



Clare Learning Spaces – Schools Connect Programme

Engaging Hard-to-Reach Schools

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1. Purpose of the Grant

In response to an identified need, the Clore Duffield Foundation is launching a new grant programme to support organisations with Clore Learning Spaces to develop and deliver innovative programmes for hard-to-reach state-funded primary and secondary schools.

The grant programme is designed to support organisations to test and innovate new approaches to developing and sustaining engagement with hard-to-reach schools. The programme aims to allow organisations to make a significant step-change in their current engagement with schools.

The grant will support a cohort of up to five Clore Learning Spaces to develop, test, and embed best practice in engaging hard-to-reach schools.

We hope to work with a range of types of organisations in terms of focus, geography and size to make up the cohort.

Over an extended funding period, the grant will enable participating organisations to:

- Develop new and innovative approaches to schools engagement
- Build confidence and capacity among teachers and school leaders to engage with cultural organisations
- Share learning through a structured cohort model
- Contribute to sector-wide understanding of best practice

2. Funding and Duration

- Organisations can apply for up to £50,000 per year, depending on scale, ambition, and direct costs of their proposed programme
- Organisations selected to be part of the cohort are expected to participate in the programme for three years
- Up to three years of funding is available to each organisation, depending on successful delivery, participation in evaluation, and reporting each year
- Maximum total award per organisation: £150,000 over three years
- Funding is intended to support programme design, delivery, and participation in cohort activity, including programme evaluation

3. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must:

- Be an organisation with an active Clore Learning Space
- Have an existing schools offer with the ambition to increase reach and engagement with hard-to-reach schools
- Demonstrate organisational capacity to deliver a multi-year programme
- Demonstrate Senior Leadership buy-in of the grant programme (Directorate or Board level depending on the organisation)
- Commit to full participation in cohort learning, evaluation and reporting activity

4. Definition of 'Hard-to-Reach' Schools

Applicants should clearly define the schools they intend to work with. Schools must be state-funded primary and/or secondary schools. This might include schools that:

- Would benefit from additional support to engage
- Haven't previously or recently (within the last 3 years) engaged with your organisation or have low levels of cultural engagement / low number of school trips
- Schools with high proportions of pupils experiencing disadvantage (schools with higher than national average % FSM, which is currently 25.7% - [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))
- Schools in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage

5. Aims of the Grant Programme

Funded projects should contribute to the following shared aims:

- Broadening access to cultural learning for pupils who face barriers to engagement
- Encouraging innovation in schools engagement programming
- Developing sustained partnerships between the organisation and schools
- Building teacher confidence and long-term relationships with cultural organisations
- Creating strong peer networks and shared learning across the grant cohort and more broadly

6. Grant Principles

All funded activity should align with the following principles:

Innovative & Sustainable Practice

Grantees should use the funding as an opportunity to try out new approaches to engaging hard-to-reach schools with view to informing practice in the longer-term.

Extended Timeframe

Use the three-year period to test, reflect, refine, and embed practice.

Relational Approach

Work collaboratively with schools and, where relevant, other cultural or community partners to develop a relational approach to engagement.

Research, Evaluation, and Learning

Build in time and resource for reflection, evaluation, and learning.

Share findings openly with the Clore Learning Spaces cohort and wider network.

7. Grant Model

The programme will:

- Fund a cohort of up to five Clore Learning Spaces
- Ensure geographical spread across the cohort
- Include a range of organisational sizes and contexts
- Provide structured opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, including:
 - Cohort meetings
 - Shared reflection sessions
 - Collective dissemination of findings

8. The Cohort Model

Organisations selected for funding will be required to participate in cohort activity. The aims of working in a cohort are to share learning and best practice

and reflect on any challenges or successes to iterate and improve engagement with schools.

The cohort model will be run by an external delivery partner.

Organisations will meet together in person twice a year and online at other points during each year. The frequency of these meetings may be reviewed over the course of the grant programme.

Organisations can use their grant to fund attending in-person cohort meetings.

9. What we will fund

Funding may be used for:

- A proportionate level of backfill for staff time for development and delivery
- Staffing costs for prep time and delivery
- Marketing to schools (a small proportion)
- Programme delivery costs (e.g. materials for sessions)
- Transport costs for schools (if necessary)
- Teacher-focused activity (e.g. CPD, co-design)
- Costs associated with internal evaluation of the programme (the Foundation will be carrying out evaluation into the cohort model and impact of the grant)
- Costs associated with cohort participation and knowledge sharing (e.g. travel expenses to attend in-person meeting)

10. What we will not fund

The grant will not fund:

- Existing schools programmes. The funding is to be used to create new programmes of engagement to support hard-to-reach schools. However, the new programmes of engagement should complement existing programmes to ensure sustainability and legacy.
- Activity that does not prioritise hard-to-reach schools in areas of high need (areas with higher than national and regional average % Free School Meals and Pupil Premium.)
- Managerial staff time
- Capital projects
- General organisational running costs unrelated to the programme

11. Applying for the grant

There will be a two-stage process for applying for funding.

Stage 1

Applicants will be asked to complete an online application form. This will help us understand your organisation's current schools provision, your experience of working with schools, and how the grant would support engagement with hard-to-reach schools.

As part of the application form, you will be asked to provide the following information:

- Most recent annual schools engagement figures, (number of pupils and teachers engaged) and, where available, the percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or Pupil Premium (PP)
- Annual budget for schools programming, including any significant funding sources
- Staffing structure of the Schools Team (or Learning Team for smaller organisations)

Written Statement (650-700 words)

You will also be asked to submit a written statement (650-700 words) to outline the points below. This is an opportunity to explain your approach, priorities, and capacity to engage in this programme.

Please include:

- An overview of your current schools programme, focusing on key highlights rather than detailed descriptions, and your organisation's strategic priorities for schools engagement
- How you would identify and target hard-to-reach schools, including the data, relationships, or local knowledge you would use, and how you define 'hard-to-reach' in your context
- How you would use the grant to work towards sustained engagement with hard-to-reach schools in areas of high need
- Your organisation's and team's capacity to take part in a cohort over an extended period, including your ability to commit staff time, reflect on practice, share learning, and trial new ways of working
- What you would bring to a cohort-based model of working, including how your experience, insights, or approaches could contribute to shared learning and support other cultural organisations and schools

Shortlisting and Interview

All applications will be reviewed and a shortlist drawn up. Shortlisted organisations will be invited to interview to outline their plans further before the final cohort is selected.

Stage 2

Following the interviews, selected organisations will be put forward to the Second Stage Planning Phase. This stage will be used to plan out the first year of programme, including estimated numbers of engagement (pupils and teachers) and budget.

12. Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

Clear alignment with the aims and principles of the grant

- Strong understanding of the need and context of target schools
- Demonstration of how the funding would allow your organisation to make a step-change in engaging hard-to-reach schools in areas of high need
- Demonstration of the commitment and capacity to try new and different approaches to engage hard-to-reach schools or schools in areas of high need
- Demonstration of how your organisation would embed learning from engagement in the programme to sustain relationships with schools beyond the 3 years of funding

Learning and Evaluation

- Commitment to evaluation, and iteration
- Willingness to share successes and challenges with peers

Organisational Capacity and Buy-in

- Ability to manage funding and deliver a multi-year programme
- Commitment to staff time for cohort participation
- Buy-in from Senior Leadership (Directorate or Board level depending on the organisation)

Contribution to the Cohort

- Potential to contribute insights relevant to other Clore Learning Spaces
- Openness to peer learning and sector-wide dissemination

13. Reporting and Learning Requirements

Funded organisations will be expected to:

- Provide biannual update and financial reports
- Participate in cohort learning activities
- Contribute to shared evaluation and learning outputs
Support dissemination of findings to the wider Clore Learning Spaces network and more widely

14. Timeline & Application deadline

| Activity | Date |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Applications open | 19 March 2026 |
| Application deadline | 29 April 2026 (6 weeks) |
| Shortlisting & Interviews | June 2026 |
| Selection of cohort | 1 July 2026 |
| Onboarding & Second Stage Planning | July–September 2026 |
| Programme delivery | October 2026 – 2029 |