

# SHAPE Involve and Engage - Scheme Guidance Notes

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Last review date	May 2026
Next review date	May 2028

**Please read the scheme notes carefully. Incorrectly submitted applications will not be considered.**

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## **1 Introduction**

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- 1.1 The British Academy is inviting proposals for innovative public engagement activity for SHAPE Involve and Engage 2027-2028.
  - 1.2 We are searching for ambitious projects led by the brightest and best researchers and delivered in partnership with a GLAM organisation (gallery, library, archive or museum). This year, the scheme will also welcome collaborations with performing arts organisations.
  - 1.3 Funds of up to £8000 will be awarded to projects which actively engage the public with humanities and social sciences research using creative and forward-thinking approaches.
  - 1.4 Callout opens: Monday 1 June 2026
  - 1.5 Callout closes: Tuesday 15 September 2026
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## **2 Timeframe and period of award**

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- 2.1 Engagement activity must take place between 1 April 2027 and 31 December 2028, with all evaluation completed by the end of January 2029 or within one month of the project's completion (whichever comes first).
  - 2.2 Your project activities may be delivered over a period during this window, for example as an ongoing public consultation or engagement project or take place on one day for example a one-off event or performance. However, all activities should be completed by 31 December 2028.
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## **3 'Community of practice' workshop**

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- 3.1 Successful applicants will be invited to attend a 'community of practice' workshop in mid to late January 2027. Alongside training on areas such as audiences and evaluation techniques, researchers will also have the opportunity to share their plans with other award holders. Researchers will act as critical friends and sounding boards for each other, offering the

opportunity to share ideas, give each other feedback and troubleshoot possible challenges.

- 3.2 Researchers are encouraged to continue to stay in touch, offering support through the duration of the project development and delivery.
- 3.3 Where applicable, costs of travel or accommodation will be reimbursed, further details of date and location to follow.

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## 4 Why should you take part?

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- 4.1 This is an exciting opportunity for researchers who wish to build connections with a partner organisation, experiment with their public engagement practice and explore new ways of working and engaging with the public. Participating in the programme will:
- Act as a catalyst to get a new project or idea up and running.
  - Be an opportunity to try a new approach or work with a new audience to gain new perspectives on your research.
  - Offer the chance to build a new partnership with the cultural sector or develop or try a new approach with an existing collaborator. It will also offer the chance to work with a partner who will truly add value and make a meaningful contribution to your project through their expertise, connections, skills and collections or materials.
  - Allow you to make contacts and find networking opportunities with others in the research community who are interested in exploring new and innovative approaches to public engagement.

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## 5 About you

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- 5.1 The Academy is searching for inspiring communicators who are passionate about actively engaging the public and partners in their work. We welcome applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, expertise and career stages.
- 5.2 Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:
- Lead researcher must be at postdoctoral level or higher with a primary research focus in the humanities or social sciences. Postgraduate

students are not eligible to apply as a lead researcher but may be included in a project team.

- Applicants must be resident in the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands (that is, classed as 'ordinarily resident' for tax purposes).
- Applicants must have secured the support of their employing institution and their cultural partner. A contact at the home organisation who will support the delivery of the project must be included on the application form.
- Applicants may be independent scholars\* or retired/emeritus.
- Applications may be led by a GLAM or performing arts organisation but should have a university partner (see below for information on partnership working).
- Applicants should be available to attend the community of practice workshop held in mid-January 2027 (further details to follow).
- Current British Academy award holders are eligible to apply, with two exceptions. If you will hold a Mid-Career Fellowship or Wolfson Fellowship which will be active between April 2027 and December 2028 you are not eligible to apply, because these awards include support for public engagement and your engagement activities should be delivered using the funding from your existing award.
- Previous successful SHAPE Award holders are unable to reapply.

\*Independent researchers without practical support from a home institution should indicate this on their application form. While in the first instance you should seek practical support from your partner organisation, the Academy may be able to offer assistance to a small number of projects run by independent researchers.

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## 6 Partnership working

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- 6.1 Your project should be delivered in partnership with a performing arts organisation, or an organisation from the galleries, libraries, archives and museum sector. You will be expected to find your own partner and your activity should be developed and delivered together with your partner organisation. While you may choose to host your activities at your partner's venue, the partner should be a collaborator, and not simply a venue.
- 6.2 You should partner with one primary organisation, but we welcome applications which include other partners such as arts practitioners or

creatives, civil society organisations or local community groups in addition to your main partnership.

- 6.3 You can use existing partnerships. However, while your project can build on existing work, your activities should be new; this opportunity is not intended to provide further funding for activities that are already taking place.
- 6.4 Applicants should note that the British Academy is not able to help applicants find or make partnerships. [NESTA](#) and the [NCCPE](#) have advice articles about how to make partnerships, including with GLAM organisations, and you could also reach out to public engagement and communications or events staff within your organisation for assistance.

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## 7 What we expect from you, your institution and project partner

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- 7.1 **Provide the academic expertise** that the event or activity is based on.
- 7.2 **Act as the project lead** – together with your partner and colleagues, you will be responsible for project design, day-to-day project management, development and delivery, including staffing your activity.
- 7.3 **Event delivery, marketing and promotion** – you should name a contact who will be responsible for supporting you with event or activity delivery and logistics, booking venues and AV, promoting your event or activity and securing an audience.\*
- 7.4 **Financial processing** – the Academy will make a one-off payment to your organisation and all project expenses should then be claimed from your institution.

\* Independent researchers without practical support from a home institution should indicate this on their application form. While in the first instance you should seek practical support from your partner organisation, the Academy may be able to offer assistance to a small number of projects run by independent researchers.

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## 8 How the Academy will support you

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- 8.1 **A community of practice workshop** featuring sessions on refining and working with your audience and evaluation. There will also be time during the event to share your plans with other successful project teams to challenge and develop your ideas.
- 8.2 **Promotional support and advice** working with your organisation's communications contact to support and amplify your promotional campaign including through a variety of digital channels.

- 8.3 **Advice and guidance at every stage** – Academy staff will be available to offer support and troubleshoot questions as you develop and deliver your project.
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## 9 Examples

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- 9.1 We are looking for proposals which embrace a participatory approach to public engagement. You should consider how you might involve your audience in the research or delivery process.

This might include but is not limited to:

- Peer-to-peer conversations stemming from the research.
- Collaborative or co-designed approaches which involve the audience throughout the project.
- Opportunities to listen to a range of audience voices, for example considering what direction the public would like the research to go in.

- 9.2 Activities should ideally be delivered outside of a university setting wherever possible, i.e. not in a campus venue.

- 9.3 Some possible activity ideas are detailed below but this list is not exhaustive, and we welcome proposals which experiment with new formats and methods of delivery.

- 9.4 Activities or outputs could include:

- Pop-up shop, including opportunities to collect and share responses from the public in the 'shop'
- Theatre, storytelling or music performance developed with the public
- Memory bank or oral history pop-up
- Place-based participatory activities
- Artistic workshop – graphic, textile, mixed medium, etc.
- Walk in local area with performances or learning trail
- Activity based on the interests of a local group – for example a nature-based activity with a gardening club, an active game with a sports club. Other local groups could include youth clubs, reading groups, stay and play parent and child groups, social groups for older people, etc.
- A 'night at the library or museum' style event which could feature quizzes, immersive puzzles or mystery games
- Gallery, library, archive or museum pop-up such as town centre, park, cinema or other local venue

- Gaming or games event

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## 10 What your proposal must include and demonstrate

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### 10.1 Applicants must demonstrate in their proposal:

- Innovative public engagement activity. Innovation could be demonstrated through:
  - Research content
  - Methodology
  - Audience
- Outputs Genuine opportunities for co-production with the project partner and the public
- Partnership working that is collaborative, equitable and of a high standard
- A clearly defined audience (for example ‘cinema fans in Manchester aged under 35’, rather than ‘the general public’). We especially welcome proposals which seek to engage with underrepresented audiences
- A robust ethics and safeguarding plan for working with your audience (applicants should liaise with their organisation’s research office to discuss an ethics plan)
- Consideration of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – you must demonstrate that you have considered how to ensure your proposed activities are accessible and inclusive, and how you might adapt planned activities to accommodate access requirements. The British Academy Events Team can offer guidance on ensuring your project is open and accessible to all
- Tangible outputs to extend the legacy of your project. The audience for your outputs could be the public (for example continuing to target your original public audience) through blogs or articles, zines, a one-off podcast or mini podcast series, videos, or for an academic audience such publications, blogs or articles (provided there is a public focus to your project or activity)
- Justification of resources (see below for eligible costs)

### 10.2 You may also find it useful to frame your project around one of the Academy’s policy themes.

- Public policy themes
  - Public policy themes
  - Sustainability for people and planet
  - Social and cultural infrastructures
  - Digital societies

- Governance, trust and voice
- International themes
  - What is a good city?
  - Global (dis)order
  - Just Transitions
- Higher education and skills theme
  - A vision for SHAPE research and innovation in 2030

More information on the Academy's policy themes can be found [here](#).

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## 11 Eligible costs

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The following costs can be covered by the award:

### 11.1 Delivery and production costs including:

- Room or venue hire
- AV services and technical support
- Transport costs for equipment
- Production materials such as exhibit panels or activity packs
- Hire of equipment, props, costumes
- Design and print materials
- Marketing costs
- Catering that is essential to the delivery of the event for example as part of a tasting experience.
- Light refreshments such as tea and biscuits.

### 11.2 Staffing costs including:

- Support staff for on the day delivery, for example an event space or pop-up shop
- Creative/arts practitioner fees e.g. artists, musicians, performers, consultants
- Reasonable speaker fees/honoraria

### 11.3 Travel for project team and speakers/creative practitioners (standard class public transport in accordance with the British Academy's events travel policy – see Table 1 and note in the scheme [terms and conditions](#)).

### 11.4 Accommodation for project team and speakers/creative practitioners (in accordance with the British Academy's events travel policy – see Table 1 and note in the scheme [terms and conditions](#)).

11.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) adjustments\*: requests to reduce barriers and improve accessibility, such as:

- Provision of live subtitling
- British Sign Language interpretation
- Translators
- Large-print programmes
- Childcare or other family care costs for speakers on the days of the event/activity
- Travel to support inclusion of lower socio-economic groups or other audience members who may have difficulties attending without support.

\* If there are specific costs you would like to request for EDI adjustments in addition to those listed above, please make this clear in your application. We will consider all reasonable adjustments to ensure the events or activities are accessible.

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## 12 Ineligible costs

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- 12.1 Catering, unless it is integral to the activity itself, for example a food tasting. Alcohol is prohibited.
- 12.2 Salaried staff time or replacement teaching costs (please note this programme is not covering full economic cost)
- 12.3 Administrative support staffing costs
- 12.4 Research assistance or research assistant staffing costs
- 12.5 Purchase of computer hardware such as laptops, digital cameras etc. or specialist software
- 12.6 Institutional overheads
- 12.7 Permanent resources, equipment or any elements that should be properly ascribed to departmental or institutional overheads.

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## 13 Code of Practice

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- 13.1 The Academy has a [Code of Practice](#) for assessing funding applications, setting out the principles of equity, integrity and confidentiality governing the treatment of all applications for support. The Code of Practice also covers Data Protection, the Academy's ethics policy and the appeals procedure.

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## 14 How to apply

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- 14.1 Applications should be made through the British Academy's Flexi-Grant portal. If you have not previously used FlexiGrant and were not previously registered in the e-GAP system, please follow the registration process from the Flexi-Grant homepage. Applications cannot be submitted on paper or in any other medium.
- 14.2 Before completing the online form, all applicants should check that they comply with the eligibility requirements and ensure all necessary information is presented in the application. Applications without all the necessary information, or evidence to show the assessment criteria are met, will be rejected.
- 14.3 Full application guidance can be found in the scheme [Flexi-Grant Guidance Notes](#).
- 14.4 Please ensure you have also referred to the scheme [terms and conditions](#) for this award before making your application.
- 14.5 The Flexi-Grant application form will cover the following:
- Lead applicant details
  - Topic eligibility
  - Lead applicant background including recent appointments and publications
  - Partner organisation details
  - Partner organisation letter of support (see below for details)
  - Project title, summary and outline of plans
  - Project aims, and anticipated outputs and impact
  - How your project meets the innovation criteria
  - Intended audience or audiences, including consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion
  - Ethics and safeguarding plans
  - Venue
  - Evaluation
  - Budget/financial details of the project

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## 15 Letters of support

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- 15.1 Applicants should upload a letter of support on **headed paper** from their organisation and GLAM/performing arts partner (max 500 words each).
- 15.2 The statement of support from your GLAM/performing arts partner should include:
- Details of how the partner expects to benefit from the partnership.
  - How the partner will support the application and project.
  - Any in-kind support such as venue, marketing, collections, and materials.

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## 16 Assessment process

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- 16.1 Before assessment the applications will be checked for eligibility. Then a review panel of British Academy Fellows, funded researchers, and internal and external public engagement experts will use the assessment criteria to make a selection of around 10 projects.
- 16.2 Assessment criteria
- **Innovation and creativity** - The panel will consider innovation in the broadest sense across project concept, proposed methodology, underpinning research, reach, impact and outputs.
  - **Underpinning research** – applicants should clearly show the high quality, inspiring research underpinning the proposal.
  - **Feasibility** - How well the proposal has been conceived and how practical it will be to deliver, how appropriate the proposed activity is for reaching the intended audience and achieving the intended impact.
  - **Clearly defined audience** – a carefully considered proposal which is targeted at a specific audience, ideally with a co-production element which involves the audience in the project.
  - **Partnership working** with a co-production element which demonstrates active involvement of the partner i.e. the partner is not simply a hosting venue.
- 16.3 The selected applicants will then be invited to take part in the community of practice workshop, taking place mid-to-late January 2027.
- 16.4 We encourage you to use the workshop to challenge your initial proposal, to be inspired by the other successful applicants and truly think creatively about your plans. Following the workshop, you will have the opportunity to make any refinements to your proposal, before confirming any revisions by mid-March 2027.

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## 17 Scheme Timeline

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- 17.1 Scheme opens: 1 June 2026
- 17.2 Deadline for applications: 15 September 2026, 5pm
- 17.3 Panel meeting date: October 2026
- 17.4 Applicants informed of outcome: November 2026
- 17.5 Community of practice workshop: mid-January 2027
- 17.6 Confirmation of final plans and any revisions (post workshop) by: mid-March 2027
- 17.7 Activity to take place: 1 April 2027-31 December 2028
- 17.8 Evaluation of projects completed by: 31 January 2029

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## 18 What we expect from successful applicants

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- 18.1 Successful applicants will be expected to:
- Adhere to the terms and conditions of the award and by the British Academy's [Code of Practice](#).
  - Ensure all contributors are up to date with safeguarding requirements, for example a current DBS certificate or safeguarding training, if working with children, young people or vulnerable people.
  - Provide regular updates to the British Academy throughout the course of their activities, to enable the Academy to monitor progress and help promote the projects.
  - Acknowledge the British Academy in the communications, branding and marketing of their project.
  - Work with the British Academy on media or digital campaigns and promotion relating to the overall public engagement programme. This may include contributing to press announcements, social media or contributing to blog posts with the support of the British Academy communications team.
  - Complete an evaluation of their project and submit a copy of their results along with a summary report of the project to the British Academy by end of January 2029.

- Take part in the overall evaluation of the programme to enable us to assess the success of the programme. Applicants' involvement in this may include a short conversation with our evaluator and/or an evaluation survey.

18.2 Successful applicants may also be invited to:

- Take part in other British Academy public engagement activities and wider communications or events activity either concurrently or in future.
- Contribute to an information day or workshop session relating to the programme to share their experiences and learnings.
- Liaise with the Academy after the end of the programme, for example giving feedback for legacy or follow-on projects or to share findings, successes and challenges that have come out of the programme.

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## 19 Questions and support

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19.1 If you have any questions about the application process, please contact the Events Team:

- Email: [shapeawards@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:shapeawards@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)
- Phone: +44 (0)20 3912 3894
- For technical questions about Flexi-Grant, you can also contact [grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)
- You can also consult the list of [Frequently Asked Questions](#).