

CultureStep Guidelines 2026/27

Funded by **Hodge Foundation** and **Moondance Foundation**, CultureStep is designed to encourage new sponsorship and develop established business engagement with the arts.

Through CultureStep, A&B Cymru invests in innovative partnerships of all kinds between the two sectors, enhancing projects and increasing their long-term effectiveness.

Priorities & Criteria

CultureStep investment must be used to strengthen and develop the relationship between the business and arts partners, through arts activity. All projects must also benefit individuals living in Wales and address **at least one** of the following priorities:

- **Arts & Diversity:** working with the arts to promote and celebrate diversity and inclusion, engaging those who face barriers on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, race, religious or political beliefs and sexual orientation.
- **Arts & Employees:** encouraging partnerships that integrate the arts into employee development and motivation, while stimulating a more creative working environment.
- **Arts & the Environment:** encouraging partnerships that address the climate emergency, demonstrating a commitment to environmental best practice while having a positive impact on people and communities.
- **Arts & Health & Well-being:** working with the arts to aid mental, emotional and / or physical well-being.
- **Arts & Kids:** engaging socially disadvantaged and underrepresented young people with the arts, making a tangible difference to their lives.
- **Arts & Older People:** engaging vulnerable, disadvantaged and isolated older people with the arts, making a positive difference to their lives.
- **Arts & Tackling Poverty:** partnering the arts to improve the lives of people who do not have sufficient resources to provide an acceptable living standard which allows them to participate fully in society.
- **Arts & the Welsh Language:** encouraging partnerships which celebrate and promote the language, maximising opportunities for people and communities to experience the arts through the Welsh language.

All projects must demonstrate:

- Clear business objectives for investing in the arts, which will be strengthened through CultureStep
- The potential to develop a clear sustainable relationship between both parties
- Value for money
- The ability to manage and deliver the partnership
- Appropriate plans for crediting and evaluation

How Much Can I Apply For?

Arts partners may apply for up to **£1 CultureStep investment for every £2 invested by the business partner** provided the partnership:

- ✓ Is in its first year
- ✓ Is in its first 3 years and the business investment has remained the same or increased in years 2 and / or 3 OR
- ✓ Has existed for more than 3 years and the business investment has increased by at least 20% in year 4

If, after 3 years, the business investment has stayed at the same level or increased by less than 20%, the maximum CultureStep investment is £1 for every £3 invested by the business partner.

The minimum business investment required is £1,000.

The minimum CultureStep investment is £500. The maximum CultureStep investment is £15,000.

How Does It Work?

All CultureStep applicants are assigned an A&B Cymru Manager to advise both partners on the process. Decisions are taken by the CultureStep Panel, made up of senior representatives of business and the arts and chaired by A&B Cymru's Chief Executive. Panel meeting dates and application deadlines are published on A&B Cymru's website – www.aandb.cymru/culturestep.

The application process is as follows:

- ✓ Contact A&B Cymru to discuss your project. If eligible, A&B Cymru will email you a proposal form.
- ✓ Complete the proposal form in consultation with your partner and submit to A&B Cymru by email, no later than the published deadline.
- ✓ A&B Cymru will inform you of the result of your proposal within 2 working days of the Panel meeting.
- ✓ If successful, you will be sent a Schedule and Offer Letter detailing any conditions to be met before payment can be made.

Please note that A&B Cymru will review projects on a case-by-case basis. The decision of the CultureStep Panel is final. There is no process for appeals.

Payment

Proof of payment from the Business Partner is required before any CultureStep investment is released. Should the Business Partner pay in instalments, this percentage will be matched by A&B Cymru, up to 70%, for the first instalment.

CultureStep investments above £1,000 will usually be split 70% on submission of the signed Declaration, proof of payment and any other stated conditions and 30% on receipt of a satisfactory evaluation report and financial statement.

If the CultureStep investment is below £1,000, full payment will be made upon receipt of a satisfactory evaluation report, proof of payment from the Business Partner and a financial statement.

Programme Eligibility & Exclusions

- ✓ Projects must identify new business money over and above any existing commercial relationship between the partners.
- ✓ Funds must come from the business' own funds and not a third party. Marketing, PR or advertising spend will be considered only when it specifically supports the project.
- ✓ Trusts & Foundations are eligible only if their funds originate from business activities.
- ✓ Arts partners can apply to CultureStep for up to 12 months after a business has invested in its work.
- ✓ A&B Cymru can only invest in the cost price of goods, tickets and services being purchased for a project. If tickets are funded for project participants, a strategy to ensure take-up will be required. Evidence of ticket receipts / box office data may be needed before releasing funds.

CultureStep is unable to invest in:

- Retrospective costs.
- Staff salaries. However, the cost of employing freelance staff to deliver arts activity is eligible.
- Social events, parties and catering costs.

In-Kind Investments

In-kind investment can be included within a project as an element of the business contribution.

The panel will consider partnerships which are 100% in-kind but such proposals must demonstrate real cost to the business.

Please note, a business' staff time to participate in a project is not eligible as in-kind investment

In-Kind Investment Included

- ✓ Professional services provided to assist the project e.g., Legal or Accountancy.
- ✓ Products given to assist the project.
- ✓ Revenue lost as a result of contributions made to the project e.g., rented spaces.
- ✓ Fit out of buildings or the provision of spaces or facilities.

Arts Partner Restrictions

- ✓ CultureStep is open exclusively to A&B Cymru's arts members.
- ✓ Organisations should be registered charities or legally constituted as non-profit distributing. Commercial arts organisations' eligibility will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- ✓ Individual artists are eligible if they are members of relevant professional associations or able to submit the names of 2 referees. A&B Cymru may seek the recommendation of Arts Council of Wales.

Geographic Restriction

CultureStep can invest in arts partners based outside of Wales, as long as that activity directly benefits the people of Wales.

Programme Limits

An arts or business partner may apply to the scheme up to 3 times in one financial year for separate projects provided that the overall CultureStep investment does not exceed £15,000.

Simultaneous Applications

No organisation can apply for A&B Cymru investment as both the arts and business partner simultaneously.

VAT

If the recipient of CultureStep provides services that are subject to input VAT, no additional funds will be provided by A&B Cymru. When a business receives sponsorship benefits for their investment this is deemed an exchange of services and so VAT is payable by the business. CultureStep is a grant which is not subject to output VAT.

Validity of Offer

Unless otherwise agreed with A&B Cymru, all recipients of investment must:

- ✓ Return the signed schedule within 1 month of issue and begin the project within 6 months thereafter.
- ✓ Complete the project within 6 months of the agreed end date within a total time frame of 18 months.
- ✓ Return the evaluation and final financial reports to A&B Cymru within 3 months of project end.

Projects failing to comply with agreed timeframes will forfeit their final investments. A&B Cymru reserves the right to withdraw investments or request repayment, whole or in part.

Investment Crediting Guidance

It is a condition of investment that all recipients publicly acknowledge CultureStep support, as well as that of the business partner(s). Guidelines will be sent to applicants and A&B Cymru can advise on how best to do this.

Financial Reporting & Evaluation

All CultureStep recipients must prepare detailed evaluation and financial reports setting out how the investment was used and other information A&B Cymru may reasonably request. Guidelines will be sent to applicants with the proposal form. Funding to cover the cost of evaluation can be applied for as part of a proposal. A&B Cymru will not look favourably on organisations / individuals that have previously received an investment and have failed to produce an appropriate evaluation report.

Recording Projects

CultureStep projects should be visually documented (e.g., photography, film etc) and shared with A&B Cymru so that a lasting legacy may be created.

Arts & Business Cymru Awards

The arts partner from each CultureStep investment is expected to submit a nomination for the A&B Cymru Awards, provided the project is deemed successful by all parties. A&B Cymru will not look favourably on arts organisations / artists that have previously received an investment and failed to nominate.