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Guidance for Applicants

Youth Arts Open Fund

June 2026



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Overview

The Youth Arts Open Fund is a Creative Scotland Fund, administered by YouthLink Scotland (the national agency for youth work in Scotland) supported by Scottish Government.

The purpose of the Youth Arts Open Fund is to support freelance artists or organisations seeking small amounts of funding so that they can deliver **youth-led** arts activity for children and young people, who would benefit most from it, particularly those who face barriers to participation in the arts.

Freelance artists can apply for funding of up to **£10k** and organisations can apply for funding of up to **£20k**, to deliver up to 12 months of arts activity.

Who can apply

This fund is primarily intended to support freelance artists and third sector organisations (e.g. charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, and social enterprises)

We will also consider applications from not-for-profit organisations that are not part of the third sector, where they can clearly demonstrate that:

- they are not established to generate profit for private distribution, and
- any surplus is reinvested into their stated social, cultural or community purpose

For the purposes of this fund, “not-for-profit” is defined by how an organisation is structured and operates, rather than how it describes itself. This means applicants must evidence that:

- their governing documents, constitution, or business model prevent the distribution of profits to individuals, shareholders or owners
- their activities are carried out for a defined public, community or cultural benefit

Applicants must be based in Scotland, experienced in working with children and young people and supporting the delivery of FREE community-based arts activities for children and young people living in Scotland.

Creative Scotland “Multi-Year Funded” organisations are eligible to apply, but



any proposed project must be separate and distinct from their existing Creative Scotland-funded activity. However, the fund aims to build capacity among smaller-scale organisations, and applications from these organisations will be prioritised.

We are committed to equality of opportunity and will prioritise the short-listing of applications from organisations with specific equalities remits and diverse led organisations (where applications meet the fund criteria), for more information on diverse-led organisations, visit pg. 6-7 of Creative Scotland's EDI Funding Criteria: [3-Equalities-Diversity-and-Inclusion-EDI-Fund-Funding-Criteria-July-2023-Update.pdf \(creativescotland.com\)](#)

Who is not eligible to apply

The following are not eligible to apply:

- Local authorities
- Schools (but freelance artists and third sector organisations can deliver extra-curricular/ alternative curriculum projects in partnership with schools)
- Organisations operating on a for-profit basis (other than eligible freelance artists applying in an individual capacity)

Eligible activity

Proposals should engage children and young people in high-quality and accessible arts activity that empowers them through self-expression, enhances their health, wellbeing, and personal development, and builds their confidence and skills.

All funded activity must be provided free of charge for all participants (the fund does not support the provision of subsidised places at chargeable provision).

Funded activity should be **youth-led**. This is core to the objectives of the fund and applicants are expected to familiarise themselves with the related guidance (below). Applications that do not meet this core expectation are unlikely to be considered for funding.

As the Youth Arts Open Fund is part of the Scottish Governments commitment to expand the Youth Music Initiative (YMI) to other art forms **we cannot fund music projects** via this fund. Music could make up part of a wider arts offer, but it



cannot be the prominent or sole focus of your proposal. The YMI Access to Music Making Fund is currently providing opportunity for music-based projects ([Youth Music Initiative Funding | Creative Scotland](#)).

Fund criteria (Your application will be scored against these)

Proposals must be:

1. Be youth-led. By this we mean that children and young people will be empowered as equal partners in deciding and shaping the content of funded activity based on their needs, interests and the issues that are of interest to them. It is unlikely that projects with a pre-defined curriculum will meet this core criteria. (Please see the application support document for examples)

Please note that this fund supports children and young people aged between 0 and 25 and we (and assessors) understand that “youth-led” will look entirely different according to the age of the young people involved. For example, work with very young children may incorporate approaches like self-directed play.

Please note that a panel of young people will assess the extent to which your project is youth-led. The youth panel will make final award decisions.

2. Offer free, high-quality activities, which encourage children and young people’s access and participation in one or more art forms. (i.e. artist-led, a well-designed programme, appropriate for the young people involved and with clear evidence of artistic thought, planning, and delivery)

3. Take a proactive approach to addressing inequalities ensuring the activities are targeted towards children and young people who have traditionally found it harder to access youth arts activities. These inequalities can be intersectional and can include children and young people who:

- reside in areas of social and economic deprivation, for more information on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), visit the [Scottish Government website](#)
- are experiencing or at risk of experiencing harm and neglect
- are care experienced, for more information visit [The Promise Scotland](#)
- are in the early years (0-5) of their life
- are of the global majority and/or ethnic minorities



- children and young people with disabilities/learning disabilities
- are neurodivergent including autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourette’s syndrome
- are experiencing mental health illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, bipolar, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders and addictive behaviours
- have experience of the criminal justice system
- are young carers (as defined by the [Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#)) and/or young parents
- are experiencing homelessness or who have been homeless.

Assessors will expect you to have considered and be able to set out your specific plan for engaging with children and young people. For example, what partners will you work with to support access. Your plan should not be entirely speculative, previous successful applicants set out how they would work with key partners and indicated that this had been discussed and agreed as part of developing their application.

4. Achieve at least four of the following outcomes for the children and young people (CYP) participating:

1.CYP facing additional barriers have equal opportunities to access artistic and creative activities.
2.CYP develop wider transferable skills through involvement in youth arts provision.
3.CYP are empowered through their involvement in youth-led activities and their voices are amplified.
4.The mental health & wellbeing of CYP is improved through their participation in artistic and creative activities.
5.CYP feel better able to express themselves through involvement in arts activities.
6.CYP feel better connected to their peers and communities.
7.Partnerships between youth arts and youth work organisations are strengthened, improving the quality, reach and sustainability of arts provision for children and young people

5. Involve qualified and experienced tutors in the delivery of the art activities. CVs or proposed job descriptions of delivery staff must be provided.

If you are a non-arts organisation - the arts activity must be delivered by an experienced artist and you must provide the CV/s or job descriptions/s required to be submitted as part of your application. Where internal team members will lead arts activity, their CVs must be provided.

If you are a freelance artist, you must provide a CV as part of this application. Note that applications cannot be considered without this information.

Note that CVs should be tailored to show relevant experience.

Creative Scotland is committed, through any activities they support, to ensure that artists and those professionals working in the creative community are paid fairly and appropriately for their time and effort. Guidance on rates of pay for artists which is available on the Creative Scotland website: [Rates of Pay Guidance | Creative Scotland](#)

6. Safeguarding – Ensure that participants are safe and protected from harm, abuse and exploitation. Specific safeguarding obligations and legal requirements apply when working with children and young people, so projects must have robust approaches in place.

Applicants must:

1. Confirm that they have appropriate policy and procedures in place. These should include a Safeguarding or Child Protection Policy and membership of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme.
2. Outline how these will be applied in the context of the specific activity outlined in your application.

As a guide, a Safeguarding or Child Protection policy should include:

- Clear procedures for reporting and responding to concerns with a named person who is responsible for safeguarding and their contact details.
- A Code of Behaviour for staff and volunteers.
- Safer recruitment practices to demonstrate that appropriate policies are followed when appointing staff or volunteers, and that regular training is offered to reduce the risk of harm or abuse. This includes appropriate background checks, such as PVG scheme membership for regulated roles.



- A clear process for reviewing and updating your policy to reflect current legislation, guidance, and learning.

Guidance on child protection for individuals and organisations is available on the Creative Scotland [website](#).

Fair Work First

Fair Work First is the Scottish Government's flagship policy for driving high quality and fair work across the labour market in Scotland. There is an expectation that grantees will pay the Living Wage to directly employed staff members.

Funding period

All funded activity must be delivered between December 2026 and December 2027. All project reports must be submitted one month after project completion.

Timeline

- Fund opens 9th June 2026
- Deadline for applications – 21st July 2026
- Creative Scotland assessment period – 27th July – 21st August
- Youth Panel assessment period – 23rd August – end of October 2026
- Decisions communicated to applicants – early November 2026
- Project delivery – November 2026 – November 2027
- Project reports due one month after individual project finish date

The assessment process

Applications will initially be checked for eligibility by YouthLink Scotland and scored against the fund criteria by a team of assessors at Creative Scotland. Short-listed applications will then be passed to a panel of young people who will make final award decisions.



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Young person panel

The young people involved in the panel will be recruited via the YouthLink Scotland Youth Hub. Previous panel members included young people who self-identified as:

- Living in poverty /or from low-income households
- Neurodivergent
- Having health needs
- Being disabled
- LGBTQ+
- Having experience of homelessness
- Having experience of domestic abuse and violence
- Black or minority ethnic
- Young Carers
- Living rurally

The Youth Panel will look specifically at the extent to which short-listed applications demonstrate:

- a youth-led approach
- a clear plan to reach marginalised children and young people
- an attractive and impactful experience for children and young people

You should therefore ensure that your application is written in as accessible a way as possible.

Applicant information sessions

Online applicant support sessions are available on the dates below. To book a place, please contact: Jane Dailly, National Grants Manager, YouthLink Scotland jdailly@youthlink.scot

Thursday 11th June – 10am – 10.30am

Thursday 11th June – 12.30pm – 1pm

Monday 15th June – 10am – 10.30am

Monday 15th June – 2pm – 2.30pm

Thursday 18th June – 11am – 11.30am

Thursday 18th June – 2pm – 2.30pm



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Closing date for applications

All applications must be submitted by no later than **5pm on the 21st of July 2026**.

Information you will need to complete your application

To complete the form, you will require the following information at hand:

- Bank account details
- Programme budget with breakdown of costs

You will also be asked to upload electronic copies of the following documents:

- Annual accounts / Receipts and Payment Statement
- Bank statements (for organisations who have been operating for less than one year)
- Public Liability Insurance Certificate
- CVs of freelance/delivery artists or a relevant job description

Information on completing the online application

We use an online application process. Once you have logged into the system you can choose to save and return to the application at any point prior to submission. Please take the time to complete every question, the programme does not allow you to submit the application form otherwise.

Once you have completed the form you must REVIEW your application and select the SUBMIT option, you will then receive email confirmation that your application has been received. If you do not select the SUBMIT option, your application cannot be processed or considered by the assessment panel.

Should you experience any difficulties with the application process please contact:

Jane Dailly, National Grants Manager, YouthLink Scotland
jdailly@youthlink.scot

UNCRC

The fund outcomes are informed by the following articles of the UNCRC:

- Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously
- Article 13 (freedom of expression) Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law
- Article 29 (goals of education) Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.
- Article 30 (children from minority or indigenous groups) Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.
- Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.





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YouthLink Scotland
Caledonian Exchange
19A Canning St.
Edinburgh
EH3 8EG
T: 0131 202 8050
E: info@youthlink.scot
W: www.youthlink.scot

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