

Example Successful Application

SHAPE Involve and Engage 2027-28

Archive to Stage: Performing the Silence

This is a fictional application created by the British Academy team to demonstrate the kind of proposal we are looking to fund as part of the SHAPE Involve and Engage Scheme.

Application Details

Title: Archive to Stage: Performing the Silences

GLAM Partner: The City Archives & Local Library

Grant Sought: £8,000

Project Summary

Performing the Gaps is an innovative theatre public engagement project that invites local communities to explore how archives shape historical narratives, citizenship, and belonging, through theatre-making as a research method. Developed in partnership with the City Archives & Local Library, the project uses archival fragments, missing records, and contested accounts as the raw material for co-devised performance.

Community participants work alongside researchers, theatre practitioners, and archivists to identify gaps and bureaucratic absences within the archive, using these as creative starting points to explore the stories of those not presented in traditional historical documents. Letters, case files, oral histories, and photographs relating to life in the city during periods of migration, redevelopment, and social change will centre in the theatre workshops guiding participants through improvisation, chorus work, and physical storytelling to explore the difference between official record and lived experience.

The project culminates in a public performance staged inside the archive building, transforming the reading room and document stacks into performance spaces. Audience members move between scenes, encountering stories that fall between the lines of the historical record. Alongside the performance, the project creates a co-curated digital collection of scripts, short films, participant reflections, and contextual archival material. An online map of the places highlighted in the archival materials will create a lasting legacy, allowing people to explore areas of their community with new understanding and accessibility. This resource will allow wider audiences to immediately connect with archival materials, enabling a journey into primary-source learning.

By foregrounding collaborative theatre-making, *Performing the Gaps* pushes public engagement beyond passive consumption toward co-production and shared meaning-

making. Participants gain confidence working with archives, understanding historical bias, and shaping their own interpretations of history. The project builds lasting skills for the GLAM partner in participatory performance methods and deepens the archive's connection to communities historically underrepresented in the records. Through theatre, the project transforms the archive into a living space of creativity, dialogue, and cultural engagement with a lasting legacy for performers and audiences alike.

How does your idea meet the call's innovation requirement?

This project tests an entirely new approach of using theatre-making as a method of archival research and public engagement. Participants do not simply learn about archival gaps, they embody, question, and reinterpret them. The project innovates by turning the archive itself into a performance site, blending curatorial expertise, creative devising, and community interpretation. This pushes the boundaries of both GLAM practice and humanities engagement.

Details of the Outputs

- A co-devised site-specific theatre performance inside the City Archives
- A digital archive of scripts, short films, and participant reflections
- Workshops on archival interpretation and theatre devising
- A toolkit for future GLAM–theatre collaborations
- Researcher reflection blog and evaluation report
- A living map with immediate access to archival materials that informed the performance, and can be used for walking tours or further research.

Partnership Working

The City Archives is a full collaborative partner. Archivists co-select materials, guide participants through archival handling and interpretation, contribute contextual expertise, co-facilitate workshops, and advise on ethical representation. They also host the performance and co-curate the digital outputs. The partnership is central to concept, process, and delivery and are offering in-kind support through providing spaces for free, as well as hosting the online map on their website for a lasting legacy of the project. This project has been developed and designed together.

Audience and Venue

The primary venue is the City Archives, whose reading rooms and stacks will host workshops and the performance. Additional sessions will run in partner community

centres. This venue reinforces the project's themes giving audiences intimate, creative access to archival spaces that are often perceived as exclusionary.

The audience will be made up of:

- 40–50 workshop participants (community groups including the city refugee network and local sixth form students)
- 200–300 audience members across multiple performance showings
- 1000+ online visitors to the digital archive
Audience includes migrant communities, young people, emerging theatre-makers, and residents interested in local history or creative expression.

How do you intend to reach your audience

Promotion through:

- archive and council networks
- community arts and heritage organisations
- youth groups and migrant support groups
- local theatre companies
- social media campaigns
- flyers in libraries, cultural venues, and transport hubs

Workshops will be co-designed with community partners to ensure relevance and accessibility.

Do you intend to work with vulnerable audiences

Yes. Many of the organisations we will collaborate with support young people, migrants, and adults experiencing social exclusion. All activity will be trauma-informed, with facilitators trained to manage any sensitive material arising from archival content. We will also be working with young people aged 16-18 from the local sixth form college. For all workshops, we are intending on hiring support workers who are experienced with working with all these groups, and we will ensure content is reviewed thoroughly beforehand to ensure it is appropriate. We will also be seeking ethical approval from our university for working with these audiences.

Name of proposed venue/platform – why this is a good place to reach your audience

City Archives & Local Library

Staging theatre inside the archive opens the space to new audiences, challenges perceptions of who history belongs to, and physically situates the public within the material they are interpreting.

Accessibility details

- Step-free access to all archive spaces
- All content provided in large print and Easy Read formats
- Option for audio description
- Sensory-friendly workshop sessions
- BSL interpretation for the performance
- Short video of the show for those unable to attend in person
- Map with resources used for those unable to visit the archives in-person

Intended Aims and Outcome

Aims:

- To democratise access to archives through embodied, creative participation
- To illuminate archival power and historical silences
- To develop a new model of GLAM–theatre collaboration
- To build community confidence in interpreting archival material

Outcomes:

- Enhanced public understanding of how history is constructed
- Increased engagement with the archive among new audiences
- Lasting digital resources and creative methods toolkit
- Strengthened cultural partnerships

Reasons why this would be successful:

Although this is asking for the maximum grant award, it reaches all of our criteria and would be successful as:

- The project is innovative, using theatre making as both a research method and form of public engagement with archives, moving audiences from passive learning to active involvement.
- The project is underpinned by a strong, genuinely collaborative partnership with the City Archives, ensuring long term institutional impact. Meaningful co-production with underrepresented communities is embedded throughout.
- The proposal demonstrates clear aims, realistic outputs, and a well-considered delivery plan, with a strong understanding of its target audience.
- The proposal demonstrated understanding of the sensitivities of working with vulnerable audiences, and what steps should be taken to ensure they are supported.
- A clear legacy is built in through the digital archive, living map, and collaboration toolkit, ensuring learning and impact extend beyond the grant period.
- Accessibility details are clear and have been well thought-out and considered through each step of the process.
- The proposal is well written, and clearly structured and easy to understand, reflecting a strong ability to translate complex academic ideas into accessible and meaningful public engagement