes.

Feedback from members highlighted **accessibility audits and reviews, staff capability development, guidance and toolkits and community awareness and education** as the key areas for the fund to support.

A range of initiatives were also identified that could deliver meaningful improvements in accessibility and inclusion beyond existing funding programs, including:

Accessibility infrastructure and equipment	Capacity building and workforce development	Accessibility reviews and expert advice
• Installation of accessible toilets, lifts, electric entry doors and changing facilities. • Purchase of shared accessibility resources such as off-road wheelchairs, beach wheelchairs, accessible matting, sensory equipment and transport vehicles for community use. • Development of accessible walking routes, upgraded footpaths, signage and inclusive play spaces.	• Employment of regional Community Inclusion Facilitators to support councils, community organisations and sporting clubs. • Disability inclusion training, mentoring and practical support for volunteers, event organisers, businesses and community organisations. • Establishment of local Inclusion Champion networks and communities of practice to share knowledge and good practice.	• Accessibility audits of council facilities, events, communications, websites and customer information. • Reviews of recruitment, volunteering and emergency management processes to improve participation and accessibility for people with disability. • Expert support to improve accessibility and inclusion at major community events and festivals.

Co-design and community engagement	Community inclusion programs and events	Grants and incentives for inclusion improvements
• Funding to involve people with lived experience of disability in planning, design and decision-making processes. • Partnerships with disability-led organisations, CALD communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify and address barriers to participation.	• Delivery of inclusive community events, such as accessible festivals and library-based social connection programs. • Initiatives that raise awareness of disability inclusion and strengthen connections between community organisations, businesses and people with disability	• Small grants for community organisations, sporting clubs and local businesses to implement accessibility improvements, accessible communications, inclusive registration processes and program modifications.

LGA Recommendation

7. That the Fund support practical, non-service delivery initiatives that improve accessibility and inclusion outcomes. Priority should be given to initiatives that build long-term capability, remove participation barriers, and create lasting community-wide inclusion.

Examples include:

- accessibility infrastructure and equipment, accessibility audits and expert advice, workforce and volunteer training, co-design and community engagement activities, community awareness programs, and small grants to help organisations implement accessibility improvements and inclusive practices.

What role could local governments play in supporting community inclusion?

Local government, as the level of government closest to the community, plays a critical role in shaping and delivering policies and programs, providing essential services and infrastructure and promoting inclusion and access for people with disability.

As a key partner in government, councils bring local knowledge, established community relationships and delivery capability that can enhance the impact of government investment. By working with local government, Federal funding can be leveraged further to deliver more responsible, effective and sustainable outcomes for communities.

The initiatives and activities which local governments undertake to support people with disability vary in scale and location but broadly include:

- Providing services directly to people with disability, their families and carers
 - Local governments play a critical role in providing services and often work in partnership with other organisations to deliver these services.
- Enabling or facilitating services and access to services and facilities
 - Local governments enable and facilitate services or access to services and facilities in a range of ways including through the provision of financial assistance and referrals to appropriate services.
- Advocating for services or support
 - Local governments play a key role as advocates, including raising awareness across communities and lobbying other levels of government or nongovernment organisations to establish specific policies, programs or grants.
- Employing people with disability
 - Local governments can be a key source of employment for local communities, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- Providing accessible services and infrastructure

- Local government integrates and embeds inclusiveness and accessibility into planning and development to ensure essential services, footpaths and facilities are accessible and can be used by people with disability.

Member feedback highlighted that local governments are well placed to support community inclusion. As managers of community facilities, public spaces and local services, councils can use the Fund to improve accessibility and inclusion across community assets while identifying local needs, connecting stakeholders and supporting partnerships with disability-led organisations.

The most frequently identified roles for councils were **coordinating local inclusion initiatives, facilitating co-design with people with disability, supporting local organisations**, and **providing community leadership and advocacy**. These functions position councils to drive sustainable, place-based inclusion outcomes and maximise the Fund's impact in local communities.

With the right resourcing, councils, could coordinate co-design processes, build community awareness, and support organisations to implement accessibility improvements and inclusive practices. Funding could also strengthen local capability through dedicated access and inclusion officers who provide training, mentoring and practical support, particularly for smaller organisations with limited capacity to access funding directly.

Councils can further support disability leadership through mentoring, skills development and co-design opportunities, while embedding inclusion into long-term planning and Disability Access and Inclusion Plans. This would help ensure lasting outcomes beyond the funding period.

What is the best way for community organisations to build meaningful and lasting inclusion?

Member feedback highlighted that councils could achieve meaningful and lasting inclusion outcomes by:

- **Embedding inclusion into core business** — making accessibility and inclusion part of everyday planning, decision-making and service delivery, rather than separate or one-off projects.
- **Genuine co-design and lived experience** — shifting from consultation to shared design with people with disability and disability-led organisations.
- **Capability building** — supporting mainstream organisations with training, mentoring, practical resources and guidance.

- **Whole-of-council approach** — applying inclusion across infrastructure, facilities, events, recreation, tourism, emergency management, communications and service delivery.
- **Universal design and strategic alignment** — using universal design and embedding inclusion into Disability Access and Inclusion Plans and other strategic frameworks.
- **Sustained, place-based investment** — using funded access and inclusion officers, formal co-design mechanisms, paid advisory roles and long-term partnerships to sustain outcomes beyond funding cycles.

How can we make sure the benefits of the Fund continue after the 3-year funding period ends?

LGA welcomes the longer-term nature of the Fund as the short-term nature of most funding is problematic for disability inclusion activities. Benefits are more likely to be sustained when the Fund supports lasting changes to how councils and community organisations operate, rather than funding activities that rely on ongoing grants.

Three-year funding would provide time to build partnerships, implement and evaluate initiatives, and embed successful approaches into policies, budgets, governance, workforce development, procurement, facilities, communications and planning processes. This would help ensure inclusion becomes part of everyday practice and continues beyond the funding period.

Key strategies for sustaining outcomes beyond the funding period include:

- embedding inclusion and universal design into organisational policies, planning and Disability Access and Inclusion Plans;
- building workforce capability through training and mentoring and knowledge-sharing initiatives;
- establishing long-term partnerships with disability-led organisations;
- developing practical resources and tools;
- investing in lasting accessibility infrastructure improvements; and
- supporting regional networks and communities of practice to promote ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing.

LGA recommendation

8. That the Fund supports approaches that embed accessibility and inclusion into council planning, policies, programs, service delivery and decision-making processes to ensure inclusive practices become part of everyday operations and are sustained beyond the funding period.

Grant Design, Administration and Reporting

Member feedback emphasised the need to reduce administrative burden and provide greater funding certainty. Key priorities included:

- multi-year funding,
- longer funding timeframes,
- clear assessment criteria, and
- simple application, reporting and acquittal processes.

Respondents also supported straightforward funding agreements and regional collaboration opportunities to improve accessibility and support effective delivery.

Feedback also highlighted the importance of avoiding complex and bureaucratic requirements, particularly for smaller, volunteer-led and regional organisations. Members called for plain English materials, flexible funding that responds to local needs, and sufficient time for partnership development and co-design.

Councils further recommended avoiding mandatory co-contributions, excessive or duplicated reporting, inflexible funding conditions, and an overreliance on quantitative performance measures. Instead, they supported proportionate, outcomes-focused reporting and assessment approaches that recognise long-term inclusion, capability building and systemic change.

There was also a strong view that the Fund should complement existing programs and support sustainable outcomes beyond one-off activities.

LGA Recommendation

9. That the Fund provide flexible funding with simple, proportionate application and reporting requirements, clear assessment criteria, and support for regional collaboration and co-design. Furthermore, funding arrangements should minimise administrative burden, avoid mandatory co-contributions, and focus on long-term inclusion outcomes, capability building and sustainable organisational change.

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