

YOUTH MUSIC

Youth Music Incubator Fund

Applicant Guidance Notes

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1. About Youth Music

We believe every young person should have the chance to change their life through music, yet our research shows 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 to young people themselves means that more 0–25-year-olds can make, learn, and earn in music.

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.

2. What is the Youth Music Incubator Fund?

The Youth Music Incubator Fund offers grants between £5,000 and £30,000 to businesses, collectives and not-for-profits working across the music industries*.

We launched the fund to enable organisations to create sustainable, meaningful career opportunities for young people aged 18-25, especially those who are currently underrepresented in the sector. We help creative employers support emerging talent and benefit from a more diverse workforce.

Crucially, businesses must offer paid opportunities for 18-25s, and provide young people with the opportunity to work autonomously. All participants should receive support from the organisation through incubation, training, mentoring, and networking.

Applications are made through our online portal at <https://grants.youthmusic.org.uk/>

More information on upcoming rounds, deadlines and how to apply can be found on [our website](#).

3. Who is the Incubator Fund for?

Applicants

Companies, collectives, sole traders, and not-for-profits in the music industries* across the UK are eligible to apply. We're particularly interested in micro-businesses (between 1-9 employees) and small-scale enterprises (10-49 employees); or groups of these working together as partners (consortiums). See Section 4 for more information on eligibility.

Around 80% of our Incubator Funded partners are creative micro-businesses employing less than five full time staff and two thirds have a turnover of less than £100k.

We back dynamic and innovative businesses and not-for-profits who can offer genuine work opportunities led by well-networked people who have a genuine desire to open access to the industries.

We prioritise applicants who:

- Demonstrate the ability to provide impactful opportunities and pathways into the commercial music industries.
- Demonstrate a clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Have a diverse leadership team/workforce.
- Are unable to otherwise fund the programme themselves.
- Could use Youth Music investment to seed-fund more permanent ways of supporting talent from diverse backgrounds.
- Emerging companies or start-ups who could benefit from investment.
- Have a turnover of under £1 million.

We invest around 75% of our funding outside of London.

Existing Youth Music funded partners are eligible to apply to this fund, but we ask that you contact us first to discuss your application.

Beneficiaries

18-25s should be amongst those most negatively affected by forthcoming economic challenges. Therefore, the focus of your support will be 18-25s who are currently under-represented in the music industries: this includes both musicians and those who want to work in wider industry roles.

Several pieces of research have highlighted the increased barriers faced by the following groups (although this is not an exhaustive list)

- Women
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people
- Disabled people
- Those from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds
- Those located outside major cities – i.e. live in suburban, rural, small town areas
- Neurodivergent people
- Trans and non-binary people
- Non-graduates

At least 50% of the grant must go directly to 18-25s as a wage, commission, or bursary. The remainder can pay for costs incurred by the organisation in staff time and other associated costs.

4. Eligibility summary

We will fund organisations that:

- Are based in the UK and operate in Scotland, England or Wales.
- Have a business bank account.
- Can provide a recent set of financial accounts (if you/the organisation doesn't yet have a set of accounts, then we'll accept a spreadsheet that tracks your income and expenditure to date, or your most recent set of management accounts).
- Have a legal status (i.e. registered with Companies House, Charity Commission, FCA or HMRC or have a constitution) – the following are all eligible:
 - Sole traders (please note that the maximum grant size for sole traders is £15,000)
 - Unincorporated associations (voluntary group with a constitution)
 - Registered charity
 - Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
 - Company limited by guarantee
 - Company limited by share capital**
 - Community Benefit Society
 - Collectives: if you are a collective with no formal legal status (an 'informal collective') then another organisation can apply on your behalf (a 'sponsor organisation'). This can be:
 - a member of your collective who is a registered sole trader (**please note that the maximum grant size for sole traders is £15,000**)
 - another partner organisation.

If successful, the sponsor organisation or sole trader would be required to enter into the funding agreement with Youth Music. A robust partnership agreement should therefore be in place between the sponsor organisation and the collective.

****Companies limited by share capital:**

While we will fund profit-making enterprises, we won't give money to organisations we think should be paying for the proposed project themselves, or who have created an opportunity purely to secure additional income. We will judge this from a combination of factors assessed through the application e.g., scale, profit and loss, balance sheet, annual budget, the nature of the proposal.

We won't fund:

- Unpaid internships.
- Work where people are paid below the [Real Living Wage](#).
- Activities that promote party political or religious beliefs.
- Costs incurred in making your application or retrospective costs.
- The purchase of land or buildings.
- VAT costs that can be recovered.

5. The Roles

Roles should last between three and 24 months and provide meaningful support for between two and 10 young people. They should be co-designed with 18-25s, responding to their needs and career aspirations, and include ALL of the following elements:

1) Creativity and autonomy at work

Your role should provide 18-25s with the chance to learn on the job, whilst having some creative input. We will prioritise our investment in work that gives people autonomy to make decisions and lead, be that programming their own event, recording their own show, developing a marketing plan for an artist on your label etc.

The funding can be used to employ, commission or grant money to 18-25s (contracted according to what works best for you and them). You will help to incubate their business and creative ideas. For more inspiration check out [case studies of 18-25s transforming the industries through running their own independent projects](#).

We want to reflect the diverse range of careers in the music industries, beyond becoming a musician or performing artist.

2) Career development support

A career development support package delivered by you or through a partner. Consider the legacy of the roles you're offering, and what young people could move on to following their time with you.

The support offer should have an element of flexibility to respond to individual need. We expect your offer to incorporate some or all of the elements in the list below;

- Access to skilled mentors and coaches (in particular, people with experience navigating the current industries rather than those who gained their experience at a different time).
- Access to a network and/or opportunity to learn from peers.
- Strengthening regional and suburban networks and provision for music careers (particularly outside of London).
- Support in developing and maintaining a portfolio career or a 'side hustle', including:
 - opportunities to generate revenue
 - business skills such as financial management, monetising products and applying for funding.
- Developing communication skills, in particular networking, business communication, pitching and interviews.
- Developing entrepreneurial skills, a 'brand' and a social media presence.
- Sharing knowledge about the different jobs that exist within the music industries and the pathways to get into them.
- Time and space to learn, develop, and create.

3) Pastoral support

You should consider the **emotional, financial and access needs** of those you engage and account for these in your budget and planning. Holistic support at the early stages of a career can help to build resilience and embed good health and wellbeing practices; this can be delivered internally, or by an experienced partner organisation.

Consider what's required to recruit a diverse pool of applicants; this might involve providing additional funding to support people to participate or ensuring your workplace is welcoming and inclusive for people from different backgrounds.

Examples of access costs may include:

- Support workers, British Sign Language interpreters etc.
- Childcare or other caring costs
- Travel and subsistence
- Mental health support and guidance

[Read more about improving inclusion and diversity in our guidance for music industry organisations.](#)

Recruitment and selection

We expect you to follow best-practice recruitment and employment principles in order to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds, and ensure they have a positive experience. We recommend you look at the [inclusion and diversity guidance](#) on our website for more information. Even if you have an idea of who you want to work with, we'll expect you to run an open recruitment process and advertise on our [opportunities board](#), to create fair access. Further advice and support for organisations and 18-25s is available from the Youth Music team.

If you're unsure how to advertise roles for specific target groups, [read more about Government guidance on Positive Action Recruitment.](#)

6. Budget guidelines

Organisations can apply for between £5,000 and £30,000 under this programme. Sole traders can apply for a maximum of £15,000.

Budget for 18-25s

At least 50% of your grant should go directly to 18-25s. We expect this portion of the funding to be spent on wages, fees, grants and/or access costs.

Key criteria:

- People must be paid at the rate of the [real Living Wage](#) (currently £10.90/hr or £11.95/hr in London). Note that this changes every November, so ensure that what you're offering is correct.
- The maximum Incubator Fund contribution that can be spent on wages or fees is £5,000 per person.
 - This is not a wage replacement programme; we expect wages or fees to be topped up where possible by the host organisation.
 - Individuals can't receive payment in both wages and fees. However, they can receive a grant and access costs on top of any wage or fee payments.
- The maximum that can be given out as a grant is £1,000 per person.
- There is no maximum amount that can be allocated to access costs.

Type of payment	Purpose	Maximum Incubator Fund contribution per person
Wages	Salary costs (the take-home amount) where people are employed on the payroll.	£5,000
Fees	Where people are commissioned as a self-employed contractor, for example to deliver a creative brief.	£5,000
Grants	To support professional development or for someone to deliver their own creative project.	£1,000
Access costs	To enable people to participate in the programme or attend an interview. This might include travel, childcare costs, accommodation, equipment, or living expenses.	No maximum

Organisational and delivery costs

The remainder of the grant (up to a maximum of 50% of the total request) should be spent on the support package and organisational costs required to deliver the programme. This includes:

- **Support package** to cover career development activities (mentoring, network sessions etc.) and holistic support (to cover wellbeing needs or help the host organisation to be more inclusive).
- **Staff and support costs** to cover the management of the programme. This can include payroll on-costs such as tax, National Insurance and pension contributions.
 - Note: if you are creating new staff roles such as a Project Manager role to run the programme and will be recruiting someone 18-25 then this can be included in the 18-25s budget section.
- **Marketing and promotion** to recruit to the programme or market products that are created through it.
- **A proportion of overheads** such as office space, utilities, finance/admin, equipment, insurance, training etc. Please ensure this is proportionate to the nature of your programme.

Your contribution

We expect you to make a financial contribution if you can. We will assess this based on the size of business, the turnover, balance sheet and other factors. (Two thirds of organisations we funded in previous rounds had a turnover of less than £100k.)

If you are unable to make a cash contribution, we'd be looking to see how else you are adding value to the project through 'in kind' support such as providing access to working space, studios, software, networks, people or other non-monetary support.

Making profits

If the activities delivered with this grant earn your business a profit, we expect that:

- You will re-invest some or all of the profits in similar roles, either in your own organisation or by making a donation to Youth Music.
- You will create an ethical contract with the 18-25s you're incubating that includes clauses on intellectual property. See our [guidance](#) for more information.

7. Application process and key dates

1 Application	2 Decision and funding agreement	3 Payment	4 Communication	5 Reporting
Submit your application by 5pm on the deadline day. (Information on rounds and deadlines can be found on our website .)	We'll aim to notify you within 12 weeks of your application being submitted. If you're successful we'll issue a funding agreement for signing and return. If unsuccessful, you'll receive constructive feedback on your application.	The payment should clear in your bank account within 5 weeks of Youth Music receiving your signed funding agreement.	You'll have a dedicated Grants Manager at Youth Music who will check in with you. We'll ask you to post the Incubator Fund jobs on our website and then signpost the 18-25s you're working with to register on our Incubator Fund database.	Your Grants Manager will contact you halfway through your project for an informal interim call. You'll also be required to complete an online evaluation report at the end of your project.

Assessment process

Each application will be assessed by an 18–25-year-old Advisor and a music industry Assessor, before being discussed at a decision-making panel. Applications will be assessed based on how closely your programme fits within the guidance, the impact on young people, and the need within your area. We aim to support a diverse range of programmes from across the country that will make a real difference to the people they're working with.

8. Application Support

Questions and queries

We're keen to support new applicants to this fund, particularly those who are new to making funding applications. We invite you to contact Youth Music's Grants and Learning Team to arrange an informal chat about your plans, to check whether it is a good fit for the programme and answer any initial questions. Please check our [FAQs page](#) which will be continually updated with new information.

We will be offering 30 minute 1-1 calls for applicants; however we ask that you have first read the guidance, and identified no more than three key questions.

If you'd like to speak to us, please email grants@youthmusic.org.uk in the first instance to arrange a chat. If you can't access email, then telephone 020 7902 1060.

Support writing your application

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

At present, our online application system does not currently meet full Web Accessibility Guidelines – for instance it is not optimised for use with accessible technologies such as screen readers. We are working hard to improve this, but in the meantime, encourage you to contact us if you have any difficulty making an application (on grants@youthmusic.org.uk or call 020 7902 1060).

Support for Disabled applicants to make an application

If you identify as Disabled and require additional support to enable you 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 for you to make an application.

How to apply for access funding

There are three ways you can make an application for access funds. Pick whichever option best suits you.

As part of the application, we ask you to send us a copy of a recent bank statement, no more than three months old. If your application is approved, we will pay the funds directly into this account.

Option A

Complete a short application form on Alchemer and attach a recent current account statement.

[Follow this link to go to the access fund application form \(Alchemer\)](#)

Option B

Download the [access fund questions in Word and pdf formats from this page](#), and email your answers to adam.cookson@youthmusic.org.uk

Please remember to attach a copy of a recent current account statement.

Option C

Download the [access fund questions in Word and pdf formats from this page](#), record your answers as a video or voice note and then email the file to adam.cookson@youthmusic.org.uk.

Please remember to attach a copy of your organisation's most recent current account statement.

What happens next

We will get back to you with a decision within 5 working days of receiving your application. We will aim to transfer the payment into your bank account within 2 weeks of approving your application (although we recommend that you allow for 3 weeks in your planning).

Contact us

If you need further support, or if you have any questions, please contact the Grants & Learning Team by emailing grants@youthmusic.org.uk or calling 020 7902 1060.

9. Case studies

Take a look [on our website](#) at what successful applicants have achieved with Incubator funding.

10. Youth Music NextGen Fund

In 2021 we launched our new, [NextGen Fund where 18-25s can secure funding from Youth Music for their creative and professional development](#). We encourage you to direct any 18-25s who might be ready to apply towards this opportunity.

11. Additional Information

The Research

In developing this fund, Youth Music spoke to over 100 stakeholders (young people, organisations, funders) and surveyed over 1,300 young adults (aged 18-25) in a wide-ranging series of consultations. The guidance and application form is based on what we heard, and the findings have also informed a [research report: A Blueprint for the Future](#). The research will give you a fuller understanding of the context for this fund and we recommend that you read it in conjunction with this guidance.

*The Music Industries

We use the term 'music industries', not 'the music industry' to reflect the full range of large and small companies, not-for-profits, sole traders and collectives who generate employment, revenue and audiences through music. From musicians to their management teams and touring crews, to the craftspeople and coders who make musical instruments and music-making software, to the people who work in PR, distribution and licencing and legal teams, as well as trade bodies, unions and federations, teachers and education providers.

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