

The Spark Arts for Children

Vital Spark Ideas Fund 2025/26

Information pack – Plain Text

Funded by Arts Council England, AAC, Inspire.

What is the Ideas Fund?

An opportunity for artists to receive financial support of up to **£3000** and expertise at the early stages of development of a new piece of work created for children and young people (0-13 years).

These ideas will be bold, exciting, and original, and will help us to achieve our ambition of a PYA sector that is relevant to and representative of all children and young people.

Previous Ideas Fund productions have gone on to tour theatres, libraries, schools, community centres, art centres, outdoor and international art festivals. We are interested in ideas that can reach children in any setting.

This fund is about supporting Idea Development rather than 'full productions'.

Who will the selected artists be?

We accept applications from artists based in England. Applicants will work with The Spark Arts for Children and their national Vital Spark partners.

Vital Spark aims to make a positive change to the PYA sector by increasing representation and this opportunity is open to artists who identify as one or more of the groups below.

We recognise that this is not an exhaustive list and welcome applications from people who may have faced barriers working in the arts or cultural sector in the past.

- People who identify as being from a global majority background or as ethnically diverse (including but not limited to African, African Caribbean, South, East and South East Asian diaspora)
- People who are D/deaf, Disabled and/or Neurodiverse
- People who identify as LGBTQIA+
- People from a refugee or migrant community
- Those who are care-experienced (defined as individuals who are in or have experienced care during their lives, no matter the duration)
- People who are from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community
- People from a working class/low-income background (or have identified as such in the past)

You might be...

- Artists with a passion or strong interest in supporting the PYA sector in England
- Artists that share our vision of a sector more representative of children today
- Artists with experience of presenting their work in a professional context (at least twice)
- Artists that have an original, exciting and bold idea they wish to explore further
- Artists working in any form of performance (theatre, dance, performance poetry etc.)

This fund isn't for you yet if you are at the start of your career and/or new to developing and performing work for live audiences.

Please note...

- We welcome joint applications made by artists working together. If this is the case, you will need to state who the lead artist is.
- We welcome applications from artists with other commissioning partners on board, but we'd like to know the details of the partnership and responsibilities.
- This opportunity is not for Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisations.

What will support look like?

- Investment in an idea of **£3000**
- Potential of additional support through:
 - Vital Spark partner organisations (space or other in-kind support)
 - Supporting the artist/company to seek additional funding where required
 - In the past four years Vital Spark has supported Ideas Fund recipients in brokering £185,000 match funding across project grants from ACE and Developing Your Creative Practice
- Connections with industry professionals e.g. Dramaturgs, producers & production support throughout R&D phases

- Sharing The Spark's wealth of expertise around making work with and for children and young people
- A space to share work in progress at a future Spark event.
- Potential future programming at Spark Festival and Vital Spark partner venues
- Advocating for the artist/company and their work at national and international networks.

We will be investing in a minimum of **two ideas** during this round of support.

Timeframe

Successful applications will need to use the funding to develop their idea during the period from **November 2025 – June 2026**. You will be able to share your ideas at an Artist Takeover at The Spark Festival in May 2026.

What is expected from artists?

- To develop the idea with children and young people (0-13) as part of the process (Spark can support with this)
- To invite The Spark into key moments throughout the process including; research and development, rehearsals
- To have regular meetings with The Spark to share progress and updates
- To present a sharing of ideas, however, best suits the format
- We do not expect you to share a finished product at a Spark event. The Ideas Fund is to develop ideas during their early stages; therefore, we imagine the ideas will be presented as works in progress. What this looks like exactly will be up for discussion

What future possibilities could there be?

- There may be an opportunity from The Spark and/or Vital Spark Partners* to support the work in progress to a full production for touring in the future
- Through the Spark Festival relationships with other theatres/companies/artists could be realised
- By becoming a part of The Spark artist community, you will have access to any future opportunities with The Spark and Spark Festival
- The Spark team will continue to advocate for the artist/company and work created beyond the life of this opportunity

Venue Host Partner: Attenborough Arts Centre

We have worked with several partner organisations historically through the Vital Spark programme, including:

- Arts Depot
- Catherine Wheels Theatre Company
- Inspire: Culture, Learning, Libraries
- Lincoln Arts Centre
- Southbank Centre
- Travelling Light Theatre Company
- Warwick Arts Centre
- Z-arts

Vital Spark partners have expressed interest in continuing to support artists through Vital Spark and opportunities will be shared with them.

Each partner brings different offers of support for artists to the table. This includes:

- Additional funds for commissioning and/or programming
- Rehearsal space in-kind
- Complimentary tickets to see work
- Staff time and resources
- Mentoring and shadowing opportunities
- Further networking possibilities

Access

We will do our best to meet any and all access needs of artists both during the application process and the duration of the project. The project will be delivered through consultation with selected artists to ensure we meet individual access needs,

If you have any questions about access or if you require additional support to apply, please contact admin@thesparkarts.co.uk or call 0116 261 6893.

We are aware that the above won't meet everyone's access requirements and that access requirements can vary from day to day. Therefore, we will do our best to meet all access needs of artists both in application phase and for the duration of the programme.

How to apply

Expressions of interest can be made by written, video or audio response. Please use the Application Guide for each strand or listen to the audio guide for a full breakdown of what is needed.

- **Submissions are via the online portal for each application strand.**
- You can find the links to each portal on our website or by downloading the Submission Guide
- Submissions must be received by midday on **Friday 10th October 2026**
- **Thirty-minute online meetings** with shortlisted artists will take place during the week of **27th October 2025**
- Final decision: **Monday 3rd November 2025** (all applicants will be contacted by this date).

If you have any questions or any problems downloading these forms, please contact the team on admin@thesparkarts.co.uk or call **0116 2616893**.

Got a question about the application?

Arrange a chat

If you have any questions about how to make your application or if you have any questions relating to the programme itself, please contact Mita Pujara on: VitalSparkLead@thesparkarts.co.uk or call **0116 2616893**.

Online Information session: 17th September, 6.30pm

We're hosting an informal online Q&A session where we will explain a bit more about the programmes and answer questions you have on **Wednesday 17th September at 6.30pm**. This will take place on Zoom and will be British Sign Language interpreted if requested.

Do get in touch with any access needs you may have by emailing admin@thesparkarts.co.uk or call **0116 261 6893**.

Here is the pre-registration link for the session: [Online Information session: 17 September, 6.30pm](#)

Who are The Spark?

Based in the heart of Leicester's cultural quarter in England, we are an arts organisation with over 20 years' experience of culturally raising the children of

Leicester. We help children immerse themselves in the arts in a variety of places and spaces. We offer children opportunities to discover their skills, passions, and potential—both as an audience and participants.

We commission and produce ambitious, high-quality experiences that are led by the values of diversity, representation and innovation. We organise a bold and imaginative children's arts festival. And we champion local cultural activity so that children in the region can thrive!

Our child action group **The Mega Bosses of Spark** is made up of 8 -13-year-olds from across Leicester. They help Spark to understand what kinds of arts and creative activities children want to see and take part in, and what 'amazing' looks like for them.

What is Vital Spark?

Born in 2018, Vital Spark is a movement addressing the lack of diversity and representation in the Performance for Young Audiences (PYA) sector.

How?

Through Vital Spark, we share best practice with partner organisations – and provide essential support to under-represented artists – to create world-class cultural opportunities.

We care about artists, partners, and children – and recognise that they are all different, so each Vital Spark relationship is bespoke.

Why?

Through development opportunities, and the commissioning and production of new work, we support artists who are currently under-represented in the PYA sector; and in turn, these artists support us in our ambition to be a more inclusive organisation, which reflects the cultural make up of our city.

We believe that children and young people should be able to see themselves reflected and represented in all the shows they watch. Both in terms of the stories being told and the performers who tell those stories.

By working closely with the Vital Spark Artists and Partner Organisations, we can make this a reality.

Vital Spark impact to date

Over the last 7 years artists who we have partnered with have developed their craft and performed in leading venues across the country including at international children theatre festivals.

- Ideas seeded: 16
- Full commissions: 8
- Spark Investment directly in artists and ideas: £188,000
- Match funding brokered (partners and Arts Council England): £185,000
- R&D days: 173
- Performances: 362
- Performed in 10 countries
- Audience members: 23,000

Thank you and we look forward to receiving your application!