



Exceptional awards: Guidance for applicants

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Section one – introduction

Welcome

Thank you for emailing us your idea. If you have received an invitation to apply it is because we believe the proposal could meet the objectives of the Exceptional awards initiative as set out in section two below and invite you to complete an application for funding using this guidance. Please note that this document is given for information and is only to be used by organisations who have been invited to make an application.

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 2011 and 2015, we will invest £1.4 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

From 1 October 2011, we added museums and libraries to our remit. As with the arts, this will see us championing, developing and investing in museums and libraries. In April 2012, we announced a new network of Music education hubs, working with funding from the Department for Education.

For more information about the Arts Council visit www.artscouncil.org.uk

Section two – purpose of the Exceptional awards initiative

Arts Council England funds a range of programmes designed to deliver the ambitions set out in [Achieving great art for everyone](#), our strategic framework for the arts. However, we recognise that, on occasion, arts organisations may wish to respond to a one-off opportunity to create a project that is of such ambition that it sits outside the normal programme of the organisation and does not fit into existing Arts Council funding routes.

This Lottery-funded initiative provides a potential funding route for such projects.

Your application must demonstrate how your project fulfils **all** of the following:

- you must be able to prove that the project is genuinely exceptional in its ambition. We are looking for bold projects that are ground-breaking and are likely to change the English cultural landscape
- if you receive National portfolio funding, you must be able to demonstrate that the project is clearly in addition to your currently funded programme
- you must be able to prove that you have the managerial capacity, technical expertise and organisational stability to deliver the project successfully
- the project must make a significant additional contribution to helping the Arts Council deliver its strategic vision, through at least one of the Arts Council's five goals outlined in [Achieving great art for everyone](#)
- the project must deliver clear outcomes and have national, and even international, impact

Please also refer to the full [Eligibility](#) criteria in this document.

It is likely that we will make fewer than 25 Exceptional awards before 31 March 2015. This means that there will be many good ideas and opportunities that we cannot help to realise, given our limited resources at this time.

Although we have offered you an application form on the basis of your idea, there is no guarantee that your application will be successful.

Section three – financial range and delivery timetable

What can an organisation apply for?

You can apply for funding above £50,000. Although we anticipate it is unlikely we will make awards of over £250,000, we may consider applications above this level for a project that is genuinely exceptional in its artistic ambition and which will make a significant additional contribution to helping the Arts Council deliver its strategic vision, through at least one of the Arts Council's five goals.

Delivery timetable

If your application is successful we will agree a delivery timetable which will form a condition within your funding agreement. However, **all projects must start before 31 March 2015**. If you are currently funded as a National portfolio organisation, being in receipt of an Exceptional awards grant does not guarantee that you will be successful in any subsequent application in the next portfolio round.

Section four – requirements

What you will be expected to deliver

Your application will need to demonstrate how your project will meet the requirements of the initiative and make a significant additional contribution to achieving at least one of the Arts Councils five goals:

Goal 1: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated

England is regarded as a pre-eminent centre for artistic excellence.

Goal 2: More people experience and are inspired by the arts

The arts are at the centre of people's lives – more people are involved in arts in their communities and are enriched and inspired by arts experiences.

Goal 3: The arts are sustainable, resilient and innovative

Collaborative and networked, the arts are known for resilience, innovation and their contribution to the nation's reputation and prosperity.

Goal 4: The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

The diversity of the arts workforce reflects the diversity of society and artistic practice in England. Outstanding arts leaders play a wider role in their communities and nationally.

Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

Children and young people have the best current and future artistic lives they can have. They are able to develop their artistic capabilities and engage with, and shape, the arts.

Experience and capacity needed to make an application

You will need to demonstrate that you have a track record of successfully delivering discrete time-bound projects and that you possess proven expertise in all of the areas covered by your application.

If you currently receive Arts Council funding you will 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

Eligibility

Your project will need to meet **all** the eligibility criteria:

- your project is not eligible for funding from other Arts Council programmes
- your project has not been rejected from one of our existing programmes, unless for eligibility reasons
- you have not previously submitted your idea to Exceptional awards
- your project's beneficiaries are based in England
- your organisation (unless it is a National portfolio organisation) is based in England
- your organisation is primarily focused on one or more of the following: creating, producing, distributing and presenting the arts in England **and** is registered as a charity or established on a not-for-profit basis with charitable objectives

We will **not** consider applications from:

- a consortium or umbrella organisation
- a commercial organisation
- an individual artist
- an organisation (such as a museum or library) whose normal activity is not related to the arts
- organisations who have not been invited to apply
- applicants who fail to upload all mandatory attachments when submitting their application

Application process

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 enquiries team at enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk

Prepare and submit your proposal

You must apply through our [online application portal](#) using the **standard application form**.

The proposal can be a maximum of 9,000 words.

You must upload the following mandatory attachments

- the email we sent inviting you to apply
- audited annual accounts for the last two years (non-National portfolio organisations only)

- your latest management accounts (non-National portfolio organisations only)
- your governance documents (non-National portfolio organisations only)
- business plan and budget for proposed project
- work plan for proposed project, including milestones and key review dates

You may upload the following optional attachments

- any other relevant attachments up to a total limit of 10 megabytes

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 acknowledgement email confirming that we have received your application.

Assistance with your application

We are committed to being open and accessible, and want to make the Exceptional awards 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: 020 7973 6564
- email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk

Section six – how we will make our decision

We will check your application to ensure that it is eligible and 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 from you; our own internal knowledge of your organisation and the sector expertise of our Arts Council National Discipline Directors; 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.

Applications will be assessed using a four-point word scoring:

- not met
- potential
- met
- met – strong
- met – outstanding

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 recommended for funding.

We will look at each individual application on its own merits and assess against the following criteria, using the assessment prompts below and any other relevant factors based on the information in the application:

Criteria
<p><i>Meeting the brief</i> Weighting: 50% Word count: up to 3,000 words</p> <p>Convincingly articulates, using robust evidence and assumptions how the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is of such ambition and so distinctive that it sits outside the applicant's normal programme• will make a significant additional contribution to helping the Arts Council deliver its strategic vision through at least one of our five goals in a way that will have both national (and even international) impact
<p><i>Management of the activity</i> Weighting: 25%</p>

Word count: up to 3,000 words

- 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
- demonstration that the organisation's current Arts Council risk assessment 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 (National portfolio organisations only)

Financial viability

Weighting: 25%

Word count: up to 3,000 words

- financial viability of the applicant (we would not expect to offer funding to any National portfolio organisation currently assessed by us as being high-risk)
- robustness of the project budget and sustainability of the applicant once funding ends
- demonstration of value for money – an appropriate return on investment

Completed assessments and recommendations will be considered by the Arts Council. You will be notified of the decision no later than 12 weeks after you submit your application.

Any decision to offer funding will be subject to signing a detailed funding agreement.

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.