



# Guidance for applicants

#MuseumOfTheYear

The Box, Plymouth, Museum of the Year, Winner, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

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The V&A Storehouse, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# About the prize

Art Fund Museum of the Year is the world's biggest museum prize: a celebration of the museums, galleries and historic places that inspire and connect people across the UK. The prize shines a light on the extraordinary work museums do every day, encourages more people to visit and engage with art and collections, and celebrates what makes a truly outstanding museum visit.

Since 2013, the prize has championed organisations showing excellence, innovation, creativity and imagination in many different forms. Being shortlisted for, or winning, Art Fund Museum of the Year can be transformative: previous finalists have used the recognition to strengthen advocacy, unlock fundraising opportunities, deepen partnerships and build lasting networks.

Each year, an independent judging panel shortlists five exceptional organisations and selects one outstanding winner to receive the £120,000 prize. The remaining four finalists each receive £20,000. All shortlisted museums also receive dedicated support from Art Fund throughout the prize campaign, including national press coverage, marketing support and opportunities for exciting collaborations that help their stories reach further.

**If your organisation is working in bold and meaningful ways, we would love to hear from you. Read on to find out more about the prize, what we are looking for and how to apply.**



The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026.

Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026. Artworks: © Gillian Wearing. All rights reserved, DACS 2026

# Why apply?

*"Morale internally has been phenomenal and has united the organisation – everyone's hard work has been recognised, and this means a lot to staff and volunteers" – Finalist, 2026*

Taking part in Art Fund Museum of the Year is an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on what your organisation has achieved over the past year. From shaping your application to sharing your story if shortlisted, the process is designed to be rewarding, useful and energising for your whole team. Alongside the prize money, finalists become part of a national conversation about the value and power of museums today.

*"Each opportunity has deepened relationships with funders, partners and local organisations, building lasting legacy for the museum." – Finalist, 2023*

Previous finalists and winners have seen increased visitor numbers and engagement, a stronger public profile and renewed support from stakeholders. Many have also found that the prize helps open doors for fundraising, advocacy and new partnerships, creating benefits that continue long after their nomination. You can find out more about the impact of taking part in the prize from previously shortlisted museums on our [programme webpage](#).

The Art Fund team will work closely with you to make sure you get the most out of taking part in the campaign, which will include national press, content, and bespoke marketing opportunities.



The National Gallery, London, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026.  
Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# Who can apply

Art Fund Museum of the Year is open to all UK museums, galleries, historic places, libraries or archives that have spaces for people to visit and experience the visual arts or other object-based collections.

We are keen to receive applications from across all four UK nations, no matter your organisation's size or subject matter.

## **Before applying, please ensure you meet the following criteria:**

- You must be based in the UK and be either a public museum, gallery, historic place, library or archive which has spaces for people to visit and experience the visual arts or other object-based collections. You do not need to have a collection of your own but should have a dedicated exhibition or visual arts programme.
- Your application must focus on one venue (even if you are part of a group of museums).
- Your organisation must operate to standards of best practice and/or have a strong track record in delivering high-quality public activity. You could demonstrate this through accreditation schemes (such as those managed by Arts Council England), endorsement by partners, successful past projects, or awards you have received. If you are a non-accredited museum, we may seek advice from trusted sector partners (such as MDUK) to better understand your organisation and needs.
- The activity that your application focuses on must have predominantly taken place between 1 July 2025 and 31 December 2026.
- For applications that focus on reopenings, the reopening must have completed by 1 July 2026, to allow for at least 6 months of visitor data to have been collected.

## **Unfortunately, we are unable to receive applications from:**

- Commercial or for-profit organisations, including Private Limited Companies, Public Limited Companies, Unlimited Companies, or Sole Traders.
- General Partnerships, Limited Partnerships, or Limited Liability Partnerships.
- Organisations with a focus on music, drama, dance and art forms outside the visual arts.
- Individuals or unincorporated bodies directly (unless an application is submitted by or with the formal written agreement of an eligible organisation [as described above]).
- Hospitals and places of worship.
- Schools or higher education institutions.
- Artist groups.

# Judging criteria

Every year we invite an external panel of judges to review, shortlist and decide on the winner. This year's panel of judges will include sector experts, cultural leaders and artists, and chaired by Jenny Waldman, Art Fund's director. We look forward to announcing the panel in early 2027.

The judges are central to the prize, and each brings their own experience, perspective and expertise to the process. Longlisted applicants will have the opportunity to be interviewed by the judging panel, to help the judges make their decision on which five organisations will be shortlisted. Shortlisted museums are chosen on the strength of their application and how their work is brought to life during the online shortlisting interviews.

Each museum on the shortlist will host the judges during a group visit, which gives the judging panel an opportunity to better understand the workings of the organisation, its visitor offer, and the ways audiences and communities are engaged through their collections or programming. After visiting all five shortlisted organisations, the judges will decide the winner. Taking a holistic approach, they will consider the original application, the shortlisting interview and the visit before deciding who should be crowned Art Fund Museum of the Year.

The prize programme lead will work closely with you throughout the process, helping you plan an itinerary that gives the judges a clear and compelling impression of your organisation, collections and programme, your people and your impact.



Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026.  
Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# Focus for 2027

If you feel your organisation meets the criteria for eligibility, please read on to find out what we are looking for in 2027.

## Inspiring connection

Art Fund Museum of the Year is powered by our National Art Pass members, who believe access to art, culture and heritage should be for everyone. Together, we are championing the vital role museums play in creating a brighter, more connected future for all.

Now in its 14th year, the prize celebrates museums working with ambition, care and imagination. Whilst the sector continues to grapple with challenges in an ever-changing landscape, we recognise that museums are places of possibility and hope. They can offer a warm welcome, learning, joy, reflection and connection. At their best, they help people see themselves, each other and the world differently.

This year, we are inviting applications from organisations who are **inspiring connection**. Museums, galleries, historic places, libraries and archives are vital civic spaces where people come together to encounter the ideas, places and stories that shape their lives.

**We want to hear from applicants who through art, collections and programmes, bring communities together and connect audiences with the ideas, places and stories that matter to them.**



The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# Your application

## How to apply

For 2027 you will need to complete an [Application Form](#), which is available to download from our [Get Funding webpage](#). The first part of the application form will include basic information, alongside financial and other data requests (including visitor statistics, information about your collection or programme, and your impact on audiences).

The second part of the application is your opportunity to shine. As outlined on the next page, you will be asked to respond to the question, 'Why are you Museum of the Year 2027?' Through your responses we want to understand what makes your organisation distinctive, what you have achieved and why your work deserves to be recognised as Art Fund Museum of the Year.



The National Gallery, London, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

## How to tell your story

Applicants are invited to make their case as to why they believe they are 'Museum of the Year 2027', through a 'tell, hear, see' approach.

You will be asked to respond to the question 'Why are you Museum of the Year 2027?' in the following ways:

1. In writing, tell us why you should be considered for the prize this year. Frame your answer through linking your projects or activities with this year's application focus – 'inspiring connection'. Responses should be kept to no more than 1,000 words.
2. We want to hear from other voices across your organisation, such as staff, volunteers, artists you've worked with, or community partners, why you are applying for the prize this year and how your work stands out. Please use the application focus to inform your responses and treat this as an opportunity to expand on your written response. You can submit these responses through pre-recorded vox-pops (no more than three in total with a maximum of two minutes each).
3. Give the judges a flavour of what a typical visit at your organisation looks like, either through a selection of images or a short film (maximum four minutes in length). If you choose to submit images, please collate these into a PowerPoint presentation or PDF.

We recognise that every organisation is different and will have varied resources. Whilst we encourage you to submit audio-visual materials for questions b and c, this can be adapted to suit the way in which your organisation works – for example, a recording on Teams or Zoom could be submitted for vox-pops, and a rolling PowerPoint of images could be supplied for question 3. Applications will not be judged on the level of production value, but it is important for the judging panel to be able to see and hear more about your organisation through audio-visual media.

To complete your application, you will also need:

- Optional supporting material to evidence your answers to the application question (these must be relevant and no more than three in total).
- These could include:
- visitor statistics/reports
  - case studies
  - evaluation reports
  - A high-res image selection (no more than five) showing the exterior and interior of your organisation. Please ensure these have the appropriate permissions in place for third-party use.
  - A letter of support from your director or chair confirming their wish for the organisation to be considered for Art Fund Museum of the Year 2027 and agreeing to our terms and conditions.

## Application checklist

To help you gather everything you need for your application please refer to the [application checklist template](#), which you will need to complete and submit as part of your application.

## Submitting your completed application

Please send completed copies of the application form and checklist (along with other supporting material) to [programmes@artfund.org](mailto:programmes@artfund.org), with programme lead, Emma Mills, [emills@artfund.org](mailto:emills@artfund.org) in the cc line, **by 5pm on Thursday 7 January 2027**. Please note in the subject line: '[Organisation name] Museum of the Year 2027 application'.

- A completed application form
- A completed application checklist template, which details and includes links to the audio-visual responses
- Optional supporting material for your application
- A high-res image selection (no more than five) showing the exterior and interior of your organisation.
- A supporting letter from your Director or Chair of Trustees

If you wish to discuss your application or have any questions about the application process and how to submit your materials, then please direct these to programme lead, Emma Mills, by emailing [emills@artfund.org](mailto:emills@artfund.org)

## How applications are assessed

Applications go through a two-part process before the shortlist is confirmed by our expert panel of judges. Below is a guide to what you can expect if your application is taken forward.

- Once we receive your application and all other required materials you will be sent an email confirming receipt from a Programmes team colleague.
- Following the deadline, all applications are carefully reviewed by an internal longlisting panel.
- The longlisting panel and the judges will agree who will get taken forward to the interview stage. Longlisted applicants for interview will be informed of the date and time of the interview with at least two weeks' notice.
- If your application is not going to be taken further at this stage, you will be notified by email. Due to the high number of applications we receive we will not be able to provide feedback unless requested.
- At the shortlisting interview two to three representatives from the applicant organisation will meet the judging panel online and be asked a series of questions (which will be sent in advance with at least two weeks' notice).
- Following the interviews, judges will agree on the shortlist of five organisations, and if you are successful, you will be contacted by the prize project manager to discuss next steps.
- If you are unsuccessful, you will be contacted by email and can request further feedback if required.

## What happens if you are shortlisted

- As per our terms and conditions, shortlisted organisations will need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.
- Shortlisted organisations will be invited to attend a collaboration workshop held online, in advance of the shortlist announcement (date TBC). This will be an opportunity to meet the Art Fund team and the rest of your cohort, as well as find out more information about the campaign.
- The prize project manager will work closely with your key contact to get you ready for the shortlist announcement and campaign.

## Shortlist announcement

- The shortlist will be announced in April 2027 (date TBC). We will work closely with you and your communications team to maximise press opportunities during this time and provide you with a briefing pack in advance.



The Box, Plymouth, Museum of the Year, Winner, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

## The campaign

- We want shortlisted museums to get as much value as possible from the campaign period, so in addition to Art Fund's activity we encourage shortlisted organisations to plan their own during this time, with support from Art Fund where helpful.
- As part of this campaign, we would ask you to offer a special benefit for National Art Pass visitors from the date of the shortlist announcement to the announcement of the winner. This could be a further discount on admission or a special offer in your shop or café.
- During this time, the judges will visit the five shortlisted organisations as a group, which helps them to make their final decision on who the winner should be. This will take place across May and June; dates will be determined with the shortlist.

## Winner announcement

- All shortlisted organisations are invited to attend the award ceremony in June (number of invites TBC) where the winner will be announced. Further details, including date and location will be confirmed in due course.
- More details about the announcement will be revealed closer to the time. Shortlisted museums will be supplied with a briefing pack to help get ready for the event and announcement.

## Legacy and evaluation

- All shortlisted organisations take part in an evaluation process, in line with other Art Fund's funding programmes.



The Box, Plymouth, Museum of the Year, Winner, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# Timeline

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- Applications open 9am, Wednesday 7 October 2026 and close 5pm, Thursday 7 January 2027.
- Shortlisting interviews with judges will take place either late February or early March 2027.
- Shortlist announcement & campaign kick-off will take place April (date TBC) 2027.
- Judges' visits will take place between late May – early June 2027, dates to be agreed with shortlisted museums.
- Winner announcement/award ceremony will take place late June 2027 (date and location TBC).



The V&A Storehouse, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026

# Terms & conditions

As with all our programme activity, we ask applicants to agree to certain terms and conditions as part of their application. These help ensure the prize is clear, fair and collaborative for everyone involved.

We ask longlisted organisations to:

- Be present at an online interview to meet with the judges to discuss your application.
- Take part in a short evaluation.

We ask shortlisted organisations to:

1. Work collaboratively with us as part of a joint initiative to celebrate and promote the shortlist. Art Fund can provide advice and press and marketing support as needed.
2. To sign a Memorandum of Understanding which outlines mutual areas of responsibility and expectations between Art Fund and all finalists.
3. Be represented at the judges' visits in May – June and winner announcement event in June 2027.
4. Support the audience engagement campaign with a special benefit for National Art Pass visitors, from the date of the shortlist announcement to after the announcement of the winner – the duration and details to be determined in conversation with Art Fund's marketing team. (This could be a free or discounted admission offer, for example, or a shop and/or café discount.)
5. Display Art Fund print and digital materials, such as posters and digital assets, onsite and online, at least for the duration of the campaign.
6. Work collaboratively with the other finalists to support each other and raise awareness of each other's work.
7. Work with Art Fund to evaluate and provide feedback at the end of the prize process to help us assess the impact of Art Fund Museum of the Year and make improvements for the future.



Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Museum of the Year, Shortlisted, 2026. Photo: © David Levene / Art Fund 2026



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# Art Fund\_

The Box, Plymouth, was announced as the winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2026 at the award ceremony held at Cutty Sark, London. © Hydar Dewachi / Art Fund 2026

For any questions about applying for Art Fund Museum of the Year, please contact the prize project manager, Emma Mills, at [emills@artfund.org](mailto:emills@artfund.org).

For more information about the prize, visit [artfund.org/museum-of-the-year](https://artfund.org/museum-of-the-year).

Find out more about our funding opportunities, and check which grants you are eligible to apply for, here: [artfund.org/professional/get-funding](https://artfund.org/professional/get-funding).

For more information about joining Art Fund's network of museums, please visit [artfund.org/professional/promote-your-venue](https://artfund.org/professional/promote-your-venue).