

Culture Investment Framework

2026/27 Recommendations

This appendix presents the recommended awards for 2026/27 Culture Investment and in-principle recommendations for 2027/28.

At the meeting of the Finance and Resources on the 7th August 2024, the Committee approved the establishment of a new Culture Investment Framework, replacing previous grant schemes and arrangements for supporting externally delivered cultural services. The Committee also approved that from 2025 onwards, any Common Good proposals for non-capital creative projects and cultural funding support are directed through the Culture Investment Programme (The Programme).

In total there are four programmes provide flexible entry points for organisations:

- **Acorn** (£500–£2,500): Seed funding for pilots/small projects.
- **Catalyst** (£5,000–£15,000): Project and festival funding.
- **Cultivate** (£15,000–£100,000): Year-round cultural programmes.
- **Cornerstone** (£100,000+): Large-scale organisations/consortia.

Investment Priorities & Criteria

- Open to Aberdeen-based, not-for-profit groups delivering cultural activities for residents.
- Must meet criteria on quality, safeguarding, equal opportunities, financial sustainability, and environmental policy.
- Funding caps: Council investment ≤25% of annual income for >£15,000 awards, ≤10% for >£100,000 awards.

Culture Investment Allocations and Applications 2026/27

In accordance with the approved Framework criteria, Cornerstone and Cultivate are open every three years, therefore the recommendations for support set out in Table 1, are based on successful applications to the 2025/26 programme and the in-principle allocation for 2026/27.

The 25/26 programme applicants are required to submit progress reports and supporting documentation which have informed the recommendations for 2026/27 (there is some modest reductions to 3 organisations and Aberdeen Inspired are not receiving funding for Nuart as the move to biannual model). All applicants will be required to submit final end of year reports and performance impact evaluations for April 2026 prior to any new grant letters being issued. Where there is any concern on compliance or deviation from terms a new 2026/27 grant will not be issued (as per the criteria and funding agreement).

Cultivate and Cornerstone in principle recommendations

Table 1

	Organisation	FTPP Check	CG Criteria	Awarded 2025/26	Recommendation 2026/27	In principle 2027/28
1	Aberdeen Mela	Yes	Yes	£15,000	£15,000	-
2	Citymoves Dance Agency SCIO	yes	yes	£100,000	£98,000	£95,000
3	Grampian Hospital Art Trust	yes	no	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000
4	Sound Festival	yes	yes	£20,000	£19,000	£18,000
5	Open Road	yes	yes	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000
6	Belmont Community Cinema	yes	yes	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000
7	Jazz Scotland	yes	yes	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000
8	Aberdeen Inspired (Nuart)	yes	yes	£88,000	-	-
9	Peacock Visual Arts	yes	yes	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000
10	Aberdeen Performing Arts	yes	yes	£961,000	£941,000	£865,000
	totals			£1,326,000	£1,215,000	£1,120,000

The 2026/27 Catalyst programme was opened to applications in September 2025, closing in November the same year. Following initial checks, completed applications were assessed through panel meetings consisting of relevant Council Officers, Community representatives and independent cultural professionals. All applications were assessed based on the published criteria and using a scoring matrix template. Applications were also reviewed against the Common Good criteria and the Following the Public Pound checklist.

Table 2 provides the recommendations from the Catalyst application round for 2026/27, including panel scores.

Table 2: Catalyst Applications 2026/27

	Organisation	Amount Requested 2026/27	Panel Score (max 32)	Following Public Pound Check	Common Good Criteria	Rec award 2026/27
11	Black and Scots	£9,000	17	No	-	£0
12	CFINE	£11,250	22	Yes	Yes	£10,000
13	Dunami - Movement Arts Wellbeing CIC	£12,000	13	No	-	£0
14	Ferryhill Railway Trust	£15,000	22	Yes	Yes	£14,000
15	Friends of Elphinstone	£15,000	26	Yes	Yes	£14,000
16	Mamacita Foundation	£11,250	17.5	Yes	Yes	£6,000
17	Middlefield Community Project	£4,869	22	Yes	No	£0
18	Polish Association	£15,000	21	Yes	No	£0
19	Raven Afrikulture Ltd.	£15,000	14	No	-	£0
20	Touch of Love	£8,593	24	Yes	Yes	£8,593
	Total	£101,962				£52,593

Based on the Catalyst application outputs and inputs this investment of £52,593 will deliver:

- 21,770 audience engagement opportunities
- 3,840 participation opportunities
- 123 performances, exhibitions, workshops
- 178 volunteer opportunities
- 176 artist employment opportunities
- £438,442 match funding/income generation leveraged

Summaries of each application and rationale for recommendations are also provided below.

Note 1 Aberdeen Multicultural Centre /Aberdeen Mela, £15,000

This represents funding to deliver the 2026 annual edition of the Aberdeen Mela festival, showcasing the diversity of cultures living in Aberdeen through music, dance, food, dress, crafts, and more in setting of Union Terrace Gardens.

Note 2 Citymoves Dance Agency SCIO, £98,000

This request represents core funding for the delivery of annual programme of dance activity, including over 10,000 participant opportunities, including activities in schools, care homes and community settings. Investment will also support the delivery of Dancelive Festival and the Spring Show.

Note 3 Grampian Hospital Art Trust, £20,000

This request represents core funding support towards the Artroom Programme, underpinning social prescribing of cultural activity for health, recovery and wellbeing,

Note 4 Sound Festival, £19,000

This request represents support towards a year-round programme of new music development including engagement activities with communities, a composer development programme, children's music workshops and the annual Sound Festival.

Note 5 Open Road, £16,000

This requests represents support to develop new productions inspired by the history and stories of Aberdeen and the North East, as well as delivering programmes of community cultural activities, including participation in the Festival of the Sea.

Note 6 Belmont Community Cinema, £40,000

This request represents support to develop new programmes of education and community engagement as part of the venue relaunch, from introductory workshops for young children to accredited qualifications and industry-linked training for older youth and adults toward careers within the screen industry. Funding conditional on reopening date.

Note 7 Jazz Scotland, £16,000

This request represents core support to the delivery of the Aberdeen Jazz Festival, Jazz education programme and range of artists and community events.

Note 8 Aberdeen Inspired /Nuart

Aberdeen Inspired was awarded £88,000 to deliver Nuart in 2025. Following discussions with organisers and partners, the event has been rescheduled for 2026, and the funding originally allocated for 2025 will now support delivery of the 2026 event.

Note 9 Peacock Visual Arts, £50,000

This Request represents support to deliver open access print making studio and a year-round programme exhibitions and events and communities printmaking education.

Note 10 Aberdeen Performing Arts, £941,000

This request represents support for the core programming operations across His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen Music Hall and Lemon Tree, delivery of signature events and festivals, production development and creative engagement programme.

Note 11 Black and Scots, £0 (request £9,000)

This request represents support to deliver a pilot project showcasing Aberdeen's heritage, amplify Black and African diasporic voices, and position the city as an inclusive cultural destination. Proposal does not meet Following the Public Pound requirements or investment priorities.

Note 12 CFINE, £10,000 (request £11,250)

This request represents support for the Growing Connections project, bringing Aberdeen's community gardens to life with inclusive music events, workshops, and stalls to connect people through culture and green spaces.

Note 13 Dunami - Movement Arts Wellbeing CIC, £0 (request £12,000)

This request represents support to set up a soft-floored studio and purchase special movement bags for Dunami CIC, to run community wellbeing sessions and paid workshops for artists. Proposal does not meet Following the Public Pound requirements or investment priorities.

Note 14 Ferryhill Railway Trust, £14,000 (request £15,000)

This request represents support restored 1850s railway building to open as a museum showcasing Aberdeen's historic railway artefacts with volunteer-led interpretation and curated displays.

Note 15 Friends of Elphinstone, £14,000 (request £15,000)

This is a request for support for the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, celebrating Scotland and North Atlantic music traditions through concerts, workshops, and community events, with new strands giving local young people international collaboration opportunities and hosting a large gathering to share music and dance.

Note 16 Mamacita Foundation, £6,000 (request £11,250)

This is a request to support delivery of a family-friendly "Aberdeen Culture & Laughter Night" featuring comedy, music, and dance to celebrate diversity, support wellbeing, and give underrepresented local artists an inclusive platform.

Note 17 Middlefield Community Project, £0 (request £4,869)

This request is to support Middlefield Community Project to build on its live jazz sessions by adding wellbeing checks, free food bags, and links to local support services, helping families in poverty access music and education. Proposal does not meet investment criteria and proposed activity is scheduled to take place before April 2026.

Note 18 Polish Association, £0 (request £15,000)

This request is to support The Polish-Scottish Mini Festival 2026 will showcase Polish and Scottish culture through concerts, films, workshops, and community events that

celebrate shared heritage and promote integration. Proposal does not meet investment criteria and proposed activity is scheduled to take place before April 2026.

Note 19 Raven Afrikulture Ltd, £0 (request £15,000)

This is a request to support the launch an Afro Indie songwriting studio and workshops, pairing an international artist with local musicians to co-create music, share skills, and celebrate Aberdeen's cultural diversity. Proposal does not meet Following Public Pound and Investment priorities.

Note 20 Touch of Love Outreach, £8,593 (request £8,593)

This request is to support 'Beats of Belonging', free weekly Afrodance and hip hop sessions for minority young people in Aberdeen, building confidence, wellbeing and cultural expression through dance and community events.

Officers would recommend a further £40,000 is budgeted for 2026/27 to make grants through the Acorn programme to support pilot projects by community groups and individual creatives. The 2025 Acorn programme supported nine community organisations and a further nine creative practitioners to deliver pilots and community projects across Aberdeen's priority localities and beyond.

Movement from the recommended award in principle made in 2025/26 budget to the recommendations in the 2026/27 Budget**Mela (difference of £15,000)**

Mela was recommended for in-principle funding for the 2026/27 period in the March 2025 budget paper. The shift to Cultivate is primarily for consistency in presentation and monitoring, all the other 2025/26 catalyst award recipients, were all one-off funded activities within that financial year. All new catalyst recommendations are for one-off activities in 2026/27. They can still be referred to as Catalyst as there is no material difference since they have no recommendation for funding in 2027/28 and will need to apply for any further support. The approved framework permitted funding for up to 2 years through Catalyst funding but they are the only organisation where that has been applicable.

Aberdeen Performing Arts (APA) (increase of £28,000)

This adjustment was based on their progress report and financial information. For Aberdeen Performing Arts, a 3.1% variation from the in-principle recommendation (from £913k to £941k) has been suggested. This helps protect the youth and inclusion outcomes of the Light the Blue programme as AIYF reserves wind down and leverage in new funding (APA are applying for additional funding for Light the Blue for 2027). It also cushions unavoidable cost shocks (especially the NI increase and energy) without transferring costs to audiences and sustains venue improvements and decarbonisation planning, reducing long-term operating risk.

Sound Festival (increase of £1,000)

This adjustment was based on their progress report and financial information. A 5.6% variation from the in-principle recommendation (from £18k to £19k) is proposed. This secures participation growth and shores up a small but significant funding gap to ensure the continued delivery levels for the Get Creative activity across the city. It

also supports primary and secondary school tasters and ensemble sessions, which have engaged well over 300 young people in Aberdeen

Financial Implications

- Total recommended investment for 2026/27: £1,307,593 (£1,425,000 in 2025/26)
 - Request to Common Good: £1,191,000
 - General revenue budget: £116,593
- Future support for festivals/events may come from the Aberdeen Visitor Levy.
- The recommended investment will generate a saving of £117,407, detailed in the picklist is a saving (CDR-11) of £243,000 for 2026/27, therefore if this option is chosen saving of £125,593 would need to be found in the above recommendations.
- Council may face additional liabilities (e.g., Non-Domestic Rates) if cultural partner buildings revert to Council control.