

**YOUTH
MUSIC**

'TRAILBLAZER' FUND



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**APPLICATION
GUIDANCE**

Youth Music Trailblazer Fund Application Guidance

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About Youth Music

We believe that every young person should have the chance to change their life through music. Yet our research shows that many can't because of who they are, where they're from or what they're going through.

Our insights, influence, and investment in grassroots organisations and young people themselves means that more young people aged 0-25 can make, learn, or earn in music nationwide.

Youth Music is a national charity funded thanks to the National Lottery via Arts Council England, players of People's Postcode Lottery and support from partners, fundraisers, and donors.

The Youth Music Trailblazer fund is financed with National Lottery funding, which we receive through Arts Council England.

Youth Music runs several grant programmes. [Read more about them on the Youth Music website](#). Unsure which fund to apply to? Our ['Fund Picker tool'](#) can help you decide.

Find out more about our work on the [Youth Music website](#).

What's new in 2025?

We've made some small but important improvements.

Purpose of Trailblazer Fund grants

Trailblazer grants can now be used to sustain a grassroots programme, as well as test and trial new ways of working. We've made this change based on your feedback. It means organisations who have demand from young people don't have to invent 'new' projects when they already have one that works.

Personal access costs for staff and volunteers

You can now request personal access costs. These are costs that remove barriers to enable staff to deliver the project and undertake the grant reporting. Designed for those facing the following additional barriers:

- d/Deaf or disabled.
- Neurodivergent.
- Have learning difficulties.
- Have a mental health condition.
- Have a long-term health condition.

You can apply for personal access costs in addition to the main grant amount, up to a maximum of 10%. Please see section 4, Budget Planning, for more information. If you are Disabled, you can still apply for [Application Access Costs](#) for help to make your Youth Music application.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in applications

We know that organisations use AI to help with their funding applications. However, if you do use AI to help you draft your application, please make sure it's an honest reflection of your work and plans. We often find AI answers don't tell us enough about your actual practices, and this can have a negative impact on your assessment.

Increased demand for Trailblazer grants

Demand for Trailblazer continues to rise with every round. In Round 7, for example, we received 173 applications, and we were only able to fund 35. We don't say this to put you off applying but want you to be realistic about your chances of success. If you've read our [Trailblazer Fund Project Examples](#) and don't know whether your project is a good fit, then please speak to or email a member of our team.

Section one: Trailblazer overview

Overview

The Youth Music Trailblazer fund offers grants to organisations who want to:

- Trial work or test a new way of working;
- Sustain a grassroots programme; or
- Disrupt the status quo.

We invest in work that:

- Supports children and young people facing barriers to make, learn or earn in music.
- Makes music activity more inclusive, so more children and young people facing barriers can access it.

Amount

- Grant sizes are between £2,000 and £30,000.

Length

- Projects last between 6 and 24 months.

Application process

- A one-stage application process with three funding rounds per year. You'll hear the outcome within three months of the application deadline.

Target organisations

- Small organisations who support children and young people to make, learn or earn in music.
- Those who work with children and young people facing barriers who want to trial a new music offer or sustain an established project.
- Established organisations that want to test a new way of working or disrupt the status quo.

[There are project examples on our website.](#)

Funding themes

Your work must meet one or more of our themes:

- Early years
- Disabled, d/Deaf and neurodivergent young people
- Youth justice system

- Young people facing barriers
- Young adults
- Organisations and the workforce

Disabled access support

If you identify as Disabled and require additional support to make an application to Youth Music, you can [apply to our Application Access Fund](#). We offer funding of up to £900 to cover any additional application access costs that might be required. You should apply for this money before you start making your application.

Section two: Am I eligible?

Who can apply?

You must be able to answer yes to **all** the statements in this section before you make an application.

You are a constituted UK based organisation

- Sole traders, and individuals, can't apply to this fund.
- If you are a voluntary group not registered with Companies House or the Charity Commission, you must have a constitution and management committee.
- You must be legally constituted before you submit your application.
 - If your set-up date is less than one year before the application deadline, you can apply for a maximum of £15,000.

You are not a school or academy

- Schools and academies can't apply to this fund. This includes primary, secondary, PRUs, and special schools.

You have a bank account in the name of the organisation

- We can only pay grants into the bank account of the organisation that submitted the application. You'll need to give evidence of this if you're offered a grant.

You have a set of recent accounts

We expect to see accounts that:

- Show your total income and expenditure for the last financial year (often called a profit and loss or a statement of financial activities); and
- A summary of your assets and liabilities at the end of the year (often called a balance sheet).
- These should be less than 18 months old.
- You'll need to upload these with your application.

You have the correct insurance in place and comply with all relevant statutory legislation

- Correct insurance includes employers' and public liability as a minimum. Copies of your insurance must be available on request.

- Statutory legislation includes things such as company and charity law, the Data Protection Act, and the Equality Act.

Safeguarding is an essential part of your culture and ways of working, and you meet our minimum safeguarding standards

- Safeguarding practices are well understood, always developing and they inform your ethos and behaviours.
- You'll need to evidence that you meet our **minimum safeguarding standards**:
 - A safeguarding policy in the name of your organisation, updated in the last 3 years.
 - A person with overall responsibility for safeguarding (your designated safeguarding lead).
 - Their name and contact details are in your safeguarding policy.
 - Safer recruitment practices including DBS checks for those working with children and young people (at the highest level permitted, re-checked at least every three years).
 - A procedure for reporting concerns, incidents, or allegations (including those against staff/volunteers) that says who to inform and how to contact them.
 - Regular safeguarding training for staff and volunteers who work with children and young people (this can include in-house sessions) and induction into safeguarding for new starters.

If you don't have all these things in place, please contact us before you apply. Our [safeguarding hub](#) provides further information and support.

You are committed to improving inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) in your organisation (this includes youth voice and participation)

- We don't expect organisations to have got it 'all sorted,' but we want to fund those who are committed to reflecting and making change. That's why we ask you about IDEA in our application and monitoring forms.
- We expect all organisations to pay the [real Living Wage](#).

Our [IDEA hub](#) provides further information and support.

You are keen to develop your organisation

- We want to fund organisations that are open to developing. This means evaluating and reflecting on what you do, engaging with Youth Music, and

being collaborative. We try to be honest with ourselves about what is and isn't working. And we want the organisations we fund to be the same!

Current grantholders

If you already have a grant from us:

- You must be up to date with all your grant requirements.
- You cannot hold a Trailblazer Fund grant at the same time as a Catalyser Fund grant. If you hold a grant from a different Youth Music fund, then you may be eligible to apply to the Trailblazer Fund. Speak to your Youth Music contact for advice before starting an application.

Section three: Project fit

What does a Trailblazer project look like?

You must be able to answer yes to **all** the statements in this section before you make an application.

Your grant request amount is between £2,000 and £30,000 or £2,000 to £15,000 for organisations less than one year old

- It's fine to run a project that costs more using extra income from other sources.
- Organisations set up in the last year have less of a track record. This is why they can only apply for up to £15,000.

Your project lasts between 6 and 24 months

- This should include planning and project set-up time (e.g. recruiting Music Leaders, planning with partners, marketing your activities to young people).
- You should include time at the end of the project to evaluate and report back to Youth Music.

Your project will enable children and young people in England to make, learn or earn in music

- Youth Music's Trailblazer Fund only funds work in England.
- We believe in music in all its forms, whether that's making music with friends or learning about the music business. Projects can offer music making, learning, or earning – or a combination of all three.

Your project will engage children and young people who face barriers to music because of who they are, where they live, or what they're going through

- Barriers cause unequal access to music. People can face barriers because of their gender, economic or social background, disability status, ethnicity, for health or education reasons, caring responsibilities, because of where they live or for other reasons.
- You should try to remove some or all the barriers in your project design to make it accessible.

Your project has been or will be co-designed with children and young people

- Involve children and young people in the planning and ongoing development of your project so you can best meet their needs. Co-design methods might include consulting, seeking feedback, and offering paid and volunteer roles.
- The way you co-design will vary based on who you're working with, but it's a vital part of any project.
- If you're unable to co-design directly with children and young people, we'll want to know how your project is addressing their wants and needs.

Our [Youth Voice hub](#) provides further information and support.

You have built in ways to reflect on and adapt your project delivery

- Youth Music wants to support organisations who reflect on and try to improve what they do, both now and in the future. Collecting and analysing data about who you're working with and how they engage with your work is a big part of this.
- Whether you're assessing impact or reflecting on an area of your practice, we'll expect to see reflection and evaluation built into your project. If you get a grant, we'll ask you to submit a final report at the end of your grant, and in some case a short interim report midway through.

Funding Themes

We have six funding themes. Your application to Youth Music must fit into at least one of these themes.

Early years

For children aged 0–5 who face barriers to accessing music-making because of their circumstances or where they live. We encourage programmes that promote:

- Access to quality, creative musical experiences that support children's developmental needs.
- Shared learning between early years specialists, music specialists and parents, so that all become skilled, confident, and engaged in encouraging young children's musicality.
- Workforce diversification.

Disabled*, d/Deaf and neurodivergent young people

We encourage programmes for young people (aged 0–25) that:

- Ensure that they have equitable access to progress in music in a way that meets their needs and aspirations.
- Provide routes for Disabled young people into the workforce (where appropriate).

*We use the term 'Disabled' rather than 'SEN/D' in line with the social model of disability, which states that disabling barriers make life harder for Disabled people. The social model puts the onus on society to provide the right support to overcome disabling barriers.

Young adults

For young adults aged 16-25 who want to take their music further, or for whom music can support wider personal and social outcomes. We encourage programmes that:

- Improve young people's confidence, skills, social networks, and emotional wellbeing as well as providing specific mentoring, networking, and industry opportunities.
- Increase and enhance engagement with employment, education, and training.

Youth justice system

For children and young people (aged 0-25) who are, have been, or are at risk of being involved with the youth justice system. We encourage programmes that:

- Are youth-led and offer culturally relevant and engaging music programmes that promote personal and social outcomes alongside musical development.
- Work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to support safeguarding and progression and ensure that young people's needs are met.

Young people facing barriers

For children and young people (aged 0–25) who face barriers to music-making due to their characteristics or life circumstances, or because of where they live.

We encourage programmes that:

- Are youth-led and offer culturally relevant and engaging music programmes that promote personal and social outcomes alongside musical development.
- Work in partnership with other organisations and agencies to reach young people facing barriers and ensure that their needs are met.

Organisations and the workforce

Work that benefits the people and organisations who provide inclusive music-making opportunities for children and young people (aged 0-25). We encourage programmes that support and encourage:

- Organisations to be innovative, resilient, and inclusive.
- A diverse workforce that is networked, and skilled in inclusive practice with children and young people.

Section four: Budget planning

The Youth Music Trailblazer grant can fund a mix of:

- **Delivery costs:** This is funding to deliver your project.
- **Core costs:** This is funding to run your organisation.
- **Personal access costs:** This is funding to support the personal access costs for any project staff or volunteers who identify as d/Deaf or Disabled.

Budget rules

- Make sure your budget covers all the activities in your project.
- A proportion of the budget must be spent on delivery costs.
- No more than 20% of the Youth Music grant can be spent on capital costs (items that have a use which extends beyond the project or that could be sold on once the project has been completed).
- All staff working on the project must be paid at the [real Living Wage](#) rate or above.
- You must commit to raising at least 10% match funding, with a minimum of 5% in cash match funding. Match funding is additional income to your Youth Music grant that allows your project to happen. You can't use Arts Council England or National Lottery sources towards the minimum cash match.

Eligible costs

Here are some examples of eligible costs.

Delivery costs

- Salaries or freelance fees of staff working directly on the project (e.g. Music Leaders, Youth Workers, Project Manager).
- Youth voice activities (e.g. consultation, youth forum etc.)
- Marketing.
- Planning and project management.
- Monitoring, reflection, and evaluation.
- Staff induction and training.
- Capital costs such as musical instruments, and computer equipment.
- Software.
- Room and venue hire.
- Food, travel, and other access related costs.

- You can include contingency costs of up to 10% of your Youth Music grant to cover unexpected events or activities.

Core costs

- Salaries (staff who aren't working directly on the project).
- Organisational development (e.g. to develop your approach to safeguarding; inclusion, diversity, equity and access; and/or environmental responsibility).
- Communications.
- Operations (rent and utilities).
- Governance (audit, legal advice, preparation of annual accounts).
- Income generation.
- Training.
- IT costs.

Our [finance and fundraising hub](#) provides further information and support.

Personal access costs

You can apply for personal access costs in addition to the main grant, up to a maximum of 10%. These are costs that remove barriers to enable staff to deliver the project and undertake the grant reporting. Designed for those facing the following additional barriers:

- d/Deaf or disabled.
- Neurodivergent.
- Have learning difficulties.
- Have a mental health condition.
- Have a long-term health condition.

Eligible costs include:

- Transport costs, for examples taxis or someone to help you get to your place of work safely.
- Specialist software or equipment you need to enable you to deliver the project.
- A support worker to help with your grant reporting or workshop delivery.
- Other costs that remove disabling barriers and enable you to work on the project.

Points to note

- You can apply for an extra 10% on top of the amount you are requesting.
 - If you are applying for a grant of £30,000, you can apply for up to £3,000 extra in access costs (total = £33,000).

- If you are applying for a grant of £15,000, you can apply for up to £1,500 extra in access costs (total = £16,500).
 - In exceptional circumstances, we might fund more than 10%.
- Personal access costs are reviewed separately to your project, once we have made the decision to award you a grant.
- Access costs to support participants should be included in your delivery costs. There is no additional funding available for this.
- We won't normally fund access support that costs of more than £300 per day, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- If you are applying for personal access costs, then we also expect you to make (or have made) an application to the Government's [Access to Work](#) scheme. This is because we don't want to fund costs that you are entitled to and should receive from the Government. You do not need to have received or applied for Access to Work before you apply to Youth Music.

Further [guidance about personal access costs](#) is available on our website.

Ineligible costs

The following are ineligible:

- Profit-making programmes.
- Costs incurred before we made you a grant offer.
- The purchase of land or buildings.
- Reclaimable VAT.
- Reserves, loans, or interest payments.
- Activity that promotes party political or religious beliefs.
- Activities that are a statutory responsibility.
- Costs incurred in making your application (if you identify as Disabled you can [apply to our Application Access Fund](#) to help you write your application).
- Whole class tuition on the same instrument or group of instruments (e.g., strings) in schools.
- Individual tuition fees for young people to learn an instrument in school.
- GCSE or A Level Music.
- School-based music curriculum activity (unless in a special school, Pupil Referral Unit or Alternative Provision setting).

Match funding

We ask all funded partners to commit to bringing in match funding. You don't need to have this funding secured at the point of application. This is additional

money, on top of your Youth Music grant to support your project.

There are two types of match funding:

- **Cash match funding.** This is where there is money exchange involved. For example, a grant from another funder.
- **In-kind match funding.** This is non-cash support that you or your partners make towards the project. For example, free venue hire, or volunteer support.

For Trailblazer Fund, you need 10% total match funding or higher (at least 5% must be cash match funding). This means for every pound you request from Youth Music you must raise at least 10p match funding, of which at least 5p must be cash match funding.

Amount requested from Youth Music	Minimum total match funding required	Minimum cash match funding required
£30,000	£3,000	£1,500
£15,000	£1,500	£750

Whilst Arts Council England or National Lottery sources can't be used towards the minimum match funding amount, it can be used as an additional contribution.

If you get a grant, we may ask for evidence of your cash match funding.

Section five: Support and Next steps

Read the guidance and think you're eligible? You should now:

1. Download and read the example [application form](#).
2. Plan your project and gather the information you'll need to complete your online application form.
3. Double-check the [application deadline](#).
4. Create an account on the Youth Music [grants portal](#) and bookmark the URL.

There is an application checklist at the end of this document listing the steps you'll need to go through to submit your form.

What support is available?

You can ask the Youth Music team for advice or support. We're a friendly group of people and are here to help!

Email grants@youthmusic.org.uk with any questions or to schedule a call. The email will come through to a member of our Grants and Learning Team.

Access support to make an application

Youth Music is committed to offering a clear and accessible grant-making process that is open to everyone.

We use an online application system. This system does not currently meet Web Accessibility Guidelines. We know that the system may be inaccessible to some people. It is not optimised for use with accessible technologies such as screen readers.

If you have difficulty making an application, please contact us to discuss how we can help. Please email us on grants@youthmusic.org.uk or call 020 7902 1060.

If you identify as Disabled and require additional support to make an application to Youth Music, you can apply to our [Application Access Fund](#).

Resources

Check out our [resource hub](#) for additional information and support.

Online surgeries and workshops

Our [Exchanging Notes programme](#) has upcoming learning events that may help with your application.

Section six: How we make decisions

At Youth Music, we believe that a greater diversity of views, skills and lived experience leads to better decisions.

That's why we appoint a unique group of decision-makers for every funding round. Each group comprises internal and external experts with lived experience relevant to applicants, the organisations they're from, and the young people they support. We also work with children and young people via our funded partners as part of this. Applications are reviewed by multiple people, and decisions are always made collectively.

We assess all eligible applications. We then use our assessments and other data to help us make final decisions.

Assessment

We use our team of freelance funding advisors to assess applications. There are two parts to the assessment:

- We will look at your Trailblazer proposal and assess if your project is a good fit for the fund.
- We review whether your organisation meets all the eligibility criteria.
 - This includes how well you match Youth Music's values of safeguarding, IDEA and being keen to develop. You don't have to have it all sorted, but we do expect and value your honesty about where you need to develop. Remember you can use the Trailblazer Fund to help with this.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in applications

We know that organisations use AI to help with their funding applications. However, if you do use AI to help you draft your application, please make sure it's an honest reflection of your work and plans. We often find AI answers don't tell us enough about your actual practices, and this can have a negative impact on your assessment.

Decision-making

When it comes to final decisions, assessment is only one part of the picture. We try to be equitable in our decision-making. This means targeting our investment towards the people or places that need it the most. Some of the factors we consider are:

- Children and young people reached (e.g. age, barriers, ethnicity).
- Type of project (e.g. funding theme, setting) and its appeal to children and young people.
- Location.
- Organisation type (e.g. turnover, leadership).
- Risk levels (e.g. financial, safeguarding).
- How the work fits into our existing portfolio.

Unfortunately, we can't fund all the applications we receive, even though most of them will meet our criteria. Aiming for a diverse and equitable portfolio helps us to prioritise.

Competition for funding is higher in regions and for type of projects where we receive a high number of applications. This means success rates for these areas are lower. We regularly update information about [current priorities](#) on our website.

Section seven: What happens next?

You'll be notified about the outcome of your application via email – notification dates are listed on our website.

Unsuccessful applicants

If your application is unsuccessful, you will receive an email notification. We'll endeavour to outline the key reasons behind this decision and provide some support and guidance about potential next steps for your organisation.

Successful applicants

You'll be assigned a member of the Youth Music team to support you throughout your grant. We are friendly people who are looking forward to getting to know your project and your organisation. We'll issue a funding agreement and an online form where we'll ask you to upload the following:

- funding agreement (signed by two people in your organisation)
- evidence of bank details
- authorised signatories' mandate
- any other specific information we require from you
- responses to any assessment panel advice and guidance.

It takes up to 30 days from submitting these requirements to get your first payment.

Support for new Funded Partners

Alongside your funding agreement you will receive a funded partner welcome pack, and we hold online induction sessions throughout the year. These will help you understand your responsibilities and the support and opportunities Youth Music can offer you.

Monitoring and reporting

You will complete a final report at the end of your project, and in some cases a short interim report half-way through your project.

Making changes

You may need to make changes to your original plans. These should be approved by your Youth Music contact. You'll have their email and phone number so you can always contact them directly to discuss. We'll always try to approve the changes you request, so long as they meet the aims of the Trailblazer Fund.

Application checklist

Have you...	✓
Before you decide to apply	
Responded yes to all the statements in the 'Am I eligible?' section in the guidance	
Responded yes to all the statements in the 'Project fit' section in the guidance	
Read the Trailblazer Fund guidance in full	
Applied to the Application Access Fund if you need support	
Contacted Youth Music with any questions	
Before starting your application	
Downloaded a copy of the application form questions	
Created an account on the Youth Music Grants Portal	
Checked: - the date you were legally constituted - your charity/company number (if applicable) - your annual turnover	
Got the information you need to answer all the questions on the application form including a copy of your accounts and safeguarding policy (and constitution if you are a voluntary group not registered with the charity commission).	
Got the required diversity monitoring information about your leadership team	
Before submitting your application	
Ensured your application form has been checked through by the appropriate people in your organisation, that they have completed the declaration and data protection section, and signed their name, position, and the date	
Checked the validation page on the Youth Music Grants Portal for errors	
After you've submitted your application	
Received a confirmation email from Youth Music	
Downloaded and saved a copy of your application form for your records	