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ENGLAND**

YOUTH MUSIC CATALYSER FUND



**APPLICATION
GUIDANCE**

Youth Music Catalyser Fund

Application Guidance

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About Youth Music

We're a national charity. We help marginalised young people to make and monetise music.

Every year, we raise £10 million to fund inspirational grassroots music projects and support aspiring young creatives up and down the UK.

We're campaigning to break down barriers for young people facing inequity, exclusion and discrimination.

Together with our partners, we're helping the next generation to transform their lives through music. Join Us.

The Youth Music Catalyser 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](#).

Notes on applying

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 Catalyser Fund grants

Demand for Catalyser continues to rise with every round. In Round 5, for example, we received 204 applications, and we were only able to fund 44. 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 [Catalyser Fund Programme Examples](#) and don't know whether your programme is a good fit, then please speak to or email a member of our team.

Application support

Youth Music can offer 15-minute calls to **new applicants** to ask questions about Catalyser Fund and the application process. A booking link can be found on the Catalyser fund [webpage](#) during the application window. To make best use of the call please ensure you read this application guidance beforehand. The booking form will also ask you to outline the questions and areas you would like to discuss, so we can prepare for the call.

If you are a current or recently funded partner, please contact your Grants & Learning Officer to discuss your application directly.

Section one: Catalyser overview

Overview

The Youth Music Catalyser Fund offers grants to organisations who want to:

- Sustain work;
- Scale-up delivery; or
- Create change in sector practice.

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 £30,001 and £300,000.

Length

Programmes last between 24 and 48 months. Your programme must start within 6 months of notification. Notification for Catalyser Round 6 is 21 August 2026 – your programme must start by 27 February 2027.

Application process

A two-stage application process with one funding round per year. Stage one is a short Expression of Interest (EOI) form. You'll hear the outcome within three months. If successful, you'll be invited to submit a more detailed application, and be notified of the outcome within three months of its submission.

Target organisations

- Organisations looking to sustain their delivery over multiple years.
- Organisations who are working to influence and change sector practice.
- Those who want to scale-up delivery to reach more children and young people, more of the workforce or extend their geographical reach.
- Those with a track record supporting children and young people facing barriers to make, learn or earn in music.

Given the current pressures on the grassroots sector, we are currently investing more into programmes looking to sustain than scale-up. [There are programme 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 application 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 £1,500 to cover any additional access costs that might be required. Up to £300 will be paid ahead of the Expression of Interest stage; the remaining funds will be paid if you are invited to submit a full application. You should apply for this money before you start your application.

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.

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 and providing activity for at least one year before you apply to this fund.

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 and a recent set of management 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 if you're invited to submit a full application.

We expect to see [management accounts](#):

- These must be for the current financial year.
- This is so we can assess your current financial position.
- You'll need to upload these if you're invited to submit a full 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. Visit our [safeguarding hub](#) for further guidance 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.
- You should have an IDEA policy or action plan (or equivalent) that is reflected on and updated regularly. If you don't have one in place, then we'll expect you to develop one over the course of your grant.
- 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 Catalyser Fund grant at the same time as a Trailblazer Fund grant. And you can only hold one Catalyser Fund grant at any time. If you hold a grant from a different Youth Music fund, then you may be eligible to apply to the Catalyser Fund. Speak to your Youth Music contact for advice before starting an application.

Section three: Programme fit

What does a Catalyser 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 £30,001 and £300,000

- It's fine to run a programme that costs more using extra income from other source(s).
- You cannot request more than £100,000 per annum.

Your programme lasts between 24 and 48 months

- This should include planning and programme 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 programme to evaluate and report back to Youth Music.
- Programmes last between 24 and 48 months. Your programme must start within 6 months of notification. Notification for Catalyser Round 6 is 21 August 2026 – your programme must start between 01 October 2026 and 28 February 2027.

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

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

Your programme 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 of these barriers in your programme design to make it accessible.

Your programme 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 programme 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 programme.
- If you're unable to co-design directly with children and young people, we'll want to know how your programme 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 programme 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 expect to see reflection and evaluation built into your programme.
- If you get a grant, we'll ask you to submit interim reports and a final report. Our flexible final reporting format allows you to evaluate your programme in the way that's most useful to you.

You are working with other organisations to add value to your work.

- You must be working in partnership with other organisations.
- These organisations should have a clear role to play in your programme, which is why we ask to see partnership letters/emails from your key partners.

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 Catalyser grant can fund a mix of:

- **Delivery costs:** This is funding to deliver your project.
- **Core costs:** This is funding to run your organisation.

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 that 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 match funding including cash match funding.
 - The minimum amount of match funding required is dependent on how much money you are requesting from Youth Music.
 - You can't use Arts Council England or National Lottery sources towards the minimum cash match funding.

Eligible costs

Here are some examples of eligible costs.

Delivery costs

- Salaries 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.

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 do not 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 programme.

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.

The amount of match funding you need to raise depends on how much you are requesting from Youth Music.

Requesting between £30,001 and £100,000 from Youth Music?

- You need 15% total match funding or higher (at least 7.5% must be cash match funding).
- This means for every pound you request from Youth Music you must raise at least 15p match funding, of which at least 7.5p must be cash match funding.

Requesting between £100,001 and £300,000 from Youth Music?

- You need 20% total match funding or higher (at least 10% must be cash match funding).
- This means for every pound you request from Youth Music you must raise at least 20p match funding, of which at least 10p must be cash match funding.

Amount requested from Youth Music	Minimum match funding required	Minimum cash match funding required
£100,000	£15,000	£7,500
£200,000	£40,000	£20,000

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: Next steps

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

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

There is a checklist at the end of this document listing all the steps you'll need to go through to submit your Expression of Interest.

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.

If you're new to Catalyser Fund you can also book a 15-minute call with the team. Slots are made available during the application window, and can be booked through the [Catalyser Fund webpage](#).

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 support.

Online workshops

[Exchange](#) is Youth Music's online learning and networking series for the next generation of music-makers, the people who support them and the industries they're going in to.

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

The Catalyster Fund has a two-stage application process. At each stage we will assess your Catalyster proposal and your organisation.

At the first stage you will submit a short Expression of Interest (EOI) form. A proportion of applicants will then be invited to complete a more detailed application form.

Our team of freelance funding advisors support us to assess applications. There are two parts to the assessment:

- We will look at your Catalyster proposal and assess if your programme 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.

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 for both stages 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 as a Funded Partner and the support and opportunities Youth Music can offer you.

Monitoring and reporting

You will complete interim reports throughout your programme (depending on the length) and a final report at the end of your programme.

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 Catalyst Fund.

Application checklists

Expression of Interest (Stage 1)

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 Catalyser Fund guidance in full	
Applied to the Access Fund if you need support	
Contacted Youth Music with any questions	
Before starting your Expression of Interest (EOI)	
Downloaded a copy of the EOI questions	
Created an account on the Youth Music Grants Portal	
Checked: <ul style="list-style-type: none">the date you were legally constitutedyour charity/company number (if applicable)your annual turnover	
Got a copy of your safeguarding policy ready to upload	
Got the information you need to answer all the questions on the EOI form	
Got the required diversity monitoring information about your leadership team	
Before submitting your EOI	
Ensured that the EOI 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 EOI form for your records	

Application Stage (Stage 2)

Have you...	✓
Before you apply	
Re-read the guidance	
Reviewed the 'Am I eligible?' and 'Programme fit' sections in the guidance and checked you can still respond yes to all the statements	
Ensured you understand the feedback from Youth Music	
Contacted Youth Music with any questions	
Before starting your application	
Downloaded a copy of the application form questions	
Got the documents you need to upload, including:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual accounts (no older than 18 months)• Management accounts• Partnership letter/emails• Safeguarding policy	
Got the information you need to answer all the questions on the application form	
Before submitting your application	
Ensured that the 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	