Heritage Innovation Fund

See all updates

Support for projects to explore, test and grow new ways of working across the heritage workforce.

Important

Heritage Innovation Fund is no longer accepting applications.

- Explore our available funding

Page updates

Page created on 5 July 2022.

Page last updated on 7 March 2025. See all updates.

Overview

The Heritage Innovation Fund is a pilot initiative for **experimenters, collaborators and learners** from across all parts of heritage, across the UK. We're looking for people who want to play a leading role in pioneering solutions for making the heritage workforce fit for the future.

> Innovation is not supposed to be the solution to everything – it should be about setting you up to think about what might be in 20 years' time.
>
> *Natural heritage professional*

It is designed to support organisations to **explore, test and grow** the **new ways of working** needed to support the future of our diverse and varied heritage.

The funding can be used to support organisations to find practical solutions that will help them – and also be shared across the sector.

Applicants must be:

- committed to the innovation process
- prepared to learn and experiment

- willing to share their failures as well as their successes

What do we mean by "new ways of working"?

We mean issues that relate to the future workforce (whether paid or voluntary). These issues impact whether organisations have the volume of staff and the skills to meet future demands on, and ambitions for, the UK's diverse heritage.

We are aware that these might be connected to complex and wider issues of diversity, inclusion, relevance, audiences and interpretation.

How will the Heritage Innovation Fund work?

The Heritage Innovation Fund is a **pilot initiative**. It is intended to build innovation capacity within, across and between different parts of heritage around a shared priority challenge area – the **workforce, skills and ways of working** needed for the future.

The Heritage Innovation Fund is intended to involve three phases.

Phase 1: Explore

Explore is for organisations at the early ideas stage. This phase will focus on defining a clear problem statement and helping you to develop potential solutions for testing in practice.

We recommend taking a look at Nesta's Helping innovation happen tool, which can help with identifying opportunities and challenges and generating ideas.

This phase will provide access to:?

- grants of up to £25,000 to cover your time and activities during this phase (six months)
- expertise to help you develop your ideas and skills through a structured package of support?
- peer learning and exchange in a cohort

Subject to Board approval, further grants from the Heritage Innovation Fund may be available to support the following steps in the innovation process.

Phase 2: Test

This phase will offer support to put promising prototypes and ideas into practice to gather evidence of what works.

Phase 3: Grow

This phase will support you to implement findings more widely, embedding, sharing and rolling out good practice across the heritage sector.

Why are we launching the Heritage Innovation Fund?

> Innovation is definitely happening, but it's not evenly distributed. We need collective confidence.
>
> *Museums professional*

In 2021, we carried out discovery research across the sector. We heard that many organisations are facing similar workforce challenges, made worse by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

These include issues related to: how we work, who is part of the heritage workforce and what skills we need.

We also heard that in order to tackle these challenges in the **long term**, organisations need time, space, resources and the right support.

> If you conduct conversations in the right way, support small innovations and give people the confidence to do more... People need space to think in a supportive way.
>
> *Heritage professional*

The Heritage Innovation Fund will help to generate and nurture ideas that aim to ensure the heritage workforce has the capacity and capabilities required to meet future needs.

In our 2022 UK Heritage Pulse survey, 54% of respondents wanted greater support to innovate and test new approaches. The Heritage Innovation Fund is part of our wider response to this need.

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Who can apply?

We are accepting applications from heritage organisations of any size or type, anywhere in the UK.

These could include:?

- not-for-profit organisations
- local authorities
- public sector organisations or private owners of heritage (with a workforce)

They cannot include:

- commercial organisations
- for-profit organisations

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What can we fund?

In the Explore phase, we have commissioned a specialist innovation support programme to sit alongside a grant of up to **£25,000**.

The funding can be used to cover the costs of staff time to deliver a Heritage Innovation Fund project over a six-month period.

These costs could include:

- salary of?key staff member?or backfill costs if applicable?
- travel and subsistence costs associated with attending in-person events or delivering activities as part of the programme

Up to?**10%**?of the funding can be used to cover the costs of essential materials and equipment needed while researching your project. This could include the purchase of essential devices and IT equipment.

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What we are looking for

In your Explore phase application you must clearly set out:

- how you will explore and define your idea and problem statement??
- how your work will focus on the further strategic development, governance and financial planning connected to your idea and how you will engage and involve relevant groups??
- how National Lottery funding, expert advice and being connected to a group of peers with a common goal will strengthen your organisation over the longer term

Questions to consider

- What is the workforce challenge that you want to focus on?
- What are the different elements of the challenge, and why have they not been tackled before?
- What are the short, medium and longer-term results of not solving this challenge?
- Who needs to be involved (internally and/or externally)? How might you find out more about their perspectives?
- How will this exploration relate to ongoing work in your organisation?
- What support do you have, and will you need, for the early discovery work to be effective? This could be from your organisation, the Heritage Fund, and/or other organisations or people.

Topics you could explore with our funding:

> Innovation can’t happen when you pre-describe it... We should instead set criteria that finds ability, appetite and capacity – rather than being prescriptive about the experiment.
>
> *Sector support professional*

Please consider the above quote.

Our three key criteria for this fund align with this thinking (see "How we assess your application", below).

We want to hear about **what challenges and inspires you about future ways of working for heritage**.

Some topics raised in our research are:

- how to diversify the future heritage workforce through exploring new recruitment approaches, new roles, connections with other sectors and places
- reimagining the future of volunteering
- overcoming retention challenges through progression routes and pathways, enhanced health and wellbeing offers, flexible working, etc
- making the most of new technologies and approaches that streamline core processes and create better conditions for staff and volunteers

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What you can apply for

The Explore phase of the Heritage Innovation Fund will provide grantees up to **£25,000 and six months' coaching and innovation support** to explore your challenge and develop some initial ideas to prototype.

What you can expect from us

- access to a cohort of other Heritage Innovation Fund grantees
- access to innovation experts who will coach and support you
- funding to cover staff time to explore the problem you are facing and begin to frame potential solutions
- funding for the costs of associated activities in this exploration phase

What we expect from you

Successful applicants will take part in an innovation learning and development programme, led by The Young Foundation.

This will consist of:

- six 3.5hour online sessions (approximately one per month) with all programme participants
- individual/team coaching support over six months

This support will help individuals and teams to build their confidence, skills and capabilities in innovation practice.

Taking part in the support programme is **key to you receiving your grant funding**. It should be factored into your resource planning, alongside the work on your innovation projects as part of the project.

Senior support

We also expect you to have support from senior leaders within your organisation. We ask all applicants to name a senior leader who will commit time to supporting your work and advocating for it.

This should be recorded in your application form as a non-cash contribution.?

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Key dates

- open for applications: 5 July 2022
- fund closes for applications: 12noon 27 September 2022
- interview period: 16 November – 1 December 2022
- decisions announced: December 2022

Application support

- we hosted a webinar (see recording) introducing the Heritage Innovation Fund at 11am on Thursday 21 July 2022.
- workshops to help you hone your idea (one event per organisation only, please – places are limited): Thursday 4 August, Wednesday 24 August and Tuesday 13 September

If you need to speak to someone about your idea or application, please contact your local office.

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How to apply

Apply using our Get funding for a heritage project service.

Please note: the Heritage Fund uses the same forms across all of our funding programmes. Some questions will need to be answered differently for the Heritage Innovation Fund – please use our application help notes to help you to answer.

Do not use the help icons on the form (because they relate to our other funding programmes).

How many applications can I make?

We expect organisations to make only one application to the Heritage Innovation Fund.

The programme is designed to help organisations drill down into a single workforce challenge area in detail. There will be the opportunity to refine your specific challenge and focus within it as part of the Explore phase.

Umbrella organisations

Organisations that are under a single umbrella organisation but operate across multiple sites across the UK can submit more than one application. They must be able to demonstrate the need, and that they have the capacity and capability to deliver within the time available.

Each application should stand alone and will be assessed in line with the criteria set out in this guidance.

Tips on filling out the application form

Our project title?

Please ensure that you use the following format for your project title: "Explore: your organisation's name".

This is so we know that you are applying for the Heritage Innovation Fund. Otherwise, your application may be delayed or considered under the wrong programme.?

Supporting documents?

The following supporting documents will be required:?

- governing document??
- organisation's accounts??
- CV of the individual/s who will be leading the project or a statement of why they have been chosen to lead the work?
- (optional) letter of support from a senior leader within your organisation, detailing the amount of time they will commit to the programme as 'sponsor' for the work

Technical support?

For technical support or assistance with accessibility, please contact our customer service team by email: enquire@heritagefund.org.uk.

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How we assess your application

We will assess eligible applications on three key criteria:

1. A compelling challenge connected to the heritage workforce??

The challenge should be significant now, but also an ongoing and long-term problem.

It should be relevant to your specific organisation, but also one that other heritage organisations could learn from.

2. Commitment to innovation

We're looking for a commitment to learning and working in the open.

We want to see that the wider organisation is ready to engage with your findings and failures. You will be able to demonstrate that your organisation is willing and ready to learn and experiment.

You will be able to show commitment to sharing ideas, work and learning – positive and negative – with others (both inside and outside your organisation) as part of this process.?

We want to know how working with a peer group could help you in your personal and organisational development.?????

You can also show a clear commitment to devote the time and energy to this work and that it is backed up by commitment from your organisation's leadership.

3. Named leader/s of the project who can engage the whole organisation

We're looking for applicants where the funding will help release their time to engage with the programme and add value to the existing core work of the organisation. You can demonstrate that the named leader/s have the skills and capacity to engage with the support programme and deliver this work.

Your job title or level of seniority is not important. It is more important that you have the wider support of your organisation to support your engagement with the programme.

Other factors

You will also need to demonstrate your overall organisational stability and evidence robust governance structures. **?**

Balancing criteria

In making final award decisions, we will ensure as far as possible that grants are balanced across heritage type, geographic location and organisation type.?

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What happens after you apply

The application assessment process has two stages:

- We will assess all applications against the full criteria above to make a shortlist. We aim to inform you if you have been shortlisted in mid-November 2022.
- The shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview, after which a panel will make a final decision. We aim to inform you of our decision by December 2022.

Further details about the interview will be provided to shortlisted candidates nearer the time.

What happens if you are unsuccessful?

We cannot provide individual feedback on every unsuccessful application.

However, as this is a pilot initiative, we will be sharing our own key learnings and reflections on the funding process with unsuccessful organisations at a later date.

What happens if you are successful?

Please read our Receiving a grant guidance: Heritage Innovation Fund.

What happens after my six-month grant?

After completing the Explore phase, we aim to offer organisations the opportunity to apply for additional funding in the Test and Grow phases of the Heritage Innovation Fund.

Only organisations which have completed the Explore phase can apply for any subsequent phases of the Heritage Innovation Fund.?

Participating in the Explore phase **does not** guarantee you further funding. A key part of the innovation process is accepting that not all ideas will succeed. The exploration process may reveal that your idea does not warrant further testing.

More details on the next phases of the Heritage Innovation Fund will be available at a later date.

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Legal and policy requirements

Subsidy control?

At the point of publication of this Guidance for Applicants, public funding for organisations is no longer governed by the European Commission's State aid rules as set out in Article 107-109 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union and associated regulations and guidelines.

Instead all grant decisions made after 11pm on 31 December 2020 are subject to the new UK subsidy control regime, the principles of which are set out in Chapter 3 (Subsidies) of Title XI (Level Playing Field) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.?

There is expected to be further guidance, a consultation and possibly new legislation in this area to build upon those principles. You will be expected to comply with the principles of the subsidy control regime and to satisfy any future requirements. Agreements that have been entered into will be reviewed and varied accordingly. We reserve the right to impose further requirements and additional conditions in relation to this matter.???

It is an applicant’s responsibility to check whether State aid or subsidy control clearance is required. Applicants should seek independent legal advice if they are unsure whether a project will require clearance.??

Managing your data?

You can find details of how and why we use your personal data in our Privacy Policy.

Complaints?

You can find out how to make a complaint on our Making a complaint: England, Northern Ireland and Wales and Making a complaint: Scotland pages.

Page updates

- **21 July 2022:** key dates section updated to include links to workshops.
- **2 August 2022:** link to the recorded applicant support webinar added to Key dates section.
- **4 October 2022:** programme closed.
- **9 November 2022:** the date when we will inform applicants if they have been shortlisted in the ‘What happens after you apply’ section was changed to mid-November.
- **7 March 2025:** deleted ‘We are currently accepting applications for the Explore phase only’ as the programme is closed.

Tag Link
Closed programmes