

# CRITERIA

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## LUTON ARTS PROGRAMME: EVOLUTION COMMISSIONS

A PROGRAMME MANAGED BY  
BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

### Funded by:



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



Funded by  
**UK Government**



## Introduction

Luton Borough Council are thrilled to introduce Luton Arts, a two-year arts programme by the Arts and Culture Strategy Group, funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Luton Rising and Arts Council England. Read more [on the Luton Arts website](#).

The Luton Arts Programme commissioning funds are led by the Luton Arts team at Luton Borough Council, with management support from Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF). Luton Arts feeds into the [2040 vision for Luton](#).

## Fund priorities

This fund supports the creation of new work, to reach and engage new, diverse audiences and participants across all Luton wards. Funding is available across three specific strands:

- 1) General** - open to any arts and creative activity, taking place in any format in Luton that engages an audience (total amount available £100,000, approx. 10 projects ringfenced).
- 2) Wellbeing** - arts and creativity led, community-based activities and opportunities aimed at improving wellbeing (total amount available £50,000, approx. 5 projects ringfenced). See Appendix A for additional guidance.
- 3) Schools & Education** - focused on culture in schools and education to expand young people's understanding of what culture can be (total amount available £40,000, approx. 4 projects ringfenced). See Appendix B for additional guidance.

## Luton Arts Programme: Evolution Commissions (£5,000-£20,000)

We accept applications for commissions from individuals aged 18+ with a background in artistic or creative work and a connection to Luton, and from organisations with charitable objectives such as registered charities, unincorporated groups with a constituting document, CICs limited by guarantee (not shares) and Parent Teacher Associations/PTFAs.

Schools are eligible to apply (including Academy Trusts, colleges and alternate provision) but please ensure you are in line with our wider guidance on what we do and do not fund. If you have any questions about your governance ahead of applying please get in touch with [grants@blcf.org.uk](mailto:grants@blcf.org.uk)

Applicants must be based in or connected to Luton and delivering activity within specific wards in Luton. Organisations do not have to have creative charitable objects to apply, but please make sure any activity you are undertaking is permitted under your constitution. If you have any queries, please contact us at [grants@blcf.org.uk](mailto:grants@blcf.org.uk)

You can also find [our standard information for organisations on this webpage](#).

**Funded projects should be delivered by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2026.**

## What does a connection to Luton look like?

Here are some examples:

- The lead applicant works or lives in Luton now.
- The lead applicant grew up here but moved away.
- You are partnering with a Luton organisation on the project (but not just as a venue or space).

**We are only able to consider one application per lead applicant to the Luton Create Fund.**

## We Do Not Fund

- Groups with 3 or more active BLCF grants, (each of more than £5,000).
- Groups who have provided low quality monitoring on previous grants via BLCF.
- Individuals without a UK bank account.
- National organisations (unless clear local benefits).
- Private Limited Companies (except Community Interest Companies - CICs - limited by guarantee).
- Profit-making organisations.
- Organisations or activities that promote political parties or religion. (We do fund activities that demonstrate wider public benefit).
- Professional marketing / advertising (unless you can demonstrate that this is only to publicise the funded work to engage beneficiaries).
- Professional fundraising.
- Retrospective costs.
- General appeals or sponsorship.
- Animal welfare, unless the activity directly benefits people.
- Fundraising events.
- Organisations already in receipt of Arts Council England NPO funding.
- Individuals who are not eligible to receive public funding.

## What are we looking to fund through the Evolution Commissions?

Projects funded through the commissions would be expected to start in January 2026 and be completed within 9 months. The Evolution Commissions are intended for projects to be created and experienced by a diverse audience in Luton. Applicants need to consider how they will make their work fair, inclusive and accessible to the audiences they wish to engage. We are open to activities taking place in any settings anywhere in Luton.

Some examples include:

- Organising an event and/or sharing that is open to the public, this could be in traditional venues (e.g. Hat Factory Arts Centre, Luton Library Theatre, community centres, church halls) or unconventional spaces, e.g. parks, on the streets (Luton Arts can support with coordination, permissions etc, there may be costs involved)
- Mural, sculpture, projection.
- Delivering a creative workshop, poetry event, open mic night.
- Making a short film.

- Touring and showcasing a theatre show across multiple wards and locations in Luton.
- Performances or exhibitions.

The work you produce can also be shown to audiences through existing channels, e.g. it could be part of an existing open mic or scratch night, for example through existing events at local venues, for example The Bear Club, Revoluton.

All activities must take place in Luton. Please note venue costs will need to be factored within your budget. If you want support identifying a venue and/or partnerships please contact [lutonarts@luton.gov.uk](mailto:lutonarts@luton.gov.uk)

## **What experience and/or skills are we looking for in applicants for the Evolution Commissions?**

You will be asked to tell us your practice, experience to date, and how you plan to deliver your project. There will also be space to tell us about any support (other than funds) you may need. As well as funds, the Luton Arts team will offer wrap around support and are keen for this to be an opportunity for applicants to grow skills and try something new. We welcome people taking a new step into a different level of activity, using this as an opportunity to work on larger budgets, or transferring skills between different artforms and contexts. For some examples:

- You may have been delivering and creating art or creative activities on a voluntary basis or in your spare time and looking to take the next step and be able to pay collaborators fairly.
- You are drawing on skills gained in non-arts related employment (e.g. customer service) and incorporating something new into your creative work.
- You want to grow your artistic experience, for example, you have been performing 10 mins poetry at an open mic night and are now looking to build from this and organise your own poetry night.

We will want to be reassured by your answers to the application questions on how you can deliver the project. If you apply to do something you have less experience in, some tips and suggestions that could help, include but not limited to:

- Working with a mentor.
- Attend training (e.g. in budgeting and marketing).
- Attend networking events (Creative Industries Network event at Hat Factory, Luton Producers Hub organised by Revoluton are some of the ones we know).
- Building in enough time to build relationships and partnerships, if you are new to it.

If anything is unclear or you are not sure, please contact [lutonarts@luton.gov.uk](mailto:lutonarts@luton.gov.uk)

## **What is the process?**

You will be asked to complete a simple Expression of Interest (EOI) form which you can save as you go. As part of the EOI stage you will be asked to tell us about:

- Your experience as an artist or organisation and what you want to do.
- Where in Luton you want to do it and what audiences you want to engage.

If you are an individual, you will also be asked to provide a Luton-based reference who can confirm your experience as an artist and your identity. If you need help with any of this, please contact [lutonarts@luton.gov.uk](mailto:lutonarts@luton.gov.uk)

Following this, all EOIs will be reviewed by the staff at BLCF, with input from the Luton Arts team. If you are successful, you will then be sent a full application form to complete.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

We will be asking recipients of the Evolution Commissions to attend evaluation training, and BLCF and Luton Arts will work with you to agree a timeline to deliver your project/activity and agree on any data, feedback, case studies to collate in advance, which will form part of your interim and end of commission reports, and these would be proportionate to the amount awarded and length of project.

The Luton Arts team will also be able to assist you with further delivery planning and structure, so please get in touch should you need this support.

BLCF will seek updates throughout your project to check progress, this will also help identify if there are any challenges or anything has changed and how we or the Luton Arts team might be able to support. You will be asked to outline how you spent the grant and including providing receipts at end of project report stage.

Luton Arts & BLCF hopes that this will be a mutually beneficial process, enabling you to document your learnings and achievements, which we hope will support your career, for example in future grant or job applications. We may also ask you to contribute to wider evaluation for the overall programme, to support us in evidencing outcomes and learning, and hopefully continue to offer these funds in future. You will be supported throughout.

Before beginning the project, please consider:

- Who will write your reports.
- Your aims and objectives.
- How will you measure progress.
- What information you will collect, including:
  - Numbers (quantitative data) – how many people use the service, goals achieved (e.g. employment, improved health).
  - Stories / Case Studies (qualitative data) – user / volunteer feedback, observed increase in skills, confidence, etc.
  - Learning – user / volunteer / partner feedback, what went well, what would you do differently, etc.

## What are we asking for in the full application process?

If you are progressed from the EOI to full application, for all applicants, we will ask for:

- Track-record in delivering work in the area.
- Bank statement (which can be redacted) showing account registered in the lead applicant's name.
- If you have indicated working with collaborators or making purchases (e.g. training and equipment), we would ask for confirmation, Memorandum of Understanding, where applicable, and quotes for purchases above £100.

- A link to or attachment that shows the art form of the individual or organisation, for example a portfolio or video link to a recording.

#### **In addition, for individuals we will ask for:**

- A referee whom we will contact for a reference.
- Proof of address or connection to Luton.

#### **In addition, for organisations, we will ask for:**

- Annual accounts - most recent annual accounts and / or management accounts, which have been audited / independently examined where required.
- Governing documents - constitution, memorandum and articles, articles, or set of rules.
- Equal opportunity policy.
- Safeguarding policy.
- Trustees and directors (names, roles, confirmation of any related trustees / directors and any other potential conflicts of interest).

### **How will decisions be made?**

- All EOIs will be reviewed by BLCF and shortlisted EOIs will be invited to full application stage.
- Additional support will be available from the Luton Arts team for those invited to make a full application, which may include contacting potential partners.
- All full applications will be reviewed and decided by an independent panel of volunteers.

It is important to us to ensure there is a diverse spread of funded projects across the 20 wards in Luton, and a diverse range of ideas and art forms being funded, so we will be taking that into consideration.

If you are a larger organisation, we may also consider your annual income, free reserves, and strength of local partnerships.

We welcome applications from experienced artists and organisations alike. You will need to demonstrate how you will be able to deliver your idea/project – this could be through working with experienced mentors or partners, or it could be through examples of other work.

### **Planning and deadlines**

We strongly encourage you to book in a conversation by emailing [lutonarts@luton.gov.uk](mailto:lutonarts@luton.gov.uk) who will be able to support you in forming your application.

Applications must be made through BLCF's online system, which you can find on the [BLCF website](#). Please contact us at [grants@blcf.org.uk](mailto:grants@blcf.org.uk) if you need support with the application form.

The **deadline Expression of Interest (EOI) for the Evolution Commissions is Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025 at 12pm midday.**

## Key dates & timelines

- 26th Sept 2025 Expression of Interest deadline (12pm midday).
- W/c 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 2025 Shortlisted applications invited to full application.
- W/c 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2025 Applicants notified of outcomes.
- Early Jan 2026 Delivery to start.
- 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2026 Project to be completed.
- 26th Oct 2026 End of project report to be submitted to BLCF.

## Unsuccessful applications

All applicants will receive feedback if requested, and the Luton Arts team and BLCF will be able to offer a one-off conversation and endeavour to signpost other opportunities and funding where appropriate.

## Additional Information

All applications are thoroughly assessed, including due diligence checks (for more information, please visit our [due diligence checks page](#)). Only applications which clearly meet the fund's criteria will be presented to our panel of local volunteers. We reserve the right to decline or accept any application according to the grants panel's decision.

The decision panel is due to take place in December, with the aim of relaying decisions to applicants within 10 days of the panel date.

We encourage all applicants to explore other funding sources. Your local Community Voluntary Service (CVS) can provide funding advice. For Bedfordshire CVS, visit [www.cvsbeds.org.uk](http://www.cvsbeds.org.uk)

## Equal Opportunities

We commit to promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity regardless of any protected characteristics.

If you have any queries, please contact us at [grants@blcf.org.uk](mailto:grants@blcf.org.uk)

## APPENDIX A

### Wellbeing Commissions

Within the Evolution Commissions, Luton Arts have ringfenced £50,000 for arts and creative led, community-based activities/opportunities with improving wellbeing as the key outcome. We welcome applications from individuals and organisations.

For example, your activity might be:

- An intervention/preventative activity for marginalised groups, e.g. around cultural identity, building compassion and cohesion across cultures.
- An artist with a practice of therapeutic, healing, health (or similar) elements, reducing inequality, contributing to health equity, or reducing social isolation.
- Collaboration between arts and creativity and other settings such as therapeutic, health and sport.
- Cookery, gardening, sound baths, drum circles, mindful art/movement & dance/theatre, arts & crafts sessions, DJing/rap/recording.
- A practice that seeks to connect people together e.g. it could be inter-generational activities that address common issues or shared values of marginalised group, neighbourhood, or section of a community.
- A programme to improve people's confidence or encourage people to engage in their community.
- Using arts and creativity to increase knowledge/confidence in a health topic area.
- Anything else that you can think of, get in touch with Luton Arts if you're unsure.

Additional support on how to evaluate the health and wellbeing impact of these projects will be available to those interested in these commissions. To find out more please contact the Luton Arts team ahead of application [lutonarts@luton.gov.uk](mailto:lutonarts@luton.gov.uk)

### **This sounds like some of the work we do but we're not an arts organisation, can we apply?**

We welcome applications from non-arts organisations, however, it is important that the activity is arts and creativity led. We would highly recommend that you work with an artist to collaborate and unlock new ideas for existing well-being and health activities. If you would like support, please get in touch. We are open to you openly recruiting the artist/practitioners after being awarded the commission, in which case please mention in your application and bear in mind time and resources to recruit.

## APPENDIX B

### Schools and Education

Within the Evolution Commissions, Luton Arts have ringfenced £40,000 for activities focused on culture in schools and education settings.

Karene Horner-Hughes, Cultural Education and Partnerships Officer for Bedfordshire University, will support all funded projects on the school's strands. If there is anything you are unsure of, have additional questions or support needs, please get in touch with Karene by emailing [karene.horner-hughes@beds.ac.uk](mailto:karene.horner-hughes@beds.ac.uk)

### The School and Education priority area explained

The programme aims to support the creation of new work and to reach and engage new, diverse participants across all wards in Luton. This can be led by the school or practitioner. The school & education strand supports approaches that enable young people to experience and shape culture and creativity in its broadest sense.

These commissions are intended to expand young people's understanding of what culture can be, highlight its relevance to their lives, and help make visible the diverse range of cultural career pathways available to them.

We want to ensure that these opportunities reflect and validate the rich cultural identities and heritages present within Luton. We are particularly interested in proposals that challenge narrow definitions of culture and that demonstrate relevance to the lived realities of young people.

### Who can apply to this priority area?

We welcome both individuals and organisations to apply, including schools, Parent Teacher Associations/PTFAs, individual practitioners.

This strand encourages proposals from those rooted in or inspired by local and global cultural traditions. This could be youth subcultures, community-based creative practices, or personal heritage, whether these are expressed through language, music, food, movement, dress, visual symbols, or shared storytelling.

Some examples include but not limit to:

- An individual artist proposing a performance and you want to tour it across schools in Luton. You've researched which year group and which schools it would suit. You don't have existing connections, but a target audience in mind that you have explored.
- Individual artists proposing the co-creation of a piece of artwork with home educated young people, where you have connections to these communities.
- A school applying together with an artist to co-create projects with the students.
- Cross generational work connecting with parents, caregivers, and teachers to share youth voice from workshops with young people.

We are really excited to hear how you would want to share culture and creativity in educational settings so be bold and let us know your ideas!

## **Examples of projects and what we are looking to fund:**

We are looking to fund the creation of new work of any art form or cultural expression, in any ward of Luton, for young people in education to partake in either as participants or audiences.

We welcome all forms of cultural practices, including (but not limited to) visual and performing arts, film, design, storytelling, digital creativity, craft, fashion, heritage, music, community traditions or contemporary youth cultures. If you have an idea – we want to hear about it!

Your target audience should be children and young people as pupils or learners, teachers, and school staff (e.g. teaching assistants), parents / caregivers where their involvement compliments the core engagement with children and young people, or home school groups.

Projects may include:

- Co-created workshops or sessions integrated into school subjects.
- Professional development that equips teachers to deliver creative learning.
- Artworks or performances that students participate in or experience.
- Activities that foster intercultural dialogue or celebrate underrepresented cultures.
- Anything else you might think of – get it touch if you're unsure.

## **(For Individual Practitioners) At what stage does partnership with a school(s) need to be when applying?**

If you already have existing connections with schools or organisations, that's great and we would love to hear from you. If you do not have connections don't worry, you can still apply. We would ask that you have given considered thought and research into the partnerships you would wish to create i.e. which school, what area, why and when?

We understand the amount of time and work to establish partnerships, we would expect to see confirmed partnerships and more detail if your project is accepted to the full application stage.

## **I have never worked with schools and education settings, but I would be interested in doing so, can I apply?**

Yes! We welcome people with little to no experience in working with schools to apply, you will not be assessed on your track-record of schools and education work but based on your ideas. We would want to see clear planning and delivery notes (for example through seeking mentoring/having partnerships in place). Please do contact [karene.horner-hughes@beds.ac.uk](mailto:karene.horner-hughes@beds.ac.uk) for a chat and some advice if you have no schools and education experience.

## **(For Schools or Organisations) We are new to working with freelance artists, can we apply?**

If you are a school applying and have existing relationships with artists, great and we would love to hear about. If you do not, don't worry, we would like to see you've given consideration of what artist or creative skills you'd need in your project. Do get in touch with Karene who can support you building these relationships. We also welcome you planning to openly recruit artists, in which case please mention this in your expression of interest. You should demonstrate that you have allowed for sufficient time (bearing in mind the 9-month delivery timeframe) and staffing to manage recruitment.

## **What are the things I need in place if I am working with schools and those home educated?**

If you are successful you would have to follow safeguarding guidelines, adhere to health and safety requirements, and we would advise that you to complete a full DBS check, which Karene can support you on. Organisations would need to provide their safeguarding policy and risk assessments.

Things to bear in mind:

- A reasonable portion of core costs (approx. 10-15% of project budget) can be included, or your costs for cover staff if activities are being delivered by existing teaching staff.
- Technical infrastructure and facilities vary between each school. If you are applying without a named partner or utilising our support to reach out to schools, we advise that projects are technically self-sufficient and factored into your project budget.
- The timings of a school day and how that may fit into their arrangements.
- The activity should be free to access for schools/students.
- At the expression of interest stage, we are happy to assume that spaces within the schools – e.g. classrooms, rehearsal rooms, would be free to access as part of delivering the activity with them. However, we encourage you check this if your project reaches the full application stage, Karene.horner-hughes@beds.ac.uk will be available to support this.
- We are able to support cost of DBS, if necessary, as part of wrap-around support, so you do not need to factor that into your budget.