

AHRC Creative Communities

Funding new CIP Awards 2025-26



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Mission Research: UKRI Community Innovation Practitioner Awards Scaled to Empower Place-Based Innovation Across All 4 Nations

The [Creative Communities programme](#), funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and led by Northumbria University, has extended its signature award, the [Community Innovation Practitioner \(CIP\) Awards](#), for a new 2025-26 cohort. This represents an investment of nearly £500,000 to catalyse place-based innovation across all 4 nations of the UK research ecosystem.

The AHRC Creative Communities programme examines the role of culture and devolution in unlocking cross sector co-creation and place-based innovation across all 4 nations of the UK. The new cohort CIP award holders will galvanise creativity in their regions: from transforming empty retail spaces into creative hubs in Dundee and fostering reconciliation in Belfast through a National Trust co-created community art exhibition, to strengthening community cohesion through craft in Rochdale, addressing cultural health across Kirklees, supporting cultural regeneration with the BBC in Digbeth and inspiring new forms of community journalism in Cardiff.

AHRC Executive Chair Professor Christopher Smith said: “Culture is crucial to the prosperity and wellbeing of communities, from ensuring children can develop creativity to driving growth across the UK. That’s why Governments and local actors prize the role of arts and humanities research in community-based projects—and why we launched the Creative Communities programme, to capitalise on the enormous opportunity to harness this potential to benefit places and people across the breadth of the UK.

“So far, the programme has worked with more than 100 partners, generated a wealth of new knowledge and policy proposals, and created a successful podcast. I’m excited to see where this latest round of Community Innovation Practitioner Awards will take us.”

Professor Andy Long, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive at Northumbria University added: “Northumbria is proud to be leading such an ambitious programme that demonstrates the power of arts, culture and creativity to drive prosperity and opportunity for all. As a university, and a centre of knowledge and innovation, we are focused on harnessing these strengths through a range of initiatives in our own devolved region of the North East and beyond.

“These awards also show how universities can work hand-in-hand with communities, industry and policymakers to deliver solutions that strengthen cohesion, support growth and ensure no region is left behind.”

About the Community Innovation Practitioner Awards

This is a major investment in place-based innovation and cross-sector research partnerships across the devolved nations and regions of the UK. Each CIP will work in their devolved policy context to explore how co-created

cultural innovation can enhance belonging, address regional inequality, deliver devolution and break down barriers to opportunity.

The CIPs will generate vital new knowledge about co-creation and the unique role played by their communities and partnerships in growth through new research, development and innovation (RD&I).

Each CIP will produce a [case study](#), [policy paper](#) and an episode of the [Creative Communities podcast series](#) to share learning from their community and cultural partners. Together, the CIPs will form a Community of Practice network with the aim of fostering new relationships and sharing innovative practice.

Funding has been awarded to **six new CIPs** across a spectrum of projects that represent the rich cross-sector community research and inclusive innovation that is catalysing growth in **all 4 nations of the UK**:

Scotland

- [‘Creative Spaces as Catalysts for City Centre Regeneration’ – University of Dundee](#)

Drawing on its partnership with Creative Dundee, international partner UNESCO City of Design and relationship with international flagship centre for the arts, Dundee Contemporary Arts, the team will use co-created grass roots arts activities to activate cultural regeneration in the post-industrial city of Dundee, addressing the use of empty retail spaces as hubs for creative and community as resources for cultural industries.

Wales

- [‘Newyddion i Bawb \(News for All\)’ – Cardiff University](#)

With buy-in from Welsh national broadcaster S4C, this project harnesses significant match funding from a range of media and government partners to explore what communities need from informational storytelling. It works with the broadcaster to prototype, develop and test solutions in real-world journalism environments to better connect culture, news and communities across Wales.

Northern Ireland

- ['Belonging, Heritage and Ecology in Ards and North Down: Community Co-Creation with Mount Stewart' – Queen's University Belfast](#)

This collaborative project between academic researchers and National Trust experts will design co-created community activity, inspired by the historic Mount Stewart estate, to create social cohesion and achieve NI Government reconciliation aims through a co-curated exhibition and art works.

England

- ['Unity and Strength: Banner-Making as a Craft Tool to Support Belonging and Community Cohesion' – University of Manchester](#)

In partnership with Cartwheel Arts and national organisation Heritage Crafts UK, and working closely with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, this project draws on the history and legacy of Manchester's Co-Operative movement by using crafting methods to promote resilience, belonging and cultural engagement in diverse communities in Rochdale (which is Greater Manchester's Town of Culture 2025).

- ['Kirklees Cultural Strategy: Driving Community Responsive Cultural Development' – University of Huddersfield](#)

Informs Kirklees cultural strategy by uniting cross sector stakeholders (including policymakers at West Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority and Kirklees Council) to develop a cohesive and impactful cultural plan and programme of work that addresses cultural democracy, creative health, cultural development, creative expression and creative places.

- ['Creative Futures in Regeneration: Cultivating Inclusive Public Realms for Digbeth's Creative Heritage and Communities' – University of Birmingham](#)

Working with the BBC and policy partners Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Combined Authority, this project creates a dynamic cross-sector consortium including academic, industry, public and civic partners to support

inclusive cultural regeneration in Digbeth. It examines how the BBC's high-profile investment in Digbeth supports local creative economies, skills development and cultural participation.

About Creative Communities

[AHRC Creative Communities](#) is a £3.9m major research programme based at Northumbria University in Newcastle. It builds a new evidence base on how cultural devolution can enhance belonging, address regional inequality, deliver devolution and break down barriers to opportunity for communities in devolved settings across all four nations of the UK.

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

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