

Music Entrepreneur Fund - GUIDANCE

Up to £5,000 for early-stage music entrepreneurs, artists & creators

Plus additional support.

Overview

MusicFutures is launching the Music Entrepreneur Fund to support and elevate bold, future-facing ideas for new products, services, processes and experiences in the music sector.

This fund is designed to help music innovators in the Liverpool City Region (LCR), especially those historically excluded on the grounds of gender, race and socio-economic status.

Successful applicants can receive:

- Up to £5,000 in direct financial support, and additional business support.

The fund will help you develop, prototype, test, or launch an idea for scalable products, services, processes or experiences.

About MusicFutures

MusicFutures is a UKRI/AHRC-funded initiative working to accelerate inclusive and sustainable innovation in music across the Liverpool City Region. We support creators, artists, entrepreneurs, and companies to explore new ideas, build new capabilities, and test new approaches across the music sector.

Eligibility

Who Can Apply

This fund is aimed at:

- Sole traders, freelancers, and micro-businesses (fewer than 5 employees) working on new products, services, processes and experiences for the music industry.

Applicants must:

- Be based in the Liverpool City Region.
- Be working in music, music technology, music culture or content/product/service innovation in music.
- Have a project that can be delivered by April 2027.

Not eligible:

- Public bodies, charities, universities, schools, or large companies (although they may collaborate with an eligible individual or micro-business).

Lead Applicant Requirements

Lead applicants can be:

- An individual creative, artist, band, entrepreneur, collective, community organisation or CiC, sole trader OR a micro-business (under 5 employees).
- Must be based in or significantly benefiting the Liverpool City Region.
- Within Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) limits (see Appendix 1).
- Applicants may lead only one project, but can collaborate on other projects.

Funding Scope

What We ARE Funding

We support entrepreneurial projects across the full spectrum of music from production to live, distribution to publishing which contribute to furthering the aim of a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable innovative music sector.

Examples include (but are not limited to):

Creative and Artistic Innovation

- Developing audio and/or audio visual innovations.
- Experimenting with new ways of working: innovative production, composition and performances methods, new formats and approaches to production.
- Creating prototypes or pilots for new music products, services and experiences.

Entrepreneurial and Business Ideas

- Building or testing an early-stage concept for a music business.
- New approaches to audience-building, direct to fan or community engagement.
- Projects that support new revenue or business models for artists.
- Small-scale ventures that support the wider music ecosystem.

Technology & Innovation

- Inclusive approaches to music technology.
- Early prototypes of tools, plugins, or interactive products or experiences.
- Development of technology-assisted creative tools, workflows and approaches
- Apps, creative tech concepts, or digital artist services.
- Convergent opportunities across gaming, film, TV and immersive experiences.

Live, Studio & Experience Innovation

- New performance formats, interactive shows, or hybrid experiences.
- Small-scale immersive or experiential pilots.
- Accessibility-focused innovation for audiences or creators.

Community, Wellbeing, Environmental & Social Impact

- Innovative approaches for improving access, inclusion, or participation in music
- Innovation projects supporting and benefitting under-represented groups
- Innovation in environmental sustainability for the music sector
- Innovations that improve health and wellbeing with music

If it helps advance the music industry through creativity, entrepreneurship, experimentation, or innovation in the Liverpool City Region, it is in scope.

What We ARE NOT Funding

- **Business-as-usual delivery** with no clear R&D/innovation or enterprise element (e.g., standard recording, rehearsals, gigs, releases, live production, touring).
- **Marketing and promotion** as the primary activity (PR, ads, social media campaigns, playlist/radio plugging).
- **Travel/touring costs** where travel is the main purpose of the spend. However, you are allowed travel as part of the demonstration of your R&D/Innovation activity.
- **Equipment purchases (kit)** as the main purpose of the budget (instruments, computers, studio hardware). Note Equipment/Capital Expenditure is capped at 20% of total project costs.
- **Core operational costs/overheads** not directly tied to the R&D activity (rent, utilities, routine admin, staff costs not directly tied to the R&D activity).
- **Retrospective costs** or work that has already been completed before the project start date.
- **Music Education/Support/Skills/Community programmes**, however we are encouraging applications that are education centred i.e. leading to new products and services

Assessment Criteria

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Projects will be assessed in relation to the following criteria:

1. Strategic Alignment

- Does the opportunity align with MusicFutures' mission and long-term goals?
- Does it support innovation, diversity, and sustainability in the music industry?
- Is it consistent with current priority areas (e.g., emerging talent, technology, audience development, inclusivity)?

2. Market Potential and Audience Reach

- Is there a clear target audience and demand for the proposed work?
- Does the opportunity demonstrate potential for growth or scalability?
- Are there plans for marketing, distribution, or audience engagement?

3. Financial Viability

- Is the budget realistic and well-structured?
- Are there other sources of funding or revenue streams?
- Does the project demonstrate value for money and sustainability beyond initial funding?
- Does the project allow for return on investment if profit making? If yes, how?

4. Innovation and Future Readiness

- Does the opportunity leverage new technologies or innovative practices?
- Will it prepare the music sector for future trends (e.g., digital platforms, immersive experiences)?
- Does it encourage experimentation and risk-taking in a managed and responsible way?

5. EDI and Environmental Responsibility

- Does the project promote and address inclusivity and equity?
- Are there measures to minimise environmental impact?
- Does it contribute positively to community development?
- If the project involves a team, is the project team diverse?

6. Track Record and Capability

- Does the applicant have the skills, experience, and resources to deliver the project successfully?
- Are partnerships or collaborations in place to strengthen delivery and route to market?
- Is there evidence of past success or learning from previous projects?

Funding Details

Funding Available

- Up to £5,000 in grant funding
- Plus additional business support
- Projects must be fully completed and reported on by April 2027

Eligible Costs

- Your time
- Other people's time- ie Working with specialist collaborators
- Essential capital equipment (max 20%)
- Studio time, prototyping, testing
- User research, workshops and user testing
- Venue/space hire (where relevant)

Match Funding

Match funding is not required, but evidence of additional support and income for your project will enhance your application.

Cost Requirements

Eligible costs must:

- Comply with UKRI requirements
- Demonstrate value for money
- Support R&D, testing, innovation development
- Exclude standard production costs unless essential to the project

Payment Schedule

Payments will be made in stages:

- 80% at project start
- 20% at completion/project end review

Entrepreneur Support Programme

Recipients of the Music Entrepreneur Fund will join a cohort of participants who will undertake a programme of support as you develop your project/business idea. Depending on the needs of the cohort, this may include:

- Developing your Business Model, Project and Plan.

- Developing and protecting your IP.
- Branding and Marketing.
- Enterprise Skills (Business opportunities, Accounting, Project Management).
- Peer Demo and Progress Days.
- Funding, Investment and accessing further support (i.e. R&D Tax Credits, Other Funders).

Project Requirements

Project Criteria

Projects must be:

- Fully defined and ready to deliver (Starting date by October 2026).
- Achievable within the funding limit and timeframe (by March 2027).

Projects should also:

- Align with MusicFutures' goals of innovation, experimentation, creativity, inclusion, sustainability and ecosystem growth.
- Demonstrate potential for entrepreneurial, industry and community impact.
- Show how the funding helps you progress your project/business/idea to the next level.

Collaboration

Collaboration is welcome, and you can work with others, but not required.

IP Arrangements

Applicants will own all new IP created through their project. MusicFutures will retain the right to use your project for monitoring, publicity/marketing, teaching and research purposes.

Monitoring

Applicants must participate in regular meetings, monitoring and reporting, aligned with UKRI guidelines. Keeping financial and project records for a retention period of up to 6 years.

Application Process

How to Apply

Applicants submit:

- An online application form
- Optional supporting materials: demos, sketches/images, video, pitch decks

Application link: <https://musicfutures.co.uk/opportunities/>

Information sessions and applicant briefings will be published on MusicFutures social channels.

Assessment Process

- Eligibility check
- Review by MusicFutures assessors and partners
- Follow up clarification (if needed)
- Funding award

Important: Applications that are incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be assessed.

Support for Applicants

We are committed to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) across all MusicFutures programmes.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Alternative submission formats.
- Video or audio applications.
- Access support during briefings and workshops.

Individual adjustments will be provided wherever possible.

Key Dates and Timeline

- Call opens: [20th April 2026]
- Funding Call Q&A Webinar [7th May 2026, 1pm]
- Deadline: [1st June 2026]
- Assessment Period: [June/July 2026]
- Decisions announced: [September 2026]
- Project delivery window: [October 1st] – [31st March 2027]

Appendix 1 – Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA)

Funding is awarded under the MFA regime. Applicants must declare all MFA/de minimis funding received in:

- The current financial year
- The previous two financial years

This includes:

- MFA awards
- De Minimis awards

Further guidance: Subsidy Control Act 2022.