

## Guidance for Applicants

### Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund 2027

The Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund, run by the Museums Association (MA), supports work by museums and community organisations to strengthen communities, using collections.

The Communities and Collections Fund began in 2025, building on previous grantmaking as the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund between 2011-2024. In designing the fund we set a direction of travel to support inclusive and community-led collections work in museums, towards social and climate justice. This was informed by research with museum and community organisation contributors in 2024, as well as the MA's Museums Change Lives campaign and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's strategic aims for Creative, Confident Communities. In 2026 we reviewed the [progress of our work](#) and its [long term impact](#). This updated guidance for grants in 2027 is the result.

The overall purpose of the Communities and Collections Fund is consistent with 2025-26. Our updated guidance and selection criteria are a further step towards equitable partnership working and exploring the roles museums can have to strengthen communities and engage in social and climate justice. We will still offer **core grants** and **partnership project** grants, but we have added to our guidance to better differentiate what we look for in each type of grant application. Our application processes remain the same and our grant thresholds have increased with inflation.

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 by museums and community organisations to strengthen communities, using collections. We offer:

- **Partnership project grants** to museums and community organisations that work equitably together and share aims for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We look for ambitious and compelling ideas for inclusive project work with collections, with a focus on how the work contributes to local community agendas and needs.
- **Core grants** to museums that have established strategic aims for 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. We look for work that addresses organisational or systemic change with potential for strong legacy and future community partnership.

Grants of up to £110,000 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).

The fund has a twin focus on communities and collections. We anticipate this will result in work that explores and influences key themes in social and climate justice, such as social cohesion, decolonisation, climate crisis, anti-racism and others. Importantly, we will look for local relevance, for example asking how people or communities are centred in the work and how you have decided who to work with. Our 2026 review highlighted museums acting as anchor organisations in communities and as valuable civic spaces for community-led work. We are interested in supporting more of [this work](#) to strengthen communities and build the resilience and relevance of museums as parts of local networks.

With core grants, applicants should move away from a project output approach and focus more on the organisational or systemic change that they wish to influence through their work. We aim for these grants to help create the conditions for success in future inclusive and community-led collections work (i.e. building the trust, confidence, culture and capacity needed for future equitable partnership work); or to support a museum that is well-placed to contribute to a particular cause. In applications, we look for leadership support and advocacy for the work; investment in staff capacity, skills development and a culture of care; and making time for reflective practice. Where the work of a core grant is based on programmes, we will always consider whether it would have greater impact as a partnership project.

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 making meaningful change 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. This means we welcome partnership project applications where community groups or museums are the financial host of the work. We are interested in how you plan for the end of a funding period and to develop legacy. Legacy of your work is a key factor in demonstrating your long-term approach, especially for core grants and this might be in terms of continued relationships, changed internal practices, stronger civic links and community-held outcomes, for example.

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, using the MA's [Power to the People](#) framework as a measure of organisational change. We also understand that genuine participation and co-production mean 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. 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 co-developing partnership project applications to consider how power, decision-making, resources and learning will be shared. The guides 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

June 2027 decisions:

- September 2026 onwards: contact the MA to discuss your project ideas
- 20 January 2027: deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- w/c 8 February 2027: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 5 May 2027: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- End June 2027: grants awarded

December 2027 decisions:

- February 2027 onwards: contact the MA to discuss your ideas
- 14 July 2027: deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- w/c 2 August 2027: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 27 October 2027: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- Mid December 2027: 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](#)
- Findings from our 2026 [review of progress](#) and [impact](#).
- [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 book in directly with Sarah Briggs using this [link](#) to discuss your ideas for an application. Alternatively, you can contact Sarah Briggs or Sally Colvin at the Museums Association with any questions:

Sarah Briggs: [sarah@museumsassociation.org](mailto:sarah@museumsassociation.org), 020 7566 7834

Sally Colvin: [sally@museumsassociation.org](mailto:sally@museumsassociation.org), 020 7566 7851

# Application Criteria

## Essential Requirements

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.
- Be for work that supports and strengthens communities and/or meets an evidenced local need.

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.
- Develop the museum's capability to work in equitable partnership and/or as an anchor organisation for a place or cause, in the long term.
- Work with existing collections to embed community-led and democratised practice.

## 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, themes or causes that you will explore.
2. Progress towards community led and/or equitable working, see our guidance and terms and conditions for more details.
3. The beneficial impact on participants including your organisation(s), individual participants, audiences and, where appropriate, the wider museums sector, or partners from other sectors.
4. The ambition for organisational or systemic change, 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.
- Organisations that are not constituted or do not have measures in place to guard against disproportionate “personal benefit”.
- Work that is primarily the responsibility of statutory authorities using public funds e.g. social services.
- 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 £50,000-£110,000 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 develop a [culture of care](#) for staff, freelancers, volunteers, partners and participants.
- Tell us about your local context and existing relationships with community and stakeholder groups and provide evidence of strategies and plans for inclusion, including partners where relevant.
- 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 grants manager 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 financial host (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 and one constituted community organisation. It is expected that the museum partner(s) will hold collections that will be used during the partnership project. Partnerships should select one organisation as "financial host" who coordinates funding and this can be a museum or community organisation.
- We 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 need to complete and sign a Grant Acceptance and Bank details form. This will provide us with your bank information, act 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 copy of a recent bank statement or letter from your bank.
- Funds will be drawn down annually in advance from the start of the funding period. In year one, funding will be drawn down at a point to be agreed with grantees, for example, upon recruitment of a post. In later years, grantees should supply a progress report, supported by approved annual accounts for each financial year of the grant and a budget for the coming year in advance of their draw-down date. 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. We may also use details of your work in our publicity material. We can supply logos for you to use, and please contact us if you are undertaking significant press work or other media coverage.
- You will join an Action Learning Set with other grantees from your round of funding. You must nominate one individual to attend 4-6 online meetings in the year after your grant is awarded. As well as peer-led action learning, you will feed learning back to the MA and develop ideas to be shared with a wider audience, for example through conferences and publications.
- Alongside the Action Learning Sets we run a Collections Network which includes coaching conversations and network meetings. Successful applicants should reserve resources to allow at least 1-2 people to attend network meetings at least twice a year. Note that some meetings are held online and some in person around the UK.
- If the proposal includes recruiting staff or freelance support, applicants must follow the MA's work on fair pay in museums, salary guidelines and inclusive recruitment practices. We expect museums to undertake open recruitment according to an agreed job specification and description.
- All grantees are required to use inclusive practices and create equitable relationships with community partners, groups and stakeholders. For example, offering payment for lived experience. See the MA's Working Equitably guidance for more information.
- All grantees must consider how they will support the wellbeing of staff (paid or unpaid), freelancers, partners and participants. See the MA's online Wellbeing Guidance for more guidance.
- Grantees must have a safeguarding policy to protect people with whom they work.
- Grantees shall comply with UK legislation (together with any policies and procedures notified to it from time to time) pertaining to Health and Safety; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Bullying and Harassment; and Whistleblowing. This includes, but is not limited to, relevant provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018, the Bribery Act 2010, the Fraud Act 2006, the Equality Act 2010 and the Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- Any substantial changes to the work require the Museums Association's agreement. You must inform us of significant proposed changes to expenditure. Taking part in the Collections Network is also a useful way of maintaining communication with the Museums Association.
- We may wish to visit the work funded during the life of the grant.