

Museum Learning and Engagement Grants

Guidance for Applicants 2026-27

If you require this document in an alternative format (for example, Large Print or Audio), or need support or adjustments to the application process, please contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk.

1. Introduction

Museum Development is delivering *Museum Learning and Engagement Grants* on behalf of Arts Council England (ACE), with funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

This one-off, rapid-response grant programme has been introduced to provide funding opportunities for museums in the period between the end of the current phase and start of the future phase of the ACE [*Museums and Schools Programme*](#).

The grants will support museums to develop and test innovative learning initiatives that improve access to cultural learning opportunities for children and young people in primary, secondary and sixth form settings, including special schools/colleges and home education groups particularly in underserved communities and areas of low cultural engagement.

This meaningful engagement activity should support an improvement in children and young people's cultural access, participation and learning outcomes.

The ACE *Museums and Schools Programme* has a strong record of reaching areas with low cultural engagement and has contributed positively to pupils' learning and enrichment since it was introduced in 2012. It has supported participating museums to build sustained relationships with schools and has demonstrated the value of museums as learning partners.

The education and museum operating environment has changed since the ACE *Museums and Schools Programme* was introduced and now it needs to evolve to remain relevant, equitable and impactful. *The Museum Learning and Engagement Grants* have been introduced to maintain momentum between the current and future iterations of the ACE *Museums and Schools Programme*. It provides an opportunity to

generate evidence, test delivery models and explore new approaches that can inform future museum education investment.

As a rapid-response fund, project proposals should be realistic, deliverable and capable of being completed within the funding period. Grant recipients must demonstrate in the application that they have the capacity to deliver their activity within the funded period.

Project activity can start from **15 October 2026** (following signed acceptance of grant offer). The full value of the grant award expenditure must be committed and paid by **31 March 2027** although activity may continue until **17 May 2027**.

The grant is open to all Accredited museums in the ACE Midlands area, including National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and museums Working Towards Accreditation. DCMS-sponsored national museums are not eligible to apply.

Organisations may apply for up to £20,000 per eligible museum.

Additional priority will be given to projects that support activity in [DCMS Culture Priority Places](#). The ambition is that around 70% of available funding will be awarded to museums located, and/or working with primary, secondary and sixth form settings, including special schools/colleges and home education groups, in those places.

Applications that support activity in areas of low cultural engagement and high deprivation are also encouraged.

This guidance provides information on eligibility, what the grant can and cannot fund, how to apply, and what will be expected if your application is successful.

We recommend working offline using [this template form](#) until you are ready to upload your application.

2. Key Information and Deadlines

Organisations may apply for up to £20,000 per eligible museum.

This programme is separate from MDM's core small grants schemes. Funding awarded through this programme will not count towards the usual £10,000 annual funding limit that applies to MDM small grants.

Grant value per eligible museum

- Minimum grant award: **£5,000**
- Maximum grant award: **£20,000**

Match funding is not compulsory, but applicants are encouraged to indicate what they plan to provide in the form of in-kind or cash contributions as a sign of their commitment to project delivery.

Programme timetable

- **Applications open:** 25 August 2026
- **Application deadline:** 5pm, 24 September 2026
- **Applicants notified of decisions by:** 14 October 2026
- **Projects may start from:** 15 October 2026 (following formal, signed acceptance of the grant offer)
- **All grant funds must be spent by:** 31 March 2027
- **All grant activity must be completed by:** 17 May 2027
- **Final grant report due:** 24 May 2027

We expect this to be a highly competitive grant.

In line with DCMS funding requirements, priority will be given to projects that support activity in [DCMS Culture Priority Places](#). This ambition is that around 70% of available funding will be awarded to museums located, and/or working with primary, secondary and sixth form settings, including special schools/colleges and home education groups, in those places.

Applications that support activity in areas of low cultural engagement and high deprivation are particularly encouraged. The assessment process will apply additional weighting to applications that contribute to these priorities.

3. Eligibility

Who can apply:

- The grant is open to all Accredited museums in the ACE Midlands area. This includes:
 - National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs)
 - museums Working Towards Accreditation.
- DCMS-sponsored national museums are not eligible to apply.
- Partnerships or consortia are eligible, but the lead applicant must be a museum that is either Accredited or Working Towards Accreditation.
- The submission of multiple applications by an organisation operating more than one eligible museum does not guarantee that all applications will be successful.

Education providers must:

- serve children and young people in primary, secondary and sixth form settings, including special schools/colleges and home education groups.
- have been informed about the potential project activity at the time the application is submitted if the applicant is planning to enter into a formal development partnership with them.

Who cannot apply:

- Museums that are neither Accredited nor Working Towards Accreditation
- DCMS-sponsored national museums
- Organisations not currently trading solvently
- Organisations with overdue reporting from previous MDM funding

If you are unsure of your Accreditation status, please check the [ACE Accreditation webpage](#).

4. What the *Museum Learning and Engagement Grants* are intended to achieve

The *Museum Learning and Engagement Grants* will support museums to test and develop new approaches to working with schools, home education groups and/or other learning settings.

The grant funding is intended to:

- Enable museums to pilot new models of engagement with schools, including work in primary, secondary and sixth form settings, including special schools/colleges and home education groups
- Contribute to improved access, participation and learning outcomes for children and young people
- Increase activity in areas of low cultural engagement and high deprivation, particularly in the DCMS Culture Priority Places
- Strengthen the role of museums in supporting curriculum learning, enrichment and teacher development
- Build evidence and insight to inform future investment, programme design and policy alignment
- Encourage flexible, locally responsive approaches tailored to the needs of schools and communities
- Support museums to test and develop a more sustainable and effective schools offer, including partnerships and delivery models

The programme will run during 2026–27. It will be evaluated independently by an external consultant appointed by ACE and all learning will directly inform future museum education investment.

5. What are the aims of the *Museum Learning and Engagement Grants*?

Museum Learning and Engagement Grants support projects that test, develop or pilot new approaches to learning and engagement for children and young people.

The programme is intended to support development activity and learning pilots, rather than ongoing or business-as-usual delivery.

Funded projects should contribute to one or more of the following:

a) Developing learning and engagement

- Testing new learning activities, resources or approaches for children and young people.

b) Improving access, participation and enrichment

- Helping more children and young people, particularly those who face barriers, to access and engage with cultural learning opportunities.
- Developing creative, cultural, or place-based enrichment opportunities that enhance learning and engagement.

c) New ways of working

- Exploring or testing new partnerships, delivery methods, digital approaches or ways of working with schools, communities and other partners.

d) Building evidence for the future

- Gathering evidence, learning and insights through research, pilots and evaluation to inform future practice, investment and development.

e) Building organisational capacity

- Strengthening your organisation's ability to deliver high-quality learning and engagement activity for children and young people in the future.

We welcome innovative proposals that meet these aims, even if they are not reflected in the examples elsewhere in this guidance.

6. Examples of Eligible Activity or Costs

Below are examples of activity or costs that may be supported through this programme.

The examples below are intended as a guide only. We welcome alternative proposals that meet the aims of the programme.

Remember that your project may be used to test a concept or approach before you seek further funding in the future.

Examples of eligible activity or costs may include:

- Creation of education resources.
- Development of handling collections for learning.
- Consumables and materials required for project delivery (for example, workshop materials, printing, learning resources and activity packs).
- ICT and digital equipment, but only where it is essential to the delivery of the proposed project. The programme will *not* fund the routine replacement or upgrading of general organisational equipment, such as laptops, desktop computers, scanners, printers or mobile phones.
- Travel costs incurred by staff and volunteers delivering the project.
- Transport costs for schools or home education groups to enable museum visits.
- Other costs incurred by schools or home education groups in relation to museum visits, for example the cost of additional staffing such as teaching assistants.
- Personal access costs incurred by project participants, staff, volunteers or education providers to support equitable access, for example additional travel costs, support workers, BSL interpreters or note-takers.
- Additional hours for existing education staff to deliver grant-funded activity between the date of grant acceptance and 31 March 2027. Expenditure incurred outside this period will not be eligible and may be subject to reclaim.
- Backfill costs for existing education staff. This may include increasing the contracted hours of another museum staff member to release capacity for education staff to deliver grant-funded activity between the date of grant acceptance and 31 March 2027.
- New employees appointed, seconded or redeployed to deliver project activity.
- Freelancers or consultants to deliver project activity or to backfill existing responsibilities, enabling museum staff to deliver grant-funded activity.

Please note: the examples above are not exhaustive and applications will be assessed against the programme aims and assessment criteria rather than against a prescribed list of activities.

7. What the Grant Cannot Fund

Funding cannot be used for:

- Activities already completed, commissioned, contracted or paid for.

- Core operating or revenue costs (e.g. utilities, existing core staff salaries). We can only support additional hours for backfill or additional temporary capacity where this is directly required to deliver the funded activity.
- Ongoing maintenance or major capital works (building or fixed asset creation/restoration).
- Replacement or upgrading of general organisational equipment, such as laptops, desktop computers, scanners, printers or mobile phones.
- Projects already funded elsewhere.
- Match funding for other grant schemes.
- Contingency or unspecified costs.
- Subsistence or accommodation (except where explicitly stated and required for project delivery).
- Costs requested that are not supported by quotations, estimates, evidence of the cost of goods or services, or any other clear and evidenced rationale.
- Any expenditure for which the museum cannot provide appropriate supporting evidence on final reporting, such as receipts, invoices or evidence of additional PAYE staff costs and backfill arrangements.
- Any expenditure incurred before the permitted project start date (date of acceptance of grant award – see project timeline).
- Any project expenditure incurred after **31 March 2027**.
- VAT, where the applicant museum is VAT registered and able to recover it.
- Ineligible organisations (refer to eligibility criteria).

8. How to Apply

1. Read this guidance in full before starting your application.
2. Complete the official online Application Form, here: [Online Application Form](#)
3. Attach supporting evidence such as:
 - evidence of significant costs such as quotations, estimates, evidence of the cost of goods or services, or any other clear and evidenced rationale (typically items of a value of £100 or more - supporting evidence is not required for every low-value item included in the budget).
 - letters or emails of support from participating schools, home education groups or other learning settings, or any other evidence relevant to your application.
4. Submit your completed form by **5pm, 24 September 2026**

You will receive an acknowledgement of your application within three working days. If not, please contact us.

Need support? Free [project development 1:1 sessions](#) are available to help you refine your project idea and understand the application process. Contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk to arrange a session (minimum five working days' notice required). For straightforward queries, email the same address or [check the FAQs](#) which are updated regularly throughout the application period.

9. Assessment Criteria

All applications are assessed competitively by an MDM Grants Panel.

The panel will consider the following:

- Does the project clearly align with one or more of the programme activity areas and the aims of the *Museum Learning and Engagement Grant Programme*?
- Will the project support an improvement in children and young people's access, participation and learning outcomes through meaningful engagement with schools, home education groups and/or other learning settings?
- Does the application demonstrate a clear need and rationale for the proposed activity?
- Does the proposed activity demonstrate a commitment to quality engagement, consultation, collaboration and/or co-design where appropriate?
- Will the project generate learning outcomes, evidence and/or new approaches that can inform future museum learning provision and curriculum delivery?
- Is the project well planned, realistic and deliverable within the programme timescales, and are any risks identified and appropriately managed?
- Does the applicant have sufficient organisational capacity to deliver the project, including appropriate arrangements for staffing, backfill and project management?
- How clearly does the applicant explain the intended outcomes, and adequately describe how success will be measured and learning from the project be captured?
- Are the proposed costs appropriate, well evidenced, and proportionate to the activity and do they represent value for money?
- Additional weighting will be applied to applications that support activity in DCMS Culture Priority Places, particularly where they address low cultural engagement and/or socio-economic disadvantage.

Panel decisions are final. Applicants will be notified by the date stated in Section 2.

10. Funding and Financial Information

- **Minimum grant value:** £5,000
- **Maximum grant value:** £20,000
- **Match funding** is not compulsory, but applicants are encouraged to indicate what they plan to provide in the form of in-kind or cash contributions as a sign of their commitment to project delivery. This could include:
 - museum funds
 - volunteer time (in kind – as a minimum based on the National Living Wage (£12.71 per hour))
 - other non-cash contributions (e.g. resources, room hire, transport)
 - other cash contributions (e.g. other grant funds)

We do not accept staff time as match funding.

- **VAT:**
 - VAT-registered museums should list costs *exclusive* of VAT.
 - Non-registered museums should list costs *inclusive* of VAT.
 - The grant will only cover VAT that you cannot recover from HM Revenue and Customs.
- **Payment:**
 - 90% of the grant value awarded will be paid by BACS after signing and returning the Grant Offer Letter.
 - The 10% balance will be paid by 30 June 2027 following receipt of grant reporting to be submitted no later than 24 May 2027. Final grant claims can be submitted prior to that date, as soon as project funded activity is completed.
 - All expenditure must be completed by 31 March 2027. **Any evidence of expenditure dated after 31 March 2027 is not eligible to be claimed through this grant.**
 - **Evidence:** All expenditure must be supported by appropriate evidence submitted with final reporting, such as receipts, invoices, or evidence of additional PAYE staff costs and backfill arrangements (PDF or JPEG accepted).

Please Note:

This programme is separate from MDM's core small grants schemes. Funding awarded through this programme will not count towards the usual £10,000 annual funding limit that applies to MDM Small Grants.

11. Reporting and Accountability

Successful applicants must:

- Sign and return the Grant Offer Letter and provide bank details for payment.
- Complete all funded activity and expenditure by the stated deadline.
- Submit:
 - An Evaluation and Monitoring Form
 - An Evidence of Expenditure Form (including receipts/invoices)
- Acknowledge Museum Development Midlands and Arts Council England support in publicity, marketing and communications relating to funded activity. |
- Complete the Annual Museum Survey when requested.
- Share the project's learning outcomes with the sector (this could be through a case study, article, or via the MDM network or a Coffee and Connect session).

12. Terms and Conditions

- By applying, you confirm all information provided is true and complete.
- All changes to project scope or budget must be approved by MDM in writing before they are made.
- Successful applicants must:
 - Uphold the *Principles for Working with Freelancers* (if applicable).
 - Comply with MDM's Standard Terms and Conditions for Grants. A copy can be found here: [MDM Grant Terms and Conditions](#).
 - Adhere to the Subsidy Control Act 2022.
- Unauthorised or inappropriate use of funds may result in repayment to the funder and ineligibility for future grants.

13. Branding and Acknowledgement

Successful applicants will be required to acknowledge support from Museum Development Midlands, Arts Council England and the UK Government in publicity, marketing and communications relating to the funded activity.

Suggested acknowledgement wording: *"Supported through the Museum Learning and Engagement Grant, delivered by Museum Development Midlands and funded by Arts Council England and the UK Government."*

Logos and branding guidelines are available on request from grants@mdmidlands.org.uk

14. Support and Resources

Useful resources for applicants and project delivery:

- **Working with Freelancers:**
<https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/resources/freelance-principles-checklist/>
- **Digital Culture Network:** <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/digital-culture-network>
- **Julie's Bicycle Museums Framework:**
<https://juliesbicycle.org/resource/museums-framework/>
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Resources:**
<https://www.mdmidlands.org.uk/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>
- **MDM Sector Support and Resources:**
<https://mdmidlands.org.uk/sector-resources>
- **DCMS Culture Priority Places:**
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/dcms-culture-priority-places>



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