

MDM Open Grants Programme

Guidance Notes for Applicants

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1. Introduction

Museum Development Midlands' (MDM) mission is 'To Empower Midlands Museums to Thrive'. To meet this mission, we are providing a programme of Open, Programme linked and Responsive small grant funding opportunities to enable museums to address organisational priorities, embed learning, develop their people and grow audiences.

MDM is committed to inclusive practice. If there are any adjustments that would support you in your application, or you would like this document in another format, eg Braille, Large Print, audio, please let us know.

Our main grant types are:

- **Open Grants:** Open to all eligible museums to fund any activity which responds to the Arts Council England (ACE) Investment Principles, and/ or is in line with existing museum forward plans or other key policy and planning documents, including addressing any Accreditation areas for development or required actions
- **Workforce Development Grants:** Individual and Organisational Workforce Development and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities. Includes support for museum practitioners, including freelancers, to attend relevant conferences or undertake CPD opportunities to up-skill in their role. Priority for first time conference attendees and programme cohort participants.
- **Programme Linked Grants:** Grants linked to participation in MDM development programmes to enable participants to embed change and build on programme outcomes. These will be released alongside individual programmes.

- **Responsive Grants:** Flexible grants to respond to urgent or unforeseen need, e.g., time critical support for organisational resilience, or a flooding or security emergency. Any eligible museum can apply, at any time. These grants can be awarded outside the usual grant schedule but must be discussed with a member of the MDM team to assess suitability before applying.

Please note that this guidance is for our Open Grants. If you are applying for a Workforce Development Grant, Programme Linked Grant or a Responsive Grant you will need to complete a different application form. See [website](#) or email grants@mdmidlands.org.uk for more details.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Eligible for MDM Grant Funding

- Museums in the Midlands which are Accredited (either Full or Provisional) or are formally Working Towards Accreditation (excluding NPO or Nationally Funded Museums). Unsure if you're Accredited or Working Towards Accreditation? You can download a list of Accredited museums and a list of Working Towards Accreditation Museums from the [Arts Council England Webpage here](#).
- Museum organisations that are not Accredited or Working Towards Accreditation, or other linked arts or community organisations can be part of a project partnership grant application, but an eligible Accredited Museum *must* be the lead applicant
- Established Museum Forum networks representing Midlands Accredited museums among their membership may also be eligible for grant support for projects. Please contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk to discuss your proposal.

Not Eligible for MDM Grant funding

- Nationally funded museums or museums directly benefitting from ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding are not eligible for MDM grant funding
- Museums or organisations that are not Accredited or Working Towards Accreditation and are not working in a partnership with an eligible Accredited Museum
- Midlands museum forums that do not represent Accredited Midlands museums and whose project does not directly benefit those museums. Forum applications must be made by a representative accredited museum organisation member.

3. What will we fund?

The MDM Open Grants programme can support museums to implement action plans, deliver projects, develop people and audiences, and pilot new ideas and initiatives.

MDM Open Grants can support museums in the following key areas:

- Collections Care and Management
- Organisational Development and Resilience
- Environmental Responsibility
- Audience Development and Inclusive Museums
- Workforce and Volunteer Development

You must show on your application that your project responds to one or more relevant [Arts Council England \(ACE\) Investment Principles](#) and is in line with your existing forward plans or other key policy or planning documents, including your Accreditation Development Areas.

Below are some examples of the type of work we can fund, organised by our key grant areas. We have suggested where these work areas might link into the four ACE Investment Principles:

- Ambition and Quality
- Dynamism
- Environmental Responsibility
- Inclusivity and Relevance

Examples of the type of work an MDM Open Grant could fund include (but are not limited to):

Collections Development and Management	Related ACE Investment Principle
Collections care and management support such as improving documentation and care of collections, addressing backlogs, or rationalisation and disposal reviews.	Ambition and Quality
Implementing recommendations from collections related research and reports, including emergency planning and security reviews.	Ambition and Quality
Commissioning collections research and development projects.	Ambition and Quality/ Inclusivity and Relevance
Support for county museum forums to celebrate and share the work of its members (to include Midlands Accredited museums).	Ambition and Quality

Organisational Development and Resilience	Related ACE Investment Principle
Accreditation support for museums to prepare for Accreditation, or address action points from outcome letters.	Dynamism

Governance development and succession planning support to help make your organisation more sustainable.	Dynamism
Fundraising development, scoping plans or piloting projects for bigger future funding bids, such as ACE's National Lottery Project Grants (NLPG).	Dynamism
Organisational resilience and business planning, including exploring new models of income generation.	Dynamism
County Museum Forum review project to ensure that the forum is structured to deliver the best outcomes for its members (to include Midlands Accredited museums).	Dynamism
Implementing recommendations from research and reports, including governance reviews or skills audits.	Dynamism

Environmental Responsibility	Related ACE Investment Principle
Projects engaging audiences with the climate crisis change through collections.	Environmental Responsibility
Energy audits to review and recommend ways to reduce energy use.	Environmental Responsibility
Investment in initiatives or equipment to support green objectives or implement outcomes of energy audits (excluding revenue or major capital works).	Environmental Responsibility
Environmentally responsible collections care practices.	Environmental Responsibility

Audience Development and Inclusive Museums	Related ACE Investment Principle
Inclusive Museums initiatives, including implementing measures to improve access.	Inclusivity and Relevance
Collections programming, such as collections access projects or community co-production projects, including digital engagement and research into untold stories of collections.	Inclusivity and Relevance

Audience Development initiatives, especially to reach new audiences and communities currently less likely to access your museum.	Inclusivity and Relevance
Initiatives to improve inclusivity and diversity in workforce, trustees and volunteers.	Inclusivity and Relevance

Workforce and Volunteer Development	Related ACE Investment Principle
Workforce and Volunteer training and development to support delivery of funded project outcomes and legacy, including related training and CPD opportunities or celebration events.	Dynamism

If you are unsure whether a cost could be covered by the grant funding, or if you need any further guidance how your project might fit with any of the ACE Investment Principles please contact the MDM team at grants@mdmidlands.org.uk for clarification before making an application.

What the grant cannot fund:

N.B. Open grants can fund a wide range of activity but cannot fund:

- **Unrelated Applications:** Projects not clearly linked to museum practice under the headings outlined in *Section 3: What we will fund*.
- **Completed Activities:** Activities that have already been completed, commissioned, or ordered. Note: Funding *can* be used for planned activities, but not for items or contracts that have already been paid for or committed to prior to application.
- **Revenue Costs:** General operating costs and staff salaries.
- **Maintenance and Capital Expenditure:** Ongoing maintenance, building work, or capital expenses (*We define capital expenditure as money spent on the purchase, improvement, restoration, construction or creation of a fixed asset, including expenses or costs that are directly attributable to delivering the capital project*).
- **Existing Funded Projects:** Projects already funded by another organisation.
- **Match Funding:** Funds intended to match other funding sources.
- **Contingency Funds:** Any contingency expenses.
- **Unsupported Expenditures:** Costs without evidence (e.g. receipts).
- **Ineligible Organisations:** Organisations currently in direct receipt of Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding, Nationally Funded Museums, or museums not in the ACE accreditation scheme are not eligible to apply as lead applicant.

Alternative Funding

If you have a complex project in mind requiring a longer timescale, you might want to consider applying to [ACE's National Lottery Project Grants \(NLPG\)](#) instead which can fund projects lasting up to three years. Applications for projects for funding between £1,000 and £30,000 are assessed within eight weeks.

4. Application Process

Though not compulsory, we recommend that you speak to a member of the MDM team about your planned activity before applying. Please email grants@mdmidlands.org.uk to request a conversation.

There are two rounds of open grants planned for 2025-26.

KEY DATES	Round One	Round Two <i>(dates to be confirmed)</i>
Application form and guidance released:	Tuesday 20 May 2025	September 2025
Application deadline:	5pm Tuesday 8 July 2025	October 2025
Notification of Outcome:	w/c Monday 28 July 2025	Within 4 weeks of application deadline
Deadline for Award Acceptance <i>(return signed grant offer letter and completed bank form)</i>	5pm Monday 4 August	Within 1 week of receipt of grant offer.
All grant expenditure must be completed by:	Friday 6 March 2026	To be confirmed
Evaluation and Monitoring Forms, including evidence of expenditure, to be returned no later than:	Friday 20 March 2026	To be confirmed
You must complete the Annual Museum Survey 2025 by:	Spring/ summer 2026 (dates tbc)	Spring/ summer 2026 (dates tbc)

The majority of the grant funding will be allocated through round one grants with the remainder allocated in round two.

- Applications must be made using our Application Form which can be found on our website www.mdmidlands.org.uk or requested by emailing grants@mdmidlands.org.uk
- We will only accept applications submitted using our grant application form
- Remember to attach copies of supporting evidence such as quotations with your application
- We will only provide funding for costs and activity once MDM has received your signed copy of the Grant Offer Letter and completed bank details form.
- We will acknowledge receipt of your application within three working days. If you haven't heard from us after this time, please contact us immediately.

- If your organisation has outstanding *overdue* grant monitoring and evidence of expenditure forms from a previous MDM grant application 2024-25, we reserve the right to withhold future funding until the outstanding paperwork is submitted.
- If you wish to discuss your application, or have any queries regarding the application process, please contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk

Other Grant Types: *If you are applying for an individual CPD/ Conference Bursary, Programme Grant (linked to MDM programmes) or a Responsive Grant – you will need to complete a different application form. See website or email grants@mdmidlands.org.uk for more details.*

5. How will grant applications be assessed?

This is a competitive application process. Each application will be assessed by an MDM Grants Panel who will consider your application against the following criteria:

- The activity is viable, achievable, and clearly planned
- The grant fulfils a demonstrable need, which is clearly evidenced
- You provide a clear outline of the project aims and objectives and how it will be implemented and evaluated
- Your proposed costs are clearly set out and appropriate to the scale and nature of your application, including any match funding, and represent value for money
- The activity responds to one or more of the [Arts Council England \(ACE\) Investment Principles](#) – see section 3 of this guidance document for further information
- Activity is in line with existing museum forward plans or other key policy and planning documents, including Accreditation Development Areas
- Project is informed by MDM training/ support/ recommendations. Priority will be given to organisations who have actively engaged in MDM training, programmes, advice or support
- Application demonstrates 10% match funding towards total project cost
- The project will be completed on time with potential risks to delay identified and mitigated

Applicants will also be asked to demonstrate how they have considered:

- Best practice when working with freelancers/ consultants
- Environmental sustainability
- Issues around equity, diversity, and inclusivity

The Grant Panel's decision is final. Museums will be notified of decisions on the date specified above.

6. Budget and Funding

- The maximum amount an individual museum can apply for as an Open Grant is **£5,000**
- The grant cannot be used for match funding other projects.
- We will pay you 100% of the grant via BACS payment once we have received your signed acceptance of the grant terms and conditions

Will the grant cover VAT?

The grant will cover VAT that you cannot recover from HM Revenue and Customs.

- VAT registered museums should show all costs and claims exclusive of VAT
- Museums not registered for VAT should show all costs and claims inclusive of VAT
- You must send us all appropriate invoices (with VAT or without VAT) when submitting your final accounts

Please Note:

- The majority of the available Open Grant funding will be allocated in round one with the remainder allocated in round two.
- No single organisation can apply for more than a combined total of £10,000 across all MDM small grants schemes within one financial year.
- We encourage applicants to carefully consider the value of their grant requested in order to support as many museums as possible.
- Though not compulsory, we recommend that you discuss your application with a member of the MDM team before you submit it. Please contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk.

7. Reporting and Accountability

Applicants must:

- Agree to the grant terms and conditions set out in the grant application form
- Complete a short evaluation monitoring form at the end of the activity to demonstrate that the project aims and objectives have been delivered. An evidence of expenditure form must also be submitted, including copies of receipts or completed invoices.
- Complete the Annual Museum Survey for 2025-26 which will run summer 2026
- Acknowledge funding from ACE and MDM on all print and online marketing materials using the wording and logo we will provide.

Museums we support will be expected to share their learning with other museums. This could include:

- Providing a written case study or newsletter article
- Contributing to a network or Coffee and Connect session

8. Contact Information

If you wish to discuss your application, or have any queries regarding the application process, please contact grants@mdmidlands.org.uk

9. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Please see the [FAQ document](#)

10. Additional Resources

Working with Freelancers/ Consultants

MDM is committed to supporting freelancers/ consultants working in the museum and heritage sector. Applicants seeking to include work with freelancers/ consultants as part of their application should be aware of the [best practice guidance](#) developed by [South West Museum Development](#) in partnership with Museum Freelance.

Successful applicants will be expected to uphold the [Principles for Working with Freelancers](#) as part of the terms and conditions of their award.

Digital Culture Network

ACE's Digital Culture Network provides practical guides, training, and support to museums, helping you to explore and harness the benefits of technology to achieve your goals
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-digital-culture/digital-culture-network>

Julie's Bicycle

ACE's partner Julie's Bicycle developed a Museums Framework to support museums in developing environmental practice <https://juliesbicycle.com/resource-museums-framework-2017/>

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Resources

<https://mdwm.org.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-resources/>

Museum Development Midlands have a list of useful EDI resources

MDM Website

Visit the *Resources* page of the MDM website for more information on MDM and wider sector support: <https://mdmidlands.org.uk/sector-resources>