



Open Call: Artist Conversations

Bristol City Council is developing a new Cultural Strategy.

As part of this process, we're commissioning Bristol-based artists, collectives, cultural and creative organisations and practitioners to engage with other artists and creatives in the culture sector in meaningful conversations about culture.

We want to hear directly from people across Bristol about how culture is experienced in everyday life, what matters to them, and how the new strategy can reflect their needs, hopes and realities.

We're especially interested in working with those who are already rooted in communities and who understand how creativity can spark dialogue, build trust, and amplify a wide range of voices.

What are the commissions?

Commissions are for you to develop and deliver a community project, event(s) or gathering(s) that will bring artists and creatives together to share experiences and ideas around culture, creativity and community life in Bristol. These conversations will help shape the development of the Cultural Strategy.

There are 5 types of commissions available, worth up to £4500 each.

Each project will focus on engagement with artists and creatives connected to one of the following themes:

- Theme 1: Music
- Theme 2: Performing Arts
- Theme 3: Visual Arts
- Theme 4: Innovation & Tech
- Theme 5: Broadcast & Screen

Your project might engage a specific group such as mural artists, migrant creatives, circus performers, grassroots musicians, or podcasters, or it may bring together a wider network of people across a specific artform or industry, neighbourhood or identity-based community. Both approaches are welcome.

We're interested in creative conversations that reflect the lived experiences from within your chosen theme. Who are the key voices you want to involve, and what stories or insights need to be shared?

Whilst we do not want to explicitly assign artforms and roles for each theme, some examples of who *could* be at the table may look like (see below):

| Theme | What it could include: |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Theme 1: Music | Musicians, music producers, venue managers, sound engineers. |
| Theme 2: Performing Arts | Music, circus, spoken word, dance, theatre, gig venues, drag, youth arts. We're especially keen to hear from voices in threatened or marginalised live arts scenes (e.g. circus, grassroots and underground music, etc). |
| Theme 3: Visual Arts | Visual artists, freelancers and makers, craftspeople, designers, producers, curators, community-led creation. |
| Theme 4: Innovation & Tech | Game design, VR/AR, creative tech, experimental practice, animation, immersive storytelling. We welcome non-traditional or emerging formats here. |
| Theme 5: Broadcast & Screen | Film, podcasting, radio, TV, digital publishing, social media content, storytelling in public or digital realms |

If you're unsure where your work fits, pick the theme that best reflects your creative practice or community.

You can apply to more than one commission if you work with more than one theme as listed above. Please specify this in your application.

What are we looking for?

We're looking for creative projects that spark conversations about culture in everyday life. We are flexible on what conversations you have, and how they will be delivered, but we want to understand more generally:

- *What spaces, skills or support do you need to thrive creatively?*
- *What barriers do you face in making, sharing or growing your work or within your industry?*
- *What do you need from Bristol's cultural strategy to support your practice?*

We're not looking for a set format. Your project could be a series of workshops, a show or performance, a community podcast, an online or in person discussion, a creative gathering in the daytime or the evening, or something entirely different.

Your project must be delivered within 8 weeks and finish by 15th June 2026. Each project should also support participants to take part in Bristol's citywide Culture Survey, launching in 2026.

We're also interested in how you creatively document conversations, insights and experiences that emerge. You'll be asked to share this in a format that reflects your practice and community, e.g. visual artwork, illustration, poetry, audio, short film, or photography, or another creative form.

We welcome new ideas, as well as proposals that build on existing work and relationships within your community.

Key dates

Applications open: Friday 14th November 2025

Applications close: Monday 12th January 2026, 5pm

Funding applications are assessed: January to February 2026

Applicants notified of decisions: End of February 2026

Applicants submit project timeline and budget breakdown: Early March 2026

Funding agreements issued: March 2026

Projects activity begin: 13th April 2026

Project activity close: 15th June 2026

Who can apply?

- You must be based in Bristol. For individuals, this means you either live in or have a studio/workspace in Bristol City Council's local authority area. If you are an organisation, your main base or headquarters are in the local authority area. You can check if you are within the area by typing your postcode into www.gov.uk/find-local-council
- A Non-for-profit organisation, e.g. registered charity or Community Interest Company.
- A non-affiliated organisation e.g. Community group, collective or organisations who do not have a formal constitution.
- Artists and Creative Practitioners over 18 years old

We cannot accept applications from these organisations, but they can be involved as partners:

- Schools
- Housing associations and Registered Social Landlords
- Public-sector organisations, for example, NHS Trusts or Historic England

These people and organisations cannot be involved in projects at all:

- Private Sector & Profit-Orientated companies, e.g. companies limited by shares
- Students

Applying in partnership?

You can apply in partnership with another organisation or individual. You will need to identify who the lead partner is for the project, and they will need to submit one application form. The lead partner must meet all the eligibility criteria. Please make sure that your partner(s) are happy for you to apply before you submit your partnership application.

Our decision-making process

There are two stages to our decision-making process for awarding funding.

Stage 1 – Assessment

Applications will be assessed by members of Bristol City Council's Arts Development team using a clear scoring system. Answers will be given a score between 0–3, based on how well the question has been answered. The scores are added together to give a total score.

Stage 2 – Balancing the investment

A decision-making panel will review and discuss the highest scoring applications. The panel includes members of the Arts Development team and may include other council officers with relevant expertise in the areas of Community Engagement, Equalities, Legal and Business/Finance. We may also invite other people with relevant expertise to take part.

The panel will consider the highest scoring applications in relation to our balancing criteria. We do this in order to consider the spread of investment that we want to make. Our intention is each fund will be as representative as possible in terms of [diversity](#), range of art forms, geographical location and the communities they serve.

We will consider applications against the following balancing criteria:

- Geographical location (with a particular focus on Bristol City Council's priority areas)
- Range of art forms (visual art, music, dance, theatre, festivals etc.)
- Evidence of working with groups with [protected characteristics](#)

Applicants will be informed if their application has been successful or not in February 2026.

How to apply

Please submit your application via our [online form](#). Please note you need to fill in your application in one session. You cannot save your application and come back later to submit it.

We recommend you create a draft of your application using the [application form and guidance template](#) before you start the online form. You can then copy your text across. All the prompts for the questions are within the guidance template.

Preparing your application

Some of the questions in the application form have a word count limit. These questions are clearly on the application form template.

The online form will not allow you to exceed the word limit so please use a word count checker when drafting your application.

If you can answer the question as fully as possible in less than the maximum word count that's fine also; you won't be penalised. You are welcome to use bullet points in your answers.

Completing your application form

You will need to confirm your eligibility at the beginning of the application.

The application form does not ask for a full budget breakdown and project timeline. If you are successful in your application, you will be asked to submit these documents. These documents need to be reviewed and agreed with the arts development team before you can receive any funding.

You must complete your application by 5pm on Monday 12th January 2026.

Support

If you have any challenges or specific access requirements for filling in your application, please do get in touch with the Arts Development Team by emailing us at cityartsfunds@bristol.gov.uk

Thank you for considering applying to Bristol City Council's Open Call for the Culture Strategy Artist Conversations.