

Guidance for applicants

Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund 2025

The Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund, run by the Museums Association (MA), supports museums and their community partners to develop together, using collections.

In 2022, the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund (as it was then) was reviewed and updated to prioritise inclusion using collections; enhance learning from the grants we offer; and offer core funding for the first time. In 2024 we reviewed the impact of the changes we had made and sought input from [stakeholders in museums and community organisations](#). As a result, we have relaunched the fund as the Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund.

The overall purpose of the Communities and Collections Fund remains the same as in 2023-24. However, we have updated our processes to better support the best of the types of application we have been receiving; and to take the fund further in the direction of the changes made in 2022. We now offer **core grants** to single museum organisations for strategic development of their inclusive collections work; and **partnership project grants** for museums and community organisations working equitably with collections to achieve shared aims for inclusion.

Please read this guidance to determine if and how you can apply.

Purpose and process of the Communities and Collections Fund

The Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund supports work with museum collections to improve inclusion and equitable working with community partners. We offer:

- **Core grants** to museums that have established strategic aims for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); and that are ready to use their collections and our funding to support social and climate justice, in ways that are relevant to local contexts and relationships.
- **Partnership project grants** to museums and community organisations that work equitably together and share aims for DEI; with ambitious and compelling ideas for inclusive project work with collections.

The fund has a twin focus on inclusion and collections. We anticipate this will result in work that explores and influences key themes in social and climate justice, such as wellbeing, decolonisation, climate crisis, antiracism and others. Importantly, we will look for local relevance and holistic approaches from applicants, for example asking how you have decided who to work with.

Grants of up to £100k over a maximum of three years are available and we expect to award around 12 grants per year in two funding rounds (see dates below).

We want to support a range of museums and partnerships through the fund; from those that are starting out in their participatory practice, to those that are leading change on behalf of the museum sector and working equitably with communities. Our requirement is that you know your direction of travel and that the work we support fits into a wider context at your organisation(s) and in the place where you operate. We will use the MA's Power to the People framework as a measure of organisational change in funded museums. We are interested in how you plan for the end of a funding period; and planning for the legacy of your work is a key factor in demonstrating your long-term approach, especially for core grants.

If you are funded, we will work with you to honestly explore the areas where you would like to progress and review this at the end of the funding period. We also understand that genuine participation and coproduction means that topics, outputs, and workflows cannot be defined far in advance. This means that we will ask for you to describe your work in terms of outcomes and indicative activities; and only require a headline budget for the planned work so that we can assess its scale and feasibility. To support this flexible approach, we'll stay in touch, using network meetings and learning sets (see below) to support your work and understand its impact.

We want our funding to go to organisations where this size of investment can make the most difference. For core grants, we expect to fund museums where the grant is a relatively high proportion of turnover or where the museum has few other sources of core

funding. Museums that have previously received project funding are welcome to apply again to the Communities and Collections Fund for work that builds on earlier experience. In the future, core-funded grantees may also reapply for the next stage of their work. However, our core grants are intended to support a particular stage in a museum's strategic development so repeat funding will be rare and we don't expect to offer continuous funding.

Two guides, in the links section below, are available to help applicants: *Working Equitably* and *Wellbeing Guidance*. These outline what we look for from applicants as good practice, especially in codeveloping partnership project applications, and they draw on research, ethics and ways of working from colleagues in museums and a range of community organisations.

We ask that applicants speak to a member of Communities and Collections Fund staff at the MA before submitting an EOI to ensure that the fund is a good fit for you, and to help draw out the strengths in your application. We will also offer coaching conversations to all second stage applicants and all grantees. All grantees are required to join our Communities and Collections Network, which includes participating in an action learning set in the early stages of your funding period, 2-4 network meetings per year (mixed online and in person) and contributions to evaluation.

Dates

December 2025 decisions:

- May 2025 onwards: contact the MA to discuss your project ideas
- 16 July 2025: deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- w/c 11 August 2025: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 5 November 2025: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- Mid December 2025: grants awarded

June 2026 decisions:

- November 2025 onwards: contact the MA to discuss your ideas
- 21 January 2026: deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- w/c 23 February 2026: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 13 May 2026: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- End June 2026: grants awarded

Links

The resources linked below may be useful in developing your grant application:

- [Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund webpage](#) for case studies from previously funded projects.
- [Working Equitably: a toolkit for museums and community organisations](#)
- [Wellbeing Guidance: creating a culture of care for museums and community](#)

partners

- [Power to the People: Participatory Practice Framework](#)
- [Measuring socially engaged practice: a toolkit for museums](#)
- [Museums Change Lives](#)
- [Empowering Collections](#)
- [Supporting Decolonisation in Museums](#)
- [Communicating Decolonisation](#)
- [Museums for Climate Justice](#)
- Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund [projects that have already received funding](#)

Contacts

Please contact Sarah Briggs or Sally Colvin at the Museums Association to discuss your ideas for an application, or with any questions:

Sarah Briggs: sarah@museumsassociation.org, 020 7566 7834

Sally Colvin: sally@museumsassociation.org, 020 7566 7851

Application criteria

Essential requirements

To be considered for a **core grant**, applications from single organisations must:

- Be for core work that accelerates progress towards the established strategic aims of the applicant in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion. Applicants will describe their local context and existing relationships with community and stakeholder groups and provide evidence of strategies and plans for inclusion.
- Work with existing collections to engage community groups, partners and/or stakeholders in prominent, democratised and/or community-led roles.

To be considered for a **partnership project grant**, applications must:

- Come from an equitable partnership between museum(s) and community organisation(s) that have developed the application together and that have an existing relationship on which to build.
- Be for a time-limited project working with existing collections towards shared aims for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Criteria for Success

All applications are assessed for:

1. A strong link between the people you wish to work with, the collections you expect to use and the topics or themes that you will explore.
2. Progress towards leading participatory practice and/or equitable working, see our guidance and terms and conditions for more details.
3. The beneficial impact on your organisation(s) and individuals within it, and, where appropriate, the wider museums sector, or partners from other sectors.
4. The ambition, innovation, creativity and/or approach to risk of the work, in the context of your museum/partnership.
5. Feasibility within the headline budget and timescale; and value for money.
6. How you will manage the end of the funding period. Particularly for core grants, how you plan for the legacy of your work to sustain or build on the benefits of funding.

Exclusions

The Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund will not support:

- Capital costs, including building work, renovations, and equipment.
- Grants to individuals or to causes that will benefit only one person, including student grants or bursaries.
- Work that does not have a direct benefit in the UK.

- We will not normally replace or subsidise statutory income although we will make rare exceptions where the level of performance has been exceptional and where the potential impact of the work is substantial.
- The promotion of religion.
- Retrospective funding, meaning support for work that has already taken place.
- General appeals or circulars.

Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund Terms and Conditions

What to apply for:

- Grants of £40,000-£100,000 over a period of up to three years.
- The grant can make up any proportion of the overall budget for your work, including the full cost of a project without match or partnership funding.
- Tell us about how you will work through the funded period:
 - Consider how you can apply the MA's work on fair pay in museums, [salary guidelines](#) and [inclusive recruitment](#). We expect grantees to undertake open recruitment according to an agreed job specification and description.
 - Consider how you can develop your equitable working practices, for example payment for lived experience.
 - Consider how you can support the wellbeing of staff, freelancers, volunteers, partners and participants.
- Grant funding periods should begin within six months of the award of the grant (and must begin within 12 months). MA staff will work on an individual basis to meet your planned start date based on the needs of your work, setting funding outcomes and signing grant agreements.

Resubmissions and multiple projects:

- Resubmissions will not be accepted unless they have been specifically invited by the MA. We define a resubmission as an application with the same focus and using the same collection. If you are in any doubt, please contact the collections development lead at the MA to discuss what you are proposing.
- We will usually only award funds to an organisation as the sole grantee (for a core grant) or lead partner (receiving funding and coordinating financial reporting on a partnership project grant) for one grant at a time. Organisations that have received a Collections Fund grant in the past are welcome to apply for core or partnership grants that build on their experience.
- Organisations that have received core funding may reapply when their funding period is ending, for a new phase of work. It is likely that only two grants per year will be made to recent grantees as it is not intended for this fund to offer continuous funding.

Eligibility:

- The Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund is open to all MA institutional member museums and galleries in the United Kingdom for core or partnership grants. MA membership is required to demonstrate commitment to sharing learning, to the social and climate justice agenda of Museums Change Lives, and to the museum sector's Code of Ethics.
- Partnership applications must include at least one MA institutional member museum partner. It is expected that the museum partner(s) will hold

collections that will be used during the partnership project and that a museum partner is typically well positioned to receive and coordinate funding on behalf of the group. Please discuss any alternative arrangements with the collections development lead at the MA so that this is clear in your application.

- We normally expect museum applicants, or one applicant in a partnership, to be Accredited (or formally working towards this). Occasional exceptions may be made where the applicant's activities are based on the care and interpretation of collections of historical, artistic or scientific interest, provided that they are in the public sector or have charitable status. The selection committee's decision on eligibility is final.
- For core grants, we expect to fund smaller and medium sized museums where funding of this size can make the most long-term difference, for example as a higher proportion of turnover. National and larger museums may apply, but we expect applications to reflect their capacity to influence the sector more widely and to develop museum practice. National and larger museums are strongly advised to speak to staff at the MA prior to applying.
- Applicants must have an up-to-date safeguarding policy to protect people with whom they work.

Other Terms and Conditions:

- Successful applicants will complete and sign a Grant Acceptance and Bank Details form, which provides us with your bank information, acts as your acceptance of our grant conditions and as confirmation that the money will be spent on the purpose detailed in your application. The form should be accompanied by a photocopy/scan of a recent bank statement or letter from your bank. Where relevant, partners will be asked to sign the form.
- Funds will be drawn down annually in advance from the start of the funding period, upon signing the Grant Acceptance and Bank Details form for year one and then on receipt of annual progress reports (supported by approved annual accounts for each financial year of the grant and a budget for the coming year). The grant should be specifically acknowledged in annual accounts for each year in which it was received.
- Any part of the grant not required for the purposes approved should be refunded.
- We reserve the right to withhold a grant or require repayment if:
 - we find that false information has been deliberately supplied;
 - the work undertaken is not that which is approved (originally or via approved changes);
 - your organisation becomes insolvent or goes into administration, receivership or liquidation, and if the grant has not already been spent on its intended purpose.
- We reserve the right to share information you have provided with relevant parties where appropriate, e.g. the Charity Commission.
- The grant should be acknowledged in all written materials you produce about

the work for which you receive funding and grantees will receive a media guide. We may also use details of your project in our publicity material.

- Successful applicants are required to join the Communities and Collections Network and should reserve resources to allow at least one person to participate in an action learning set during the early stages of the funding period, coaching and evaluation conversations, and to attend at least two network meetings (of four) per year.
- Any substantial changes during the funding period require the Museums Association's agreement. You must inform us of significant proposed changes to expenditure. Taking part in the Communities and Collections Network is also a useful way of maintaining communication with the MA.
- We may wish to visit to see the work funded during the life of the grant.