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**Museum Development North 2024-26**

**Open Grants Round 4**

**&**

**Collections Care and Security Grants**

**Guidance**

**Issued June 2025**

1. **What is the aim of the MD North Open Grants scheme?**

MD North Open Grants are a major part of the Museum Development North (MD North) programme using our core funding from Arts Council England (ACE).

For Round 4, MD North has also received additional funding by Gift-in-Aid from the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media & Sport via Arts Council England specifically for disseminating Collections Care and Security Grants.

**Please note, your application doesn’t have to relate to Collections Care and Security for this Round. Your project can be about many different aspects of museum practice. If you are applying for a Collections Care and Security related project, there will be a specific box to tick on the application form.**

**Please contact your Museum Development Adviser if you are planning to apply.** **They will be able to give you advice on your application.**

These grants are to support organisational development that help museums to meet or go beyond the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. We encourage museums to submit grant applications that build on the advice and support of MD North.

By organisational development we mean interventions that might:

* build your museum’s capabilities and capacity to achieve your long-term goals
* improve performance of how you plan for and deliver some of your services
* support testing, trialling or changing approaches to the way you work
* enable your workforce to flourish, thrive and have meaning in their work

All applicants must state which of Arts Council England’s Investment Principles in the [Let's Create](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create)[[1]](#footnote-2) strategy the project delivers against:

* Ambition and Quality
* Dynamism
* Environmental Responsibility
* Inclusivity & Relevance

See Appendix 1 for more details on the Investment Principles and how they can relate to museum activity.

1. **Who can apply?**

The following museums are eligible to apply for an Open Grant:

* Museums in the north of England which are Accredited, hold provisional status, or are formally Working Towards Accreditation[[2]](#footnote-3).
* Museums that are not Accredited, or not formally Working Towards it, can be part of a project involving a partnership of museums, but an Accredited museum must be the lead partner.

The following museums are not eligible:

* National Portfolio Organisations and DCMS sponsored National Museums, English Heritage and National Trust sites and unaccredited museums.

1. **How much can you apply for?**

A single Accredited museum or museum Working Towards Accreditation can apply for grants from £1,000 up to **£5,000.**

Multisite organisations, partnerships and consortiums can apply for **£7,500** where the funding will benefit more than one Accredited museum, including those officially Working Towards Accreditation.

**Please note** that you may not be offered the full amount you apply for.

Match funding is not a requirement but confirmed match funding will demonstrate a commitment to the project and will be considered when reviewing the applications.

We may release up to 90% of the grant value on signing the grant acceptance letter, with the remainder on completion of the project, submission of final report and proof of expenditure.

1. **When and how can you apply?**

Three rounds of Open Grants have been awarded so far, and Round 4 opens on 9 June and closes on 12 September 2025.

In Round 4 of MD North Open Grants & Collections Care and Security Grants, the total funding pot is £67,500 to allocate to museums across the North region, with an emphasis on the quality of the proposed project. £16,531 of this is specifically for Collections Care and Security Grants though we may fund more projects with this focus from the remaining pot.

Only one application should be submitted from your organisation in this funding round. There will be a specific box to tick on the application form if your project focusses on Collections Care and Security.

The link for the online application is <https://online1.snapsurveys.com/hzia5f>. Applications open on 9 June 2025.

Guidance on how to complete the application and a word version of the questions to help you draft your application can be found here [Grants Guidance – Museum Development North.](https://www.museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk/resource-category/grant-guidance/)

**Please contact your Museum Development Adviser if you are planning to apply.**

1. **When does the money have to be spent?**

Projects can start on return of the grant acceptance letter. All project funds must be spent and completed with final reports and invoices submitted to MD North by:

* Open Grants Round 4: **29 January 2027**
* Collections Care and Security Grants: **28 February 2026**

We may release up to 90% of the grant value on signing the grant acceptance letter; with the remainder on completion of the project, submission of final report and proof of expenditure.

1. **What will we fund?**

The MD North Open Grants scheme can assist museums to implement advice, test new ways of working and develop organisational practice linked to the ACE Investment Principles.

You must show that your project has been developed:

* through your consideration of how ACE’s *Let’s Create* strategy and the four Investment Principles impact on what your museum does and how it works

*and*

* in line with existing forward plans or other key policy and planning documents, including Accreditation Development Areas

Funding may support you to deliver on actions arising from your participation in current and past Museum Development programmes.

**We can fund:**

* Materials and equipment
* Contracting freelancers or other specialists to increase expertise or capacity
* Research and development costs
* ICT equipment and digital infrastructure – you must provide a clear explanation of need and show you have considered ongoing costs of development and maintenance
* Promotional activities and event costs
* Minor building modifications to implement accessibility or carbon reduction actions
* Additional resourcing to enable staff/volunteers to develop new ways of working

**We will not fund:**

* Major building work
* Revenue costs, such as salaries and general running costs
* Ongoing capital or maintenance costs
* Any expenditure for which the museum cannot provide evidence (e.g. receipts)
* Costs incurred prior to the project start date
* Projects partially funded by ACE or as match funding for monies from ACE

**Alternative funding:**

If you have a complex project in mind requiring a longer timescale, you might want to consider applying to ACE’s NLPG[[3]](#footnote-4) instead which can fund projects lasting up to three years. For advice on alternative sources of funding please contact your Museum Development Adviser.

1. **How do we assess applications?**

Your application will be assessed by the MD North team with support from an independent panel of museum professionals based in the north of England.

**Applicants should discuss their application with MD North before submission. Please contact your Museum Development Adviser.** You can find the team’s contact details [here](https://www.museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk/?post_type=team).

We will be looking for evidence of the following:

* Project is viable, achievable and clearly planned
* The need for the project clearly evidenced
* You have shown how the project contributes to organisational development
* Clear aims and objectives with outcomes that demonstrate the impact of funds
* Outputs and outcomes that respond to MD North’s funding priorities and ACE’s Strategy [Let's Create | Arts Council England](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create)
* Details outlining when and how the project will be implemented and how it responds to project need
* The project demonstrates value for money – costs are appropriate to the scale and nature of your project along with details of any match funding or contributions in kind
* The project will be completed on time with likely risks to delay identified and mitigated

Applicants will also be asked to demonstrate how they have considered:

* Best practice when working with freelancers/consultants[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Environmental sustainability in response to the climate crisis
* Issues around equity, diversity and inclusivity including digital and physical access

1. **Do I need to submit anything with my application?**

You can upload up to three additional supporting documents with your application. This can help provide clear evidence of:

* How the project links to organisational plans and policies
* Your costs, this may include a detailed budget spreadsheet, screenshots or quotes

1. **What are the key dates for this round of funding?**

The funding will be a single-stage process. You need to allow enough time for funding decisions to be made before you start your project.

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| **Round 4** |  |
| 9 June 2025 | Open for applications |
| 12 September 2025 | Deadline for applications |
| Week of 29 September 2025 | Panel considers applications |
| Week of 29 September 2025 | Final decisions made |
| Week of 6 October 2025 | Applicants informed of outcome |
| Week of 13 October 2025 | Projects can start, once funding agreements are signed |
| 28 February 2026 | **Collections Care and Security Grants**: Project funds must be spent and completed with final evaluation report and invoices submitted |
| 29 January 2027 | **Open Grants Round 4**: Project funds must be spent and completed with final evaluation report and invoices submitted |

1. **Are there grant conditions and reporting requirements?**

It is a condition that grant recipients do the following:

* Complete a short evaluation report which describes the impact of your project to enable us to report the value of investment through Museum Development including evidence of expenditure
* Complete the Annual Museum Survey for 2025-26 which will run summer 2026 with registration in April 2026
* Open Grants Round 4: Acknowledge funding from ACE and MD North on all print and online marketing materials using the wording and logo we will provide
* Collections Care and Security Grants: Acknowledge Gift-in-Aid funding from UK Government’s Department for Culture, Media & Sport and ACE on all print and online marketing materials using the wording and logos here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/grant-award-logos>

**Additional Requirements**

Every museum we support will be expected to share their learning with other museums. This could include:

* Providing a written case study or blog post
* Presenting a paper at our Celebrating Museums events
* Contributing to a Forum or online session

**Appendix 1: The four Investment Principles from ACE’s *Let’s Create* strategy**

Each Investment Principle has three pillars. These are core features providing detail to help museums apply them according to your own context. To find out more about the Investment Principles, ACE have published some ‘Essential Reads’ to help museums understand the foundations of each of them.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**1) Ambition & Quality**: Cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work.

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| **Pillar** | **Summary** |
| Understanding Perception | Museums understand how they are perceived by the public through consultation with participants, communities, partners, staff, peers, stakeholders. |
| Progression | Museums develop by adopting a culture of continuous improvement and progression and refine their creative practice through testing and piloting ideas; learning, adapting and advocating for themselves and the sector. |
| Measuring Performance | Museums become outcome focused regarding the quality of their service, through effective performance management, monitoring risk and embedding evaluation. |

Examples of activity that MD North could fund relating to Ambition & Quality include (but are not limited to):

* Implementing recommendations from research and reports previously undertaken
* Commissioning new research or bringing in additional expertise for forward planning, including work to support an application for larger scale funding e.g. ACE’s National Lottery Project Grants (NLPG)
* Research and/or piloting of audience engagement programming or community co-production projects, including digital engagement
* Work to support collections care, security and management, such as environmental monitoring, improved storage and display conditions and security, cataloguing projects or disposal reviews

**2) Dynamism**: Cultural organisations are dynamic and able to respond to the challenges of the next decade.

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| **Pillar** | **Summary** |
| Business Model Innovation | Museums plan strategically, influenced by their environment, adopting new business models and developing partnerships to drive innovation, deliver value and diversify income. |
| People & Skills | Museums recognise and invest in developing the skills, diversity and resilience of their workforce. |
| Using Technology & Information | Museums develop strategies using evidence from data and technology to develop an outcome driven approach. |

Examples of activity that MD North could fund relating to Dynamism include (but are not limited to):

* Business planning, including exploring new models of income generation
* Investing in health & wellbeing and development of your paid and volunteer workforce
* Governance development support to help make your organisation more sustainable
* Digital development projects to support new engagement and resource management

**3) Environmental Responsibility:** Cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility

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| **Pillar** | **Summary** |
| Understanding the Data | Museums use data to understand their environmental impacts and responsibilities as well as the wider local and global impacts of climate change. |
| Plan, Action & Change | Museums take organisation-wide action, developing plans to adapt, change, and mitigate their impacts and reduce carbon footprints. |
| Influence, Educate & Advocate | Museums become advocates of environmental action in their local communities and wider cultural sector, seeking to work in partnership to accelerate action. |

Examples of activity that MD North could fund relating to Environmental Responsibility include (but are not limited to):

* Audits, surveys and assessments that support your organisation to find ways to reduce carbon emissions
* Implement outcomes of audits, surveys and assessments that lead to reducing carbon emissions
* Initiatives to engage your audiences with issues of the climate crisis using collections
* Develop or implement climate action policies and plans

**4) Inclusivity & Relevance**: England's diversity is fully reflected in the individuals and organisations supported by ACE and the work they produce.

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| **Pillar** | **Summary** |
| Communities | Museums develop their collections to tell new - and sometimes challenging - stories relevant to communities they serve; with a renewed focus on under-served communities. |
| Workforce, Leadership & Governance | Museums embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity within their governing, leadership and workforce practices. |
| The Creative Case for Diversity | Museums are community-centred in their approach to programming and service delivery; creating opportunities to work with a range of artists / practitioners / freelancers from different backgrounds and lived experiences to celebrate and present an inclusive and diverse programme. |

Examples of activity that MD North could fund relating to Inclusivity & Relevance include (but are not limited to):

* Audience development, especially to reach new audiences and communities currently less likely to access your museum
* Equality and accessibility audits, planning and development
* Working with collections to tell new stories, or the preparatory work for this to happen
* Inclusivity and diversity in workforce management



1. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Recognised as Working Towards Accreditation by Arts Council England through the allocation of a reference ‘T’ number [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [www.artscouncil.org.uk/projectgrants](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/projectgrants) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. More information on working with freelancers can be found [Contracts, Work Plans and Working Effectively with Freelancers - GEM,](https://gem.org.uk/resource/contracts-work-plans-and-working-with-freelancers/) [Calculating Day Rates For Freelancers - GEM,](https://gem.org.uk/resource/calculating-day-rates-for-freelancers/) [Working with freelancers - Museums Association.](https://www.museumsassociation.org/careers/freelancers-week/working-with-freelancers/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/explore-investment-principles/applying-investment-principles#essential-reads> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)