



Live & Immersive Innovation Fund

Call for Expressions of Interest



Guidance for Applicants



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## 1. Introduction

The second round of CreaTech Frontiers funding focuses on live performance and immersive experiences. It is aimed at freelancers, microbusinesses and SMEs. The budget for this call is £250,000, and we will be awarding ten grants of £25,000 each.

We are seeking to fund frontier innovation in live performance and immersive experiences. Frontier innovation means going beyond what's currently possible. We are looking for bold R&D projects that use creative technology to reimagine live performance or immersive experiences. We are interested in transformative projects exploring how audiences encounter, participate in, and interact with creative work. If you need to experiment to get there, that's exactly the point.

We will not fund projects and productions that use existing technologies without demonstrable creative innovation, projects where the role for R&D is not clearly articulated, content that is recorded or post-produced without live or participatory elements (film, albums, podcasts), projects that are primarily games, and purely theoretical research without a practical R&D component.

Each grant will be complemented by a dedicated Research and Development (R&D) programme designed in collaboration with the grant holder, and involving academics, technologists and experts from CreaTech Frontiers core partners – Birmingham City University, Coventry University, the University of Birmingham, the University of Warwick, the Royal Shakespeare Company and Digital Catapult – and [industry partners](#).

## 2. Live Performance and Immersive Experiences

The Live & Immersive Innovation Fund supports R&D and innovation in two closely related areas: Live Performance and Immersive Experiences. Your project can belong in either area. Projects that sit at the intersection of both are equally welcome.

Live Performance encompasses projects where creative technologies are used to augment, extend, or transform a live event (e.g. music, dance, theatre, sports, circus acts, street performances). Human performers and an audience share an experience in real time — whether in the same space, remotely, or both. Projects must centre on human expression through performance, with technology supporting, shaping, or augmenting the work rather than replacing the performer.

Immersive Experiences encompass projects where creative technologies are used to construct environments — physical, digital, or blended — that envelop participants, placing them at the centre of the experience. The defining characteristic is participant immersion: the environment draws individuals inside the experience, transforming them from outside observers into an integral part of the work.



Examples of what we are looking for in Live Performance:

Audio and visual processing, including AI or generative tools, in live performance; new or augmented instruments, body augmentation, and performance interfaces; digital tools for real-time interaction, including with audiences; remote and hybrid performance technologies; motion capture, physical computing, or biometric feedback in performance; and digital storytelling formats that incorporate live human presence.

Examples of what we are looking for in Immersive Experiences:

VR, AR, and mixed reality experiences designed for creative or cultural content; spatial audio systems creating three-dimensional sound environments; location-based or site-specific work where technology responds to participant presence, movement, or actions; multi-sensory installations combining digital and physical elements; and 360° or volumetric content designed for immersive viewing.

### 3. Key dates

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 23 March 2026             | Call is announced                                       |
| 13 April 2026             | Expression of Interest (EoI) submission window opens    |
| 11 May 2026               | EoI submission window closes                            |
| 12 June 2026              | Selected applicants invited to develop full application |
| 13-17 July 2026           | In-person interviews with applicants                    |
| 24 July 2026              | Successful projects announced                           |
| September 2026            | Contracts to grant recipients, R&D plan agreed          |
| October 2026 – April 2027 | R&D activity (6 months)                                 |

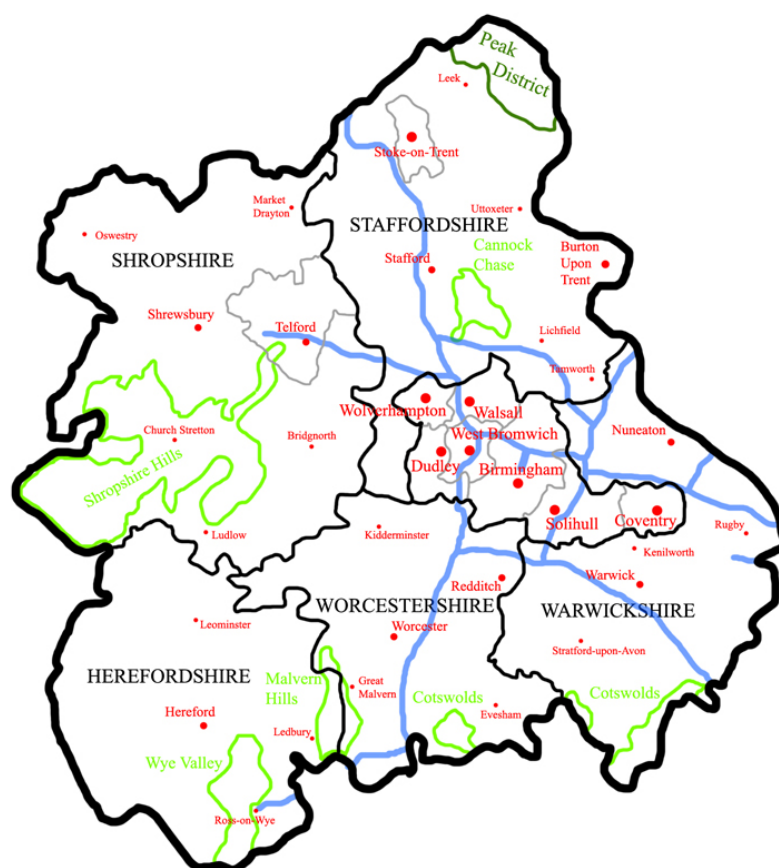
### 4. Eligibility

1. You must be a freelancer, microbusiness or SME
2. You must be aged 18 or over
3. You must have a registered address in the West Midlands region as shown on the map below (including Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire)
4. Your Expression of Interest must be aligned to the Cluster themes of Live Performance and/or Immersive Experiences



We particularly encourage applications from individuals who are Black, Asian or from other ethnically diverse backgrounds, disabled people, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged communities — as well as companies led by or primarily serving these groups.

We would also welcome applications from counties less represented in our first funding round: Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, and the Black Country.



 Chris Bayley

## 5. Expression of Interest requirements

Eligibility will be assessed based on the information provided in the form. Please submit the following supporting evidence with your Expression of Interest (Eoi):

- All applicants (companies or individuals)  
Proof of address within the West Midlands region dated within the last three months (e.g. utility bill, bank statement, or council tax letter)



- Individuals  
Evidence of your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR). You can check if you already have your UTR [here](#). **If you don't have an UTR, please register [here](#) for Self Assessment with HMRC as soon as possible, as it can take up to 15 days to receive your UTR.**

## 6. Submission

The deadline for submission of the EoI is 11 May 2026 at 17:00. Please submit your EoI through the [online form](#). You will need to register as a New Applicant the first time you access the form. This will allow you to save, close the form and return to it later before submitting.

## 7. After Submission

Initially, we will check your application against the eligibility criteria for the call. In the unlikely case that you are not eligible we will let you know straight away and guide you towards further support and forthcoming CreaTech Frontiers funding calls. Eligible EoIs will follow a three-stage review and selection process:

1. Review of EoIs by panels of two members, composed by one academic and one innovation expert
2. A shortlist of 18-22 EoIs will be established by a panel composed of independent industry representatives, academics and business innovation experts

The shortlisted applicants will be invited to full application. This will involve an in-person presentation and interview in front of a panel composed of representatives from CreaTech Frontiers and industry. Alternative arrangements will be made if applicants are unable to attend in person.

## 8. Assessment criteria

Only questions 2, 4 and 5 in the EoI will be scored. Questions 1 and 3 help us understand the context of your project. The weightings of the three scored questions are:

- Q2: How innovative is your project? 50%
- Q4: What is the expected economic impact of your project? 25%
- Q5: Do you expect your project to have a social impact? 25%



CreaTech Frontiers uses a double-blind review process. All personal information submitted as part of the Expression of Interest form will not be made available to the reviewers of your Eol.



## Annex 1. Useful tips on preparing your EoI

When describing your project, aim to keep it clear and focused. Someone reading or watching your EoI should quickly understand what you want to do, why it matters, and how it fits the aims of the CreaTech Frontiers Live & Immersive Innovation Fund.

A strong EoI will:

- Clearly explain what you want to develop or test
- Show alignment to one or both cluster themes (live performance and immersive experiences)
- Demonstrate why your project represents frontier innovation
- Outline the expected commercial or economic impact of your project
- Engage convincingly with responsible innovation, EDI, and/or sustainability

Examples:

We will prototype a VR-enabled theatre experience where audiences interact with live performers in real time through gaze and movement tracking. This tests how audience behaviour can shape narrative outcomes.

✓ INNOVATIVE

Introduces a new interaction model; tests something uncertain

We will create an immersive theatre experience using VR headsets to present a 360° story to audiences.

✗ NOT INNOVATIVE

Uses familiar technology in a standard way; audience remains passive; no clear experimentation

We will use projection mapping in a live performance.

✗ NOT INNOVATIVE



We will develop a system where projection mapping responds in real time to performers' biometric data, testing how physiological signals can shape visual storytelling.

✓ INNOVATIVE



#### Strong example:

This project explores how real-time sounds coming from the environment and the audience can shape a live dance performance. Using microphone and speaker arrays, novel spatial audio algorithms, and dynamic mapping strategies, environment sounds control lighting, sound diffusion, and projected visuals, with performers responding dynamically. The project will prototype a system for responsive environments suitable for small-scale touring.

#### Why it's strong:

- ✓ Clear and easy to understand
- ✓ Strong idea expressed in a few sentences
- ✓ Shows how audiences actively participate
- ✓ Explains the role of technology
- ✓ Uses specific terms (e.g. spatial audio, mapping strategies)
- ✓ Follows a clear structure: idea → technology → outcome

#### Weak example:

This project will create an immersive dance performance using new technologies. It will explore how audiences can experience dance in different ways. Tools such as projection and sound will be used to enhance the performance.

#### Why it's weak:

- ✗ Too vague ("new technologies", "different ways")
- ✗ No clear explanation of what is being tested
- ✗ Audience interaction is unclear
- ✗ Lacks a clear focus



## Annex 2. Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Eligibility

#### **What type of creative companies can apply?**

The CreaTech Frontiers Live & Immersive Innovation Fund is designed for SMEs, micro-businesses and freelancers in the West Midlands region that wish to develop their projects through collaborative research and development (R&D).

#### **Can CICs and charities apply?**

Community Interest Companies can apply. Charities can be involved in a project as collaborators but can only apply for funding if they also have company status.

#### **Can individuals apply?**

Yes, we welcome applications from individuals who have a unique tax reference (UTR) and are based in the West Midlands region.

#### **What areas are covered by the West Midlands region?**

The six counties of the West Midlands region are Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands county, and Worcestershire. Postcodes in any of these six counties, including all local authorities areas included in the region, are eligible.

#### **I am a registered company/ individual outside the West Midlands region, can I still apply or are there other opportunities for me?**

No, only registered companies and individual residents in the West Midlands region as defined above can apply.

#### **I have not received any funding before for my work, can I apply?**

Yes, this is one of our key priorities. We fully encourage applications from eligible SMEs, micro-businesses and freelancers who have not yet had the opportunity to apply for funding or may be from underrepresented or under-supported areas of the West Midlands.

### 2. Application Process

#### **How many times can I apply over the course of the 5-year cluster programme?**

You can apply to more than one funding call over the 5 years of the cluster. Please remember that you can only submit one application within any funding call.

#### **Can I be named on other Eols as a freelancer?**

Yes, you can be named on multiple Eols in a freelance capacity. The main applicant would need to clearly outline your role within their project proposal.



**I submitted a live performance or immersive experiences project to the Foundations call. Can I resubmit the same project again?**

If your previous application was successful – Yes, provided you clearly demonstrate a new and distinctive innovation element and the need for further R&D.

If your previous application was unsuccessful – No in most cases, unless you can address the feedback provided and revise your initial proposal to demonstrate a higher level of innovation and a project size compatible with the £25k grant.

**If I am unsuccessful this time, will there be other opportunities for funding or support through CreaTech Frontiers?**

Yes, we will offer unsuccessful applicants support in the forms of events and workshops and we will be running more funding calls over the next four years of the CreaTech Frontiers cluster programme. We aim to provide you with constructive feedback on your grant application, signpost potential collaborators or networks, and help you shape and refine your project ideas.

You can re-apply to CreaTech Frontiers with a different project, or with the same project if you demonstrate that all feedback provided on your original proposal has been addressed in the resubmission.

**What about Intellectual Property (IP)?**

All participating companies and individuals based in the West Midlands will retain the Foreground IP they develop during their R&D collaborations funded by CreaTech Frontiers. Our aim is to build a sustainable and prosperous createch cluster in the West Midlands - to see new businesses emerge and existing businesses grow.

**Can the supply chain for my project be outside the region?**

Some elements can be external (e.g. specialised technical expertise or services), but the benefits of the R&D impact for the West Midlands region must be clearly demonstrated and evidenced.

**Is there a required Minimum Viable Product (MVP)?**

No.

**Can a CreaTech Frontiers core partner participate in grant applications? Can they be named as a partner?**

No, existing CreaTech Frontiers core partners (Birmingham City University, Coventry University, Digital Catapult, Royal Shakespeare Company, University of Birmingham and University of Warwick) cannot apply for grants or receive payments from the grants awarded to a grant recipient. Individual academics can apply for grants only in their capacity as company owners if they have a separate business that is completely independent from the university that employs them.



### **Can a CreaTech Frontiers industry partner\* participate in a grant application? Can they be named as a collaborator?**

Yes, but please consider the following. If you are already working with an organisation who is a CreaTech Frontiers industry partner, you should clearly outline within the grant application the existing relationship and how the collaboration will enable R&D innovation to happen. How would the R&D grant enable you to move to the next step, and how will it add value to your existing collaboration? If the industry partner is receiving funding directly from CreaTech Frontiers to deliver a specific activity outlined in the original funding submission, then the grant applicant should clearly outline how this collaboration on R&D activity is above and beyond that activity.

## **3. Academic Support**

### **How do we find academic support?**

We provide a list of academics that have offered to support CreaTech Frontiers R&D collaborations on our [website](#). We will negotiate with successful applicants the appropriate R&D plan and academic support for their project.

### **Is academic support free for companies and freelancers?**

Yes, academic support for collaborative R&D is provided at no cost to the companies or the freelancers and in addition to the grant. The number of days of support will vary depending on the R&D needs of the project. This will be outlined to applicants if they are successfully awarded a grant. Please note that academic support is strictly for collaborative R&D. Academics are available to provide high-level guidance, specialist expertise, and strategic advice; however, they will not be responsible for the direct development or technical execution of the project on your behalf.

### **What facilities are available to use at the four universities?**

Successful applicants will have access to a network of four CreaTech Frontiers complementary labs, acting as interconnected hubs for collaborative R&D, including world-class facilities and computing infrastructure:

- Birmingham City University, CreaTech Frontiers Lab at STEAMhouse and other spaces at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Parkside (immersive video and audio, motion capture, world building, high-end recording studios and performance venues)

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\* As of 13 April 2026: Advantage Creative, Ars Electronica, BIMM University, , Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Birmingham Opera Company, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Birmingham Open Media, Capture, Central Conservatory of Music, Covatic, Coventry City Council, Create Central, Creative UK, Culture Central, DESIblitz, Future Screens NI, Hollywood Gaming, Holosphere, Reach, Rebellion, South by Southwest, Tech West Midlands, The Repertory Theatre, Totem Learning, Vodafone, West Midlands Combined Authority.



- University of Coventry, Labs in the Delia Derbyshire building (virtual production and immersive)
- University of Birmingham, Transformative Humanities Lab (AI and ML for creative applications)
- University of Warwick, Fusion Lab (Gaming, esports, and animation)
- Royal Shakespeare Company (Stratford-upon-Avon), Mobile CreaTech Frontiers Lab (mobile equipment on loan for createch projects, access to theatre space)

Access to the Labs will be determined through discussion between the grant recipient, academic and technical support team after the grant has been allocated. Technical support in the labs will be available for the duration of the R&D collaborations.

Please note that access to facilities and technical support is on a bookable basis and remains subject to availability.

## 4. Funding

### **Can freelancers be funded, especially if they are out of the region?**

Freelancers from outside of the West Midlands region can be supported by a West Midlands based grant recipient, but the regional impact must be clear. Where these types of collaboration are known at the time of submitting your EoI, you should outline details of the support and why there is a requirement to work with a freelancer from outside of the region, outlining the rationale.

### **Can I pay myself from the grant funding?**

Yes, you can pay yourself and use some of the grant to cover your time to undertake R&D collaborations. You should outline in your application why this approach is required and how it will enable the R&D activity to happen that may otherwise not be possible. The grant cannot be used to support 'business as usual' activity.

### **Is the grant taxable?**

The grant is not taxable.

### **Is the grant subject to subsidy control rules?**

The funding is subject to subsidy control – "Minimal Financial Assistance" (MFA). You must not exceed £315,000 in government funding over three fiscal years. You will be required to state if you are/are not within your subsidy control limit at the time of application.

### **What insurance and risk assessments are required?**

This will depend on your project – details will be confirmed with each technician team in the specific Lab location that you will be using. Undertaking R&D activity within a university campus will require risk assessments to be undertaken in advance of R&D work



commencing. You should be able to evidence that you have public liability insurance cover.

### **What documentation will you need from me when I am awarded?**

As a minimum, the documentation we expect to ask you for will include:

**Grant Agreement Terms and Conditions:** Project Lead will be required to sign and return a Grant Offer Letter before any grant can be disbursed or any costs can be claimed on the project.

**Nominated contacts:** We will ask you to confirm a project contact (for operational day-to-day delivery of the project) and, where applicable, a finance contact (responsible for supplying any additional information required to complete financial due diligence checks or to address enquiries on the budget, and who will authorise submission of financial claims).

**Supplier form, bank account and other financial details as necessary:** in order that we can set up payments to you we will need to set you up as a supplier. We will also ask for assurance or evidence of other sources of match funding identified in your budget.

**Payments, financial claims:** Costs are only eligible if they are incurred and paid between the project start and end dates. We will provide you with a spending summary report and guidance on submitting this to us. Our first payment of 80% of the grant is in advance, on signature of contract. Our final payment of the remaining 20% will be in arrears on submission of your final report.

**Document retention and audit:** You should have financial systems in place to retain all records relating to a project for at least ten years after it finishes. We may visit you to review these records, or ask you provide further supporting evidence to satisfy requests under our own regulations or audits from CreaTech Frontiers Cluster programme funders – this is often at short notice.

### **Am I required to evidence my spends at the end of the project?**

At the end of the R&D activity, you will have to submit a spending summary report together with the receipts as evidence of spending. A review will be taken on the grant spend against the original budget submitted at the application stage, to ensure costs align to activity undertaken. Minor budget adjustment is allowed with reasonable explanations.

### **What happens to the funding if I have not spent the funds awarded to me by the project end date (expected to be in April 2027)?**

If you believe that you will not spend your grant by the project end date, you will need to talk to the CreaTech Frontiers Team as soon as possible to discuss in detail if there is a realistic date within the next 4-week period by which you will have spent the grant. If this is not possible, the remaining grant will be withdrawn.



## 5. Review Process and Outcome

### Who will review my application?

Each Eol will be reviewed by specialist academics and innovation experts from the four university partners and by independent industry representatives.

### What feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants?

Each Eol will have two completed reviews and these will be provided to all unsuccessful applicants.

### Can I appeal a decision or provide feedback on my project outcome?

As part of our commitment to responsible innovation, we aim to provide transparency in our processes. We therefore welcome feedback on any stage within the application process. CreaTech Frontiers is here to support, develop and encourage the createch ecosystem, so your feedback at any time is highly valued by the team.

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If you require further guidance during the submission period, please sign up for our [events](#) or contact the CreaTech Frontiers team at [grants@createchfrontiers.com](mailto:grants@createchfrontiers.com).

## What is CreaTech Frontiers?

CreaTech Frontiers is a creative industries cluster funded by a 5-year, £7.2m grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). We aim to establish a thriving createch ecosystem across the West Midlands by developing skills and talent, funding collaborative R&D, and supporting business innovation.

Led by Birmingham City University, CreaTech Frontiers is delivered by a consortium of six core partners that includes Coventry University, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the University of Birmingham, the University of Warwick, and Digital Catapult. An impressive array of industry and regional partners have also committed their full support in delivering our objectives.