

A composite image featuring three athletes in motion against a dark background. On the left, a cyclist in a black and blue jersey and helmet is riding a blue road bike. On the right, a runner in a grey tank top and black shorts is captured mid-stride. In the foreground, a swimmer in a black cap and goggles is performing a freestyle stroke in blue water. The overall aesthetic is dynamic and high-tech, with blue light effects and a starry background.

Funding support for
the sport sector

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The COVID-19 outbreak severely impacted sport and leisure activities in 2020, turning daily life upside down. The cancellation or postponement of many international sports events – not least, the Tokyo Olympic Games and Euro 2020 football championship – was a highly visible consequence, with millions of pounds lost in revenue. At the more local level though, the pandemic's arrival has also caused many grassroots and community groups to struggle financially. Staff have been furloughed and projects put on hold.

Experiences during the pandemic have highlighted, however, sport's benefits for both physical and mental health. Projects such as exercise referral and social prescribing are becoming mainstreamed within public health policy. It also plays a role in tackling loneliness and in meeting broader outcomes such as community development and capacity building. For children and young people, engagement with sports groups can set a positive pattern for life, yet data from Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People survey shows that one third of children are achieving less than half of the Chief Medical Officer's guideline of 60 minutes of daily physical activity. It is estimated that there are over 150,000 affiliated sports clubs across the UK, and many more delivering community sport.



Emergency funding support for the sector

As the impact of Covid-19 and repeated lockdowns became clear, each of the UK nations launched emergency funding initiatives as they sought to sustain the sport sector during restrictions while retaining the ambition to boost participation in the future.

Sport England made available a financial package totalling £220.5 million, including up to £35 million for a Community Emergency Fund, £115 million of funding rollover for partners, a £16.5 million Return to Play Fund and £55 million for key innovation programmes. SportsScotland released £16.4 million to struggling governing bodies and clubs, while Sport Wales reallocated budgets to create Be Active Wales, a fund to help clubs and not-for-profit organisations protect their sport offer. Northern Ireland operated a £25 million Sports Sustainability Fund to help address the economic consequences of COVID-19.

Funds aimed to minimise the financial stress on organisations, and this was complemented by additional groups making available grants to support those delivering activities including coaching and teaching. However, while the funding programmes responded to organisations' financial need to survive the months-long restriction periods, they could not hope to replace all lost income.

Although some sports activity has been permitted intermittently in 2020, the year 2021 got under way with many venues still closed, and at a community level millions of people left without a place to exercise or play sport. The reality is that many people, including those with the most to gain from sport, are missing out on physical activity. And it will take time before we know the long-term damage to participation levels.

A major concern is whether communities who were least likely to engage in sport before the pandemic will be even less likely to do so now. As the Active Partnerships agency has reported, 25% of the UK population aged 16+ do less than 30 minutes' exercise a week. The need to support people into exercise and sport participation came sharply into focus when obesity emerged as a risk factor for severe COVID-19. This was a timely reminder that community sports hubs, sports clubs and school programmes play a vital role in society. It is likely that tackling health inequalities will become a key priority for funding bodies as we move forward from the pandemic.



GrantFinder as a resource for the sector

GrantFinder is the UK's leading funding resource for funding for the voluntary and community sector. We enable thousands of organisations every year to find funding to help their local communities.

Our Funding Strategy Toolkit provides practical tips and a step-by-step approach for groups considering applying for funding.

Generally, evidence suggests that funders adapted their grantmaking strategies during 2020. Research from London Funders found that funders had been increasingly flexible in terms of allowing groups to use funding in different ways, e.g. to pay for equipment, and had also been pragmatic in terms of reporting – acknowledging that anticipated outcomes may not be met within the original anticipated timescale. Many funders also postponed or cancelled the opening of new funding calls in order to allow them to focus their support on organisations they were already working with.

As we look to 2021 and beyond, it is clear that funders will continue with new ways of working. A majority of funders surveyed by London Funders expected to pivot their response. This could involve changing their priorities or the way they deliver grants. They also anticipate working more in collaboration with other funders, to work together on joint priorities or to reduce overlap.

GrantFinder normally contains up to 3000 open funding opportunities at any time. And our expert team are monitoring over 9000 funders for new funding announcements.

Top five tips for success

- To be successful in funding applications, sport organisations should not rely on targeting the usual suspects for funding or assume that schemes they have applied to in the past will be available again this year. Using GrantFinder to set up funding searches will highlight new opportunities which you may not be aware of.
- Think about broad outcomes. When searching for funding opportunities on GrantFinder consider who the beneficiaries of your project are. Also don't limit your search to those schemes explicitly focused on sport and improving physical health. Does your project help mental health or reduce isolation? Does it have a capacity building or skills development element?
- Look carefully at eligibility criteria. Most funders welcome organisations contacting them to clarify if they would be eligible.
- Many organisations within the voluntary sector have had to deal with difficult restructuring or retrenchment decisions in the last year. While capital or employment costs are not normally covered by most grants, there is recognition that many organisations have had to use their reserves over the last year. A shift from emergency short-term funding support back to longer-term funding, and wider provision of unrestricted funds is expected in the post-pandemic period.
- A clear understanding of your organisation's core purpose will help in funding applications. The sports sector is diverse and being clear about sports outcomes will help to differentiate your organisation from others.



Call us now on **0333 011 1200** or email marketing@idoxgroup.com to find out more about Idox's funding services.

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