

**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

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 Network](#). Unsure which fund to apply to? Our ['Fund Picker tools'](#) can help you decide.

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

Section one: Trailblazer overview

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

- Trial work for the first time;
- Test a new way of working; 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.
- Established organisations that want to test a new way of working or disrupt the status quo.

Funding themes

Your work must meet one 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 Access Fund. We offer funding of up to £900 to cover any additional access costs that might be required. You should apply for this money before you start making your application.

Full details about [how to apply to the Access Fund](#) are on the Youth Music Network.

Section two: What does a Trailblazer project look like?

All Trailblazer projects will have [children and young people's voices centre-stage](#).

A Trailblazer project will be trialling work for the first time, testing a new way of working, or disrupting the status quo (or all three!). A Trailblazer project could be:

- A new CIC testing out different ways of supporting nurseries to embed music-making into their day-to-day activities.

or

- A Music Education Hub that wants to disrupt the status quo of their local music scene by setting up a Youth Board that has budget & power to make decisions about how the hub is run.

or

- An established youth centre trialling a music activities for the first time.

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

Section three: Am I eligible?

Who can apply?

You need to meet the following criteria to be eligible to apply for a Trailblazer grant from Youth Music. Check you can answer yes to **all** the statements in this section before you make an application.

You are committed to improving equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in our 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. Hence, we ask you about EDI in our application and monitoring forms.
- Fair pay is important to EDI, and we expect all organisations to pay the [real Living Wage](#).
- Our [Inclusion Hub](#) can provide further 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.
- Youth Music likes to experiment, make mistakes, adjust, learn, and improve. 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! If you have a Trailblazer grant, we will be there to celebrate your successes, help when things need to change and support if things don't go to plan.

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 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.

You have a safeguarding policy that is reflected on and updated regularly

- Your policy should take a proactive approach to keeping people safe from harm.
- The policy should be a living document. As a minimum, we'd expect the policy to be updated every few years, and in many cases annually.
- Our [Safeguarding Hub](#) provides further information and support.

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 have a grant from another Youth Music fund (e.g., Fund A, Fund B, Recharge Fund, or the Incubator Fund) you are unlikely to be prioritised for a Trailblazer grant if it will be active at the same time. Please speak to your Youth Music contact if you want to discuss this further.

Section four: Project fit

There are some project criteria that we expect all applicants to meet. Check you can 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)

- You can apply for a grant of between £2,000 and £30,000. It's fine to run a project that costs more using extra income from another source. 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 is only open to projects 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 of these 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](#) can provide further 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 evaluation report](#) and in some cases a [short interim report](#).

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.

Ineligible activities

There are some types of music activity we won't fund. These are:

- 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).

Section five: Budget planning

The Youth Music Trailblazer grant can fund a mix of:

- **Delivery costs:** To deliver your project.
- **Core costs:** To run your organisation.

Budget rules

- Make sure your budget covers all the activities in your project.
- All staff working on the project must be paid at the [real Living Wage](#) rate or above.
- A proportion of the budget must be spent on delivery costs.
- Total project budgets should include at least 10% match funding, a minimum of 5% cash match funding. This minimum amount can't come from Arts Council England or National Lottery sources.
- No more than 20% of the Youth Music grant can be spent on capital costs.

Eligible costs

Here are some examples of eligible costs.

Delivery costs

- Music leader fees
- Project management
- Other members of staff working on the project (e.g., youth workers)
- Youth voice activities (e.g., consultation, youth forum etc.)
- Marketing
- Planning
- Monitoring, reflection and evaluation
- Staff induction and training
- Equipment such as musical instruments, hardware, and software
- Room and venue hire
- Food, travel and other access related costs

Core costs

- Salaries (staff who aren't working directly on the project)
- Communications
- Operations (rent and utilities)

- Governance (audit, legal advice, preparation of annual accounts)
- Income generation
- Training
- IT costs

Need help to plan your budget? [Our finance and budget guidance can help.](#)

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 Access Fund](#) to help you write your application)

Match funding

The total project budget should include at least 10% match funding. 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. At least 5% of the total project budget should be made up of cash match funding.
- **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.

Funding from Arts Council England or National Lottery cannot be used towards meeting the minimum match funding requirements but can be used as additional contribution.

The more match funding you can show, the better. This helps us to show the full value of Youth Music's investment when we report back to our own funders. [Our finance and budget guidance](#) will help you to show the full value of your match funding.

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

Section six: Next steps

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

1. Download and read the [application form template](#).
2. Plan your project and gather the information you'll need to complete your 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?

Don't forget 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.

We are aware that our application process may make it difficult for some users to access our funding. We are working hard to remove barriers to make our application processes more accessible. 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.

We also have an [Access Fund](#) to support people that identify as Disabled to cover additional access costs that might be required for you to make an application.

Resources

Below are links to resources that could help you plan, deliver, and monitor your project.

[Inclusion hub](#)

[Youth Voice hub](#)

[Evaluation guidance](#)

[Finance and budgets guidance](#)

[Safeguarding hub](#)

[The Youth Music Quality Framework](#)

Online surgeries and workshops

Check out our [Exchanging Notes learning and development programme](#) for details of upcoming events that may help with your application.

Section seven: How we make decisions

We can't fund all the applications we receive, even though most of them will meet our criteria. We assess all eligible applications. We then use the assessment and other data to help us make final decisions.

Assessment

We will assess your Trailblazer proposal and your organisation.

- First, we'll check that you are eligible to apply to the Youth Music Trailblazer Fund ([see 'who can apply' on pages 5 and 6 above](#))
- We will look at your Trailblazer proposal and assess if your project is a good fit for the fund ([see 'Project fit' on pages 7 -10 above](#))
- We will try to assess if your organisation and project are a good match with Youth Music's ethos, culture and values of youth voice, and equality, diversity, and inclusion. We don't expect you 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 develop.

Decision-making

Following our assessment, Youth Music makes final decisions on what to fund and how to spend our available budget.

This decision-making process includes external people with a range of lived experience and expertise (e.g., experience of barriers faced by young people or of running music projects, expertise in youth voice etc.). We also have a new Children & Young People's advisory board who will be reviewing applications and contributing to decisions.

In making decisions, we'll aim for a diverse portfolio that includes a mix of:

- Children and young people reached (e.g., age, barriers, ethnicity, etc.)
- Different types of projects
- Activity in different areas of the country
- Organisations (e.g., turnover, leadership etc.).
- Risk levels

Most applications we receive are fundable, so aiming for a diverse 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 is lower. [We regularly update information about current priorities on our website.](#)

Section eight: What happens next if my application is successful?

You'll find out if you've been successful three months after the funding deadline.

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 & guidance.

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

[Read more detailed information on the Youth Music Network.](#)

Monitoring and reporting

You will complete a [final evaluation 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 'Who can Apply' section in the guidance	
Got a project idea that fits all the project criteria in the guidance	
Read the Trailblazer Fund guidance in full	
Applied to the Access Fund if you need support	
Contacted Youth Music with any questions	
Before starting your application	
Created an account on the Youth Music Grants Portal	
Checked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the date you were legally constituted • your charity/company number (if applicable) • your annual turnover 	
Co-designed your project with children & young people or decided how you will build co-design into project delivery	
Got the information you need to answer all the questions on the application form	
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	