

Ambition for Excellence

Guidance for applicants

The below is a summary of key information. Please see [section three](#) for full eligibility criteria.

Summary of key information	
What is the focus of the fund?	<p>The aim of this fund is to stimulate and support significant ambition and excellence across the arts sector in England, particularly outside London.</p> <p>It is a flexible fund that will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribute to the development of place (and specifically grow talent, leadership and production capacity in the regions) • address national sector development issues, especially in relation to outdoor arts and festivals • assist the arts sector in England to develop international collaborations • make a strong contribution to the Creative Case for Diversity <p>The fund supports organisations and partnerships with production, commissioning or creative development projects.</p> <p>Projects should demonstrate potential for significant impact on the development of talent and leadership, and the growth of an ambitious international-facing arts infrastructure, especially outside London.</p>

Who can apply?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organisations that have made an Expression of interest and have received a notification from us inviting them to apply, and are one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National portfolio organisations • organisations primarily focused on (and that can demonstrate a track record in) one or more of the following: creating, producing, distributing and presenting the arts in England, and are based in England • Universities and colleges that have a standalone arts entity • museums (that are applying for arts-focused projects only) • partnership applicants: please refer to section three <p>Applicant organisations must not apply for funding for their project from other Arts Council programmes.</p>
When is the deadline for applications?	<p>The Ambition for excellence fund is a rolling programme, and will open on 28 May 2015 and close on 27 October 2017.</p> <p>There is a two-stage application process.</p> <p>Applicants must submit an Expression of interest, and if invited to apply must then make a full application within four weeks of being invited.</p>
How much can be applied for per application?	Between £100,000–£750,000

When must the activity take place?	<p>Activities must start no earlier than the likely date on which you could have received and accepted in writing an offer of funding from us.</p> <p>Please note: we will aim to notify applicants of our decision no more than 22 weeks following submission of an Expression of interest. This should be factored into your timeline planning.</p> <p>Activities can be any length up to three years. They must end no later than three years from their start date. The latest start date will be 31 March 2018.</p>
Minimum match funding from other sources	<p>A minimum of 10 per cent of the total cash cost of the activity must come from sources other than the Arts Council. This can include funders overseas. This match funding must be in cash, rather than in kind.</p>
When will we make our decision?	<p>We will aim to notify applicants of our final decision no more than 22 weeks following submission of an Expression of interest.</p>

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Section One: Introduction

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the Ambition for excellence fund. This guidance gives you information on how to apply for funding.

The fund will support organisations and partnerships with production, commissioning or creative development projects that demonstrate potential for significant impact on the development of talent and leadership, and the growth of an ambitious international-facing arts infrastructure in England, especially outside London.

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2015 and 2018, we plan to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.
www.artscouncil.org.uk

About Arts Council England's strategic funds 2015–18

Our Strategic funds help us to target particular challenges, opportunities or gaps, creating the environment for further development to take place in the arts and culture sector. Ultimately, they help us meet the goals set out in our strategy, *[Great art and culture for everyone](#)*. Our goals are as follows:

Goal 1: excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 2: everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 3: the arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable

Goal 4: the leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled

Goal 5: every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

The focus of this fund is Goal 1.

Section Two: Purpose of the Ambition for excellence fund

Aims and outcomes

The aim of this fund is to stimulate and support a programme of ambition, talent and excellence across the arts sector in England and in particular outside London. It forms an important element of how we contribute specifically to development of place, grow and develop talent and leadership in the regions, enhance excellence through international working and create the highest quality work for audiences including outdoors and in festivals.

The fund supports organisations and partnerships with production, commissioning or creative development projects that demonstrate potential for significant impact on the development of talent and leadership, and the growth of an ambitious arts content infrastructure in England.

It supports work that goes beyond an organisation's core activity, in terms of scale, practice or range of collaborators. It should lead to a clearly identified step-change on practice or place and provide a legacy for both.

The geographical focus is designed to support the Arts Council's intent to ensure that a minimum of 75 per cent of lottery funding is committed outside London. For this particular fund, our expectation is that 80–90 per cent of the fund will be committed outside London. This higher percentage recognises both that there are significant unrealised opportunities for talent development in the regions, and the capacity for cultural growth outside London.

The central aims of the fund are:

- to achieve step-change impact on the sector, practice or place
- develop ambition, excellence, talent and leadership across ecologies and/or places

- to further enable contribution to the Creative case for diversity – enriching the arts for artists, audiences and our wider society
- to increase the quality and range of arts commissioning partnerships, including internationally, and in festival or outdoor contexts
- to allow the sector to respond ambitiously to compelling or timely opportunities
- to bring the best of culture to new or larger audiences, including by digital capture

How much funding is available?

There is a total of £35.2 million available through this fund. The fund will be open for three years from the end of May 2015 to the end of March 2018.

We expect that Ambition for excellence fund will be a very competitive programme. Please consider what you would do if we cannot fund your activity. You can find some useful information on other sources of funding on our website (www.artscouncil.org.uk).

This is a three-year strategic fund programme, and we expect that this significant investment during that period will have a longer term impact. However, please note that support through this programme does not indicate additional investment will be available from future Arts Council England funding programmes, including the National portfolio funding programme.

Section Three: Eligibility

Please read the eligibility requirements for the fund carefully. If you do not meet any of these requirements we will be unable to consider your application for funding.

Who can apply?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• organisations that have made an Expression of interest and have received a response from us inviting them to apply, and are one of the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- National portfolio organisations- organisations primarily focused on (and that can demonstrate a track record in) one or more of the following: creating, producing, distributing and presenting the arts in England, and are based in England- Universities and colleges that have a standalone arts entity- museums (that are applying for arts-focused projects only)- consortia: all types of organisations (including local authorities, museums, libraries, Music education hubs, non-arts and commercial organisations) are eligible as partners in consortia, as are individual artists, but the named lead applicant must be a National portfolio organisation, an organisation primarily focused on arts activity or a museum that is applying for arts-focused activity <p>Applicant organisations must not be applying for funding for their project from other Arts Council programmes.</p> <p>It is unlikely that we would fund an application from a National portfolio organisation that has not scored at least ‘met’ against the Creative Case.</p>
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Who cannot apply?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• applicants that have not completed an expression of interest form and received an invitation to apply• organisations applying for funding for activities that are aimed at making a profit to be distributed to members or shareholders• individuals, unless you apply as a director of your own company. We will not accept applications from people applying in a purely personal capacity• local authorities, unless a National portfolio organisation, an organisation primarily focused on arts activity or a museum that is applying for arts-focused activity
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What activity can be supported?	<p>Arts-related activities that make a significant contribution to the aims of the programme.</p> <p>Examples of the type of activity that can be supported include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ambitious projects of a scale that could not otherwise happen • one-off or time-limited opportunities likely to create national impact for the arts and likely to result in a step-change of ambition for organisations, place, artists or artform • innovative outdoor arts projects based on talent development and new commissions to significantly increase the quality and range of artistic practice in the field, and to grow the international market for UK large-scale work • bold, innovative ideas from arts organisations working internationally to both import and export talent and ideas, leading to significant growth in ambitious content • exceptional cultural leadership projects creating new product, talent development opportunities or cultural infrastructure developments • projects that will create a lasting change in the ambition and scale of work created outside London and to further increase the pool of talented leaders and artists living and working in the regions
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What activity cannot be funded?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities that are not related to the arts and Goal 1 of the Arts Council's strategy ('excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries') • activities that do not benefit or engage people in England (in the short or long term) or that do not help artists and arts organisations in England to carry out their work • activities (including buying goods or services) that have started, been bought, ordered or contracted before we make a decision about your application. This is because we cannot fund activity retrospectively • costs that are already paid for by other income including your own funds or any other funding
How much can be applied for per application?	Between £100,000–£750,000
How much match funding from sources other than Arts Council England is required?	At least 10 per cent of the total cash cost of the activity must come from sources other than the Arts Council. This match funding must be in cash, rather than in kind
Delivery timetable	<p>Activities must start no earlier than the likely date on which you could have received and accepted in writing an offer of funding from us but must have started no later than six months after you have accepted an offer of funding from us.</p> <p>Activities can be any length up to three years. They must end no later than three years after their start date.</p>

Consortia and partnership agreements

We welcome applications for funding from organisations working as a consortium. One organisation must act as the lead organisation and submit the application.

If you are the lead applicant representing a consortium or partnership we will expect you to be solely accountable to us for the funded activity and to deliver the project in accordance with our terms and conditions.

Further guidance on what we expect from lead applicants can be found in the [Partnership agreements](#) guidance on our website.

All partners within the consortium must show a firm commitment to joint working.

Your application must show the benefits and rationale of working as a consortium. If we decide to fund your project we will enter into a legally binding grant agreement with the lead organisation. This organisation must accept our terms and conditions of grant and will be solely accountable to us for all monitoring information, how all the money is spent and for the full and successful delivery of the project.

One of our standard terms and conditions of grants is that the organisation we enter into a grant agreement with cannot subcontract any of the project to other organisations without our prior agreement in writing.

We request that partnership agreements between the lead organisation and the other partners involved in the project are submitted as mandatory documents along with your application.

Partnerships that are led by London-based organisations will form part of the calculation of investment in and outside London from this fund.

Partnerships that include, but are not led by, London-based organisations will not form part of the calculation of spend in and outside London. However, the substantive benefit and activity must apply outside London.

Section Four: What could activity look like?

We welcome applications that will make a contribution to achieving the aims and outcomes outlined in section two above.

While we are not prescriptive about the types of activities we would like to support to meet the fund's aims, examples of the types of activities we may fund could include the following:

- supporting talent development hubs around the country in order that a new generation of diverse artists and producers make more innovative and critically engaged work for wider audiences in outdoor and festival contexts
- supporting a place-based consortium (including arts organisations, museums and libraries) with a programme of commissions that allow new and diverse artistic collaborations and talent development across different scales in order to build long-term production capability and audience capacity for new work
- supporting a national network of venues to develop new models for the production and distribution of mid-scale work by world-class artists and producers
- supporting the legacy of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad through support for cultural programmes attached to major national or international events
- bold, innovative ideas from arts organisations working, or planning to work, internationally, including a range of projects at different scales – such as ambitious residency, exchange and production projects, development initiatives such as brokering, mentoring and partnership networks (including larger organisations established in international working to apply in partnership with smaller and/or emerging organisations)
- supporting innovative sector and subsector approaches to talent development

If you currently receive Arts Council funding you will need to demonstrate that your proposal is for work that is clearly in addition to your currently funded core work. You will also need to demonstrate that you have the capacity to take on a new project or the delivery of new outcomes without putting at risk the delivery of your current funding agreement commitments.

Section Five: How to apply

Expression of interest stage

If you believe you have a proposal that meets all of the eligibility criteria and the criteria described within the meeting the brief section of the application form please tell us about it by completing an expression of interest through [Grantium](#), which will give you the opportunity to describe your outline proposal in no more than 2,500 characters. Within your submission you should tell us the anticipated overall project cost and the amount you would like to request from us if you are invited to apply.

For technical guidance on how to submit your expression of interest through Grantium please read our [**Grantium guidance for applicants - Strategic Funds.**](#)

Expressions of interest can be submitted anytime until 5:00pm, 27 October 2017.

If we think that your proposal could make a significant contribution to the aims and outcomes of this strategic fund, we will inform you of our decision by email within six weeks. If you are invited to make an application you will have four weeks in which to develop your full application and the mandatory supporting documents required, as detailed in this guidance document.

If we decide not to invite you to apply we will notify you within six weeks. We will not be able to provide feedback on Expressions of interest. Contact our Customer Services team on 0845 300 6200 for further guidance.

As well as the eligibility criteria, if you are a National portfolio organisation or Major partner museum we may also take your current risk rating into account when deciding whether or not to invite an application. If you are invited to make a full application, we will also take your risk rating into account in our assessment of your application, and will expect you to include plans to mitigate against current and potential risk in your proposal.

For all applicants to the fund we will review your total investment to date from the Arts Council in order to assess organisational capacity and risk in the context of the application you have made to this fund.

When to apply

Applications must be submitted within four weeks of our inviting you to apply. Applications submitted after this time will not be considered.

You will receive an email notification confirming that we have received your application.

Making an application

1. Read this guidance carefully and contact us

This guidance gives you information on how to apply and answers some common questions. If you have any further questions you can contact our Customer Services team at enquiries@arts council.org.uk

2. Prepare and submit your proposal

You must apply through Grantium

Proposal

The proposal can be a maximum of 60,000 characters, divided into three sections: ‘Meeting the brief’ (20,000 characters), ‘Governance and management of activity’ (20,000 characters) and ‘Financial viability’ (20,000 characters). You do not need to use the full character count if you do not feel it is necessary. Use the criteria/prompts in section six of this guidance to help you structure your proposal.

Attachments

You must upload the following mandatory attachments on the ‘Attachments’ screen:

- a detailed budget for the activity, showing proposed income and expenditure (as an Excel sheet or similar)
- a work plan for proposed project, including milestones and key review dates or fill in the activity plan template within Grantium
- partnership agreements between the lead organisation and all other partners involved in the project

- financial statements for the last two years prepared to the appropriate standards for your organisation (non-National portfolio organisations only)
- your latest management accounts (non-National portfolio organisations only)

You may also upload the following optional attachments:

- up to three other relevant attachments. These must each be a maximum of five pages in length

Allowable formats: jpg, xls, xlsx, jpeg, pdf, doc, docx, pptx, and ppt.

The combined limit on file size for all the attachments taken together is 10 megabytes.

We will use the information you give us in your application form and any attachments to decide whether we will offer you a grant. If your application does not contain the information we need in the format we ask for it to be in, we may not be able to consider your application. After you have read this guidance, if you have any further questions please contact us.

Applications must be submitted within four weeks of our invitation to apply.
Applications submitted after this time will not be considered.

Assistance with your application

We are committed to being open and accessible, and want to make the Ambition for excellence fund application process accessible to everyone.

If you experience any barriers within the application process or require help to make an application, our enquiries team can be contacted by:

- telephone on: 0845 300 6200
- text phone: +44(0) 161 934 4428
- Email: enquiries@arts council.org.uk

After you submit your application

You will receive an acknowledgement email confirming that we have received your application. This will be sent to the email address which you used to log into the portal.

We will conduct an eligibility check within ten working days of receiving your application. If your application is not eligible, this means that we cannot process it any further and it will not be considered for funding. If your application is not eligible we will write to you to let you know, and will explain our decision.

Section Six: How we will make our decision

We will aim to notify applicants of our decision no later than 12 weeks after they have submitted a full application.

We will check your application to ensure that you have provided all the information we have requested.

We will make our decision based on the information you provide in your application, any further information that we request and, where relevant, data and information from the Charity Commission and Companies House websites relating to your constitution and audited accounts from the past two years.

Each criteria ('Meeting the brief', 'Governance and management of the activity', and 'Financial viability') will be assessed using a five-point word scoring:

- Not met

The application does not meet the criteria

- Potential

The application does not meet the criteria but shows potential to do so

- Met

The application meets the criteria

- Met (strong)

The application meets the criteria and shows strong qualities

- Met (outstanding)

The application meets the criteria and shows outstanding qualities

On the basis of these ratings we will recommend whether an application is suitable for funding. Applications that do not achieve at least 'met' under all three criteria will not be deemed suitable for funding.

We will assess each application against the following criteria, using the assessment prompts below:

Criteria
<p>Meeting the brief</p> <p>Weighting: 50 per cent</p> <p>Character count: up to 20,000 characters</p> <p>Convincingly articulates, using robust evidence and assumptions, how the project will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achieve significant impact on sector, practice or place (mandatory) • develop talent and leadership across arts ecologies and/or places (mandatory) • further enable contribution to the Creative case for diversity – enriching the arts for artists, audiences and our wider society (mandatory) • not simply build on or does not duplicate activity funded by other Arts Council grants (mandatory) • increase the quality and range of arts commissioning partnerships including international and in festival or outdoor contexts (if relevant to activity) • allow the sector to respond ambitiously to compelling or timely opportunities (if relevant to activity) • bring the best of culture to new or larger audiences including by digital capture (if relevant to activity)

Management of the activity

Weighting: 25 per cent

Character count: up to 20,000 characters

- clear and convincing plans to deliver the requirements described in this brief
- demonstration of skill and capacity to deliver the programme
- robust plans demonstrating that taking on this activity will not place at risk the management of the core business or any other discrete programmes currently being delivered
- are partners appropriate? Do they have clear roles and responsibilities?
- robust plans for resourcing the activity effectively
- for National portfolio organisations and Major partner museums, demonstration that the organisation's current Arts Council risk rating has been considered in planning the proposed activity and actions to mitigate potential risks have been incorporated into the overall management of the project. We would not expect to offer funding to organisations considered major risk (ie with a summary rating of 9 or above) unless robust risk mitigation plans that are satisfactory to the Arts Council are integrated into the project proposal.

Financial viability

Weighting: 25 per cent

Character count: up to 20,000 characters

- financial viability of the applicant. We would not expect to offer funding to organisations considered major risk (ie with a summary rating of 9 or above) unless robust risk mitigation plans that are satisfactory to the Arts Council are integrated into the project proposal
- robustness of the project budget and sustainability of the applicant once funding ends
- demonstration of value for money – an appropriate return on investment
- evidence of organisational buy-in by applicant and project partners, as cash investment and/or in-kind support
- a clear case for any proposed capital expenditure

Decision making

Once we have scored your application and a recommendation has been made whether to fund it, we will make our decision. To do this, we will consider how strongly your activity scored against our criteria, the risks we have noted and the overview scores, and we will also consider your activity alongside other applications to the fund. We will consider both the assessment and your full application to do this. We will also consider your activity alongside other applications to the fund.

When we will reach a decision

We aim to reach a decision on all eligible applications within 12 weeks from the date you submitted your application. If we are not able to meet our published turnaround times, we will let you know by email as soon as we can.

Once a decision is made

Once we have made a decision, we will advise you by email to log in and check the outcome of your application via the online system.

If your full application is unsuccessful, you may submit a new Expression of interest for the same idea.

Complaints procedure

If you are not happy with the way we have dealt with your application, please contact us and we will discuss this with you. If you are still unhappy, you can ask us for a copy of our complaints procedure.

Details can be found in [Making a complaint](#), which is available on our website, www.artscouncil.org.uk, or by contacting our enquiries team by email to enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk or by phoning 0845 300 6200.

Please note that you can only complain if you believe we have not followed our published procedures when assessing your application. You cannot appeal against the decision.

Section Seven: Freedom of Information Act

The Arts Council is committed to being as open as possible. We believe that the public has a right to know how we spend public funds and how we make our funding decisions.

We are also listed as a public authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. By law, we may have to provide your application documents and information about our assessment to any member of the public who asks for them under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

We may not release those parts of the documents which are covered by one or more of the exemptions under the Act. Please see the Freedom of Information website at www.ico.gov.uk for information about freedom of information generally and the exemptions.

We will not release any information about applications during the assessment period, as this may interfere with the decision-making process.

Contact us

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