

Sunshine Coach Programme

Variety, the Children's Charity

Registered Charity Number 209259 (England & Wales)

SC038505 (Scotland)

Applicant Eligibility Criteria & Casework Metrics

July 2026

In order for your application to be approved, your organisation will need to meet our eligibility criteria. The first step of our online application is an eligibility checker, where you will be required to confirm that your organisation meets our criteria in order to submit your application.

There are six core eligibility areas that we look at:

1. Age requirements
2. Organisation type
3. Special educational needs and disability criteria
4. Financial disadvantage criteria
5. Usage and impact
6. Operational readiness

Variety's mission is to improve the lives of children and young people. Our Sunshine Coaches are for schools & non-profits as they are used to (among other things) compliment the academic curriculum, for school trips, outdoor learning experiences, sporting events, hydrotherapy, life skills and social development. The Sunshine Coach Programme supports schools and organisations by providing accessible transport in order to help create these experiences.

We do have alternative supportive programmes for individuals. These are our [individual grants for specialist equipment](#) and [wheelchair](#) programmes and [Access Interns](#) for our older learners. There is more information available on our website.

We are an international charity, with our roots beginning in [Pennsylvania, America, in the 1920s](#). We have since grown all over the world thanks to the patronage of [celebrities and the arts](#). The UK branch supports schools and charities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Below we will elaborate on the eligibility criteria a little more, explain why it's necessary, and how we mark this during the casework stage of your application.

1: Age requirements

As a children's charity, we work with children up to 19 years of age.

There are ongoing conversations about supporting young people up to 25 who may continue their learning in alternative provisions, in line with the Children and Families Act 2014 & the accompanying SEND Code of Practice. For now, it is agreed that so long as 75% of service users are below the age of 19, you are still eligible for a Sunshine Coach. That means if your organisation has 30 children aged 19 and under and 10 aged 20 and over, you are still able to apply.

2: Your organisation type

Our Sunshine Coaches are for:

- Nursey, primary and secondary schools – including SEN schools, mainstream schools, mainstream schools with SEN provision, boarding schools, alternative provisions or academy trusts.
- Non-profit organisations – including other charities, youth clubs, hospices, hospitals, and vocational groups.
- Organisations which are based and operate in the UK.

3: Special educational needs and disability criteria

Variety exists to improve the lives of children who are disabled, disadvantaged, have special educational needs, or a combination of all. The UK's Equality Act 2010's definition of disability is: *"You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities."* ([Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 - GOV.UK](#)).

A special educational need (SEN) means help that is in addition to, or different from the support generally given to all children of the same age. A child has a SEN if they need further adjustments or support on top of 'differentiation', which is when teachers have previously made adjustments so they can meet a range of needs for all children in the class. A child does not need a medical diagnosis to be recognised as having SEN. ([What is a Special Educational Need? - Suffolk SENDIASS](#)).

Variety utilises a harmonised classification system that aligns with the Family Resources Survey (FRS) framework. This includes:

1. Mobility impairments
2. Stamina/breathing/fatigue impairments
3. Dexterity impairments
4. Mental health conditions
5. Memory impairments
6. Hearing impairments
7. Vision impairments

8. Learning impairments
9. Social/behavioural impairments
10. Other conditions not listed above.

We take into account the SEN provision in organisations, which is available on the relevant establishment page of the government website.

In the application form, we will ask you to outline the disabilities and/or special educational needs of the children and young people who access your organisation.

4: Financial disadvantage criteria

Variety aims to address the link between disability and poverty. This is very much relevant to our other grant programmes, which exist to support individuals and their families. The Sunshine Coach Programme, as a grant programme for organisations, looks at both the organisation as a whole and service users involved. We do this by checking the postcode of the organisation with the relevant government deprivation statistic tool which can be found at the bottom of this document in the casework section. We are specifically looking at the IMDD score to see how disadvantaged the postcode is compared to the rest of the country. For schools, we additionally look at the average number of students receiving, or eligible for Free School Meals. [The national average of FSM eligible students is 26.5%](#) and we compare the number in your school with this, as an indicator of likely deprivation and household income in the catchment area of the school.

If your organisation does not support SEND children, we will ask you to demonstrate that you support financially disadvantaged children.

5: Usage and impact

We expect our Sunshine Coaches to be used 4-5 times a week, 39 weeks a year.

Sunshine Coaches are for educational purposes, activities, residentials, and anything that would further the educational, emotional or social development of the children attending your organisation. We ask that is used frequently so that your children have the best chance at opportunities to learn and grow, and so we can be sure that the Sunshine Coach is having a positive effect on your organisation.

If your application is successful, you will be asked to participate in our impact monitoring process. This will involve both a brief telephone interview approximately three months after your Sunshine Coach is delivered, and a short survey ten months after your Sunshine Coach is delivered.

Your feedback is vital in helping us to evaluate the impact of our work and demonstrate the ongoing needs of disabled and disadvantaged children across the UK. This, in turn, enables Variety to raise further funds and support more children in need.

6: Operational readiness

To ensure that your organisation can receive a Sunshine Coach if successful, we consider your operational readiness. We look at:

- If you have your share of the contribution to fund the Sunshine Coach
- How you will maintain the Sunshine Coach (if you have a budget for repairs, fuel, MOT, insurance etc)
- Where and how you will keep your Sunshine Coach in evenings, weekends, overnight and throughout the summer holidays, if it is not being used on an outing
- Whether you have vehicle drivers with appropriate licenses (D1s for the 17 seater and 17 seater with tail-lift)

6a: Your contribution

The Sunshine Coaches are expensive vehicles. The Programme works so that your organisation contributes 1/3 of the base cost of the Sunshine Coach, and we match your application with a donor who contributes the remaining 2/3.

Dependent on your Sunshine Coach type selected, we will be asking you to contribute between £18,000.00 and £25,000.00. This does not include VAT which will be your organisation's responsibility to pay, unless your organisation is VAT exempt or you can pay and claim back.

We understand that this is a significant amount of money, and so you can submit your application while actively fundraising. We ask that you provide an estimated date that you will have secured the full funds by, so that we can assign donors appropriately.

If your application has been approved and matched with a donor but you do not have the funds, we reserve the right to ask you to withdraw your application and re-apply when you have the money available. This is so that we can re-allocate the donor's fund to an alternative beneficiary who are able to receive a coach immediately.

Submitting your application while not having the funds available does not affect the assessment or potential approval of your application. It just means that we can move the process along quicker, should a donor come available to fund your coach. If you decline due to the lack of funds, the donor will be allocated to another organisation.

We ask that you do have the funds available at the point of application where possible.

Casework

Casework is the first step in your application's journey. It is carried out internally and is a check of all the information you have provided, to ensure that it is factual, clear, and matches the eligibility criteria we look for. There are formal metrics in place for each step of the process,

and the subcategories are marked on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest score. The total is then added up, and the application is sent to assessment so our Network of External Assessors can explore the coach usage and impact with you.

If your application does not get a high enough score at Casework to go to assessment (which is generally 60% and above), it will first be passed to another member of the Sunshine Coach Team who will independently carry out a secondary Casework to see if they come to the same conclusion. If so, your application will be rejected and you will be provided with a statement explaining the scoring and reasoning. You can appeal this decision by emailing the team at appeals@variety.org.uk. More information about the appeal process will be available soon.

Below we will outline the metrics we use, and how they are rated for your application.

As we work over four countries, the government tools we use are different and in line with each government's policies. We have separated by country, where relevant, for ease.

1: Organisation type

1a: Schools & alternative provisions.

Country	Metric
England	We identify the school with their URN and the “Get Information About Schools” .gov website, along with the school website. We download and read the most recent Ofsted report. (N.B the Ofsted rating is not relevant to the application, we are just checking that the school is a legitimate organisation).
Wales	We find the school on the My Local School Welsh government website, and find the most recent inspection report on ESTYN .
Scotland	We identify schools with their SEED and find the most recently Inspection Report on the Education Scotland page.
Northern Ireland	We search by school name on the Education Authority Northern Ireland page and read through the information provided. We cross-reference with the Department for Education Institution Search .

1b: Charities and non-profit organisations.

Country	Metric
England	We use the charity commission website to find English and Welsh charities.
Wales	We use the charity commission website to find English and Welsh charities.
Scotland	We use OSCR , the Scottish Charity Regulator.
Northern Ireland	We use CCNI , the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Applications are likely to score highly (5) if they are legitimate and regulated.

2: The age of your organisation.

You would have been asked to fill out when your organisation was founded as part of our application form, so this information should be available for us from your completed form. If it is not, we will look on the school and .gov website to determine this for schools & alternative provisions. For non-profit organisations and charities, this information is available on the relevant charity commission website and/or on the website of the charity.

3: The age of the children in your organisation.

You would have been asked to input this information in the application form, and we cross-reference with your organisation's website.

If this information is not available, we will contact you via email to enquire.

4: Disabled and disadvantaged children and young people.

4a: Schools and alternative provisions.

4ai: Disabled & SEN children

This information is available on the .gov website, which will list if your school & organisation is a special school and/or has SEN provision. It will also state the number of SEN children on roll, and the SEN capacity of your school.

We will also go through your SEN statement (if available) on the school website, along with your mission & values, student cohort, and specialist provisions (hydrotherapy pools or lessons, physiotherapy, alternative/bespoke curriculums).

4aaii: Disadvantaged children in school.

Country	Metric
England	We use the government Deprivation in England 2025 tool to better understand the extent and type of deprivation of your catchment area.
Wales	We use the Welsh Index of Deprivation tool to better understand the extent and types of deprivation in your catchment area.
Scotland	We use the SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) government tool to understand the extent and types of deprivation in your catchment area.
Northern Ireland	We use the NISRA (the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)'s 2017 deprivation tool to understand the extent and types of deprivation in your catchment area.

We look for an IMDD (index of multiple deprivation decile) score. A score of 10 indicates little deprivation and generally highlights the more affluent areas of the country, and a score of 1 indicates significant deprivation in the postcode area.

We use the IMDD score as an overall indicator, as this combines:

- Barriers to Housing & Services
- Living environment
- Income
- Crime
- Health & disability
- Employment
- Education and skills.

We fully appreciate that the metrics provided are not always indicative of reality, and heavily take into account the detail given in your application form, especially what you have referenced in the disadvantage & disability sections.

4b: Charities and non-profit organisations

We use the relevant charity commission websites to look at the “*charity overview*”, “*who, what how, where*” and “*governing document*” sections to get a good understanding of how your organisation supports disabled and disadvantaged children and young people. We cross-reference with your application form and website.

Occasionally, we will also use the deprivation tools, unless your charity or non-profit operates nation-wide.

5: Coach usage and impact.

You will have been asked to state how often you will be using the Sunshine Coach, and what you will be using it for, as part of your application form. We will read this, along with the reasons the Sunshine Coach is needed, and mark your response on the scale. As a reminder, we ask that you endeavour to use your Sunshine Coach 4-5 times a week, 39 weeks a year.

6: Operational readiness.

You will have been asked to state the amount you are able to contribute and whether this is available immediately on the application form, at the point of applying. However, if this is not complete or is unclear, we will be in touch via email to confirm.

We will also review how you will fund the coach maintenance, and what long-term measures you have in place to ensure the coach is kept safe, insured, and running.