

UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES INNOVATION CHALLENGE SCHEME

A proposal for Consultation



DECEMBER 5, 2023

The Unitarian Innovation Scheme

Context

Over 80 members attended an EC workshop on 'Membership Sustainability' at the GA annual meeting in April 2023¹. While there was a great deal of anxiety and frustration about falling membership², attendees also discussed a range of positive themes and opportunities for rejuvenating their congregations and reversing the decline.

To rejuvenate the Unitarian movement in the UK into a sustainable and vital future, we must reinvigorate existing processes and build new capabilities. Collectively, we have a huge store of resources, but we are not currently using them to our best advantage.

The EC is proposing a mechanism to harness our collective reserves of skills and money to enable congregations to take action in pursuit of innovative opportunities for growth and rejuvenation.

This is not about growth for its own sake, but because we have a valuable message to offer to people: a new way of 'doing religion' that builds on a proud and historic tradition of rationalism, radicalism, truth and liberty. We live in a world that is bruised and aching, where rationalism, fairness and truth are under threat from different directions. Today's Unitarians have a duty as carriers of the Unitarian flame to honour our ancestors and keep our flame of free faith alive for future generations.

The Unitarian Innovation Scheme

The EC is proposing to designate a Unitarian Innovation Scheme using £1.5m of the GA's own funds to 'match' funds from other sources. (see Schedule A)

The fund aims to secure the future of the Unitarian movement and achieve an increase in the number of sustainable congregations measured by activity and engagement with their communities, financial health and learning between congregations.

Why now?

To quote a Minister: "Where will your beloved congregation be in the next ten years? If you want to survive and if you care about Unitarianism surviving for future generations it's essential to act now. The time for piecemeal reform and Keith Gilley's 'gentle transitions' is past".

¹ Notes from EC workshop at the annual meetings 2023 on membership sustainability

². 2,842 in 2019, 2,536 in 2022, an average annual decline of 110 members or 4% per year. At this rate of attrition membership will have fallen by over 40% to 1,830 from 2019 to 2030 with many of today's 104 smaller congregations of less than 20 (63% out of the current total of 148) becoming non-viable and facing closure or merger.

A Grant Scheme

Congregations will be able to apply to the fund for grants to <u>invest in people</u> – that is, to employ or contract with people who can help them innovate in the way they develop, communicate and deliver an engaging and rewarding spiritual and social experience for current and new members. Ideally, two or more congregations will collaborate in a joint project, maybe with robust and thriving congregations supporting and encouraging emerging congregations.

For example, a group of Congregations could apply for funds to recruit a new full time Minister who has innovative plans for developing local Ministry to reach beyond the current membership. Or the scheme could pay for a full-time administrator for several Congregations, with the aim of improving revenue by innovative use of buildings, assisting the Trustees with accounting and day to day financial management, and freeing up time for Ministers or other leaders to increase community engagement.

Or maybe a group of Congregations wants to commission advice on developing a clear and innovative "Welcome" message, provide training for volunteers and enhance communication with the broader community, including paying for various events to focus engagement with existing and potential new members.

These are just suggestions, not prescriptions. The scheme is open to all ideas for building capabilities for growing our movement, encouraging learning and reflection, and recognising that healthy church activity will activate new possibilities.

However, the scheme will not fund building work or other kinds of regular outgoings only serving the existing membership of a congregation. By funding the right kind of people to build vibrant congregations, it is expected that congregations will be better able to meet their spending needs in the future.

Main Conditions of a Grant

The Unitarian Innovation Challenge Scheme will make grants to congregational partnerships for recruitment, training, remuneration (salary or fees) and associated overheads of the people they need for up to five years.

Applications will need district support but must clearly be driven at congregational level.

There will be three types of project grant and one development grant available

Project grants

A - Long term (up to 5 years) Innovation grants of up to £50,000 per year for multi congregational new capacity building programmes

B - Short term (2-3 year) grants of up to £45,000 as 'Pathfinder grants', aimed at District(s) innovative thematic work, and multi-congregational networking on shared topics

C - One off Impact grant of up to £20,000 for innovative campaigns e.g. to extend the reach of a successful programme to more congregations

AND

D - Development grants (up to £5,000 in one payment) to pay for research or other assistance for a group of congregations to submit a full proposal for an A, B or C grant

Total project costs **could** be funded as follows:

50% from GA reserves (the Match funding)

40% from District reserves or other sources e.g. a grant giving charity or individual donations

10% from Congregations

The congregations' funding contribution may be in cash, or it can be 'in kind', e.g. by putting a value on facilities donated or volunteer time³ contributed to the project.

Where a congregation lacks people, time or skills to develop their ideas into a workable project, they can apply to the scheme for a one-off development grant of up to £5,000 to allow them to bring in someone with the skills to develop an application with the congregation. No 'match' funding is required for Development grants which are at the Programme Managers' discretion.

Scheme Administration

The scheme will be run by a Programme Manager who will be funded by the GA and report to the Chief Officer. As well as administration, their role will include supporting and encouraging potential projects to successful applications, and funded projects to successful completion (see Appendix 1).

The application form will be available online and bids can be submitted either online or on paper (see Appendix 2).

Every application will be reviewed by an Assessment Panel of three people, randomly allocated from a pool of Assessors to be recruited from across the Unitarian movement, and perhaps also from beyond (e.g. the Quakers, or non-faith community organisations) (see Appendix 3).

Assessors allocated an application to review will have to declare that they have no conflict of interest and can assess the application impartially.

A Chair of the Assessment Panel will be appointed by the EC who will review every application assessment to check that criteria are being applied consistently

Grant applications will be evaluated four times a year and proposers will be notified of the Panel's decision within 3 weeks of their meeting.

Applications will continue to be evaluated until the full fund has been allocated to proposals approved by the Panel or by September 2030 whichever is the sooner.

³ Professionals' time (e.g. accountants, project directors) will be valued at £500 a day of 7.5 hours; middle management at £300 a day, and general assistance at £100 a day.

Evaluation Criteria

When evaluating a proposal, the assessment panel will focus on three areas. (see Appendix 4). A grant application will need to persuade assessors that a project shows:

A demonstrable, positive and sustainable impact on the individual congregation(s) concerned, beyond its current membership

A demonstrable, positive and sustainable impact on the wider Unitarian movement

A clear and convincing implementation plan

Impact

Applications will need to show how the proposers will measure success and the claimed impact, both for the individual congregation(s) and for the wider movement. There are no prescriptions here, other than bearing in mind the aspirations for the scheme as a whole. The intended impact should be reflected in outcomes that align to the ethos and values of the congregation(s); a purpose-driven project is most likely to gain and maintain the support of the community. The application should include an explanation of how the planned steps of this project will support the intended long-term goals or purpose of the congregation.

Applications will also need a letter of support with indicative funding from the District or other funding partner.

Implementation Plan

In addition to inspiring and creative ideas for growth, grant applications will need to show that the proposed project can be effectively managed over time. Applications should include some or all of the following:

A project plan with key milestones

A project budget and outline cashflow for the project's full duration

A job-description / consultancy brief for the proposed new hire(s)

An organogram showing clear reporting lines from the new hire(s) to the Trustees

Brief biographies of the team who will have overall and day-to-day oversight of the project.

Grant administration

Once a grant is approved, 10% of the total grant will be payable within 28 days.

Thereafter, projects must submit a quarterly report showing progress against the agreed criteria, and a drawdown request accompanied by receipts for eligible outgoings. Quarterly reports will be approved by the Programme Manager within 14 days of receipt, and payment will be made by bank transfer within 14 days of the approval.

Recognising that circumstances change, the scheme allows the Programme Manager discretion to agree reasonable changes to plans, indicators and budgets, or to agree to an early wind-down of the project so resources can be deployed elsewhere.

In case of disagreement about a decision by the Programme Manager, proposers (or anyone with a legitimate interest) may appeal to the Convenor of the EC who will review the facts within 14 days. The Convenor's decision is final.

Advice and Help

We will be creating opportunities for interested congregations and districts to be in conversation with us (and each other) to explore ideas and get feedback at an early stage. The EC will run advisory workshops at the start of the scheme and at appropriate intervals thereafter. Applicants will also have the option of submitting an outline bid for preliminary advice on how the proposal fits with the criteria and how it can best be presented to the Assessment Panel.

The outline bid (maximum 1,500 words) should describe the congregation(s), summarise the project's aims, describe the proposed activities and explain their intended impact. It should include a summary budget and information about who will be overseeing the implementation.

The Programme Manager will make contact within three weeks to discuss the application. Advice is given in good faith, but the Programme Manager's comments and advice do not bind the Assessment Panel, whose decision is final.

If the Assessment Panel agree that a proposal is strong but needs more preliminary work (e.g., to develop a job description, or undertake community research, or run a pilot to test a hypothesis) then the Programme Manager may approve a one-off Development Grant.

Awarding a development grant does not bind the Assessment Panel to approve an application for a full grant.

Appendix 1

Programme Manager – Job Description Appendix 2

Application form

Appendix 3

Assessment panel and process

Appendix 4

Assessment report

Schedule A

Cash Flow Model

Appendix 1 – Programme Manager- Job Description

UNITARIAN INNOVATION CHALLENGE SCHEME - Programme Manager

The Unitarian Innovation Challenge scheme aims to secure the future of the Unitarian movement by increasing the number of active and sustainable congregations across the UK (not necessarily based around buildings). Congregations (or relevant groupings) will be able to apply to the fund for grants to invest in people who can help them innovate in the way they develop, communicate and deliver an engaging and rewarding spiritual and social experience for current and new members.

Job purpose

To set up, lead and administer the Unitarian Innovation Challenge Scheme

Role

To support and encourage potential projects to successful applications

To run briefings and/or workshops (on-line and face-to-face) to promote the grant scheme and coach would-be applicants in how to envision and prepare successful grant applications

To advise and coach congregations or groups on how to develop initial ideas in outline bids into successful grant applications, including via Development grants where appropriate

To support and encourage funded projects to successful completion

To assist and encourage funded projects that are struggling to overcome challenges and/or terminate a project that proves unviable

To share learning and experience around the Unitarian movement to leverage insights and inspire others

To evaluate progress and procedures and propose/implement improvements as experience is gained

To organise and administer the process by which grant applications are evaluated

To recruit, train, motivate and administer a pool of suitably qualified assessors

To organise quarterly assessment panels

To administer the process by which the Chair of the Assessment Panel reviews the assessments to check that the criteria are being applied consistently

To administer the scheme

To issue grant agreements

To authorise payments in accordance with grant agreement terms

To receive and approve progress reports from grantees

To control the scheme's budget

Prepare short quarterly reports for the GA Executive Committee, both quantitative (statistics on number of applications, number and value of grants, budget etc) and qualitative (achievements of grant-aided schemes, insights and improvements) and a summary annual report of progress and learnings for the GA AGM.

Reporting to: Chief Officer

Term of appointment: 3 years full time in the first instance, renewable by mutual agreement on an annual basis until the final project is established. A further part time monitoring and reporting only contract may be awarded after that time.

Person specification

Experience of motivating and coaching teams to innovate

Project management vision and skills

Experience working in a community setting

Excellent administrator with attention to detail

Excellent written communication and good financial modelling skills

Good facility with database, spreadsheet and communication software

For a recruitment advertisement:

Background on the Unitarian movement

Detail on the grant scheme

Detail on the recruitment process (how to apply, date of interviews, evidence of achievement (e.g. presentation during interview)

Appendix 2: Application form

For office use only : Application number _____

Please follow the format of this application form as far as is practical. It makes it easier to take a consistent approach to evaluating proposals. If you wish to give additional information, please include it as attachment(s).

- 1. Short name for your proposed project:
- 2. Short description of your proposed project (max 150 words).
- 3. Lead contact person (title, name, address, daytime telephone number, email address, relationship to the applying congregation(s) of group(s).
- Congregation(s) all and any of the following details, as appropriate: name, address, telephone number, website, Charity number, CIO number, VAT number, Bank account details (name, sort code, account number), Minister's name, Chair of Trustees' name ...

If more than one congregation is applying, repeat the above for each.

If the application does not involve an existing congregation, please give details of the proposed grouping, and attach the relevant minute(s) or other documentation that establishes a formal grouping for the purposes of applying for this funding.

- 5. State clearly who will sign the grant agreement on behalf of the congregation or consortium (their full name, address and their role in the congregation or consortium).
- 6. What type of grant are you applying for (tick box)?
 - A. Long term Innovation grants of up to £50,000 per year for 5 years for multi congregational new capacity building programmes.
 - B. Short term (2-3 year) Pathfinder grants of up to £45,000 (£15,000 per year), aimed at District(s) innovative thematic work, and multi-congregational networking on shared topics
 - C. One off Impact grants of up to £20,000 for campaigns or to extend the reach of a successful programme to more congregations
 - D. Development grants of up to £5,000 in one payment, for research or other assistance to a group of congregations to develop a full proposal for an A, B or C grant
- 7. Tell us more about your project.
 - a. Describe the congregation(s) or grouping. Tell us what you want to do and what you hope to achieve. Describe the proposed activities. Include as much detail as possible, such as relevant job description(s) or consultancy brief(s), examples of existing programme materials and/or results. Explain how you know there is a need for what you plan to do.
 - b. Describe the intended impact of your project on your congregation(s). Show how it will make your congregation(s) more sustainable, more active and more engaged with the community(ies) and/or how it will improve your congregations' health (financial, operational, spiritual). Show how the impact will be demonstrable, positive and sustainable.
 - c. Describe the impact of your project on the wider Unitarian movement i.e. show how your project will build capabilities for growing our movement, encourage learning and reflection (especially between congregations), and

activate new possibilities for healthy church activity. Show how the impact will be demonstrable, positive and sustainable.

- d. Describe how you will measure the intended impact, both for the individual congregation(s) or grouping, and for the wider movement
- 8. Tell us how you plan to implement your project.
 - a. When do you plan to start and finish?
 - b. How much money do you need from the GA reserves?
 - i. Is 40% matching funding already pledged? If so, please indicate source and amount (e.g. district level, a grant-giving charity, an individual donor) and attach an offer letter (conditional offers are acceptable). If not please indicate your ideas for raising it.
 - ii. Show how you will achieve congregational match funding of 10%, whether in cash or "in kind", e.g. putting a value on facilities donated or volunteer time contributed to the project⁴.
 - c. Show the timeline (cashflow) for your spending over the lifetime of the project (outflow and inflow at minimum quarterly intervals)
 - d. Show the key milestones by which you will mark your practical progress as your plan unfolds
 - e. Tell us who will manage your project?
 - i. Include an organogram showing clear reporting lines from the frontline actors to the Trustees (or grant signatory, as appropriate)
 - ii. Brief biographies of the team who will have overall and day-to-day oversight of the project.

⁴ Professionals' time (e.g. accountants, project directors) will be valued at £500 a day of 7.5 hours; middle management at £300 a day, and general assistance at £100 a day.

Appendix 3 – Assessment panel and process

The scheme will be run by a Programme Manager who will be funded by the GA and report to the Chief Officer. As well as administration, their role will include supporting and encouraging potential projects to successful applications, and funded projects to successful completion.

The application form will be available online and bids can be submitted either online or on paper (see Appendix 2). The amount of detail expected in an application will be proportionate to the scale of the proposed project.

Every application will be evaluated by an Assessment Panel of three people, randomly allocated from a pool of Assessors to be recruited from across the Unitarian movement, and perhaps also from beyond.

Assessors allocated an application to review will have to declare that they have no conflict of interest and can assess the application impartially.

Each evaluator will complete an initial evaluation form and apply a score for each of three criteria (see Appendix 4). They will do that without conferring with each other. Then one of the three evaluators will read all three evaluation reports and propose a consensus score. If individual evaluators cannot agree the proposed consensus score, a fourth evaluator can be asked.

An application will need to score at least 4.7 in total and not less than 4.2 in each criterion to reach the threshold.

Grant applications will be evaluated four times a year. For each session, a percentage of the total budget⁵ will be available to be awarded in the round. All applications that pass the threshold will be ranked according to the consensus score, and funding will be applied to the ranked list, starting with the highest scoring proposals and continuing until all the funding available in the round is allocated.

A Chair of the Assessment Panel will be nominated by the GA who will review every evaluation round to check that criteria are being applied consistently.

Proposers will be notified of the Panel's decision within 3 weeks of their meeting.

The scheme will remain open for new applications until the full fund has been allocated to proposals approved by the Panel or by September 2030 whichever is the sooner.

⁵ Available funds will be restricted for the first two evaluation sessions, in order to allow the process to be refined and learning applied to future proceedings

Appendix 4- Assessment report

Scores must be in the range 0-5. Please use the full range of scores. Decimal points are permitted (e.g., 1.6 or 4.7). Please add a sentence or two against each sub-criterion to justify/explain what led you to that score. It can be helpful to define your comments as either "strengths" or "weaknesses".

Interpretation of the score:

0- The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1- Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses. 2- Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3- Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.

4- Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

5- Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Application number:

Short name of proposed project: _____

Date of evaluation:

Name of evaluator:

I declare that I have read the grant application with an open mind and have no conflict of interest in evaluating it

Signed: (Evaluator)

Criterion 1 – The objectives

Quality and pertinence of the proposed objectives.

The extent to which the objectives are

- based on convincing descriptions of need
- ambitious and innovative
- realistically achievable _____

Score:

Criterion 2a - Impact on the congregation(s) or grouping Scor

Credibility of the claim that the proposed project would make the congregation(s) or grouping(s)

- more sustainable
- more active
- more engaged with the community(ies)

Credibility of the claim that the proposed project would improve the congregations' or groupings' operational and spiritual health

Extent to which the claimed impact will be demonstrable, positive and sustainable

Suitability and relevance of the indicators designed to measure the intended impact.

Criterion 2b – Impact on the wider Unitarian movement

Credibility of the claim that the proposed project will

- build capabilities for growing the wider Unitarian movement
- encourage learning and reflection (especially between congregations)
- activate new possibilities for healthy church activity

Extent to which the claimed impact will be demonstrable, positive and sustainable.

Suitability and relevance of the performance indicators intended to measure impact.

Criterion 3 – implementationScore: _____Quality and practicality of the implementation plan (milestones)Credibility of the fund-raising planPlausibility of the line-management arrangementsCapability of the team that will have day-to-day insight

Score: _____

Score: _____

Schedule A

Cash flow model

A Projects -10

B Projects - 5

C Projects - 10

D Development grants - 20

Unitarian Innovation Ch									
Projects	Total bid		GA funds		District funds		Congregation funds		
Type A - 5 year up to £50k pa	Total	Per year	Total	Per year	Total	Per year	Total	Per year	
Site 1	£100,000	£20,000	£50,000	£10,000	£40,000	£8,000	£10,000	£2,000	
Site 2	£100,000	£20,000	£50,000	£10,000	£40,000	£8,000	£10,000	£2,000	
Site 3	£100,000	£20,000	£50,000	£10,000	£40,000	£8,000	£10,000	£2,000	
Site 4	£150,000	£30,000	£75,000	£15,000	£60,000	£12,000	£15,000	£3,000	
Site 5	£150,000	£30,000	£75,000	£15,000	£60,000	£12,000	£15,000	£3,000	
Site 6	£150,000	£30,000	£75,000	£15,000	£60,000	£12,000	£15,000	£3,000	
Site 7	£200,000	,	£100,000	,	£80,000	,	£20,000		
Site 8	£200,000	,	£100,000	,	£80,000	,	£20,000	,	
Site 9	£250,000	£50,000	£125,000	£25,000	£100,000	£20,000	£25,000	£5,000	
Site 10	£250,000	£50,000	£125,000	£25,000	£100,000	£20,000	£25,000	£5,000	
Sub TOTAL Type A	£1,650,000	£330,000	£825,000	£165,000	£660,000	£132,000	£165,000	£33,000	
B 5 2year £45k avge pa	£450,000	£90,000	£225,000	£45,000	£180,000	£36,000	£45,000	£9,000	
C 10 One off £20k	£200,000	£40,000	£100,000	£20,000	£80,000	£16,000	£20,000	£4,000	
D 20 £5k Development grants	£100,000	£20,000	£100,000	£20,000	£0	£0	£0	£0	
Programme Manager incl O/H	£250,000	£50,000	£250,000	£50,000	£0	£0	£0	£0	
Sub Total other projects and PM	£1,000,000	£200,000	£675,000	£135,000	£260,000	£52,000	£65,000	£13,000	
TOTAL	£2,650,000	£530,000	£1,500,000	£300,000	£920,000	£184,000	£230,000	£46,000	
Cashflow									
Type A only	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	TOTAL
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	
Sites	1 and 7	2and 8	3, 4 and 9	5,6 and 10					10
Cum	2	4	7	10	10	8	6	3	
GA	£ 30,000	£ 60,000	£ 110,000	£ 165,000	£ 165,000	£ 135,000	£ 105,000	£ 55,000	£ 825,000
DF	£ 24,000	£ 48,000	£ 88,000	£ 132,000	£ 132,000	£ 108,000	£ 84,000	£ 44,000	£ 660,000
CF	£ 6,000	£ 12,000	£ 22,000	£ 33,000	£ 33,000	£ 27,000	£ 21,000	£ 11,000	£ 165,000
Sub TOTAL	£ 60,000	£ 120,000	£ 220,000	£ 330,000	£ 330,000	£ 270,000	£ 210,000	£ 110,000	£ 1,650,000
Type B & C									
GA	£32,500	£32,500	£65,000	£65,000	£65,000	£65,000			£325,000
DF	£26,000	£26,000	£52,000	£52,000	£52,000	£52,000			£260,000
CF	£6,500	£6,500	£13,000	£13,000	£13,000	£13,000			£65,000
Sub TOTAL	£65,000	£65,000	£130,000	£130,000	£130,000	£130,000			£650,000
GA Programme Costs									
Programme manager	£25,000	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£25,000			£250,000
D 20 £5k Development grants	£10,000	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000	£10,000			£100,000
TOTAL	£ 160,000	£ 255,000	£ 420,000	£ 530,000	£ 530,000	£ 435,000	£ 210,000	£ 110,000	£ 2,650,000
								GA	£1,500,000
								DF	£ 920,000
								CF	£ 230,000