

## AHRC Creative Communities: Community Innovation Practitioners (CIP) Awards 2025-2026

The [AHRC Creative Communities programme](#) explores the transformative power of cross-sector collaboration for culture and inclusive innovation in the policy contexts of the three devolved nations and twelve Mayoral Combined Authorities of the UK. Hosted by Northumbria University, the programme is developing a new evidence base on how and why culture can address **growth, regional inequality**, enhance **belonging** and **equalise opportunity** using culture-led R&D.

The Community Innovation Practitioner (CIP) Awards will provide innovative funding for cross-sector research partnerships to host a Community Innovation Practitioner (CIP) from 1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026.

The aim of the CIP Awards is to generate new knowledge on **how and why engaging cross-sector partners in research, and communities as research partners, can enhance the quality, resilience, and sustainability of our research ecosystem.**

Indicative areas of interest include the role of culture and cultural R&D in addressing key **UK government missions** including:

- **Belonging**
- **Equalising Opportunity**
- **Growth**
- **Regional Inequality**

Up to 10 Community Innovation Practitioners (CIPs) Awards of £75k (100% fEC) will be available.

CIPs will be required to work with communities, third and private sector partners to explore different collaborative models for co-inquiry through the co-designing, co-creating and co-evaluating of new culture. Their projects will generate evidence that will go on to inform policy recommendations for funders, central UK Government, devolved administrations and Mayoral Combined Authorities.

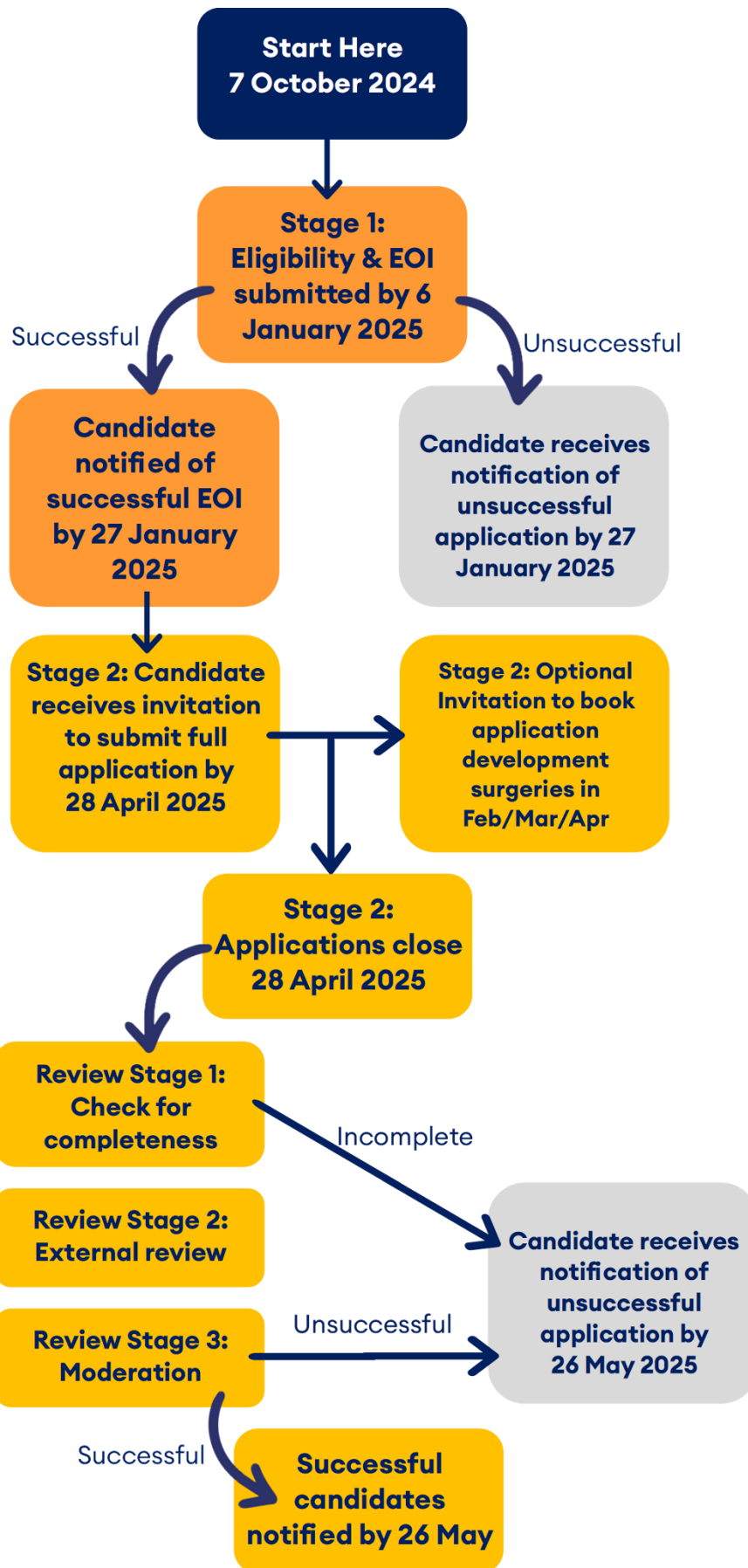
**To apply for the CIP Awards, you must submit an initial expressions of interest (Eoi). Your Eoi application will outline your eligibility for the Awards and your outline project proposal. If your Eoi application is successful, you will be invited to submit a full application in Spring 2025.**

### Who Can Apply

Those eligible to apply for this funding must:

- Be based at a UK higher education institution (HEI) or independent research organisation (IRO) that **is located in a devolved [region](#) or [nation](#) of the UK;**

- Already be **working in partnership** with diverse external partners, cross-sector collaborations and/or communities;
- Have planned projects of work featuring **collaborative/co-creation R&D**;
- Identify a **named individual** as CIP candidate on the application;
- Actively engage in the co-design and co-authoring of the application with **all partners**, including the CIP candidate;
- Outline a **distinct** piece of research activity to be led and completed by the CIP candidate;
- Commit to **providing a suitable package of support for the CIP**, including managing the hosting, allocation of mandatory budgets, and line management of the CIP within existing institutional frameworks and governance structures.



## AHRC Creative Communities

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Creative Communities aims to explore **how and why engaging cross-sector partners in research, and communities as research partners, can enhance the quality, resilience, and sustainability of our research ecosystem.**

The programme is shifting research funding and power back into devolved nations and regions by harnessing devolved culture policy and trailblazer deals to help cross-sector communities take back control of their own culture and innovation story.

It takes an integrated approach to contextualise and catalyse the co-creation of R&D with communities, government, and the third and private sector using a new evidence base to identify capacity, reach, best practice, and potential for scale up.

In May 2023 we delivered '[By All, For All: The Power of Partnerships](#)', a deep dive report drawing on more than a decade of AHRC-funded community and cross-sector collaborative R&D to explore how we can unlock the potential of engaging communities and partners as researchers. This was followed by the [Community Innovation Practitioner \(CIP\) Pilot 2023/2024](#), awarding £290k funding to five CIPs from across the four nations of the UK to capture co-creation processes in collaborative cross-sector research. AHRC Creative Communities also hosted a series [Policy Labs](#) across the UK, using experimental creative facilitation methodologies to harness co-creation processes to unite a diverse range of cross-sector stakeholders around a series of key challenge areas in RD&I with the aim of generating new policy solution suggestions.

### What is a CIP?

The [CIP Pilot 2023/2024](#) captured vital new knowledge about co-creation methodologies and the roles of communities and non-academic partners promoting more inclusive models of innovation. You can read the [CIP Case Studies](#) and [Policy Papers](#) on the Creative Communities website or listen to the [Creative Communities podcast](#) to hear from the CIPs, their communities and partners.

Building upon the success of the Community Innovation Practitioner (CIP) Pilot 2023/2024, the 2025-6 CIP Awards offers a new opportunity to co-create R&D with communities and cross-sector partners across the devolved nations and regions of the UK. Each CIP will consider the role of co-creation and cross-sector collaboration in the understanding and development of culture within devolved delivery contexts, aligning with the new UK government missions of **growth, regional inequality, belonging**, and **equalising opportunity, within a context of national and regional devolution**

Successful 2025-6 CIP Award holders will:

- Engage in co-design, co-creation and co-evaluation in collaborative R&D, drawing on appropriate qualitative and participatory research methods;
- Produce research reports and other outputs including briefing papers, blogs, and other engagement updates and outputs;
- Ensure quality control and commitment to ethical standards is maintained in relevant research projects;
- Manage project progress and provide updates to the Creative Communities programme team and other key stakeholders. Contribute towards project monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning;
- Contribute to the external communication of research outputs and support research dissemination processes through attendance at meetings and other events and the production of a case study on the CIP programme of work;
- Connect with the Creative Communities and with other CIPs through a learning network to share cross-nation policy co-creation and learning

## Outputs

### Case Study

Each CIP will generate a 2500-word case study delivered August 2026 that will provide a contextual deep dive into their collaborative R&D and relating this to the devolved policy contexts of the four nations and regions, as well as to central government.

### Policy Paper

Each CIP will generate a 1000-word policy paper by August 2026 that will draw on the findings of the CIP case study to make explicit policy recommendations to relevant policymakers and governing bodies, as well as other key stakeholders within the CIP area of research interest.

### Podcast

The CIPs will be supported in contributing to the co-production of a podcast series addressing the core Award thematic of belonging, equalising opportunity, growth, and regional inequality. These themes will act as structuring principles for the podcast to profile the voices of Creative Communities and their stakeholders across the UK. The CIPs will be provided with in-kind professional support on podcasting, media skills and community researcher training via remote CPD by Northumbria University. **A minimum £500 for the procurement and use of specialist podcast recording equipment must be incorporated in the proposed CIP project budget.**

## CIP Network

The CIPs will be supported by the Creative Communities team to form a national Community of Practice for the duration of the programme. This will include monthly 1-1 mentorship between the CIP and CC team; a 12-week programme of training activities and knowledge exchange via virtual network sessions including the CIPs, CC team, and invited guests; and policy and impact workshops and events. **£4500 of the budget must be retained as a travel and public engagement fund for use by the CIP. Around 50 hours of CIP time must be factored into the CIP activity plans to enable these activities.**

## How Will It Work?

Funding of **£75,000 is available for each CIP Award**. Awards will be paid by Northumbria University to the successful HEI host organisation at **100% fEC**. **£4500 of the budget must be retained as a travel and public engagement fund for use by the CIP. £500 must be retained for the procurement and/or use of podcast recording equipment**. The remaining £70,000 must be dedicated to CIP staff costs, and/or the costs of any project partner staff time.

Creative Communities recognises that there are multiple ways the CIP role, and therefore the use of the budget, may be modelled. Detailed budgets will be requested at the invited **application stage**.

Successful applicant teams will be required to engage in line management, reporting and governance relating to their CIP, working with the Creative Communities on **monitoring and evaluation**.

## Timeline

Activity	Deadline
<b>Stage 1 – Eligibility &amp; Expression of Interest</b>	
CIP Awards Application Portal Opens	7 October 2024
CIP Pilot Showcase Webinar	23 October 2024, 11am (UK time)
CIP Awards Webinar	13 November 2024, 11am (UK time)
CIP Awards Application Portal Closes	6 January 2025, 4pm (UK time)
Outcome Notifications	27 January 2025
<b>Stage 2 – Full Awards Application</b>	
CIP Awards Application Portal Opens	27 January 2025
Application Development Surgeries	February, March & April 2025
CIP Awards Application Portal Closes	28 April 2025, 4pm (UK time)
Outcome Notifications	May 2025
CIP Research Start	September 2025
CIP Research Close	September 2026

## How To Apply

To apply for this funding opportunity, you must:

**Stage 1.** Complete an eligibility assessment to demonstrate meeting the full eligibility criteria and submit a **500-word expression of interest** that outlines your project proposal.

**Should your expression of interest project proposal meet the minimum standard for the assessment criteria, you will then be invited to:**

**Stage 2.** Submit a **full application**, consisting of either:

- a. **Written** application consisting of 4 x 250-word written responses to 4 research questions (max 1000-words); *OR*
- b. **Video application** consisting of oral and/or visual responses to 4 research questions (max 8 minutes).

Joint applications from 2 or more eligible HEIs/IROs are welcomed, but applications must stipulate a lead HEI/IRO that will submit the application, be the central recipient of funding from Creative Communities, and be responsible for the employment and line management of the CIP and reporting on the project. Joint applications must name a Co-Lead from the secondary partner HEI/IRO. All joint applications must include full details of how CIPs travel, communication, and project management will be structured and shared between the HEIs/IROs.

### Submitting your Application

Written applications must be submitted through an online application portal hosted by Gecko Forms accessible via the Creative Communities website. Please refer to the CIP Awards Applicant Guide for full details of the application process, including the structure of the application forms and questions.

### Deadline

**Stage 1: Eligibility Assessment & Expression of Interest:** We must receive your eligibility assessment & expression of interest submission by **Monday 6 January 2025 at 4pm** UK time. You will not be able to apply after this time.

**Stage 2: Full Application:** Invitations to submit a full application for the CIP Awards will be sent 27 January 2025. The submission deadline for invited full applications is **28 April 2025 at 4pm** UK time.

## Assessment Criteria

All applications will be scored on their ability to demonstrate excellence across the following equally weighted categories:

<b>Leadership &amp; Capacity</b>	Overview of the CIP project plan, including project team, with a clear vision for integration of the CIP role, articulating effective and clear lines of management, responsibility, and accountability.
<b>Co-Creation</b>	Articulate how the proposed CIP project plan will benefit the existing research project(s) and its partners and deliver outputs and outcomes that are relevant to Creative Communities core themes, as well as the research context, regional place and impact agendas, and wider stakeholders.
<b>Cross-Sector Collaboration and Partnerships</b>	Define what partners and collaborative relationships are in place, and the role of these partners in the project plan. Where partnerships are yet to be secured, there must be detailed plans for expanding and strengthening partnerships, with information on the approach to be taken to welcome and include new partners and sectors through equitable partnership working.
<b>Geographical Spread</b>	<p>Reflect the programme objective of delivering place-based activities and outputs that are contextually relevant and addresses regional inequalities in collaborative R&amp;D opportunities within devolved contexts. The highest scoring proposals from each nation of the UK will be automatically awarded (4 Awards). The highest scoring cross-nation proposal will be automatically awarded (1 Award). The 5 remaining Awards will be allocated to the remaining highest scoring proposals.</p> <p>In the case that one nation does not meet the threshold score for awarding, priority will be to allocate to the next devolved nation application with the highest score.</p> <p>Proposals that have received the same final score may be re-ranked to facilitate this. The final decision on portfolio coverage will be taken by UKRI.</p>
<b>Added Value and Strategic Delivery</b>	Evidence that issues relating to equality, diversity, inclusion, risk, ethics and environmental sustainability have been considered throughout the proposal and in relation to each of the assessment criteria. CIPs must be in role September 2025 to September 2026. Applicant project plans must present a clear delivery plan that is adaptable to the needs of the context, with outcomes that are achievable and measurable within budget and timeframe and demonstrate planning for ethics and safeguarding for managing the health, safety and wellbeing of CIPs and project partners.



**Northumbria University will be responsible for administering the Awards. The funding will be subject to UKRI terms and conditions in addition to the requirements set out in this funding document.**

### **Contact Details**

The Creative Communities team is led by Professor Katy Shaw, supported by Senior Research Fellows Dr. Lauren Baker Mitchell and Helen Apsey, and Programme Co-ordinator Samantha Peel. One member of the AHRC Creative Communities research team will work with each of the Award holders and CIPs. Questions relating to the funding can be sent to: [ad.ahrc.creative.communities@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:ad.ahrc.creative.communities@northumbria.ac.uk)