
The Shackleton Award - Cumbria 2026

A new £15,000 award for an early-stage social entrepreneur in Cumbria

At a glance

- **What:** Up to £15,000 as an unrestricted grant, and membership of and support from our wider Leader community
- **Who for:** An individual launching a venture that supports children and young people (0-25) facing barriers to opportunity in Cumbria
- **Stage:** In the first 12 months of operation
- **Applications open:** Tuesday 4 August 2026
- **Applications close:** Monday 2 November 2026
- **Apply at:** <https://shackletonfoundation.org/who-we-fund/#how-to-apply>

About this opportunity

The Shackleton Foundation is launching its first ever Cumbria-focused funding round, with the generous support of the Francis Scott Trust. We are looking for one outstanding individual whose new social venture will make a real difference to the lives of children and young people in Cumbria.

Most foundations want to see a track record before they invest. We don't. Our focus is what we call the "first mile" - the riskiest and least-supported stage of launching a social enterprise, when the idea may still only exist in someone's head. If you're passionate about creating change for young people in Cumbria, but you've found it hard to get backing for an idea this early, this award is designed for you.

About the Shackleton Foundation

The Shackleton Foundation was founded in 2007 by descendants of the Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, and we have been making awards since 2008. We exist to tackle youth inequality by investing in courageous, early-stage social entrepreneurs who exemplify the spirit of Shackleton: leadership, innovation, ambition, endurance and the willingness to take a calculated risk.

Since we started, we've backed more than 70 Shackleton Leaders across the UK. On average, each Leader goes on to support around 1,600 young people in the three years following their award. We are a small, hands-on funder - and the Leaders we back become part of an active, lasting community.

About the Francis Scott Trust

The Francis Scott Trust is one of the largest independent grant funders in Cumbria and Lancaster District focused solely on improving the life chances of children and young people. Established in 1963 by Peter Scott CBE in memory of his father, Francis C Scott, the Trust has now been giving for over 60 years and distributes more than £1 million each year through grants, social investment and organisational development support.

Based in Kendal, the Trust works in close partnership with local organisations to ensure young people facing challenging circumstances can fulfil their potential. Their support has made this Cumbria-focused round of the Shackleton Award possible, and they are involved in shaping the process throughout.

What being a Shackleton Leader means

Successful applicants - known as Shackleton Leaders - receive a package of support designed around the realities of getting a new venture off the ground:

- **Up to £15,000 as an unrestricted grant.** A substantial amount, intended to give you the room to commit fully to your idea.
- **Membership of the Shackleton Leader community:** around 75 social entrepreneurs across the UK who connect through a closed WhatsApp group, in-person events, and one-to-one introductions.
- **A Leader Partner.** You'll be paired one-to-one with an experienced Shackleton Leader from our alumni community for a dedicated conversation about your venture. Your Leader Partner remains informally available afterwards for any further questions as you find your feet.
- **Quarterly advice surgeries and an annual Leader's Forum.** Informal sessions where Leaders share challenges and solutions, with plenty of room for the questions you actually want to ask.
- **Awareness-building for your venture** through Shackleton Foundation channels and our networks.

What we expect from you

Being a Shackleton Leader is a partnership. Alongside the support above, we ask successful applicants to commit to the following over the course of their first year and beyond:

- **Attend the annual Shackleton Leaders' Forum** in the first two years of your award (and, ideally, for as long as you are able after that). You may also be asked to speak at a future Forum.

- **Attend at least two of the three Leaders' Information and Advice Surgeries** in the first year of your award (around 45-60 minutes per session).
- **Take part in the Leader Partner programme.** You will be paired with an alumni Leader for a one-off 60-minute partner session in your first year. Three years on, you will pay it forward by being paired with a new Leader and offering the same.
- **Sign a Shackleton Leaders' Agreement (SLA),** which sets out how your project will be managed and what you and the Shackleton Foundation agree to share over the course of the award.

Who can apply

To be eligible for this Cumbria-focused round, your venture must:

- Solely benefit young people aged 0-25 who are facing barriers to opportunity and are based in Cumbria.
- Be in its first 12 months of operation
- Be constituted as a registered charity, Community Interest Company (CIC) or Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
- Be innovative and fresh - not a duplication of services that already exist locally
- Address a clear need and demand
- Have the potential for genuine social impact, with well-defined outputs and goals
- Show real prospects to grow and become financially sustainable beyond grant funding

A few important notes

- **Beneficiaries must be in Cumbria.** All of the young people your venture supports should be based in the county.
- **New organisations.** We only accept applications from individuals setting up new organisations or organisations no more than 12 months old (from the date of registration). We do not accept new projects out of existing organisations.
- **The £15,000 must be a meaningful share of your project costs.** We require the funding request to be at least 25% of your total annual project budget.
- **We don't fund what government should.** As a rule, we do not directly finance projects for which substantial government funding is available.
- **Safeguarding will be checked at shortlisting.** If you are invited to pitch, you will need an up-to-date safeguarding policy that is relevant to your beneficiaries.

Children and young people facing barriers

We take a broad view of who faces barriers to opportunity. A young person under 25 may be experiencing disadvantage if they face one or more circumstances that limit their access to

opportunities, resources or outcomes compared to their peers - whether in education, employment, training, health, or wider life chances. These may include:

- Living in a low-income household or experiencing financial hardship
- Being eligible for Free School Meals, Pupil Premium or means-tested benefits
- Being not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, or unstable accommodation
- Being care-experienced, a care leaver, or a young carer
- Having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- Experiencing mental health challenges or poor emotional wellbeing
- Living in an area of high deprivation
- Experiencing barriers linked to discrimination or inequality

Young people don't need to meet all of these criteria – barriers are often complex and overlapping. What matters is that these circumstances have had, or continue to have, a material impact on the young person's access to opportunities and life chances.

Who we're looking for

Beyond the formal eligibility criteria, our trustees are looking for a particular kind of person - someone who embodies the spirit of Sir Ernest Shackleton.

In practice that means: courage to start something before all the answers are clear; the leadership to bring others with you; resilience to keep going when the work is hard; and a deep, often personal, understanding of why this matters for the young people you want to serve.

We don't expect you to have launched a venture before. We don't expect a polished business plan. We do expect you to be serious about the difference you want to make and have clarity about how you might get there.

Preparing your application

Whatever shape your idea is currently in, our Trustees will want to understand a few specific things about it. Spending time on these questions before you start the application form will make your submission stronger:

- How will the Shackleton Award enable you to deliver your project?
- How will young people benefit - and how many?
- Where do you see your idea in five years' time?
- How will you measure success - how will you know that you are succeeding?

Key dates & How to apply

Stage	Date
Applications open	Tuesday 4 August 2026
Free applicant webinar	Thursday 3 September 2026, 12:30-1:30pm
Applications close	Monday 2 November 2026, 5pm
Shortlisting decisions	Wednesday 18 November 2026
Pitch meeting (top 3 candidates, online)	Tuesday 1 December 2026
Final decision	Tuesday 8 December 2026

To apply, visit <https://shackletonfoundation.org/who-we-fund/#how-to-apply> from 4 August 2026.

Free applicant webinar

We will be running a free, joint webinar on Thursday 3 September 2026, 12:30-1:30pm for anyone considering applying. It's a chance to hear directly from the Shackleton Foundation and the Francis Scott Trust about what makes a strong application, ask any questions, and get a feel for whether this is the right opportunity for you. Register to attend by emailing victoria.cushing@shackletonfoundation.org

Questions? Get in touch

If you're unsure whether your idea fits, or you'd simply like to talk it through with someone before applying, we'd genuinely encourage you to be in touch. An informal conversation early on is often the most useful thing we can offer.

Contact

Victoria Cushing

The Shackleton Foundation

victoria.cushing@shackletonfoundation.org

www.shackletonfoundation.org

The Shackleton Award for Cumbria 2026 is delivered by the Shackleton Foundation in partnership with the Francis Scott Trust.