

# Guidance for Applicants v1.3

## CreaTech Frontiers – Foundations Funding Call

### Introduction

This is the inaugural funding call of CreaTech Frontiers, as we begin to lay the foundations of our work. This first call is aimed at freelancers, microbusinesses and SMEs. We want to fund truly innovative ideas and the development of innovative content, products and services using creative technologies. Our grants will be complemented by individual Research and Development (R&D) support from academics at Birmingham City University, Coventry University, University of Birmingham, University of Warwick and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

### What is CreaTech Frontiers?

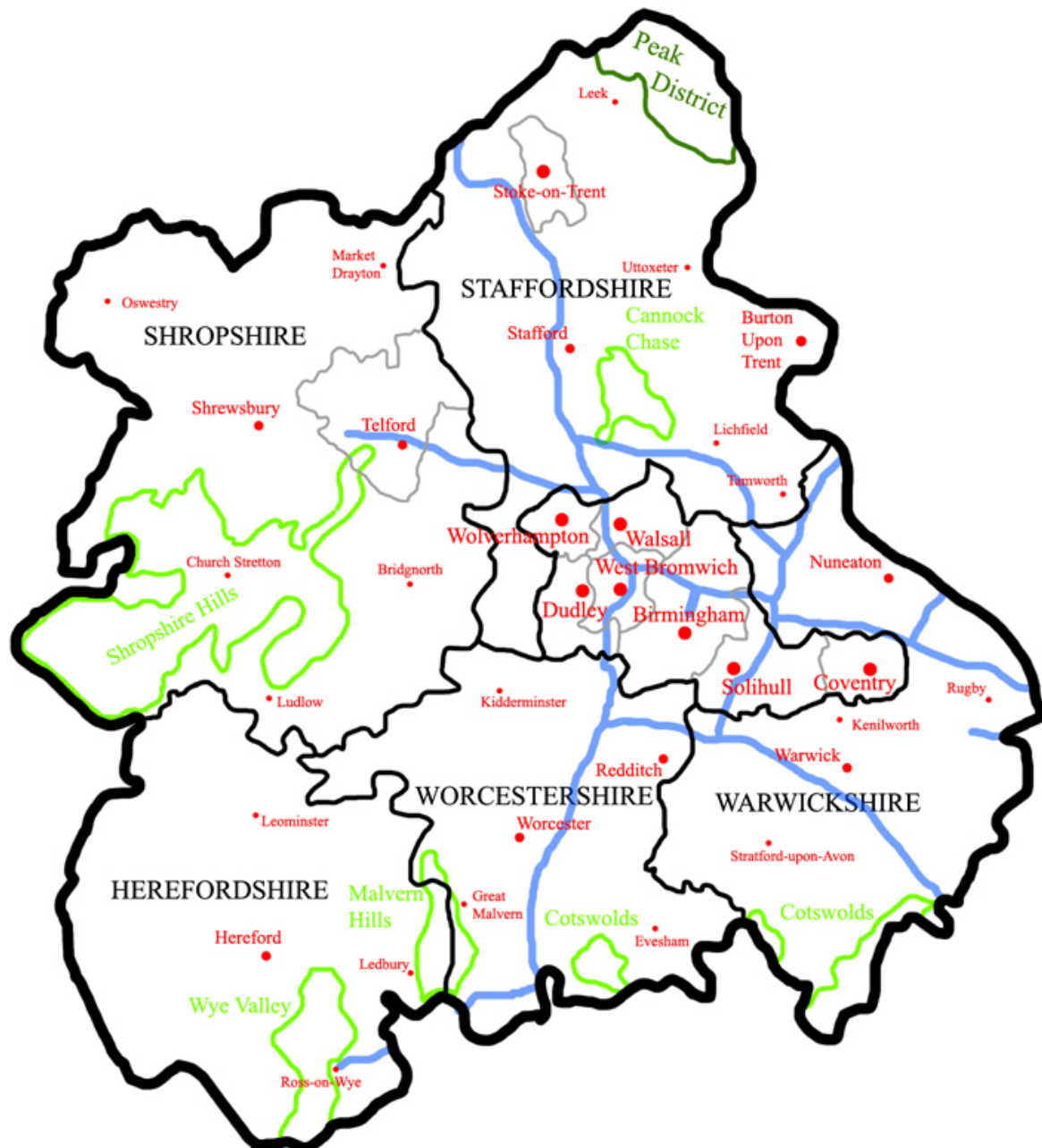
CreaTech Frontiers is the creative industries cluster for the West Midlands funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. CreaTech Frontiers aims to transform creative productions, practices and policies through inclusive innovation. Each strand of CreaTech R&D brings together creative companies, creative practitioners and academics to develop a stronger, more integrated and responsive CreaTech ecosystem in the West Midlands. All R&D activities will follow principles of responsible innovation, environmental sustainability and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We expect that this framework will empower grant beneficiaries to examine their own practice and their approach to technology, leading to ethical and sustainable creative content, products or services that enrich the human experience.

### Key dates

|                            |                                          |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 2nd June 2025              | Applications submission opens            |
| 21st July 2025, 13:00 BST  | Project Overview deadline                |
| 4th August 2025, 13:00 BST | Application submission deadline          |
| 1st October 2025           | Applicants informed of review outcome    |
| By 1st November 2025       | Contracts to successful grant recipients |
| By 1st December 2025       | R&D activity starts                      |
| By 30th April 2026         | R&D activity ends                        |

# Eligibility

1. You must be a freelancer, microbusiness or SME
2. You must be aged 18 or over
3. Your application must be aligned to one of CreaTech Frontiers R&D themes
4. You must have a registered address in the West Midlands region as shown below (including Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire)



Chris Bayley

## Two strands

In the Foundations call there are two strands open for application: EXPLORE (up to £5,000) and EXPERIMENT (up to £10,000). You must select ONE strand only for your application, and you can submit ONE application only. Applications made to both strands will not be considered. Therefore, please select the most appropriate strand for the needs of your project. In this initial Foundations funding call we expect to disburse up to £250,000 for 30-40 individual grants across the EXPLORE and EXPERIMENT strands.

### **EXPLORE (up to £5,000)**

The EXPLORE grants support R&D collaboration and the initial exploration of ideas for innovative content, products, technologies or services.

EXPLORE grants award up to £5k of funding, with further support of between 5 to 10 days of academic support for R&D, determined at the point of grant allocation. Grant recipients will also have access to the CreaTech labs hosted at the core partner institutions. With EXPLORE grants you will be introduced to collaborative R&D, and you will test innovative ideas around responsible and human-centred applications of creative technologies.

### **EXPERIMENT (up to £10,000)**

EXPERIMENT grants are for the development of existing concepts, projects or prototypes for innovative content, products or services through collaborative R&D.

EXPERIMENT grants award up to £10k of funding alongside 10 to 20 days of academic support. Grant recipients will also have access to the CreaTech labs hosted at the core partner institutions. With EXPERIMENT grants you will develop your concepts, projects or prototypes around responsible and human-centred applications of creative technologies.

## What are we looking for?

We want to help you develop new innovative ideas (£5k grants) or existing innovative concepts and prototypes (£10k grants) in the following creative technologies R&D themes:

1. Beyond games (for example world building; game engine development; gamification and AI)
2. Enabling technologies for creative outputs (for example AI, ML, data, haptics, robotics, cloud computing, future networks)
3. Immersive (for example XR, immersive audio)

4. Live performance (for example music and AI; augmented performance; digital storytelling)
5. Screen (for example virtual production; sustainability in media productions)
6. Visual arts (for example digital museums and heritage; digital content creation)
7. Createch research (for example environmental, social and economic sustainability of creative applications of technology; EDI issues; cultural, social and economic challenges)
8. Other (something amazing we haven't thought of)

## Further calls

CreaTech Frontiers' second funding call co-designed with industry will be announced in autumn 2025, welcoming new applications for larger grants to develop concepts, products, services and content and including R&D collaborations with CreaTech Frontiers industry partners.

Expect two further similar calls per year across 2026/2027/2028/2029, depending on the outcomes of the first ones.

Two further calls delivered in collaboration with our partner Digital Catapult are planned for 4x £50k grants focusing on creative applications of generative AI and 4x £50k grants focusing on creative services to high-growth industry sectors of the West Midlands.

## Before Submission

The EXPLORE and EXPERIMENT strands have the same application process.

CreaTech Frontiers uses a double-blind review process. This means that all personal information submitted as part of the application form will not be made available to the reviewers of your submission. However, to ensure the funded projects are geographically spread across the region, postcodes will be reviewed during the final assessment stage.

The submission must include all information necessary for reviewers to evaluate it, and applicants must not ask reviewers to go to web sites or other external information sources, since that may jeopardize or bias the review process.

**Ethics and Responsibility:** All submissions describing research experiments with human participants must follow the appropriate ethical guidelines. If you require further guidance on this aspect during the application submission period, please contact the CreaTech Frontiers team at [grants@createchfrontiers.com](mailto:grants@createchfrontiers.com).

## Eligible costs

Eligible costs for both EXPLORE and EXPERIMENT strands:

- Project development, paid development and training time for freelancers
- Planning, research and idea development
- Materials and equipment
- Purchase or rental of materials, equipment, software licences and other technical tools
- Payment to collaborators, mentors, technical support and other professionals involved in the project
- Training fees
- Formal or informal support or learning related to the project
- Travel, accommodation and subsistence
- Collaborations, residencies, attending relevant events, workshops or project-related activities
- Venue hire
- Studios or spaces required for project development
- Access and inclusion
- Costs that support accessible, diverse and inclusive audience engagement and participation (eg sign language interpreters, captioning, creating accessible formats, etc).

Access provisions for applicants such as support workers, interpreters and travel costs associated with removing barriers to working do not need to be included in this budget. We will ask all successful applicants for details of their access requirements at the start of the programme, and work with them to ensure the proper resources are in place.

## Submission Process

Applications will be submitted electronically through the online form on the CreaTech Frontiers website [<https://createchfrontiers.com>]. You will be asked to create an account with Formsite to access the online application form.

### Project Overview deadline (Monday 21st July 2025 13:00 BST)

You are required to complete sections A, B and C of the application form before 21st July 13:00 BST to help us determine in advance the reviewers with the appropriate expertise for each application. Please note that this deadline includes the sections titled "Grant" (section A), "About You" (section B) and "Project Outline" (section C).

Please don't submit the form at the Project Overview deadline. You will be able to continue editing and updating these sections before the application deadline on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> August.

## Application Deadline (4th August 2025 13:00 BST)

You are required to complete and submit your application in full by the deadline of Monday 4th August 2025, 13:00 BST. At this point the application submission system will close, and no further applications will be accepted.

## After Submission

Initially, we will check your application's eligibility. If it is ineligible, your application will not be reviewed. We will let you know straight away and guide you towards further support and forthcoming CreaTech Frontiers funding calls.

If your application is eligible, it will follow a two-stage reviewing process. In the first stage, it will be reviewed by at least two academics, and a consensual recommendation will be reached. Reviewers will score applications as follows:

### Main assessment criteria (75%)

- How innovative is the idea? (50%)
- How feasible is the proposal? (25%)

### Additional assessment criteria (25%)

- Have elements of responsible innovation, EDI, and sustainability been considered, and how?

In the second stage, we will hold panel meetings with both academic and industry members to make the final decision on which applications will be funded, considering our available resources and the thematic and geographical spread of the projects.

In some cases, a project may be recommended for funding under a different strand. Applications to the EXPERIMENT strand may be awarded funding under the EXPLORE strand and vice versa. We reserve the right to make decisions on which funding best aligns to the needs of the submitted project and the priorities of CreaTech Frontiers.

## Assessment outcome

We will notify all successful applicants no later than 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025. Unsuccessful applicants will be invited to take part in CreaTech Frontiers activities specifically designed to support freelancers and businesses in developing innovative ideas and projects.

## Timeline of funded projects

We will aim to prepare grant agreements and disburse 80% of the grant by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025. All funded R&D projects must start by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 and R&D activity will need to be completed by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026. The final 20% of the grant will be paid on receipt of a short final report with details on how the grant has been spent and the outcomes of the R&D activity.

## Academic support and access to labs

All grant recipients will be offered from 5 to 20 days (depending on the strand and the specific needs of their project) of dedicated R&D support provided by one or more academics and/or researchers from the four partner universities (Birmingham City University, Coventry University, University of Birmingham, University of Warwick) and the Royal Shakespeare Company. The R&D collaborations will make use of the equipment available in the four CreaTech Labs hosted by the four universities. Mobile equipment will also be available from the RSC. Grant recipients will retain the intellectual property for everything they create and develop through R&D and academic support\*.

## Annex

### Academics R&D pool

Several academics from the CreaTech Frontiers participating universities have agreed to offer their expertise to support R&D collaborations. The list below contains the names of all the academics that can take part in R&D activities to support grant recipients. Applicants can refer to one or more of these academics in their application (this is not a requirement), otherwise we will match successful applicants with academics that have the relevant expertise for their projects.

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\*Unless exploiting already existing IP from the partner organisations.

| Theme               | Name                   | Uni        | Specialism                                                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Beyond games     | Petros Lameris         | Coventry   | Generative AI, gamification                                       |
| 1. Beyond games     | Sylvester Arnab        | Coventry   | Gaming, gamification                                              |
| 1. Beyond games     | Huanjia Ma             | Birmingham | Gaming                                                            |
| 1. Beyond games     | Feng Mao               | Warwick    | Sustainability in gaming                                          |
| 1. Beyond games     | Kurt Debattista        | Warwick    | Visual computing, gamification                                    |
| 1. Beyond games     | Tom Bashford Rogers    | Warwick    | Games engineering and computer graphics                           |
| 2. Enabling tech    | Vahid Javidroozi       | BCU        | AI applications                                                   |
| 2. Enabling tech    | Kevin Walker           | Coventry   | AI in performance                                                 |
| 2. Enabling tech    | Chris Baber            | Birmingham | Pervasive and ubiquitous computing                                |
| 3. Enabling tech    | Ian Williams           | BCU        | Visual computing, XR                                              |
| 3. Immersive        | Chris Creed            | BCU        | HCI, assistive technologies, affective computing, AR/VR           |
| 3. Immersive        | Maite Frutos-Pascual   | BCU        | HCI, assistive technologies, affective computing, AR/VR           |
| 3. Immersive        | Poppy Wilde            | BCU        | Immersive media                                                   |
| 3. Immersive        | Scott Wilson           | Birmingham | Immersive audio, interactive music systems                        |
| 4. Live performance | Aleksandar Dundjerović | BCU        | Digital performativity                                            |
| 4. Live performance | Joe Wright             | BCU        | Music interaction design, augmented performance                   |
| 4. Live performance | Islah Ali-Mac Lachlan  | BCU        | Computational musicology, soundscape, acoustics in product design |
| 4. Live performance | Ravi Deepres           | BCU        | Augmented performance                                             |
| 4. Live performance | Boyd Branch            | Coventry   | Augmented performance                                             |
| 4. Live performance | Ruth Gibson            | Coventry   | Augmented performance                                             |
| 4. Live performance | Sarah Whatley          | Coventry   | Augmented dance                                                   |
| 4. Live performance | Annie Mahtani          | Birmingham | Sound art, sound installations, electronic music                  |



|                     |                    |            |                                                                                   |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. Live performance | Joanna Bucknell    | Birmingham | Augmented performance                                                             |
| 4. Live performance | Chris Mapp         | Warwick    | Live music performance and improvisation                                          |
| 4. Live performance | Xiaobing Li        | CCOM       | AI in music composition and live performance (China)                              |
| 4. Live performance | Yixuan Zhao        | CCOM       | AI in music composition and live performance (China)                              |
| 5. Screen           | Mathew Randall     | BCU        | Virtual production, VFX                                                           |
| 5. Screen           | Pietari Kaapa      | Warwick    | Sustainability in media production                                                |
| 6. Visual arts      | Becky Shaw         | BCU        | Place-based art practice                                                          |
| 6. Visual arts      | Ben Kyneswood      | Coventry   | Performing Archives                                                               |
| 6. Visual arts      | Phaedra Shanbaum   | Coventry   | New Media Arts, AI                                                                |
| 6. Visual arts      | Edward Loveman     | Warwick    | Sustainable design                                                                |
| 6. Visual arts      | Jamie Larkin       | Warwick    | Museums and digital media                                                         |
| 7. Createch         | Nick Henry         | Coventry   | Evaluating the cluster                                                            |
| 7. Createch         | Victoria Barker    | Coventry   | Business models, evaluation, policy, cluster development                          |
| 7. Createch         | Chen Zhu           | Birmingham | Creative IP challenges                                                            |
| 7. Createch         | James Davies       | Birmingham | Measuring economic impact and identifying trends of creative sectors and clusters |
| 7. Createch         | Matthew Lyons      | Birmingham | Measuring economic impact with proprietary model designed for the creative sector |
| 7. Createch         | Christopher Bilton | Warwick    | Future of creative work/skills                                                    |
| 7. Createch         | Heidi Ashton       | Warwick    | Future of creative work/skills                                                    |

## Facilities and equipment for R&D

CreaTech Lab, STEAMhouse, Birmingham City University: [partial list of available equipment](#)