

Cultural Bridge fund guidance: 2026 - 2027



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1. **Help to apply**

We want to make the process of applying to the Cultural Bridge programme accessible to all organisations who would like to apply. If you need support to make an application, there are a number of ways we can help.

The guidance is available in accessible formats, including formatted PDF and Plain Text. If you require an alternative format please [get in touch](#).

Our programme leads, in the UK and Germany, are on hand to support applicants with questions about the guidance or making an application - see section 12 for contact details. [We also have FAQs on our website.](#)

We can also cover some access costs associated with the activity you are applying for - see section 11 for further information.

2. **About the fund**

Cultural Bridge aims to support arts and cultural organisations across the UK and Germany to develop partnerships that explore social arts practice.

We fund organisations who embody cultural democracy through:

- *placing communities at the heart of their creative work*
- *exploring new ways of connecting arts and society, particularly through fostering co-creation between communities, artists, and other partners*
- *supporting people from across their communities to develop their creativity and discover their individual voices*

- *empowering their communities to work together to shape local place, shared identity, and collective agency*

By enabling new and existing connections, Cultural Bridge supports a growing network of organisations committed to sharing expertise and skills, exchanging ideas and collaborating on artistic practices and projects that explore themes and issues faced by communities across both countries.

Cultural Bridge aims to develop innovative participatory approaches across a range of artforms and in response to our programme place themes:

- Re-invigorating post-industrial places/communities
- Increasing cultural engagement in places with fewer opportunities
- Exploring places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism
- Redefining the use of public space

The Cultural Bridge programme has investment from seven partners: Fonds Soziokultur, Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Creative Scotland, Wales Arts International, the British Council and Goethe-Institut London.

Cultural Bridge has so far supported 49 partnerships, with 62 awards, since its pilot year in 2021. Partnerships explore a wide range of themes and artforms including youth work, inclusion, health and wellbeing, socio-political, rural access and environmental. You can explore the current and previously funded partnerships via our website [here](#).

Funding decisions will be made against the criteria of the fund and will aim to be inclusive of both Germany and the UK's cultural diversity and geography.

3. Who can apply?

To be eligible, applicants **must**:

- Be an organisation* based in the UK or Germany
- Be able to demonstrate expertise in social arts practice working with communities

Cultural Bridge is open to all artforms and in Round 5 will **prioritise** support for:

- Smaller arts & cultural organisations who don't already receive significant or sustained funding
- Organisations based or working with communities outside of major cities e.g. in rural areas or less populated urban centres
- Organisations who empower **local** communities through their creative work

- Organisations whose work aligns with our programme aims and place themes
- Organisations who foster equity, diversity and inclusion through their leadership and practice

All partnerships must be bi-lateral, including at least one German partner and one UK partner, from any one of the four nations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

We will only accept one joint application per partnership, and organisations can only be involved in one application. Multiple applications from an organisation will likely result in related submissions being made ineligible.

Matchmaking support will be offered, in advance of the application stage, to help broker new connections between UK and German organisations wishing to find a partner to apply to Tier 1 of the programme with.

The Cultural Bridge programme is committed to promoting an equitable, diverse and inclusive network. The activity we support, and the workforce of arts and culture organisations we fund, should reflect the diversity of the UK and Germany.

*By organisation we mean a group of people working towards a common goal with a governing document. A governing document is a legal agreement that explains what your organisation is set up to do, and how it will operate, and it should cover the type of activity being applied for.

For example in the UK your organisation could be a charity, a registered voluntary association, a limited company (non-profit) or an unincorporated group/collective.

In Germany this could include e.V., gGmbH, gUG, Gbr, artist collective or cultural initiative. By a collective or initiative, we mean a group consisting of at least three people who reside in Germany.

All organisations must have a bank account in the organisation's name, with a minimum of two signatories (people allowed to sign cheques).

4. Who cannot apply?

We cannot accept applications from:

- Individual artists or practitioners
- Organisations based outside of the UK and Germany
- Organisations who cannot demonstrate that they have a track record of social arts practice working directly with local communities

- National or international networks or member organisations
- Universities or other educational establishments

5. How much is available?

The total budget available for **Round 5** of the programme is £370,000 (approximately €430,000). This budget will be split between our two funding tiers and we anticipate making up to 20 awards in this round. Tier 1 is for new partnerships and applicants can request between £5,000 and £10,000 in total per partnership, as well as personal (internal) access costs in addition to this. There is no requirement for match funding.

Tier 2 is for established partnerships and applicants can request up to £30,000 in total per partnership, as well as personal (internal) access costs in addition to this. There is no formal requirement for match funding, however we encourage ambition to build wider partnerships and to leverage other income, cash or in-kind, to meet your partnership aims.

The two Tiers are explained in more detail in section 6.

6. What can the funds be used for?

Applications can be for physical, digital or hybrid activity.

Cultural Bridge funds organisations working across all artforms including dance, theatre, literature, visual arts, music, creative media, outdoor and others.

One of the key eligibility criteria for the fund is that social arts practice, working with communities, must be at the core of your organisation's creative programme and/or practice.

Applicants will also be asked to respond to one or more of our place themes:

- Re-invigorating post-industrial places/communities
- Increasing cultural engagement in places with fewer opportunities
- Exploring places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism
- Redefining the use of public space

The Cultural Bridge programme has two funding tiers:

Tier 1: Practice exchange & development of <u>new</u> partnerships	
<p>Tier 1 is to support the development of brand new partnerships between arts and cultural organisations in the UK and Germany. We do not expect any performative or artistic output from activity in Tier 1. Funding can be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Partnership development- Exchanges- Residencies- Co-creation- Networking	
<i>For example:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Co-development of organisational process or practice</i>- <i>Exchange of creative practitioners to share learning, develop new relationships and explore innovative approaches</i>- <i>Testing imaginative ways of working with communities that offer new and positive responses to social engagement through creative practice</i>

Tier 2: Co-development and project delivery for <u>established</u> partnerships	
Tier 2 is to support further development of partnerships, where organisations already have experience of working together. All Tier 2 project proposals <u>must</u> include direct engagement with communities. Funding can be used for:	
<i>For example:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Co-creation with targeted communities to explore new ways of connecting arts and society</i> - <i>Co-development and dissemination of artistic practice models responsive to current needs or challenges within local communities</i> - <i>Co-delivery of innovative practice which invites social interaction and debate with individuals, communities, and institutions in the creation of participatory art</i> - <i>Collaborative project delivery to develop and refine a new approach to community engagement, beyond initial research stage</i>

7. What you cannot apply for

- Activity that is not arts-related
- Activity that is not focussed on the development of social arts practice and cultural engagement of citizens
- Repetition or continuation of an existing exchange project, programme or performance activity
- Activities which take place or start before April 2026, unless otherwise agreed
- Costs/activity that are already covered by other funding
- General running costs and overheads that are paid for by other income, including your own funds
- Fundraising or profit-making activity
- Ongoing overheads related to equipment or buildings, such as insurance and maintenance costs
- Significant asset or investment purchases - see section 11 for budget guidelines

We reserve the right to make a reduced offer where costs appear ineligible or unreasonable.

8. How and when to apply?

Fund opens:	Wednesday 1st October 2025
Application deadline:	Wednesday 12th November 2025
Decisions:	by 2nd February 2026
Activity starts:	from 1st April 2026
Activity ends:	by 31st March 2027

When the fund opens, a link to the Cultural Bridge application portal will go live on our website: cultural-bridge.info. You will be asked to complete a brief registration process before being given access to the application forms for Tier 1 and 2.

Partners should work together to complete the application - see sections 10 & 11 for application questions and budget guidelines.

9. How will applications be assessed?

First, your application will be checked for eligibility. Please make sure you, your activities and partners are eligible for this fund – see sections 3 and 4 (who can/cannot apply) and sections 6 and 7 (what funds can/cannot be used for).

Once eligibility is checked, the application will be scored by a jury panel of independent experts, comprising German and UK representatives nominated by each of the Cultural Bridge funding partners.

The jury panel will assess the application according to the following four criteria:

1. The Partnership

- rationale for the selection of partners in relation to organisational mission, experience and track record of social arts practice
- potential for mutual learning and practice development

2. Activity approach

- clarity of activity aims
- how well balanced is the exchange activity, is there clear benefit to both the UK and German partners
- ambition and potential for innovation e.g., exploration or development of a new or different approach, reach of new communities
- how well the proposal aligns with one or more of the Cultural Bridge place themes

3. Potential benefits/impact

- strength of likely benefit to exchange organisations/artists

- extent to which the activity is likely to help address current social issues or challenges for local communities, now or in the future
- clarity of evaluation approach e.g. methods to monitor, capture and share learning outcomes

4. Management of activity, including timeline and budget

- appropriateness of funding request, fees and activity costs
- quality of planning, including timeline, task and budget management

Applications will be scored against the four criteria. All applications and scores will then be discussed in the decision panel by the jury. In making the decisions for the final awards, panellists will also balance awards by considering:

- Cultural diversity
- Geographic diversity: to widen the reach of our funding into areas not already in receipt of CB funding and to balance activity partnerships across German states and the four UK nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

In the event we receive a higher number of applications than anticipated we reserve the right to introduce a further application sifting stage, in this scenario only the higher scoring applications will be taken through to jury discussions.

Due to the number of applications we are likely to receive and the limited capacity of our jury, we are unable to offer tailored feedback on unsuccessful applications to this programme.

Successful applicants will be informed by 2nd of February 2026, from which point, grants and payment schedules will be agreed before the activity commences.

As part of your funding agreement we will ask you to share your learning: insights and practice-based discoveries with the network and more publicly through contributions to our programme communications and other materials. We will also ask you to contribute towards evaluative work during and after the end date of the funded activity.

10. Completing the application form

What follows is a summary of the questions you will be asked to complete in the online application form.

Please use these questions as an initial guide, application form questions are subject to minor changes up until the fund opening date.

Your partnership

- TIER 1: As a new partnership, tell us why your organisations have decided to work together? *E.g. What do you think you can learn from each other and how do you see the relationship developing?* (300 words)
- TIER 2: As an established partnership, tell us when and how you have worked together previously, sharing links where possible, and tell us why you want to collaborate again? (300 words)
- Tell us about the track record of both organisations in relation to social arts practice? (300 words) *E.g. give an example of a recent project delivered by each organisation and the impact for those involved.* (300 words)
- Who are the people or local communities your organisations are most engaged with and why? (150 words)
- Please tell us about the principles of your organisations in relation to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion e.g. what policies do you have in place? How do you currently remove barriers to participation for the communities you work with?

Your activity

- Tell us what you are planning to do, including who with, where and when. What is the theme or focus of your exchange and is activity likely to be physical, digital, or hybrid? (300 words)
- In what way will this activity help your organisations try out something new? *E.g. explore or develop a new or different approach, engage new communities or respond to current social issues or challenges.* (250 words)
- TIER 2: How will you ensure your activity is inclusive and accessible for the people or communities you plan to involve? (150 words)
- Which Cultural Bridge place theme(s) does your activity align with and how? (100 words)
 - Re-invigorating post-industrial places/communities
 - Increasing cultural engagement in places with fewer opportunities
 - Exploring places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism
 - Redefining the use of public space

Impact of your activity

- What impact do you anticipate this activity will have on your organisations, the artists and/or communities you work with? *E.g., benefit to local artists, influence on diverse representation or community cohesion.* (300 words)
- How will you monitor the progress of your activity, including capturing and sharing learning from different perspectives? (250 words)

Management of your activity

- Tell us how you will manage your activity within the partnership, including details of who will manage your budget? (150 words)
- Your timeline - use the table to outline the main stages for your partnership activity, from the start date onwards, including where it will take place and who will lead on each activity or task.
- *E.g. main stages and tasks could include planning, research, travel, workshop or event delivery and evaluation meetings. We understand dates may be subject to change.*
- Your budget - tell us the total amount you are requesting from us, in £ for the British partner and in € for the German partner, plus any additional personal access costs which can be in addition to your activity budget.
- *You will be asked to complete a table and/or spreadsheet (Tier 2) to show us your budget breakdown and calculations. If you request additional personal access costs you will also be asked to tell us exactly what these will be used for. See section 11 for full guidance.*

11. Budget guidelines and access costs

For **Tier 1** applications we will ask you to fill in a table for each partner listing the spending for your activity. You will be asked to specify the type of cost using the following categories, description, including cost calculations and amount.

- Salaries or fees* for artists or creatives involved
- Other artistic or creative costs e.g., research, digital capture
- Hires or purchases* e.g., venue, materials, or equipment
- Marketing and developing audiences
- Access costs* e.g., personal and/or activity related
- Travel* and accommodation
- Overheads* e.g., insurance, travel documentation etc.

For **Tier 2** applications we will ask you to produce your budget in a separate excel spreadsheet with a complete breakdown of activity income (where applicable) and expenditure for the German and UK partner on the project. You can find additional information on match funding income in section 11.1.

We will ask you to use separate tabs within the spreadsheet to present the budgets of the German and UK partner/s separately, in £ or € as appropriate.

Where possible, all partner budgets should represent an equal split of the funding awarded, one partner cannot receive the full amount.

Please note 'What you cannot apply for' in section 7.

***Salaries or fees**

Your budget should include fees for artists and professionals involved in the activity. We are committed to fair pay for those who work in creativity and culture and we expect you to ensure that rates of pay for artists and professionals involved in your activity (including you) are in line with, or better than relevant industry standards. Also taking into account experience and skills, the type of work and the length of the activity.

***Hires or purchases**

If you need to purchase any materials or equipment (assets) you should include these costs in the budget and tell us about them in the description field. Buying assets is not the main purpose of the programme, but we understand that you may need to make some purchases to be able to carry out the activity.

As part of our eligibility checks we will decide if any proposed asset purchases are appropriate. For German organisations investment/asset purchases should not exceed 800 Euro (net).

***Access costs**

Access costs are non-artistic costs aimed at removing barriers to participation for yourself, someone you are working with or employing, or for participants or audiences engaging with your Cultural Bridge activity.

There are two categories of access costs:

Personal access costs (internal)

If you, as the organisation lead, or any of the core team of people you are delivering the activity with are Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent or have a long-term health condition, there may be extra costs relating to your or their access needs to help deliver Cultural Bridge activity.

Some examples are:

- a sign language interpreter
- specialist equipment or software
- additional travel costs
- a Personal Assistant for a disabled person

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and you should tell us what you require in order to deliver the activity.

Personal Access Costs are treated separately to your main activity budget. These costs can be in excess of your total funding request and may take your budget above the Tier funding limit.

Where personal access costs are requested, we will ask you to provide further detail in the application form, including a breakdown of the costs involved and what they will be used for.

Activity access costs

All other access costs relating to your activity should be included within your main budget.

This can include the costs for making your activity accessible to public audiences, participants and artists e.g. interpreters for an event, and costs related to childcare and other caring responsibilities where you are unlikely to be able to undertake the planned activities without this support.

***Travel**

Where possible please consider sustainable travel: mobility that takes advantage of low or zero-emission, energy-efficient modes of transport e.g., trains or buses, including hybrid and electric vehicles (EV).

Travel costs for German applicants may be calculated taking into account the regulations in Federal law of travel costs 'Bundesreisekostengesetz'.

***Overheads**

UK partners can apply for overhead costs that are directly related to the activity you are asking us to support - for example, payments to staff, phone bills, postage, and travel insurance. You can apply for a contribution to your ongoing overheads if these are not already covered by other funding. You may also include a reasonable contingency within your budget for unforeseen costs.

German partners can only apply for direct activity costs. Fonds Soziokultur cannot accept budgets with any undefined costs or contingency. All costs must be proven, substantiated with receipts, as part of the final reporting process.

We understand that changes may need to be made to your activity budgets during the delivery period, however any significant changes will need to be agreed with the UK or German funding lead.

Please note funding awards will be paid separately to UK and German organisations within each partnership. UK-based organisations will be paid their part of the award directly by Goethe Institut-London and Germany-based organisations will be paid by Fonds Soziokultur. The total

award should be distributed as equally as possible, one partner cannot receive the full amount.

11.1 Match funding guidelines for Tier 2:

There is no formal requirement for match funding, however we encourage ambition to build wider partnerships and to leverage other income, cash or in-kind, to meet partnership aims.

If you are not intending to source match funding, in-kind or cash, your budget should be for the total cost of the activity you are applying to do, up to the limit of the tier (£30,000), plus any personal access costs.

If you tell us you are seeking match funding, we will view your application as a contribution towards the overall cost of your partnership activity and your application and budget should reflect this ambition, with Cultural Bridge funding presented as a portion of the overall project income.

Any additional match, cash or in-kind, should be detailed in your income budget with a note on what stage you are at in sourcing the additional funding e.g. in discussion, expected, confirmed.

Tell us about your project income by using the income headings, for example:

- Earned income - any income you will earn from this activity (for example, from ticket sales, workshop fees or selling work or publications).
- Other public funding - any funding you have received or applied for from any other public organisation. Please give us the name of each organisation and the amount.

For German applicants: note that co-funding by any other source based on funding of Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, BKM is not eligible.

- Private income - any income from private sources, for example from you or your organisation, donations or grants from trusts and foundations, or from crowdfunding.
- Support in kind (UK organisations only) - means any materials or services that you would otherwise have to pay for but that are being provided free of charge or at a reduced rate.

Your budget, income and expenditure, should balance. We will consider the strength of your budget using both your calculations and your explanations.

12. What if I have a question?

Please make sure you have read the guidance in full and checked the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our website before reaching out to a member of the programme team.

<i>UK organisations contact</i>	<i>German organisations contact</i>
Lorna Palmer Programme Manager Cultural Bridge contact@cultural-bridge.info	Silvia Bonadiman Programme development Fonds Soziokultur e.V. bonadiman@fonds-soziokultur.de 02 28 - 97 144 79-15