



Call Specification

Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund 2025/26

July 2025



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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide potential applicants with the information needed to submit a Business Case application to the Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund 2025/26.

The Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund 2025/26 directly supports the Mayoral objectives of ‘a home to world-class sporting and cultural venues and events, underpinned by eclectic and fast-changing grassroots creativity and energy’ as part of our new Corporate Plan. The Programme therefore contributes to the following missions:

- *‘A home of real opportunity’ – ‘by growing our cultural and sporting sectors’; and,*
- *‘A North East we are proud to call home’ – developing a ‘thriving creative economy’ and working to ‘establish and deliver a regional event and culture programme’.*

This Call Specification sets out the funding priorities and explains the application process, applicant conditions and requirements, and the indicative timetable. Applicants are encouraged to pay close attention to the content of this Call Specification, including the specified criteria and priorities.

2. Background and Strategic Context

The North East recognises the benefits that events can bring to the region, whether socially, economically and reputationally. We are seeking proposals for investment to deliver capacity development activity which will help position regional capability and develop knowledge and skills in advance of a longer-term regional events strategy being implemented from 2026/27.

There is already a thriving events ecology across the North East and the Mayor and North East CA has committed to support its further growth and development, collaborating with partners and stakeholders. By creating ‘world-class’ and impactful events, we will attract high spending visitors providing them with memorable cultural and sporting experiences, whilst also driving local engagement, enriching, and benefiting residents and communities through improved wellbeing, sense of pride, and understanding of our diverse cultures.

Culture, creativity, heritage, tourism, and sport help define who we are as a region; it’s our showcase to the world and a source of pride for everyone who calls it home. The focus of the portfolio is therefore on delivering a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive economy by leveraging and realising the region’s cultural, creative, heritage, visitor and sport assets and opportunities in line with the Mayor’s Manifesto commitments and the Local Growth Plan. This includes our approach to the development and delivery of a regional events programme, now and into the future, which aims to address the following overarching objectives:

- To support and proactively contribute to regional inclusive economic growth, capitalising on the values and opportunities that are unique and specific to the region.
- To strengthen a sense of place: leveraging the organisations, activity, sectors, spaces and communities in the region, to shape and strengthen our identity and raise pride, improve belonging, and ignite the aspirations of our communities.
- To increase internationalisation and investment: growing the visitor economy across the region and raising the region’s national and global profile to build new relationships and attract new investment.

- To improve and grow jobs creating sustainable growth: supporting our businesses, organisations and freelancers to grow, thrive and create high-quality jobs in industries across this portfolio, working to attract new and regional young talent to these opportunities.
- To strengthen skills and training for the sector, and to strengthen employment routeways, recognising its importance as part of the wider foundational economy.
- To support health and wellbeing: unlocking a broad range of opportunities in our cultural, sporting and heritage assets that will enable residents to live healthier lives and improve their wellbeing.
- To support the ambitions of the regional visitor economy strategy in doubling the value of the visitor economy and our regenerative framework which ensures that all of our activity has a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region.
- To optimally position the investment and convening power of North East CA as part of a broader programme of events delivered within the region.

3. Events and Festivals Capacity Development Funding Aims

The North East CA is in the process of developing a long term strategic approach to regional events. This will build on investment recently made in an early events programme in the current financial year.

The Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund is focused on ensuring that opportunity is realised for event deliverers / event organisations in the region to develop their capacity to produce and deliver impactful events programmes. This is intended to help deliverers and organisations with increased momentum and capacity, providing the opportunity to support longer-term approaches for events that help to build scale, reach, creative ambition, sustainability and impact in the region.

Funding as a result of this Call will prioritise projects which support capacity development in the festivals and events sector helping to develop, for example, through improved marketing, delivery and logistics, and enhanced coordination across the region.

Through this Call the North East CA aims to support a portfolio of projects that demonstrably build on best practice and helps to move the regional offer forward, by supporting projects and approaches that are distinctive and of high-quality, and rooted in the culture of the area, attracting significant numbers of local residents and visitors and with the potential to grow.

We also see this Call supporting projects that are in line with our [Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework](#), which ensures that all our activity has a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region.

Funding from this Call is available from the date of launch (23rd July 2025) to 31st March 2026 inclusive.

4. Scope of Funding Call and Eligible Expenditure

The North East CA has agreed an indicative allocation for the Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund of up to £345,000 to support projects within financial year 2025/26.

The minimum North East CA grant investment will be £20,000 and the maximum £40,000 (*any request for funding from the North East CA above or below these stated minimum and maximum funding values will not be assessed*).

The North East CA reserves the right to decrease or increase the indicative allocation above or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received and funding available.

Eligible Expenditure

Cost Categories:

- Travel & Expenses
- Materials & Consumables
- Training
- Marketing & Promotion
- Consultancy / Fees
- Evaluation Costs

5. Eligibility Criteria

In order to deliver investment in a compliant and timely manner, this Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund Call is targeted at sector deliverers and practitioners based in the North East CA region only.

We recognise that any application made to this Call requires a reasonable level of commitment in terms of your time. Given this, if appropriate, we would welcome applications from consortia where there is the opportunity to combine resources and share an approach to the application.

All interventions should be focused on activity which is delivered within the North East CA area (*County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, and Sunderland*).

Organisations that manage or deliver culture, heritage and sporting events or festivals.

Organisations can be for profit, not for profit but must be constituted and have a company / organisational bank account.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate a track record of successful event / festival delivery in the North East CA region over the past 2-5 years.

Individuals cannot apply but can benefit from capacity building activity e.g., training programmes, and freelance opportunities.

Local Authority led events / festivals are **NOT** eligible to apply to this fund.

6. In Scope Activities (*not an exhaustive list*)

- Dedicated marketing support and skills development e.g., digital / social media.
- Specialist consultancy / support to strengthen audience development and reach, particularly into underserved communities and neighbourhoods.
- Specialist consultancy / support to develop new income generation models and / or improve organisational efficiency.

- Support to improve event management / health and safety, e.g., training provision, contracting specialist expertise; supporting staff / volunteers to achieve relevant qualifications.
- Contracting freelancers to provide specialist services e.g., producers, stage managers and support organisational capacity (project and event planning).
- Training and support for volunteers, temporary staff, trustees.
- Upskilling staff, via training, work shadowing, mentoring etc.
- Strengthening networks and knowledge and skills exchange across the sector; exploring models of shared or co-located services with other festival/event organisations to reduce costs and increase quality.

7. Out of Scope Activities

- Events and Festivals Capacity Development Funding cannot be used to create or deliver an entirely new festival or event.
- Events and Festivals Capacity Development Funding cannot be used to pay for festival / event content, or to subsidise usual activity costs e.g., apply to pay for a more expensive headline act, to draw a bigger crowd.
- Visiting other festivals and events, unless you can evidence skills development for staff and volunteers and demonstrate how this will support organisational capacity and programme quality and reach.

8. Expected Outcomes

Whilst there are no specific outputs associated with the Call Specification, successful applicants will be expected to demonstrate the following outcomes upon successful completion of their project:

- Additional revenue / income generated.
- Volunteers or staff trained, evidence of specialist qualifications.
- Better Business Plan.
- Better fundraising / income generation strategy.
- Increased sales / income at event.
- Better / new marketing plan or audience development strategy.
- Evidence that marketing has led to increased attendance.
- Evaluation strategy, to inform future planning and development.
- Improved audience feedback and data collection.
- New networks established for knowledge and skills exchange.
- New suppliers / supply chains established to reduce costs or provide better value.

9. Assessment Process

The assessment of Applications is undertaken in stages, as follows:

- **Stage 1:** Evaluation of the response to the eligibility criteria in the application form. Applicants will either Pass or Fail at Stage 1.
- **Stage 2:** Due diligence assessment - before applications are presented to the assessment panel, the North East CA will conduct a detailed review to ensure all necessary checks are completed.
 - Financial documentation: applicants must provide their most recent set of audited financial account or equivalent.

- Clarifications: If needed, additional information or clarifications may be requested at this stage.
- **Stage 3:** Applications will be evaluated by the assessment panel using the criteria and designated weightings set out below in the scoring methodology. The assessment panel will individually score responses to the questions and then come together to moderate and produce a single score for each Applicant's response to each question.
- **Stage 4:** Where clarifications are needed, applicants will be emailed clarification questions. Clarifications will not be scored, but the results will be used to amend application evaluation scores in relation to relevant parts of an application. Clarifications will not be requested where average panel scores are zero.

Where there are similar areas of clarification across multiple project submissions, all applicants will be contacted and asked the same question to ensure transparency and equality of opportunity.

- **Stage 5:** The assessment panel will then submit a recommendation for a final decision to the North East CA. The panel's recommendations will be subject to final approval by the North East CA. There are no grounds for appealing final decisions. It is anticipated that applicants will be notified of decisions in August 2025.

Application Questions

The following questions will be scored:

Question 1 – Project Description (max 1000 words)	Please provide an overview of your project, with reference to how the project addresses the requirements of the Call Specification.
Question 2 – Build on Best Practice (max 500 words)	Please demonstrate how your project can build on best practice and helps to move the regional offer forward. Describe how your project is distinctive and of high-quality.
Question 3 – Potential to Grow (max 500 words)	Please describe how your project is rooted in the culture of the area, and how it will attract significant numbers of local residents and visitors and with the potential to grow.
Question 4 – Expected Outcomes (max 1000 words)	Please demonstrate how your project supports capacity development in the festivals and events sector, helping to develop, for example – improved marketing, delivery and logistics, and enhanced coordination across the region.
Question 5 – Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework (max 500 words)	Please describe how your project aligns with our Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework – ensuring a positive impact on the communities in which it takes place and supports our ambitions as a net zero region.

Scores will be weighted in accordance with the weightings allocated to each question, as stated in the table below. The responses to the questions not listed below are for information and will not be scored.

Question	Word limit	Weighting
Question 1 – Project Description	1000 words	30%
Question 2 – Build on Best Practice	500 words	15%
Question 3 – Potential to Grow	500 words	15%
Question 4 – Expected Outcomes	1000 words	25%
Question 5 – Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework	500 words	15%

You **must complete all sections** of the Application. Any responses that are longer than the word limits will not be assessed beyond the stated word limit. If any section is not completed or averages a zero score the assessment panel will cease assessing and dismiss the application as not meeting the minimum threshold.

Assessment question scoring methodology

The Applicants' responses to each of the questions will be evaluated and given a score from 0 (zero) to 5 (five) in accordance with the scoring criteria, set out below.

All applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

Score	Interpretation
0 Unacceptable	The response does not meet the requirement, does not comply or there is insufficient information provided to demonstrate that the applicant has the ability, understanding, experience, skills, resource and quality measures required to deliver the project. Little or no evidence is provided to support the response.
1 Serious reservations	The response satisfies the requirement with major reservations. There are considerable reservations of the applicant's relevant ability, understanding, experience, skills, resource and quality measures required to deliver the project.
2 Minor reservations	The response satisfies the requirement with minor reservations. There are some minor reservations of the applicant's relevant ability, understanding, experience, skills, resource and quality measures required to deliver the project, with little or no evidence to support the response.
3 Acceptable	The response satisfies the requirement. There is a demonstration by the applicant of the relevant ability, understanding, experience, skills, resource and quality measures required to deliver the project, with evidence to support the response.
4 Good	The response satisfies the requirement with minor additional benefits. The applicant demonstrates the relevant ability, understanding, experience, skills, resource and quality measure required to deliver the project.
5 Excellent	The response identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with evidence to support the response.

The North East CA reserves the right to reject any Application that is not fully completed.

10. Allocating Funding

The highest ranked Applicant(s) will be considered for the award of a grant agreement, subject to the appropriate coverage of criteria (aims set out in the Call Specification) and successfully

passing the due diligence process and having capability and capacity to deliver within the timeframe.

From the initial submissions received, if the North East CA do not have sufficient coverage of criteria (aims set out in this Call Specification) then the North East CA will enter into negotiations with bidders to discuss their initial submission and ensure that there is sufficient coverage. This will be done on a ranking basis.

The North East CA will use the overall final evaluation score to prioritise allocations. Overall scores will be ranked from highest to lowest and grant agreements will be awarded on this basis until it is no longer possible to award any more agreements within the indicative total funding value. The North East CA reserves the right not to allocate the full indicative funding value.

Where two or more Applicants have identical scores and the North East CA budget will not allow for all Applicants to be awarded grant agreements, the unit price will be used to shortlist / select projects. This will be done by priority and on a ranking basis, with the lowest unit cost ranked first.

11. Application Process

The Events and Festivals Capacity Development Fund Call will launch on **Wednesday 23rd July 2025**.

Please send your completed Business Case application and Finance Tables to lesley.strickland@northeast-ca.gov.uk by **5pm, Tuesday 12th August 2025**.

Applications will be assessed via a panel on **Tuesday 19th August 2025**.

Dates & Deadlines	<p>Call launches: Wednesday 23rd July 2025</p> <p>Deadline for applications: 5pm, Tuesday 12th August 2025 <i>Questions and clarifications permitted in this period.</i></p> <p>Assessment/Appraisal: Tuesday 19th August 2025</p> <p>Applicants will be notified of the outcome: Thursday 21st August 2025</p> <p>Projects delivered by: Tuesday 31st March 2026</p> <p><i>The North East CA reserves the right to change the dates and the number of stages in the application process subject to the volume and quality of proposals received.</i></p>
Indicative Fund Allocation	<p>The North East CA has agreed a budget of up to £345,000 to support the delivery of capacity development activity in financial year 2025/26.</p> <p>The North East CA anticipates supporting multiple projects dependent on levels of investment sought per event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimum grant investment: £20,000 ▪ Maximum grant investment: £40,000 <p><i>The North East CA reserves the right to decrease or increase the indicative allocation or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received.</i></p>

Funding Duration and Timescale for all Expenditure	Up to 31 st March 2026.
Added Value	Applicants are expected to submit proposals that demonstrate additionality. The North East CA funding is not intended to replace or displace existing funding.
Geographical Scope	All interventions should be focused on activity within the North East CA area, though delivery partners within consortia from outside of the area are welcome.
Deadlines	The deadline for applications is 5pm, Tuesday 12th August 2025.
Eligible Applicants	Successful Applicants will receive a North East CA Grant Funding Agreement and will carry the liability for ensuring that the terms of the Funding Agreement are met by all delivery partners. In the case of consortia or partnership applications, it is expected that the funded organisation will act as lead organisation/accountable body and will carry the responsibility and liability for the project.