

VRF Grant Making Policy

Introduction

The Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF) was established by St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity (registered charity number:1156305). The VRF provides crisis grants via frontline workers to individuals at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness. Grants are given to help access accommodation.

Who do we aim to support?

VRF grants are open to individuals across all four nations of the UK who need help with accessing accommodation which may include:

- a contribution towards a deposit or rent in advance
- ID
- moving costs for removal of furniture / personal belongings
- emergency / temporary accommodation

We may also apply discretion to consider awarding a grant for items / costs not included above, if there is clear evidence the grant will help access accommodation. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Our annual budget is set in advance, and we reserve the right to decline applications in line with budget restrictions. Priority will be given to applicants who are currently homeless, or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Please note that under no circumstances can a VRF grant be transferred to another client or be used for purposes other than those explicitly stated in the approved application.

How much funding is available from the VRF?

We will consider awarding a maximum of £500.

You can apply for more than one grant for the same client. However, the maximum amount we can award to any one client in any twelve-month period is £500. The twelve-month period is calculated from the date the initial application is submitted and is not based on a calendar year.

We actively encourage repeated use of the VRF for the benefit of individuals you are working with. For learning purposes, we will be in touch with you / your organisation if a significant amount of funding has been awarded over a three-month period. To operate equitably and extend our reach across the four UK nations we will limit the total annual award to those that ultimately receive the grant funds to £50,000. If an organisation provides a variety of different services across various geographical locations, we will exercise discretion regarding this annual award limit.

Registering an account

Prior to making an application on behalf of a client, all frontline workers must each register and request an individual account with the VRF which will be verified by their line manager. Under no circumstances should accounts be shared as they are exclusive to the individual account holder.

The frontline worker must:

- register the account using their own individual work email address which cannot be a shared one.
- be employed by a constituted organisation that may be a charity, company, CIC, CIO, or statutory organisation.
- provide direct support to people who may be experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
- consider the client's needs as central to any application.

You cannot register with the VRF if you are:

- a volunteer or in an unpaid role.
- employed by an organisation that is not registered with the relevant UK authorities such as (in England) the Charity Commission or Companies House or if a constituted group cannot provide a constitution with an asset lock.
- not providing direct support to people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
- applying for funds to access accommodation for which the organisation you are employed by is the landlord.
- intending to apply on behalf of friends or family.
- using a non-work email address (e.g. hotmail or yahoo) unless we can establish that the organisation is bona fide (i.e. is registered with the relevant UK authorities) and the worker uses this email address for work only.

Organisational checks:

We will conduct due diligence checks on the organisation who employs the frontline line worker which will include:

- Charity Commission Register
- Register of companies at Companies House;
- Register of approved social housing providers maintained by the HCA
- Financial Conduct Authority
- Organisation's website to ascertain operations, values, organisational structure, etc.

If your organisation has not met or contravened regulatory requirements you will not be able to register with the VRF.

Please note that if you are already registered and the above eligibility criteria are not met your account will be deactivated.

Safeguarding of vulnerable persons:

To promote the safety and wellbeing of clients we can only accept applications from frontline workers:

- whose organisation has an adult safeguarding policy reviewed within the last three years and
- who have undertaken safeguarding training with their current employer within the last three years.

We will contact you requesting updated safeguarding policies and training dates when either or both are over three years old.

At any point during the registration process, we reserve the right to speak to you and / or your line manager to obtain further clarification of your organisation and its operations.

Decision Making:

The successful registering of an account relies both on the compliance with our registration criteria as well as the accuracy and completion of all parts of the registration form. Where this is met in its entirety and your account is approved, we will confirm this with you in an email.

Where a registration is fully and accurately completed in the first instance, we will commit wherever possible, to processing registrations within five working days.

In instances where the registration form has not been fully completed and lacks the evidence and information required for approval, we will return the registration to you for provision of the additional information and / or evidence. Your registration form may be returned to you several times to obtain the clarity required to make a decision. This does not imply the registration is declined but that further information is required.

If your registration is unsuccessful and declined, we will confirm this with you in an email giving the reason for our decision.

Making an application

You are required to read our VRF [terms and conditions](#) and [privacy statement](#), and familiarise yourself with [help guides](#) and [FAQs](#) before making an application.

All applications for grants to assist clients with accessing accommodation must be genuine and where the client has no other means to access the required funding.

We do not award grants to reimburse costs already met / paid, nor where the outcome has already been achieved prior to the initial application submission (e.g. client moved into a property before an application is submitted).

VRF grants are discretionary and should never be guaranteed to a client nor any other party.

Decision Making:

The success of a grant application relies both on the compliance with our grant criteria as well as the accuracy and completion of all parts of the application form. Where this is met in its entirety and the grant is awarded, we will confirm this with you and your line manager in an email and an attached grant offer letter.

Where an application is fully and accurately completed in the first instance, we will commit wherever possible, to process applications from submission through to award and payment within five working days.

Where the grant application has not been fully completed and lacks the evidence and / or information required to make a decision, we will return the application to you for provision of the additional information and / or evidence. Applications may be returned to you several times for any clarification required to make a decision. This does not imply the application is declined but that further information is required.

If your application is unsuccessful and declined, we will confirm this with you and your line manager in an email giving the reason for our decision.

Appeals against decisions:

Due to the high number of applications that we receive and our limited capacity, we are rarely able to reconsider appeals against our decisions where an application has been declined.

Payment of Grant:

Payments will only be made to the organisation who employs you. Payments will not be made directly to landlords or service providers. This is to ensure that funds are allocated to verified organisations and that grant funds are used for the intended purpose.

Payment will be made via BACS transfer.

We require evidence of your organisations' bank account. Either a bank statement dated within the last three months or a letter from the bank dated within the last three months. Both need to confirm the name in which the account is held, the sort code and account number. The account holder's name must match with the organisation's name provided in the application (unless supporting evidence is provided to explain any discrepancy). Please ensure that any sensitive information, such as account balances, transactions, or personal details, is redacted before submitting.

Evidence of spend

You must use VRF grant funds for the purpose set out in your original application and provide evidence of spend within eight weeks of the grant being paid.

The evidence you provide helps us to audit our grant spend and to understand the VRF's impact.

It is the responsibility of the frontline worker to obtain evidence of spend. Prior to the grant application being made, the frontline worker should consider how this can be obtained and whether any third party from whom this is required, is willing / able to meet this provision.

Decision Making:

Where the reporting form confirming evidence of spend is fully and accurately completed in the first instance, we will complete and close the application.

Where the evidence of spend does not meet our requirements, we will return the reporting form to you to you for provision of the additional information and / or evidence.

The reporting form may be returned to you several times to obtain the clarity required to complete and close the application.

Suspension and Deactivation of account (failure to provide evidence of spend):

The due date for providing evidence of spend is eight weeks after the grant is awarded.

A first reminder email will be sent one to two weeks before this date.

A second reminder email will be sent one to two weeks after this date.

If there's a reason you're not able to submit the evidence of spend within these time frames and require an extension, you must email the VRF team (vrf@stmartinscharity.org.uk) to discuss the reason and duration of extension required.

Applicants with three or more pieces of overdue evidence will be suspended and their account will not be reactivated until all three pieces of evidence have been submitted and accepted.

Where an applicant has previously been suspended as above and subsequently a further three pieces of evidence become overdue, their account will be deactivated.

This means that you won't be able to submit any further grant applications until you've provided the appropriate evidence and/or answered our queries, and they have been accepted by us.

Whilst the VRF remain committed to supporting frontline workers in their work with clients experiencing homelessness and will always attempt to understand any difficulties with obtaining evidence and evolve our practices wherever feasible, frontline workers who cannot fully comply with this requirement will be prevented from making future applications.

Returning Unwanted / Unused Funds:

Where an awarded grant is no longer required for any reason, please email the VRF team (vrf@stmartinscharity.org.uk) at the earliest instance to prevent the VRF from making the payment.

If the payment has already been made and received by the frontline worker's organisation

but is no longer required, please return this payment to us by BACS. Please email us in the first instance identifying the date the payment has been returned.

If not all of the VRF grant awarded has been used to secure the outcome for any reason, we kindly request that any unused funds are returned so that these may help to assist other people in similar housing need.

Instructions on how to return funds can be found by logging into the application portal [here](#) and referring the heading 'Returning Funds'

Suspension and Deactivation of account

The VRF reserves the right to suspend or deactivate an account at any point.

Reasons may include concern with fraudulent activity, non-compliance with VRF policies, provision of false information or concern with organisational operations.

We will endeavour to provide a reason for any suspension / deactivation although this may not always be possible.

Record Keeping

To maintain our records and database, remain GDPR compliant and focused on issuing emergency grants to those in need, we will delete any New User Registration Forms and VRF grant applications more than three months old that have not been submitted / resubmitted. Please submit / resubmit any New User Registration Forms and / or grant applications within three months if the funding is still needed.

Equal opportunities

We recognise that the needs of people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness are diverse and often urgent. We are committed to equality of opportunity and seek to challenge and respond to disadvantage through the VRF.

Further information

For further information about the VRF, we recommend visiting the [VRF web page](#) and our [Help Page](#). Otherwise, please contact:

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