

Somerset Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDMRC)

Expression of Interest (Eoi)

Community Research Supporter: Food Project

For West Somerset and Yeovil

We are looking for a community organisation with experience of using creative and inclusive approaches to work with families and local communities, helping them to share their experiences and shape the ongoing focus of the new Strategic Food Alliance for Somerset.

We are inviting organisations to submit an **Expression of Interest (Eoi)** explaining how they would use funding of **up to £10,000** to provide a **Community Research Supporter** for the project. One project will be based in **West Somerset** and one in **Yeovil**.

The Community Research Supporter will work closely with the Somerset Public Health Team and be a key partner on the Somerset Strategic Food Alliance (SSFA).

Expressions of Interest must be submitted by **Monday 16th November 2026**.

The successful organisations will enter into a Small Grants Agreement with Somerset Council. The co-design of the project with the Somerset Public Health Team is expected to begin in **December 2026** and run until **November 2027**.

Overview

The Community Research Supporter role helps to deliver a new grant initiative for voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations across Somerset. The purpose of this grant is to:

1. Strengthen how these organisations use research and increase their confidence and skills in using research evidence and undertaking research;
AND
2. Support them to share what they learn in ways that benefit local people and improve Somerset Council services.

It is a new and exciting opportunity to work with both Somerset Council and the Somerset HDMRC, and to help make meaningful, long-lasting improvements with local communities. Somerset Council is committed to making sure that the voices of local people help shape the development of future strategies, services, and support. As part of this, people's experiences, views, and ideas will be at the heart of this work.

The VCFSE organisation will work together with Somerset Council and Somerset HDMRC to help design and conduct agreed research and evaluation which will contribute to the learning and priorities of the SSFA. The SSFA is a new partnership to identify and lead action on the priorities of improving the Somerset food system.

This work will play an important role in ensuring the voice and priorities for food of local communities is centre to the work of the alliance.

All funded projects must include three key activities:

1. **Finding, using, and carrying out research** to improve understanding or support positive change.
2. **Building research skills and experience within your organisation** to improve services and decision making.
3. **Sharing learning and improving practice** so that knowledge and good practice can be used more widely.

We understand that every organisation is different and may place greater emphasis on some activities than others. What matters is showing how all three activities will be included in a meaningful way that builds on your organisation's size, role, and strengths.

Finding, using, and carrying out research

- Work closely with Somerset HDRC and Somerset Public Health to **lead on the research and provide regular reports to SSFA** to help shape the ongoing community priorities of the SSFA. This will primarily focus on food poverty, ill health and food access as well as public awareness and community action around food.
- **Work directly with people who have lived experience** of food insecurity and availability to eat healthier from groups known to be less likely to access food. This could be any communities in West Somerset and Yeovil and includes groups that are more likely to experience food insecurity and poor access to healthier foods.
- **Co-design and conduct agreed research and evaluation projects** in Somerset, including collecting, analysing, and sharing information.
- **Create and help manage new community participation groups (structures) where needed** - such as a [*Lived Experience Advisory Partnership \(LEAP\)*](#) and a [*Community Organisation Advisory Partnership \(COAP\)*](#) used by the Somerset HDRC [*Breaking Barriers Project*](#) These groups will ensure that people from the relevant communities can help shape the development the priorities of the community work for the Somerset Strategic Food Alliance.
- **Use a range of co-designed, community-centred, methods to gather feedback** for the SSFA. This may include in-person or online meetings, group discussions, one-to-one conversations, written or verbal feedback, surveys, and more.
- **Advocate for, and represent the views, experiences, and perspectives** of, community individuals in meetings and other forums.

- Bring together and **analyse the views and experiences** to **produce clear insights, evidence, or recommendations** that can lead to real improvements in the food system across Somerset.
- **Co-produce a final report, using both quantitative and qualitative information (data)**, with the Somerset Public Health team. This report will contribute to the development of the ongoing priorities for the SSFA.

Building research skills and experience within your organisation

- **Encourage and support colleagues to use research findings and get involved in research and evaluation activities** to improve their work with local communities.
- **Help people and organisations** learn about, take part in, and contribute to research and evaluation activities.
- **Support colleagues to increase community involvement in research and evaluation in their work** and increase understanding how community-led and participatory approaches can help build knowledge, improve services, and inform decision-making.
- **Promote the role of the Community Research Supporter and the wider Somerset HDRC** within your organisation and across local partner organisations and communities.
- Work with Somerset HDRC to **plan, support, and take part in training and learning opportunities** that build knowledge, skills and confidence in research and evaluation. The level and timing of involvement will be agreed jointly and will reflect the needs and timescales of SSFA.
- **Help create clear, accessible, and inclusive information for community participants and partner organisations.** This should help people understand what is involved and ensure that participation is meaningful, well-supported, safe, and ethical.

Sharing learning and improving practice

- **Help develop simple, practical ways to share learning** within your organisation and across the wider VCFSE sector, Somerset Council, and local communities.
- **Support the evaluation of the Community Research Supporter role.** Create opportunities for partners and participants to provide regular, meaningful feedback and help ensure this learning is used to improve work.

- **Work with the Somerset HDRC team to share findings in clear and accessible ways, and to strengthen communication, engagement and awareness of HDRC activities** among communities, partners and stakeholders. This may include helping to develop posters, presentations, reports, case studies, and other materials for meetings, conferences, publications, and community events.
- **Share examples of learning, good practice, and positive impact** to help others benefit from the work, support continuous improvement, and encourage wider involvement in research and evaluation.
- **Encourage reflection and learning within your organisation** by helping colleagues identify what is working well, what could be improved, and how evidence can be used to inform future decisions and activities.

What we'll make together (key outputs)

- **A community participation plan** and practical of ways for people with lived experience to help shape services. This will start with identifying key priorities across food in local communities.
- **Regular progress and review meetings** with Somerset Public Health Team, and with Somerset HDRC when needed, to support project delivery, learning, and problem-solving. The timing and frequency of these meetings will be agreed together and reviewed as the project develops.
- **Short learning reports** that bring together key findings, community feedback, and recommendations to support ongoing development of the community priorities for SSFA.
- **A final report**, developed jointly with Somerset Public Health Team, that brings together the project's findings. This will include quantitative (numerical) data, qualitative insights (lived experience), and reflections from community participants and the Community Research Supporter on using participatory approaches to work with Somerset Council.
- **An action plan** setting out practical steps to embed community-led and participatory approaches to research and evaluation within your organisation and Somerset Council, helping to ensure community voices continue to inform future priorities, services, and decision-making.
- **Accessible resources and materials** that share learning, findings and impact with a range of audiences, including community members, partner organisations and decision-makers.

- **Opportunities to share learning and celebrate achievements** across your organisation, the wider VCFSE sector, Somerset Council, and local communities. This may include presentations, reports, case studies, events, workshops, or other creative and accessible formats.

Support your organisation will receive

- **Shared line management and supervision:** The Community Research Supporter will be employed by your organisation, with day-to-day support and supervision shared between your organisation and the Somerset Public Health Team.
- **Project management support:** A named member of the Somerset HDRC Community Participation Workstream will coordinate this grant initiative and act as an HDRC Buddy for the Community Research Supporter. They will provide ongoing advice, support, and guidance throughout the project.
- **Tailored training and development:** Your organisation and the Community Research Supporter will have access to training and support from the HDRC Community Participation Workstream, the wider Somerset HDRC team, Somerset Public Health, and Somerset Council.
- **Access to Council networks and expertise:** You will have opportunities to connect with Somerset Council staff working on related topics and areas of interest, helping to build relationships, share learning, and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- **Connections with academic partners:** Where appropriate, you will be supported to develop relationships with academic partners, including the University of the West of England (UWE) and other research organisations.
- **One-to-one mentoring and support:** Individual mentoring will be available to help build confidence, skills, and practical skills in community participation, research, and evaluation.
- **Support to design and deliver your project:** Guidance and advice will be available throughout the project, from planning and community engagement through to delivery, evaluation, and sharing learning.
- **Access tools and resources:** You will have access to practical tools, templates, and other resources to support community participation, evaluate impact, collect feedback, and share learning.
- **Access to a community of practice:** You will become part of a growing network of Community Research Supporters from the VCFSE community in Somerset,

Research Practitioners from Somerset Council, and other partners, creating opportunities for peer support, shared learning, and collaboration.

- **Ongoing learning and development opportunities:** You will be invited to take part in relevant workshops, training sessions, networking events, and learning activities to further develop your skills, knowledge, and experience.
- **Support to share learning and impact:** The Somerset HDRC team will help you identify opportunities to share your work, celebrate achievements, and promote learning across local communities, partner organisations, and the wider system.

Funding

- **Up to £10,000** is available for a period of up to **12 months**.
- The funding can be used flexibly across the three areas below, but applicants must explain how they will contribute to each one:
 1. **Finding, using and carrying out research**
 2. **Building research skills and experience within your organisation**
 3. **Sharing learning and improving practice**

You can use the funding in a way that best suits the size, role and strengths of your organisation. For example, you could use the funding to:

- backfill an existing member of staff to give them dedicated time for the Community Research Supporter role
- release one or more staff members for a day a week, or in shorter blocks of time, to undertake the role
- recruit someone on a fixed-term contract for up to 12 months to deliver the role
- cover reasonable travel, engagement and participation costs associated with the project.

Applicants should clearly describe how they would use the funding and how this will help deliver the aims of the SSFA.

Expressions of Interest must be submitted by **Monday 16th November 2026**.

For further information, please contact frederick.marais@somerset.gov.uk

Somerset HDRC, Somerset Council

Somerset Strategic Food Alliance (SSFA)

Headline: Somerset council public health team are intending to establish a Strategic Food Alliance for Somerset following completion of the first 'Good Food Local' benchmarking for Somerset.

Good Food Local is a national benchmarking platform from Sustain ([Find out about sustainable food and farming in the UK | Sustain](#)) to help local authorities drive change for their local food system. Through Good Food Local authorities can track and drive meaningful action in their area while learning from others nationwide and locally what works to help build healthy sustainable food communities, that support residents to access affordable, healthy, climate and nature friendly food. [Good Food Local | Sustain](#)

Good Food Local benchmarks across 5 priority areas for the local food system. These are:

1. **Food poverty, ill health and food access** – HDRC community researcher
2. Sustainability and food production
3. Local food economy and procurement
4. **Public awareness and community action** – HDRC community researcher
5. Partnership, strategy and governance

In 2025, public health completed the Good Food Local benchmarking tool identifying areas of good practice and areas for development within the local authority and wider food system. A clear action from this was to develop a food partnership group for Somerset. The new Somerset Strategic Food Alliance (SSFA) will bring together partners from the Local Authority, Health, Community and Business sectors to collectively identify local food system priorities, plan action for change and champion good food opportunities.

As part of a collaboration with Somerset Health Determinants Research Council (HDRC) public health have funded community development work to ensure community and voluntary organisations are actively involved and resourced to support this work and that priority and health inequality groups and their specific needs and preferences are represented in the priorities for food system development of the alliance.

Existing food networks in Somerset

The aim of the alliance is not to duplicate the existing brilliant food work happening in communities across Somerset but, where possible champion and enable more community action. Existing networks include Food and Farming Network, Food resilience steering group and Sustainable Food Somerset as well as many other placed-based partnerships. There is no internal local authority led food group.

The priorities and key themes of the Somerset strategic food alliance are to be agreed by the partnership but example of areas where priorities work could be categorised.

Somerset Strategic Food Alliance



- New Multi-partnership alliance improving Somerset local food system
- Alliance Grant pilot projects showcasing positive change
- HDRC community researchers – local community representation on the alliance to shape priorities

Example projects:

- **All** – Address root causes of food insecurity, healthier advertising, develop food strategy/plan, reduce inequalities
- **Procurement** – Include sustainable food in procurement policy
- **Planning** - reduce fast food near schools, more local food growing opportunities
- **Climate Change** – Align to nature recovery and land use strategy, encourage sustainable farming and local processing
- **Local food producers** – Local supply chains,
- **Economy** – Healthy food support in retail and catering
- **Education** – School food standards, free school meals,
- **Health** – Disease management, obesity strategy, healthy start
- **VCSE** –
 - Champion community food solutions – growing, cookery, composting, community kitchens, food networks

For more info on the food alliance please contact kate.anderson@somerset.gov.uk in public health