

# Collaboration and Innovation Grant Application Guidance

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## About the grant

The Centre for Public Engagement Practice in Arts and Humanities' (CPEP) Collaboration and Innovation Grant brings together researchers, public engagement professionals, cultural and creative sector partners, charities and community partners to co-develop and deliver experimental and interdisciplinary public engagement activity. The grant has arts, humanities and social sciences research at its heart, and seeks to foster sustainable cross-sector relationship building through collaborative public engagement design and delivery.

The Collaboration and Innovation Grant will support engagement practitioners to form new practice-led and action-orientated teams to promote inclusive collaboration and innovation in novel and unexpected ways. They will bring people

together through working with others to achieve stated but flexible aims. They are awards for team building, and team work.

These grants aim to generate enhanced collaboration in engagement work across multiple dimensions – cross-sector, cross-discipline, cross-function. They will create new sites for conception of ideas and leadership of innovative practice, and they will do this in a way that leads to sustained groups and lasting connections between members of the teams.

By '**public engagement**', we mean a two-way process which breaks down barriers and connects research and wider society.

By '**collaboration**', we mean inviting, valuing and integrating ideas from all project partners, actively working together towards an agreed outcome, with clear understanding and expectations of roles and responsibilities.

By '**innovation**', we mean generating new collaborations, relationships and ideas that bring refreshed energy to public engagement work.

Funding of between £10,000 and £15,000 is available. The amount funded must be matched at 25% by the lead applicant's institution, either directly or in kind. There is a section on funding later in this guidance.

## Impact

We want teams funded by this grant to pursue public engagement work which challenges the boundaries of current practice and pushes practice forward.

The kinds of impact we want teams to work towards include:

- **Building up the infrastructure of collaborative public engagement work by working together in new ways, crossing institutional, sectoral and other barriers**
- **Changing the way people see and encounter research and research institutions, through engagement activities which are novel, innovative, unexpected, experimental – approaches and formats that haven't been tried before and that reach people in new ways**

- **Achieving a significant shift in equality, diversity and inclusion in public engagement, increasing the diversity of the public engagement practitioner community, and reaching and connecting with more diverse audiences**

The assessment criteria for applications reflect these intended impacts and are set out later in this guidance ('How will applications be assessed?'). Applications should be ambitious and consider that factors around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), openness, and reaching more deeply and widely to public audiences are integral to the core assessment criteria.

## Help to apply

Our Public Engagement Officers can support applicants with questions about the guidance or making an application. You can email [cpep@sas.ac.uk](mailto:cpep@sas.ac.uk) with questions or book in a 10-minute call.

The guidance is available in accessible formats, including formatted PDF and Plain Text and large print. If you require an alternative format please get in touch.

We will be hosting an information webinar on 9 March 2026, 2-3pm. This webinar will include input from researchers who recently took part in a pilot, including their reflections and tips for grant applicants. The webinar will be recorded and later available on the CPEP website. Sign up for the webinar [here](#).

## How will support be provided to successful applicants?

During the grant period, CPEP will support successful projects in the following ways:

- Advice and training for lead applicants based on the learning from pilot projects of this scheme; there are a wide range of practical issues and insights which we can share to ensure projects get off to a strong start
- Sharing toolkits and templates e.g. toolkits for budget development
- Being Human and CPEP training sessions will be available to all collaborators in project groups
- Joint meetings for lead researchers across different grant projects at the start and end of the grant period
- Up to two meetings throughout the grant period with a CPEP Public Engagement Officer to review progress and any challenges
- Ad hoc support via email and online meetings, where required

## How and when to apply?

Call for applications opens:	Tuesday 10 February
Application webinar:	Monday 9 March 2-3pm
Application deadline:	Tuesday 26 May 5pm
Notification of outcomes:	July 2026
Grant starts:	September 2026
Grant ends:	by the end of June 2027

When the call for applications opens, a link to the Collaboration and Innovation Grant application form will go live on our website: [engagementpractice.org](https://engagementpractice.org). You will be asked to complete a brief registration process on Survey Monkey Apply before being given access to the application form.

## How much funding is available?

- You can apply for a grant of between £10,000 and £15,000.
- The lead applicant's institution must match fund to a value of 25% of the amount applied for, equalling a total of between £12,500 and £18,750. This can take the form of a) direct funding to the project, or b) provision by the institution of staff time (where this would be eligible to be Directly Allocated in a UKRI grant), space, resources, or support equivalent to the same value.
- There will be no advantage in the competition to seeking less than £10,000 in funding, and our expectation is that this will be the minimum resource needed in most cases.
- We anticipate making up to 5 awards in this year's round of funding.

## Who can apply?

Applications must be submitted on behalf of a proposed team consisting of researchers at Higher Education Institutes (HEI)/UKRI-recognised Independent Research Organisations (IRO), professional services staff and non-institutional partners or individuals. All project team members should be based in the UK.

Please refer to the [CPEP Glossary](#) for relevant terms below.

### *Lead applicant*

The lead applicant must be employed as a researcher at an HEI or IRO. The lead applicant is responsible for shaping, convening and leading the team. The lead

applicant's institution holds the award, and the lead applicant will be expected to project manage the grant.

Lead applicant eligibility. The lead applicant:

- Must be employed at a HEI or a [UKRI-recognised IRO](#)
- Must be an arts, humanities, or social science researcher (we will work with a broad and inclusive definition of these disciplines)
- Must be on an employment contract (full-time or part-time, permanent or fixed-term) that will run to at least the end of July 2027
- Must hold a doctoral degree and can be at any stage of their post-doctoral research career

*Other team members*

Other team members fall into three categories. The grant has requirements for ensuring a balanced team across these categories (see below).

**A. Researchers.** Other researcher eligibility. We want to take a broad and inclusive approach to participation by researchers in diverse contexts. Other researchers on the team may be:

- Employed as a researcher by an HEI or IRO (this can be on a full-time or part-time, fixed term or permanent contract)
- Fellows (e.g. non-stipendiary, visiting, emeritus/emerita) associated with an HEI or IRO
- Research students enrolled on a doctoral programme (supervisor support is required)

Researchers other than the lead applicant can be from any disciplinary background. They must not have a previous working relationship with the lead applicant (see below).

**B. Other Professionals.** HEI/IRO professional staff eligibility. We want to encourage full participation in teams by professional staff who are not researchers. These team members may be:

- In any role across professional services e.g. technical staff, library staff, public engagement professionals, events staff, communications staff
- They can work in any part of the institution/organisation, provided the lead applicant believes they would make a valuable contribution

**C. Non-institutional partners.** Team members who participate on behalf of non-academic organisations, or as individuals from outside academic institutions (i.e. HEIs or UKRI-recognised IROs). These team members may be:

- Employed by a non-academic organisation
- Involved in a non-academic organisation as a volunteer, in governance structures, etc.
- Individuals without a specific organisational affiliation

The range of eligible organisations that may provide team members is very broad and includes:

- Arts and cultural organisations (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums)
- Organisations within the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector
- Schools, sixth form colleges and further education institutions
- Central or local government, or public services
- Charities
- Community groups, collectives, clubs
- Commercial businesses

The range of eligible non-affiliated individuals who may become team members is also broad and includes:

- Independent researchers (this means a person not in any of the categories above, working on a self-directed research project – in this category we may request evidence of research activity)
- Independent curators (this means a person not in any of the categories above, working on a self-directed curatorial project – in this category we may request evidence of the project)
- Artists or creative practitioners
- Freelance creative technicians (e.g. coders/IT specialists/AV) – but if included in the team they should be a full member of the team, not simply hired to do a service (this is different from hiring AV support for an event, for example)

If you're not sure if your partner organisation or an individual is eligible, please get in touch with the CPEP team.

In the case of any team members other than the lead applicant who are employed by an HEI/IRO/other organisation, we do not have specific requirements on contract duration. Instead, we ask lead applicants to consider this factor when assembling the team, with a view to ensuring the team has a high chance of being able to work together throughout the period of the grant.

## Team composition

The following requirements apply in relation to team composition:

1. All project teams must include between 5 and 12 participants
2. In addition to the lead applicant, teams must include at least 1 additional researcher from **another institution** who **does not have a previous working relationship with the lead applicant** [category A]
3. Teams should include at least 1 team member in professional services position within an HEI or IRO – this can be the lead applicant’s institution or another institution [category B]
4. Teams must include a minimum of 2 non-HEI/IRO partner team members (they can be from organisations, or individuals, as set out above); these team members **can be from the same organisation or different organisations** [category C]

Proposed teams may freely include more than these quotas in any categories, subject to an overall limit of 12 members. We encourage applicants to be ambitious in designing and building teams which involve a range of researchers and practitioners from multiple perspectives.

The lead applicant is responsible for shaping the proposed team. At the point of application the proposal may include full details of all the team members, but we acknowledge and understand that this may not be possible (or desirable) in every case or context. Some very valuable teams may need to form in stages. We ask lead applicants to provide as much information as possible about the proposed team composition, and why this would be dynamic and innovative. Details of specific people who would join the team should be included where possible, and where this is not possible or gaps remain, the application should explain the profile intended for the rest of the team. If a grant is awarded, the full team will need to be convened by the end of October 2026.

## What would not be eligible

- A partnership consisting only of researchers, only of HEI/UKRI-recognised IRO professional staff or only of non-institutional partners
- Researchers, HEI professional staff or non-HEI partners based outside the UK; all team members must be based in the UK

## Other requirements

- Project groups should develop new working partnerships. Participating **researchers** should not have directly collaborated on research projects in the past – for example, being investigators on the same grant, holding a joint grant, or publishing together. Previous working relationships with partner organisations or non-institutional individuals are permitted, although we encourage new connections. There may be existing informal relationships within the project group, and we acknowledge that forming new partnerships can be time intensive. However, as this grant is about innovation, we are looking for novel collaborations and experimental public engagement.
- Project groups must have **arts, humanities or social sciences disciplines** at the heart of the collaboration. We encourage involvement of all other disciplines, and interdisciplinary approaches – researchers other than the lead applicant can be from any discipline.
- Team members can either be based in one location or spread across multiple regions in the UK – we will seek an explanation of the **geographic approach** in the application. Whatever the geographic spread of the team, we recommend teams convene in person for at least three meetings evenly spaced through the grant period, and this should be planned and budgeted for.
- We will consider **multiple funding applications** from one institution, but we encourage you to liaise with your colleagues internally before submitting, as one coordinated application may be more successful.
- Applications should give careful consideration to ensuring **a diverse team** and should actively drive involvement of team members from underrepresented groups, and/or groups who share protected characteristics.
- We welcome applications from researchers at **all career stages**, including Early Career Researchers, and from project groups that include independent researchers.
- We encourage lead applicants to **collaborate** on elements of the application with their wider project group, with consideration to limited time constraints from partners at application stage. We will expect to see **shared decision-making, collaboration and elements of co-design** throughout the project.

## What public engagement activity can be part of your project?

- Each team should deliver within the grant period a public engagement activity (or activities) in some form. This activity may take the form of various formats, methodologies, approaches or outputs – provided it engages directly with the public. The team's work should be directed towards shaping this activity; the project should be action-orientated, not only discursive.
- Due to the nature of this grant, we do not require the public engagement activity to be fully defined at the point of application. We are looking for proposals that demonstrate the potential of a fresh team to build a deep collaboration leading to innovative engagement activities. We expect vibrant and novel activities to emerge from collaborations and teamwork enabled by the grant.
- Some examples of creative formats that can run in person, online, or in hybrid formats include:
  - Performances, workshops, exhibitions, installations, museum takeovers/lates, walks and tours, pop-ups, games and quizzes, screenings and talks
  - We also encourage teams to develop experimental and unexpected formats
- We are looking for projects that engage audiences, communities and participants in arts, humanities and social sciences research, through creative and innovative formats. There should be opportunities for interactivity and for audiences to contribute their own experiences and knowledge as part of the project. They should also come away having learnt something clear and understandable about arts, humanities or social sciences research.
- All activities must be free to attend.
- Lead applicants must follow their institution's ethics review policies and procedures relating to all project activities organised by the team.

## What this funding cannot be used for

- Activities which take place or start before September
- Funding to conduct new research
- Discussion-based collaboration between partners, without any public engagement activity

- Activity that does not engage a non-academic audience
- Activity that does not share arts, humanities or social science research
- Academic seminars, conferences and symposia, or any event that has been designed primarily for the benefit of academics, students, stakeholders or others already engaged with the world of research

## Budget guidelines and access costs

We will ask you to fill in a budget template, supplied by CPEP, listing the proposed spending for your activity, for each participating partner. You will be asked to specify the type of cost using the following categories, including description and amount:

- Staff time or fees\* for non-institutional partners involved
- Venue or equipment hire
- Materials
- Marketing and promotion e.g. flyers, paid advertising
- Access costs\*\* e.g. personal and/or activity related
- Documentation
- Essential production costs
- Travel
- Overheads directly relating to the project e.g., insurance etc.

We understand that changes may need to be made to your activity budgets during the delivery period. Any significant changes will need to be discussed and agreed with CPEP.

### \*Salaries or fees

Your budget should include fees for artists and freelancers involved in the activity. We are committed to fair pay for those who work in creativity and culture. When thinking about rates, you can ask your partner for their rates, or consult relevant guidance

- For creative practitioners e.g. artists, writers, you might consult:
  - [Artists' Union England](#)
  - [Scottish Artists Union](#)
  - [The Society of Authors](#)
  - [National Union of Journalists](#)
- For community partners and groups, you might consult
  - [National Institute for Health and Social Care](#)
- For independent researchers and curators, you might consult:
 

[Course: Going Freelance with a Humanities PhD | RESHAPED](#) (free to access with login)

## **\*\*Access costs**

Access costs are costs aimed at removing barriers to participation for yourself, someone you are working with or employing, or for participants or audiences engaging with your public engagement activity. There are two categories of access costs:

### Personal Access Costs (internal)

If you, as the lead applicant, or any of the core team of people you are designing the project and delivering the activity with, require additional costs relating to access needs that cannot be met through another source, reasonable costs will be covered by the Centre.

Some examples are:

- a sign language interpreter
- specialist equipment or software
- additional travel costs
- a Personal Assistant for a disabled person

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and you should tell us what you require in order to deliver the project. Personal Access Costs are treated separately to your main activity budget.

For Personal Access Costs that are known at the point of application, we will ask you to provide further detail in the budget, including a breakdown of the costs involved and what they will be used for. For any Personal Access Costs that are unknown at the point of application and that arise later in the project, you should contact the CPEP team directly.

### Activity Access Costs

All access costs relating to your public engagement activity should be included within your main budget.

This can include the costs for making your activity accessible to public audiences, participants and artists e.g. interpreters for an event, and costs related to childcare and other caring responsibilities where you are unlikely to be able to undertake the planned activities without this support.

Ineligible project costs are:

- Staff costs for anyone employed by an HEI or UKRI-recognised IRO, including full-time and part-time staff. Institutional match funding may include these costs
- Evaluation costs (evaluation will be provided by the Centre team)
- International travel or accommodation
- Hardware and capital equipment (e.g. laptops, projectors, mobile phones)
- Equipment purchases or capital costs
- General overheads of the community group or organisation not related to the delivery of the project, such as equipment or building maintenance costs

## How will applications be assessed?

First, your application will be checked for eligibility. If eligible, your application will then be scored by an assessment panel who will assess it according to the following criteria:

- **Collaboration**
  - Making new connections between people bringing different perspectives and skills, and who have not worked together before
  - Interdisciplinary, cross-sector, diverse viewpoints
  - Open and collaborative approach
  - Equality, diversity, inclusion and accessibility – ensuring EDI goals are ambitious and fully embedded in both team formation and the team's practice
- **Innovation**
  - Ambition, creativity and potential to bring about public engagement in novel ways and/or reach new audiences
  - Grounding in arts, humanities or social science knowledge
  - Reaching audiences outside academia
  - Potential impact for intended audience
- **Planning and delivery**
  - Appropriateness of funding request, fees and activity costs
  - Quality of planning, including timeline, task and budget management
  - Distribution of work across project members and capacity for delivery

In making the decisions for the final awards, the review panel will also balance awards by considering:

- Engagement with underserved rural, coastal, or urban communities who may have low rates of participation in public engagement and with higher education institutions
- Geographic diversity: the grant will seek to balance projects across nations and regions within the UK

Successful applicants will be informed in July 2026. Payment schedules, onboarding forms and ethics reviews will need to be agreed and completed before the activity starts.

We will endeavour to provide feedback where possible.

### **How will evaluation, data collection and reporting work?**

CPEP is both an action-based programme which funds and supports public engagement work and a research centre with a role to advance understanding, or generate new knowledge, thinking or discovery within the field of public engagement. In this way, the centre has a dual role for practice and research.

One consequence of this is that team members in this grant will also themselves become research subjects. CPEP has a full ethics review and Data Management Plan to ensure this aspect is managed appropriately. We will seek informed consent from team members in their status as research participants. Another consequence is that we will conduct research-based evaluation of all CPEP supported grants and activities.

All lead applicants will be required to undertake the following in relation to their grant:

- Lead the team in group reflection and shared learning, ensuring there is time set aside in team settings for this to happen and modelling a culture of openness and support for reflection
- Use CPEP evaluation methods for public-facing events and activities.
- Submission of reporting to the Centre's Digital Record of Practice (DROP). The DROP is an online repository of public engagement currently in development and would require awardees to reflect on their experience of the project and evaluate its impact.
- Follow their own institution's ethics review policies and procedures relating to public-facing engagement activities organised by the team.

All team members should:

- Provide us at the end of the grant with a short personal reflective statement outlining their working process, challenges and progress through the course of the grant period, and what they have learned through the experience. Successful applicants will be provided with specific guidance on this during the project.
- Provide input into the Centre's formal evaluation, if we request this. The Collaboration and Innovation Grant is part of the Centre's broader research inquiry into public engagement and feedback and reflection will help generate insights and create new knowledge about public engagement practice.

To support this, we advise team members to keep a reflective log or similar tool. This is an important part of the reflexive practice aspect of the Centre's approach. There is no prescription on the means or format participants should use to do this – it is intrinsically personal to every participant.

Project teams may also wish to develop and use other creative evaluation methods to gather deeper insights into their public engagement activity, both for their own insight and to incorporate into DROP submissions.

## Completing the application form

We acknowledge that preparing a grant application takes considerable time and resource. As such, we have tried to keep the application as short as possible and easy to understand. If you have any questions about the language or meaning of a question, please get in touch.

A Word version of the application form is available on our website, which can be used for reference when preparing your application. However, please note that applications will only be accepted through [Survey Monkey Apply](#). Applicants can save their progress and return to their applications before submitting. Applications can be downloaded during or after submission.

Please upload a completed [budget template](#) (as provided) and letters of support (as PDF files) from all non-institutional partners, HEI/UKRI-recognised IRO professional staff and researchers, who are not the lead researcher, and from PhD supervisors (if PhD researchers are part of your application), when submitting your application. Letters of support should demonstrate that the lead applicant has been in communication with the partnering organisation or individual, and that discussion of roles has taken place.

We have an Equal Opportunities Monitoring form as part of our application process, which will help us to ensure that CPEP opportunities are accessible to as many people as possible and to continue our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment. More information on how this data will be used is included on the form. The information provided will not be used as part of the application review process.

## Feedback

We welcome feedback from potential applicants and other users of this guidance and we may use such input to improve and clarify it. We may also make revisions in response to questions we receive. In fairness to potential applicants, we will always seek to avoid making substantive changes to the design provisions or requirements as set out above. Feedback can be directed to the contact information below.

## How can I get in touch?

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[engagementpractice.org](https://engagementpractice.org)

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