

# Early Years Innovation in Museums

Lead museum  
application guidance

A research and development  
programme with Art Fund and Nesta

Art Fund\_ **nesta**

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# About

Image caption: Walker Art Gallery, Families welcome! © Mark McNulty



# About

Art Fund is delighted to be partnering with Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good, on an ambitious research and development programme to develop, test and scale a new early years intervention in museums. As well as encouraging a wider range of families to use and visit museums more often, the intervention will also support early child development and enhance parent-child interactions.

We know that all babies and children need stable, caring relationships and stimulating activities in order to thrive. The environment and experiences of early childhood shape our brains and bodies, creating the building blocks of our physical, emotional and cognitive skills. However, not every child gets what they need to develop during the early years. By providing the right support during this important developmental period, and harnessing the social value of museums, we hope to change that.

Museums offer families unique opportunities to spend time together. The buildings, spaces and collections, the expert learning teams and the access to artists and makers offered through early years programming all help to fuel young children's imaginations. We think museums could provide an innovative and creative approach, supporting children's early development by building caregiver confidence and skills, enhancing interactions and relationships, and offering greater opportunities for more families to engage with the arts.

Image caption: Visitors at the Foundling Museum looking at Mark Neville's photograph *Somerford Grove Adventure Playground in Tottenham*, 2011. © Foundling Museum. Photo: Fernando Manoso 2021



# About

We are looking for 8 lead museums to help us develop and deliver this two-year programme, with each receiving a grant of up to £65,000 to work in the following ways:

In the first phase of the programme (design and prototype):

- Collaborate on the development of an evidence-informed facilitated intervention, alongside other museums and early years development professionals.
- Test and refine the intervention in the museum with cohorts of around 12 families (the exact number will be determined as part of the design process).
- Identify local partners and begin to engage families to take part in the research and attend 6-8 weekly sessions in the museum.
- Identify and agree an additional partner museum to work with as part of the second phase.

In the second phase of the programme:

- Onboard and work with at least one additional museum partner to further test, roll out and evaluate the intervention.

Throughout the project and in its legacy:

- Participate in project meetings, design sessions, evaluation and workshops.
- Share learning and insights with museum peers, and support knowledge sharing with the wider sector.

# About

## Aims and objectives

Throughout the research and development programme, in partnership with Nesta, we aim to:

- Design an engaging, high-quality and effective early years intervention in museums using museum spaces and collections/programming to support families.
- Explore how to unlock the social value of cultural spaces and places for more families.
- Enhance caregiver-child interactions and moments of connection that help to support child development.

Our objectives for the two-year research and development programme are to:

- Work with eight lead museums, who will each recruit, mobilise and work alongside at least one other partner museum, to reach an agreed number of families through an early years intervention.
- Design and undertake an evaluation that looks at the feasibility, outcomes and impact of the programme and provides a path to scale the intervention across more museums.
- Develop a toolkit of learnings to support the UK museum sector as a whole.
- Build a foundation of evidence and experience to support future development, funding and scaling into a national initiative.

Ultimately, we hope this work will enable museums to reimagine their role in supporting and inspiring families, building a broader demographic of museum visitors and helping the sector to leverage greater support at a local and national level.

# About

## Key information about the intervention

The lead museums will collaborate with Nesta and Art Fund on the development of a 6-8 week programme of facilitator-led playful museum sessions (the intervention) for parents/main-caregivers and their children aged between 2-4 years old to enjoy together.

The sessions will be designed to:

1. support warm, inviting and confident interactions and relationships between parents/main-caregivers and their children aged 2-4 years old, helping them to communicate and engage in shared activities in ways that promote children's social and emotional development and enrich family life;
2. empower parents/main-caregivers to build understanding, confidence and skills that can be embedded at home;
3. foster participatory and exploratory learning by doing, with sessions facilitated and led by museum learning teams/creative learning freelance professionals (depending on the setup of individual museums)
4. engage and support priority families in cohorts of around 12 families per group. Each museum will be required to support multiple cohorts of families over the course of the research and development programme.
5. deliver a 6-8 week evidence-informed curriculum for each cohort of families (one weekly 2.5-hour session x 6-8 weeks). Families must commit to the duration of the 6-8 week period.

Image caption: Children at Family Day: Animal Adventures at the British Library on Saturday 22 April 2023  
© Jonathon Vines 2023







# Who we are looking for

Image caption: Visitors with 'Cat-tharsis' by Andy Holden (2022), on display at the British Art Show 9, 2021-22, installed at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. A Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition organised in collaboration with galleries across the cities of Aberdeen, Wolverhampton, Manchester and Plymouth supported by Art Fund. Courtesy Andy Holden. Photo: Janie Airey/Art Fund 2022



# Who we are looking for

We are keen to hear from museums, galleries, visual arts organisations and historic places from around the UK who meet the following criteria:

## Essential criteria

- Strong experience of and best practice in working with early years families.
- An interest in and commitment to this ambitious innovation process; open and excited to try new approaches; able to work at pace; and comfortable collaborating with other museums, early years experts and community partners.
- Experience of working with community partners, childcare centres and/or other providers that support low-income families; or a demonstrable ability to form these relationships quickly to recruit families to participate in the programme.
- A track record of, or strong desire to, unlock the social value of cultural spaces and places for more families.
- The ability to be available for, and take part in, all aspects of the research and development programme (more details provided in the programme timeline).
- The ability to identify, onboard and work with at least one new additional museum partner during the second phase of the project. (This partner museum might be a sister organisation, a local collaborator or an organisation you would like to work with but haven't had the chance to yet. You must be able to demonstrate that you have had initial discussions with prospective partners and will be asked to provide details of this as part of your application.)

## Desirable criteria

- Some experience in people-centred design, with families and/or other communities, would be advantageous but is not essential.

# Who we are looking for

Each lead museum will be given up to £65,000 to cover the costs of participating fully in the programme. This includes any costs incurred by working with their museum partner(s). (The lead museum will be responsible for dispersing any funds to the partner museums in line with Art Fund's terms and conditions.)

We are aware that there are good examples of early years practice already happening in museums, but it is important to note that this is not a funding programme to develop or run an existing or self-determined early years programme; the grant can only be used to cover the costs required to participate in this research and development programme.

We are hopeful that this will result in future opportunities to embed innovative and impactful early years interventions in your organisation and across the UK museum and gallery sector, and we are keen to hear from museums who wish to be part of this exciting journey at an early stage.

## Eligibility

In addition to the criteria outlined on the previous slides, we would also expect lead museums to meet the following organisational eligibility requirements:

- You must be a UK-based museum, gallery, visual arts organisation or historic place, with or without a collection.
- You must be open to the public for at least half of the week for at least six months of the year.
- You must agree to our full terms and conditions.

# Who we are looking for

## What's in it for you?

You'll be instrumental in the design and testing of a new intervention within early years programming for the UK museum sector, and in addition to receiving the grant, which will cover all costs of participating in the process, you will build and develop new skills and partnerships and reach a wider audience of families in your community.

Together, Art Fund and Nesta will support you throughout the process: hosting design workshops, providing marketing materials and working with an external evaluator to capture learnings. The evaluation will, we hope, provide a robust evidence base which could help you to demonstrate the social value and impact of your work.

This is also an opportunity for lead museums to develop a relationship and work in partnership with another museum. Additionally, Art Fund will help you make the most of this opportunity by providing press and marketing support to build on any advocacy work undertaken within this area.







# The design process

Image caption: Children at Family Day: Animal Adventures at the British Library on Saturday 22 April 2023  
© Jonathon Vines

# The design process

Successful lead museums will be required to send up to two project leads to attend a two-day residential workshop alongside Nesta, Art Fund, child development and intervention design experts and other lead museums who are participating in the programme.

The focus of this workshop will be on shaping a 6-8 week intervention (supported by an evidence-informed syllabus) aimed at enhancing caregiver-child interactions and supporting early years learning and development.

In the workshop, museums will be introduced to key design thinking principles and will be asked to collectively apply their creative expertise to an intervention framework focused on the unique power of museum collections, spaces and practitioners.

Participants will discuss important elements of child development, such as enhancing parent-child interactions, supporting behaviour change and embedding these behaviours at home, and sharing best practice in early years museum pedagogy.

Following the workshop, museums will work individually and collectively with project partners and experts to customise the intervention for delivery in their own organisation. They will bring it to life by prototyping it with families, then regroup to refine the work before rolling it out in their own organisations (and with their partner museums).

Throughout this creative research and development journey, the lead museums will stay in regular contact as a group, with Art Fund, Nesta and external experts, sharing learning and experience and feeding back into the process. There will also be lots of opportunities for collaboration with other lead museums as well as time for reflection.

A full agenda and an outline of any pre-work required at the workshop will be sent in advance. In addition to the grant, travel, accommodation and meals will be covered by Art Fund, for up to two project leads to participate.

## Dates

Tuesday 18 June: potential travel/overnight stay at the venue (depending on your location).

Wednesday 19 – Thursday 20 June: Full-day workshops, including an overnight stay at the venue on Wednesday night. We expect to finish by 4pm on Thursday 20 June.

## Location

Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.

# Programme timeline

This ambitious programme will run from spring 2024 through to spring 2026.

The timeline is as follows:

Year one

- 15 April – early June 2024  
Applications timeline
  - Application window (15 April – 15 May).
  - Successful applicants invited to a clarification meeting that will take place w/c 3 June.
  - Successful applicants informed by 7 June; paperwork and onboarding begins.
- Mid-June – late August 2024  
Intervention content development
  - Key dates for diaries:  
Residential design workshop: Tuesday 18 (potential travel/overnight stay)  
Wednesday 19 – Thursday 20 June, full days (including overnight stay on Wednesday 19)
  - Two-day residential workshop for up to two lead museum project leads to attend.
  - Lead museums supported to engage with partners and intermediaries to begin recruitment of families. (E.g. charities, local children's services, schools with pre-schools etc.)
  - Intervention design refined, and preparations made by the lead museums ahead of the testing period starting in September 2024.
  - Lead museums to confirm partner museum(s) to work with in 2025, with the support of Art Fund if required.
- September – December 2024  
Prototyping phase 1
  - Intervention prototyped in the lead museums with families – ongoing iteration, process evaluation and refinement of intervention
  - Intervention delivered by the lead museums in their spaces to multiple cohorts of around 12 families.
  - Continuous monitoring, evaluation and iteration, responding to and recording the needs of the families and learnings from prototyping.
  - Ongoing creative drop-in clinics with Nesta, Art Fund and external experts.
  - Programme to mobilise partner museums developed with lead museums.



# Programme timeline

Year two

- January – March 2025  
Ongoing development, reflection and refinement of intervention for second phase, and partner museum preparation
  - Draw on learning from first phase of prototyping to refine, further test and finalise the intervention for a pilot roll-out in the second phase.
  - Lead museums to mobilise their partner museums (training and preparation provided for the partner museums if required).
  - Evaluation plan finalised in collaboration with Nesta.
- April – June 2025  
Evaluation and roll-out phase 2: across lead and partner museums
  - Intervention prototype roll-out in lead museums and scalability prototyped in partner museums.
  - Ongoing creative drop-in clinics with Nesta, Art Fund and external experts.
  - Monitoring and evaluation in collaboration with Nesta.
- July – August 2025
  - Likely pause in delivery for summer holidays, with additional recruitment of families as required.
- September 2025 – March 2026  
Ongoing roll-out across lead and partner museums
  - Intervention roll-out continues in lead and partner museums.
  - Ongoing creative drop-in clinics with Nesta, Art Fund and external experts.
  - Monitoring and evaluation in collaboration with Nesta.
- December 2025 – March 2026  
Planning for scale
  - Evaluation findings write-up.
  - Toolkit development to support scaling across the sector.



# How to apply

# How to apply

## Application form

Art Fund requires applicants to submit their application by:

- Completing the Word application form (which can be found on our website [here](#)) and send it to [programmes@artfund.org](mailto:programmes@artfund.org), with the subject title 'Early Years Innovation in Museums, Lead Museum Application'.

As part of the application you will be asked to:

- Provide us with information about your organisation and the work that you currently do with early years children and families.
- Tell us about any existing relationships you have with early years providers or intermediaries with connections to priority families with under-fives in your local area.
- Identify at least one museum/gallery partner you would like to work with in the second phase of the programme (this does not need to be confirmed at this stage, but we would expect you to have had an initial discussion and an agreement in principle in place).

- Confirm that you can commit to participating in the programme in its entirety, including attending the residential workshop in June 2024 and reaching other key milestones as outlined in the programme timeline.
- Confirm that you can participate in the full evaluation process with Nesta across the programme (exact outputs to be determined) ensuring data is collected and shared with the central project team in a timely and accurate manner, and in line with the evaluation toolkit and guidance provided by Nesta.

Applications open 15 April and close 15 May 2024. Successful applicants will be invited to a clarification meeting, before being informed of the panel's decision. All applicants will be informed of the panel's decision either way by 7 June.

If you are unable to access the form, please contact Emma Mills at [emills@artfund.org](mailto:emills@artfund.org) to discuss alternative options, and how we can best support you in making your application. Should you have any suggestions as to how we can make our application process more user-friendly, please get in touch.





# Terms & conditions

# Terms & conditions

Once you're ready to submit your application, you'll be asked to confirm that the person with relevant authority in your organisation has agreed to participate in the programme and will adhere to our grant terms and conditions should you be successful.

Successful applicants will enter into a partnership agreement with Art Fund ahead of project commencement. Please note that the support of Nesta in this research and development programme must be acknowledged in any related materials or activities. We will provide materials to facilitate this, and Art Fund must approve in advance any publicly available materials relating to the project.

We'll also invite you to discuss joining Art Fund's National Art Pass network and taking advantage of the opportunities that this has to offer (if you're not already a partner). This is free, and it means we can connect your museum with our 135,000 members and the hundreds of thousands of art lovers and museumgoers who access our communications channels.







# Any questions?



# Any questions?

If you have any questions about the programme or your application, please contact projects manager Emma Mills at [emills@artfund.org](mailto:emills@artfund.org) and Cat Monks, head of programme development at [cmonks@artfund.org](mailto:cmonks@artfund.org).



# Definitions and FAQs

## Priority audience: Low-income families

We want museums to work with existing and new community networks and partners to reach priority families. This could include working with a child and family centre, a local pre-school or a community charity to recruit low-income families.

When we say that the priority audience is low-income families we mean that we would aim to work with those living in the poorest 30% of households. For example, this might include families who are:

- Living in postcodes that fall into the most deprived deciles on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) or Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Eligible for early years pupil premium (<https://www.gov.uk/get-extra-early-years-funding>)
- Eligible for Universal Credit

We want to work with museums throughout the programme to explore the best ways to engage these families.

## Intervention

An intervention is a facilitator-led programme of activities – play, exercises, exploration, education, interactions, etc. – that consciously and deliberately aims to change caregiver behaviour or family interactions to achieve better outcomes for children. Group-based interventions have different challenges and opportunities compared to individual ones: while less individualised, they have social aspects and enable facilitators to support parents in forming empowered peer-support networks.

For a full list of FAQs please see <https://www.artfund.org/professional/get-funding/programmes/early-years-innovation-in-museums#faqs>

# Background

In summer 2023 Art Fund and Nesta partnered with three museums (The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums; and The Whitworth, Manchester) to explore how playful museum sessions could support families with children under five – by enhancing caregiver-child interactions, growing parent/caregiver skills and confidence, and engaging families who experience barriers in accessing arts and culture.

A series of facilitated activities were delivered across three museums to over 60 families. These were playful and creative sessions that encouraged interactions between parents/caregivers and their children, and included take-home creative materials and prompts to allow families to practise between sessions in their home environments. Each venue worked with local community partners and charities such as children's services and family centres, local school nurseries, and a charity supporting sanctuary-seeking families.

The proof of concept was encouraging and suggested that the museum context, staff and collections had the potential to play important roles in supporting developmental outcomes in children under five.

For more information on the proof of concept, visit <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/supporting-parents-and-families-through-playful-museum-interventions/>





# Art Fund\_

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