

Unlock: Creative Business Mentoring

The Unlock: Creative Business Mentoring programme is delivered by Sunderland Culture under the Sunderland Business Support Programme. The project is funded by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and managed in Sunderland by Sunderland City Council.

Sunderland Culture is proud to be one of the many cultural organisations, practitioners and businesses working in Sunderland. We recognise that it can be difficult for people working in the creative and cultural sector to invest in the skills, knowledge, networks and capacity needed to develop their business or creative practice.

Through the Unlock: Creative Business Mentoring programme, independent creative practitioners and employees of creative businesses and organisations based in Sunderland are invited to apply for a bespoke mentoring or training package to address an identified development need and help strengthen their business, organisation or self-employed creative practice.

Examples of the type of activity we can support include:

- An external training course that would support the development of your creative business or practice.
- Working with another creative practitioner to develop your practice, skills or professional networks.
- Working with a business mentor to address a particular challenge, such as governance, fundraising, business development or income generation.

Training can have a value of up to £1,200. Alternatively, we can fund up to four mentoring sessions at a maximum value of £300 per session.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the programme you must meet all of the following criteria:

- You must be employed by or self-employed by a creative business with a business address registered within the Sunderland City Council local authority area. To check whether your business is eligible, please use the Government's local council postcode checker.
- Your work must be within the creative industries. We define this broadly as businesses and organisations with creativity at their heart – for example design, music, publishing, architecture, film and video, crafts, visual arts, fashion, TV and radio, advertising, literature, computer games and the performing arts.
- You must be able to identify an external training course or a specific mentor. If you know what support you need but need help identifying an appropriate provider or mentor, please contact us before applying.
- You must be able to demonstrate how the support will help your business, organisation or self-employed creative practice to develop and become more sustainable.
- You must be committed to completing the relevant paperwork and meetings associated with the programme.

What the programme can support

The Unlock: Creative Business Mentoring programme will support six self-employed creative practitioners or employees of creative businesses and organisations based in Sunderland with a bespoke training or mentoring package worth **up to £1,200**.

Training can have a value of up to £1,200. Alternatively, we can fund up to four mentoring sessions at a maximum value of £300 per session.

Support could include:

- An external training course relevant to the development of your creative business or practice.
- Working with another creative practitioner to develop your practice, skills or networks.
- Working with a business mentor to address a specific challenge, such as governance, fundraising, business development or income generation.

This is not an exhaustive list. We will consider other proposals where there is a clear development need, and the applicant can demonstrate how the proposed support will strengthen their business, organisation or self-employed creative practice.

Applicants should normally identify their preferred mentor or training provider themselves. If you know what support you need but need help identifying an appropriate provider, please contact us before applying. Activity must be completed by **15 November 2026**.

What we cannot support

The programme cannot normally support:

- Activity that has already taken place or been paid for before a funding decision is made.
- General business running costs.
- Equipment or materials.
- Training or mentoring with no clear relevance to the development of the applicant's creative business, organisation or self-employed practice.
- Statutory or mandatory training that an employer would normally be expected to provide.
- Mentoring where there is a close personal or business relationship that could create a conflict of interest.
- Activity that cannot be completed by 15 November 2026.

Selection

This is a competitive programme and we may receive more eligible applications than we are able to support. Eligible applications will be assessed on:

- The clarity of the development need.
- The suitability of the proposed training or mentoring.
- The likely benefit to the applicant's business, organisation or self-employed practice.
- Value for money.

How to apply

To apply for the Unlock: Creative Business Mentoring programme, please complete the online application form on the Sunderland Culture website.

Alongside your contact and business details, the application asks three key questions:

1. Tell us about your current employment status, your creative business or practice, and your connection to the creative industries in Sunderland. (100 words max)

2. Tell us about the specific training or mentoring you would benefit from.

If you are applying for mentoring, please tell us about the specific mentor you have in mind and why they are appropriate for the support you need.

If you are applying for a training course, please provide details of the course, the cost (up to a maximum of £1,200) and a link to the course provider.

3. What difference will this support make to your business, organisation or self-employed creative practice? (300 words max)

Tell us what you expect to be able to do differently or better as a result of the support and how this will contribute to the future development and sustainability of your business or practice.

Please note: the application form cannot be saved in progress, so we recommend drafting your answers in a Word document before completing the online form.

Access needs

Applicants with access needs are encouraged to apply for additional budget towards higher costs they may face in taking part in the programme. These may include access to an interpreter, additional technology or additional travel costs.

Please include any access costs in your budget and identify them clearly as an access cost, for example: *Taxi (access cost): £50.*

Pre-application support

If you would like to discuss your application before submitting it, please contact unlock@sunderlandculture.org.uk to book an online conversation with Programme Coordinator Daniel Appleby.

Deadline

The deadline for applications is **Tuesday 15 September, 5pm.**

Decisions

We aim to contact applicants with a decision during the week commencing **21 September**. This may be delayed depending on the volume of applications.

The process following decisions

If your application is successful, we will contact you by email to confirm the decision and provide the paperwork that needs to be completed.

We will require:

- A signed and dated Company Capture Form. If you are employed, this will be completed by your employer.
- A signed and dated Participant Learner Record.
- Proof of your eligible address. If employed, this will be the address of the business you are employed by; if self-employed, this will be your address of self-employment.
- Proof of enterprise registration, for example a Companies House number if you are registered, or a UTR number if self-employed.
- Confirmation of your course or mentor details.

Once the required paperwork is complete, your business will be able to proceed with the mentoring or training activity described in your application.

Sunderland Culture will pay the cost of mentoring or training directly to the mentor or training provider.

Data Protection Statement, Privacy Notice and associated data-processing information

Retain the existing data protection, privacy, retention, data rights, virtual training and marketing consent sections from the current form unchanged.

Data processing purposes	The information provided to Sunderland Culture will be shared with Sunderland City Council and used to evaluate this project. Data will be used for the purpose of reporting to the Sunderland Culture, Sunderland City Council and may be shared with government departments (e.g., Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education, HM Revenue and Customs) and the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority for project reporting and UKSPF compliance. It may also be used within Sunderland City Council's governance structures to manage and administer the UKSPF programme effectively. Your data is stored securely by Sunderland Culture and Sunderland City Council, with access restricted to authorised project staff. If shared with third parties, only the minimum necessary data will be provided, and third parties are required to take appropriate security measures to keep your information safe and follow strict data protection policies set out above. For more details, see: Sunderland City Council UKSPF Privacy Notice; Sunderland Culture Privacy Policy; Governments UKSPF Privacy Notice
Legal Basis for Processing	We process all data according to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (UK GDPR). The Data Protection Legislation sets out when we are lawfully allowed to process your data. The lawful basis for this processing is Article 6 (1) (e) of the UK GDPR. Sunderland City Council is the data controller for all data related to the UKSPF in Sunderland. Sunderland Culture, as a grant beneficiary organisation of UKSPF in Sunderland, is data processor for participant data in the operations and projects funded. Sunderland City Council does not control any other/additional data collected by Sunderland Culture that is not essential for UKSPF delivery, or data Sunderland Culture would normally collect for other purposes. Sunderland City Council UKSPF Privacy Notice sets out the lawful basis for processing personal data UKSPF. Further details for Sunderland Culture's processing can be found at Sunderland Culture Privacy Policy.
Retention Period	Your data will be retained for up to ten years from the commencement of the UKSPF Programme (31 March 2036). Personal data held by Sunderland City Council and Sunderland Culture for the purposes as required by the UK Government under UKSPF will be retained in line with UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Your Data Rights	You can request a copy of the information that Sunderland City Council holds about you (known as a 'Right of Access Request'), see more at Sunderland City Council UKSPF Privacy Notice or contact data.protection@sunderland.gov.uk Sunderland Culture will process data in accordance with Sunderland Culture Privacy Policy. On how to request a copy of information held by Sunderland Culture, please contact info@sunderlandculture.org.uk For concerns or independent advice on data protection, contact: The Information Commissioner's Office
Virtual Training	If training is to be delivered by an external supplier, it may be necessary for us to provide them with some of your details for you to access the virtual classroom. In this case, only the minimum required data will be provided, and third parties must follow strict data protection rules.
Marketing Consent	Sunderland Culture would like to keep you updated with any future training and education opportunities. This would therefore require us to hold contact details for you and your organisation. To opt in, please tick the consent box below. You can opt out at any time by emailing info@sunderlandculture.org.uk. Sunderland Culture will process this data in accordance with Sunderland Culture's Privacy Policy.

