



Guidance for applicants

Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund 2021

The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, run by the Museums Association (MA), supports projects that develop collections and connect them to people. Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, we are changing the grants we will award in 2021.

Please read this guidance to determine if and how you can apply.

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Purpose and process of the Collections Fund

The Collections Fund supports museums to use their collections to become relevant and sustainable organisations that are connected to and valued by their communities. All applications to the Collections Fund must focus on existing collections, typically held by an Accredited museum or partnership of museums and other organisations, and the funded work must engage and involve audiences to achieve public benefit. We're interested in partnership projects where this shares the benefit of funding to aid delivery or the impact of your work.

In 2020 we adapted our funding to respond to change brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. We awarded six Collections Innovation and Engagement grants (up to £90k over around two years) and 26 Sustaining Engagement with Collections grants (up to £30k over one year). Sustaining Engagement grants were a direct response to the pandemic to allow a range of museums to quickly adapt their practice at a time when physical access was not possible. As the pandemic continues in 2021, we are adapting again to help museums to use collections engagement in support of their recovery with communities.

This year we will offer two funding streams for collections engagement, both offering grants of up to £90,000 over around two years. Expression of interest deadlines are in spring for grant awards in July, and autumn for awards in December, following a two-stage process (dates below). In total £1.3m will be awarded, anticipated to be 7-10 projects in each funding round.

All applicants will meet a set of essential requirements relating to using existing collections to engage audiences. You can then apply to:

- test new, ambitious, creative collections engagement that has a social impact. These grants are for museums to innovate or kick-start practice where there is a strong link between a relevant collection and audience (much like our Collections Innovation and Engagement grants in 2020); or
- use experience of participatory practice to develop new models of collections engagement with communities living with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Applicants for these grants will demonstrate that they operate at a 'best practice' level or higher in the MA's **participatory practice framework** and are therefore in a position to develop replicable ways of working with communities as we all live with the impacts of the pandemic. These projects will fit in with the strategic aims of the organisation and be developmental as models for the sector.

Essential requirements

It is an essential requirement of the Collections Fund that projects use collections to engage, involve and inspire audiences. We are keen to support museums that can

prioritise and develop their collections needs, to meet the unique potential of museums to make a difference to people's lives.

This means we want to see a strong link between the collections and audiences you want to work with, and for you to demonstrate that you have thought about social impact as a core part of the project. In addition to considering who the work is for, it may be useful to ask critically whether your target audience will be interested, and what they gain from participation. The MA's toolkit for measuring socially engaged practice (in the links below) can help you to think about this.

We want to understand why the collection you choose merits development – for example, what is important, challenging, special, at risk, or appealing about the collection you want to work on? Another way of looking at this is considering what opportunity the collection presents – what story does the collection allow you to tell and for whom does the collection hold meaning?

Almost all collections and engagement activities are eligible to be included in Collections Fund projects, with some restrictions (see exclusions overleaf, for example we would not support exhibition fit out). We are also happy to fund 100% of projects and recognise the need to undertake basic, or back-of-house, collections work. Where it is the basis for sharing and using collections, we are realistic about supporting, for example, documentation, travel and project management time. However, all projects must progress beyond back-of-house and preparatory work to related participatory activities with audiences and communities.

Applicants should think about the legacy of their project when funded activity ends. It may be useful to address how the project will end, for example in terms of managing relationships begun in the project, and how learning from the project will be retained and used in the future.

What we mean by 'new, ambitious and creative work'

These grants focus on outstanding ideas with collections where there is a strong link between the collection and the people you want to work with; and between the activities and the context of your organisation. We are realistic about what can be achieved with grants of this size and assess creativity, social impact and ambition according to the situation of the museum or partnership.

We look for projects that are outward-looking and seek change, so we are open to projects that take risks or are at an early stage of development, where an applicant can articulate their ambitions for the work but may not yet be able to identify tangible outcomes. These projects will focus on innovations for the applying museum or partnership. If you need to extend your existing approach or have lots of experience to bring to the project, think about whether your idea is a better fit for the 'new models' grants below.

What we mean by ‘new models of working with communities’

We understand that museums need the stability and capacity that funding brings to work out how to deliver to their values and work with their communities in a very different operating context. It is vital that museums approach their recovery with their communities and use collections engagement to do so. We want to use the ‘new models’ type of grant to respond to the current needs of museums as they negotiate reopening, difficult decisions about how to prioritise areas of work and perhaps also how to retain the benefits they may have seen from different ways of working and digital technologies. Given our limited funding, we want to prioritise projects that can find replicable ways of working that can act as examples for the sector. Your approach may include blended delivery; integration with local authority or community partners; or an entirely new idea born of things you have tried during lockdown.

We will only accept ‘new models’ applications from museums that are already quite advanced in their community practice because we want the projects we fund to progress practice on behalf of the sector. The measure we will use for this is the MA’s **Power to the People: a self-assessment framework for participatory practice**, asking applicants to be at the ‘best practice’ level in at least four of the six areas described.

In your expression of interest we will ask for a summary of your organisation’s assessment of where it sits in the framework and for honest reflections on areas of improvement. We are open to hearing about how you have used the framework and don’t expect full compliance, for example, you may find that recent budget cuts affect where you are able to place your museum. If you haven’t used the framework before, new self-assessments can be brief and you will find the process useful for your existing work. At the full application stage we will ask for evidence relating to any points especially relevant to your proposed project. For example, your accounts might show that community partners are represented on your board; or you might show us information about how evaluation and reflective practice is used in your participation work. If your organisation is not operating at this level, you can still apply for a project with new, ambitious and creative work.

At the end of 2021 we will reconsider whether it is appropriate to offer larger and/or longer grants, in line with the five-year Collections Strategy and Development grants we had planned before the Covid-19 pandemic. If we are able to do so, we will include an option for ‘new models’ grantees to apply to extend their projects, recognising that ‘new models’ projects are likely to be an achievable, responsive part of the kind of long-term ambitions we want to support.

Dates

Spring grant round:

- March 2021: contact the MA to discuss your project ideas
- 26 April 2021: Deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- 10 May 2021: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 14 June 2021: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- July 2021: grants awarded

Autumn grant round:

- July-August 2021: contact the MA to discuss your project ideas
- 13 September 2021: Deadline for submission of the expression of interest form
- End September 2021: confirmation of whether shortlisted for funding
- 23 November 2021: shortlisted applicants make a second stage application
- December 2021: grants awarded

Links

The resources linked below may be useful in developing your grant application:

- [Measuring socially engaged practice: a toolkit for museums](#)
- [Power to the People: Participatory Practice Framework](#)
- [Museums Change Lives](#)
- [Empowering Collections](#)
- [Projects that have already received funding \(word\)](#)
- [Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund webpage](#) for case studies from previously funded projects.

Contacts

Please contact Sarah Briggs or Sally Colvin at the Museums Association to discuss your ideas for an application, or with any questions:

Sarah Briggs: sarah@museumsassociation.org, 020 7566 7834

Sally Colvin: sally@museumsassociation.org, 020 7566 7851

Application criteria

Testing new, ambitious, creative collections engagement

Essential requirements

To be considered, applications must both:

- work with an existing collection or collections to improve understanding of them and increase their use; and
- through that collections work, involve, inspire and have value for people, communities and audiences.

Criteria for Success

Applications are assessed for:

1. the potential of the collection to inspire and interest your audiences, and the coherence of your plans to enhance its understanding and use
2. the approach to engage and involve local communities, communities of interest, or other audiences in the collection, and the sense of how this will enhance the lives of those taking part
3. the beneficial impact on your organisation and individuals within it, and, where appropriate, how the project benefits partner museums, the wider museums sector, or partners from other sectors
4. the ambition, innovation, creativity and approach to risk of the project, in the context of the applying organisation/partnership
5. the project's feasibility and value for money
6. plans to end the project and sustain or build on its benefits.

Exclusions

The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund will not support:

- capital costs, including building work, renovations, and equipment
- grants to individuals or to causes that will benefit only one person, including student grants or bursaries
- work that does not have a direct benefit in the UK
- we will not normally replace or subsidise statutory income although we will make rare exceptions where the level of performance has been exceptional and where the potential impact of the work is substantial
- the promotion of religion
- retrospective funding, meaning support for work that has already taken place
- general appeals or circulars.

Application criteria

Using experience of participatory practice to develop new models of collections engagement with communities living with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Essential requirements

To be considered, applications must:

- work with an existing collection or collections to improve understanding of them and increase their use;
- through that collections work, involve, inspire and have value for people, communities and audiences; and
- demonstrate that the applicant operates at a 'best practice' level in four of the six areas listed in the MA's participatory framework as evidence of commitment to and experience of community practice.

Criteria for Success

Applications are assessed for:

1. the potential of the collection to inspire and interest your audiences, and the coherence of your plans to enhance its understanding and use
2. the approach to engage and involve local communities, communities of interest, or other audiences in the collection, and the sense of how this will enhance the lives of those taking part
3. the potential of the project to create a replicable model or sustainable way of working that benefits both the museum and its communities, in the context of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
4. the project's feasibility and value for money
5. plans to end the project and sustain or build on its benefits.

Exclusions

The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund will not support:

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Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund Terms and Conditions

What to apply for:

- Proposals must be for time-limited projects of up to three years and for between £20,000-£90,000.
- Grant offers remain open for one year from the award date, but we work with museums to start their projects within six months of the grant being awarded.
- Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund funding may form part or all of the funding for a single project. If you are seeking funding as part of a wider project, tell us what the overall budget of that wider project is, and what other funding sources (including your own resources) are in place or yet to be secured. It should be clear what we are funding, and how what we are funding makes for a coherent project in its own right.
- If the proposal includes recruiting staff, applicants are asked to consider the MA's work on [fair salaries in museums](#). We expect museums to undertake open recruitment according to an agreed job specification and description.

Resubmissions and multiple projects:

- Resubmissions will not be accepted unless they have been specifically invited by the Museums Association. We define a resubmission as an application for the same collection with the same project focus.
- We will accept applications which are for the same collection but have a different project focus. If you are in any doubt, please contact the programmes manager at the Museums Association to discuss what you are proposing.
- We will usually only award funds to an organisation as the sole grantee or lead partner for one project at a time, with the exception of our Sustaining Engagement with Collections grants from 2020. It is highly unlikely that the same collection or project will be funded more than once, but we may fund the same organisation for different projects over time. We will look into exceptions to this where 'new models' grants from 2021 may develop into longer-term projects.

Eligibility:

- The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund is open to all museums and galleries in the United Kingdom.
- Applicants from within the museum sector must be members of the Museums Association, in order to demonstrate commitment to sharing learning, to the Museums Change Lives agenda, and to the museum sector's Code of Ethics.
- We normally expect applicants, or one applicant in a partnership, to be Accredited (or formally working towards this). We may make occasional exceptions for organisations which are not Accredited museums, but whose activities are based on the care and interpretation of collections of historical, artistic or scientific interest, provided that they are in the public sector or have charitable status. The selection committee's decision on eligibility is final.

- Applications from national museums must be in partnership with at least one non-national museum.
- We expect applications from larger and national museums to reflect their capacity to influence the sector more widely and to develop museum practice.
- Applicants must have a safeguarding policy to protect people with whom they work.
- Collections strategy and development grant applicants must provide evidence of their plans for development covering at least five years. This should be a current strategic document approved by the organisation's governing body.

Other Terms and Conditions:

- Successful applicants will complete and sign a Grant Acceptance and Bank Details form. This will provide us with your bank information, act as your acceptance of our grant conditions and as confirmation that the money will be spent on the purpose detailed in your application. The form should be accompanied by a photocopy of a recent bank statement or letter from your bank.
- Funds will be drawn down annually from the start of the project. In year one, funding will be drawn down at a point to be agreed with grantees, for example, upon recruitment of a project post. In later years, projects should supply a progress report, supported by approved annual accounts for each financial year of the grant and a budget for the coming year in advance of their draw-down date. The grant should be specifically acknowledged in annual accounts for each year in which it was received.
- Any part of the grant not required for the purposes approved should be refunded.
- We reserve the right to withhold a grant or require repayment if:
 - we find that false information has been deliberately supplied;
 - the work undertaken is not that which is approved (originally or via approved changes);
 - your organisation becomes insolvent or goes into administration, receivership or liquidation, and if the grant has not already been spent on its intended purpose.
- We reserve the right to share information you have provided with relevant parties where appropriate, e.g. the Charity Commission.
- The grant should be acknowledged in all written materials you produce about the work for which you receive funding. We may also use details of your project in our publicity material. We can supply logos for you to use, and please contact us if you are undertaking significant press work or other media coverage.
- Successful applicants will join the Collections Network and should reserve resources to allow at least 1-2 people from each project to attend network meetings at least twice a year. The group will share learning and discuss projects, and also develop ideas to be shared with a wider audience, for example through conferences and publications.

- Any substantial changes to the project require the Museums Association's agreement. You must inform us of significant proposed changes to expenditure. Taking part in the Collections Network is also a useful way of maintaining communication with the Museums Association.
- We may wish to visit to see the work funded during the life of the grant.