

Manchester City Council
Cultural Partnership Grants Programme
1 April 2026 – 31 March 2029
PROSPECTUS

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Purpose	3
3. Key Dates	4
4. Aims, Principles and Priorities	4
5. Grant amounts and Limits	7
6. Eligibility	7
7. Assessment.....	9
Eligibility Check.....	9
Scoring	9
Balancing	9
Decision Making	10
Offer	10
Due Diligence.....	10
8. Monitoring Expectation	11
9. How to Apply.....	12
Information session.....	12

1. Introduction

I'm proud to introduce the fifth round of Manchester City Council's Cultural Partnership Grants Programme, which will run from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. This programme continues our long-standing commitment to supporting our city's vibrant and diverse cultural sector which plays a vital role in shaping Manchester's identity, enriching lives, and connecting communities.

Culture is the heartbeat of Manchester. It inspires, challenges and brings people together. Our cultural organisations make Manchester a more inclusive, imaginative, and dynamic place to live, work, and visit. This funding programme is designed to help the sector thrive, by supporting organisations' core costs, enabling long-term planning, and encouraging innovation and collaboration.

The Cultural Partnership Grants Programme is rooted in the values of inclusion, sustainability, good governance and partnership working. It aligns with our city's cultural strategy *Always, Everywhere: Manchester's Cultural Ambition 2024–2034*, and supports organisations that are committed to widening access, nurturing talent, and delivering meaningful cultural experiences across our neighbourhoods.

Thank you to everyone who contributes to making Manchester's cultural life rich and exciting. We look forward to working with you to deliver another inspiring and impactful three years of cultural partnership working.



Councillor Garry Bridges, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Culture,
Manchester City Council

To apply to this fund, you will need this document and the online application form. To access these, visit our website.

2. Purpose

The Cultural Partnership Grant programme, currently in its fourth round, provides revenue funding to support cultural organisations with core costs. The next grant programme will run for three years, from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.

What will we fund

Core cost grants can be used to help pay your ongoing running costs like:

- Salaries.
- Rent.
- Utilities.

In addition, you may choose to apply for funding to:

- Deliver projects and programmes.
- Develop and embed new practice.
- Generate new income.
- Establish new delivery models.

But this must relate to your core work and to achieving the funding priorities.

What won't we fund?

The cultural partnership grant cannot be used for the following:

- Work that does not respond to the needs of Manchester City Council residents.
- Work that is outside of your organisational objectives.
- Applications where a significant proportion of the funding will be used to pay consultancy fees.
- Costs associated with the purchase of land, buildings or vehicles.
- Major building refurbishments or extensions.
- Costs incurred before 1 April 2026 or after 31 March 2029.
- Activities that are religious or political in nature or promote religious or political affiliation. Faith groups that meet our eligibility criteria are welcome to apply.

In addition:

- We expect applicants to use our funding for ongoing costs, not to build up reserves.
- We will not fund projects and partnerships that have been created to apply to this fund.
- Funded organisations must reinvest all financial surpluses to advance social, environmental or cultural goals that significantly benefit Manchester communities; they must also not distribute surpluses or assets through share dividends to individuals or shareholders.

3. Key Dates

Call for expressions of interest		Friday 1 August 2025
Deadline for expressions of interest		Sunday 17 August 2025
Call for applications		Tuesday 26 August 2025 - 9:00am
Information sessions	Online Session	Friday 22 August 2025 – 10:00- 11:30am (Microsoft Teams)
	In Person Session	Thursday 4 September 2025: 9:30- 11:00am (Mechanic's Institute, Manchester City Centre)
Deadline for applications We recommend submitting your application at least 24 hours before the deadline to avoid disappointment. Late applications will not be considered.		Monday 6 October 2025 - 12 noon
Notification of decisions		Week commencing 22 December 2025
Due diligence process and grant agreements		Monday 12 January 2026 to Friday 30 January 2026
Start of funding programme		1 April 2026

4. Aims, Principles and Priorities

Applicants to the Cultural Partnership Grant programme 2026-29 are required to evidence their ability to meet the following aims, principles and priorities of the fund. These are as follows:

Aims

The Cultural Partnership Grant fund aims to support cultural organisations which:

- contribute to the production and provision of culture and creativity in Manchester;
- foster an inclusive, vibrant, and equitable cultural landscape across the whole of the city;
- make relevant and uplifting culture, heritage and creativity opportunities accessible to everyone;
- celebrate many different cultural art forms and creators; and
- provide spaces where culture and creativity happen throughout the city.

Principles

There are four principles that underpin the CPG programme 2026-2029. There are questions within the application document that will be scored against. The principles are as follows:

A commitment to inclusion and representation

Systemic inequalities adversely impact Manchester residents' health, wellbeing, and quality of life. We are calling on cultural organisations to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in their work. And to be working towards making their organisations representative of the diversity of the city of Manchester's population and of the communities they serve.

A commitment to a more sustainable future

Manchester has committed to a science-based target to be a zero-carbon city by 2038, and we ask cultural organisations to support that mission by having a sustainability plan or carbon reduction plan or working towards one. Any plan should include reducing carbon emissions of the organisation's activities, promoting sustainable transport to, from and between cultural events, and making carbon awareness and literacy part of the organisation's everyday activities.

A commitment to good governance

We ask that organisations to have a robust and engaged board (or equivalent management committee) that follows recognised principles of good governance and good employment practices. Arrangements are in place to ensure the successful delivery of your outcomes with the Manchester communities you serve being involved in leadership and decision-making in your organisation.

A commitment to co-production and partnership working

Working together with residents, communities, partners, venues and other charities and learning from one another will lead to the greatest impact. To make your work as impactful and creative as possible, you will have strong links with residents, co-produce with community groups, or work with other cultural partners outside of Manchester.

Priorities

The priorities for the Cultural Partnerships Grants programme have been informed by [Always, Everywhere: Manchester's Cultural Ambition 2024-2034](#).

The strategy aims to foster a lifelong love of culture, creativity and ideas, ensuring that people everywhere in the city can unlock their own ability to do, create and make, offering

opportunities to develop skills and access jobs, whilst inspiring diverse and innovative forms of cultural expression and creative and artistic activities.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they meet Priority One (Widening Access for Everyone) and select at least another two of Priorities 2-6, aligned to the activities their organisation delivers:

1 Widening Access for Everyone

Widening access to culture, heritage and creativity for all, creating an inspiring and welcoming cultural offer. Providing accessible, affordable and varied cultural opportunities for everyone across the city, expanding opportunities to experience, create and make culture.

2 Culture Everywhere

Delivering a distributed and equitable cultural offer across the whole city to increase opportunities to engage in culture, heritage and creativity with a focus on activities taking place in underserved neighbourhoods. Several wards in the city have low levels of cultural engagement, evidenced by the Cultural Impact Survey data. Work in these areas (listed) and where partners have a long-term commitment to the communities they serve are of particular interest to the Council.

3 Making Connections

Ensuring culture, heritage and creativity connect with what matters most to Manchester residents, including health and wellbeing, community cohesion and resilience, environmental sustainability, skills development and education, and supporting Manchester's future generations by engaging children and young people.

4 People Shape Culture

Supporting new talent and making sure there are connections between grassroots, everyday culture, heritage and creativity and employment opportunities in the cultural, heritage and creative sectors. Enabling residents from diverse backgrounds and with different lived experiences to pursue careers in the cultural, heritage and creative industries and to enrich the diversity of people working in the sector.

5 Seeing is Believing

Delivering exhibitions, performances, events and festivals which are as diverse as Manchester's population, and which excite and attract residents and visitors.

6 A community of creatives

Ensuring that Manchester is a place where artists, producers and technicians can flourish with a range of places to work, opportunities, networks, commissions and access to professional development support.

You can view the full culture strategy, [Always, Everywhere: Manchester's Cultural Ambition 2024-2034](#).

5. Grant amounts and limits

- All grants are for three years from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.
- The minimum amount you can apply for is £15,000 a year. The maximum amount you can apply for is £40,000 a year.

Payments of grants are made quarterly, in arrears, on receipt of complete monitoring information which will be requested on a six-monthly basis.

These grants will continue to be offered as multi-year, core funding. This reflects the IVAR* principles and our shared belief that flexibility (of both funder and grant recipient) will be central to supporting organisations to be sustainable and responsive. For more information see the [IVAR open and trusting grant-making page](#).

All applications will be assessed on their eligibility and merit. Previously receiving Cultural Partnership Grant funding does not offer any advantage or disadvantage.

Please contact us if you are considering applying as a partnership.

6. Eligibility

You don't need to have received funding from us before to apply, and you can apply if you're already funded by Manchester City Council.

To apply for this funding, your organisation must be:

- A constituted community and voluntary, not-for-profit organisation.
- A cultural or arts-based organisation – as set out your organisation's Memorandum and Articles of Association. Eligible art forms include Combined Arts, Dance, Museum, Film and Broadcast, Heritage, Literature, Visual Arts, Digital Art, Music, Photography, Theatre and Performance, Craft and Design.
- An organisation based in the City of Manchester or which has a track record of delivering activity for the benefit of the people who live in or visit the city, or that benefit the local economy.

In addition, you will need to have:

- Your own organisational bank account.
- a board of directors/trustees (or equivalent management committee) in place which is independent of the staff team, with clear roles and defined responsibilities.
- The following documents: data protection policy; equal opportunities policy; financial policies and procedures; governing document (Memorandum and Articles) or written constitution; health and safety policy; recent annual report and two years' independently certified or audited financial statements; and safeguarding policy (see separate Safeguarding Guidance document).
- appropriate insurance certificates for the work you do (For example, Employer's Liability, Public Indemnity, etc.)
- list of board or management committee members, including their roles/skills
- evidence of four quorate board meeting/management committee meetings in the past 18 months.
- evidence of significant recent provision of services for Manchester people, if you are not based in the City of Manchester.

You do not need to give us any of this information when applying; you only need to provide confirmation that these documents are in place. We will perform our own checks to confirm eligibility and may contact you to help us with this. If you are successful, we will carry out further due diligence checks. This means we will ask to see your organisation's documents and any other evidence we reasonably need to make a grant offer

7. Assessment

a. Eligibility check

Applications will be checked for eligibility by a Council officer. Applications which do not pass the eligibility check will be automatically rejected.

b. Scoring

Eligible applications will be assessed and scored by three Council officers. Assessors follow guidance to undertake the scoring. The assessors complete a summary sheet of your application, giving details of the scores plus brief comments on how scores were awarded and the evidence to support their assessment. The consistency of the scoring is checked by an officer that who was not involved in the scoring process. All applications that score less than 50% will be rejected.

c. Balancing

At the balancing stage we will review the highest scoring applications against the following criteria to ensure that the overall aims and priorities of the fund are met:

- Ensuring our cultural offer reflects a broad definition of culture to capture a wide set of artistic, creative and heritage activities. The list of eligible artforms includes combined arts, dance, museum, film and broadcast, heritage, literature, visual arts, digital art, music, photography, theatre and performance, craft and design.
- Supporting targeted activities for particular groups and communities of interest based on age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation and class.
- Investing in cultural activity and access to the cultural offer for people across the whole geography and every part of Manchester.

d. Decision-making

The decision-making panel comprises three senior Council officers and a representative of a cultural organisation based in Manchester that does not receive any type of funding from the Council. The panel will make the final decision on the applications based on the application scores and balancing and agree a portfolio of funded organisations.

The panel may also use its discretion to adjust the final grant awards to individual organisations to balance the total budget against the amounts requested.

e. Offer

All applicants will be notified of the outcome by email by 22 December 2025. Feedback is available on request. Panel decisions are final, and appeals are not permitted. Funding offers are conditional on the successful completion of due diligence.

Culture Team officers and members of the scoring and decision-making panels will be unable to accept offers of hospitality (for example complimentary tickets) from any eligible organisations between 1 August 2025 and 30 January 2026 (the commissioning period).

f. Due diligence process

Successful organisations will be required to submit all the financial, governance and procedural documentation listed at the start of the application form, which will be reviewed by Council officers. If applicants state that they will be working with vulnerable groups, they will be required to produce the appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. Further guidance on the Council's expectations around safeguarding are provided within the Safeguarding Guidance document, available to download from the webpage.

All the documents will be reviewed to ensure that they meet the Council's requirements. Provided an organisation passes the due diligence stage successfully, the Council will then provide a grant agreement which includes the funding terms and conditions for you to sign and return.

8. Monitoring Expectations


We are committed to applying the IVAR principles of open and trusted grant-making to this programme (see page 7 for IVAR information) – both in the application process and the ongoing relationship we have with funded organisations.

As part of this the Council will:

- be open and transparent about our requirements and give feedback about our decisions.
- only collect the information that we need.
- keep reporting requirements proportionate to the level of funding, with good notice of requests for information.
- accept that there is risk involved and respond flexibly to changing priorities and needs.
- be flexible and support funded organisations to be sustainable and responsive.

All funded organisations will be allocated a Relationship Officer and Support Officer who will meet you every six months and be your main point of contact throughout. We will also aim to bring the portfolio members together regularly to promote networking, collaboration and learning.

Funded organisations will be expected to:

- be open, transparent, and cooperative.
- keep in regular contact with the Relationship Officer, sharing any major financial or business changes or risks.
- submit a sustainability plan or carbon reduction plan, and annual progress reports.
- complete six-monthly monitoring on outcomes, provide case studies, and complete the annual Cultural Impact Survey, which collects data on the following: 
 - Zero Carbon
 - Funding and income
 - Footfall

- Health and wellbeing
- Productions and commissions
- Audience (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, place of residence)
- Engagement and participation – (age and place of residence)
- Schools
- Employment and skills (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, place of residence)
- Volunteers (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, place of residence)
- Board members (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, place of residence)
- Qualitative data on impact

9. How to Apply

The application form is being hosted on 'Smart Survey', with detailed application guidance embed throughout the form. You can access the application form and application supporting documents using the following link to the Manchester City council website.

Information sessions

Two information sessions will be held during the application period. Organisations can attend these sessions to ask questions about the prospectus, application form and guidance and assessment. If you would like to attend one of the online sessions, please register in advance at the links below;

- Online: [Friday 22 August 2025 – 10:00- 11:30am \(Microsoft Teams\)](#)
- In-person: [Thursday 4 September 2025: 9:30-11:00am \(Mechanic's Institute, Manchester City Centre\)](#)

An FAQ section is available on the Council's website. This will be updated throughout the application period based on any questions we receive.

If you require clarification or further information on anything relating to the grants programme, please contact Thorsten Mayer at thorsten.mayer@manchester.gov.uk. Please note that Thorsten cannot help you to complete your application form or offer advice on the likelihood of your application being funded.

If you have general queries about applying for funding or developing your organisation, please contact Macc on 0333 321 3021 or info@mcrcommunitycentral.org (www.manchestercommunitycentral.org). Support will be provided on a first come, first served basis and is subject to capacity.

If you require information about the demographics of the city of Manchester please visit: http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200088/statistics_andamp_intelligence