

Arts  
Development  
Company

# County of Culture 2025



## Introduction

County of Culture is an opportunity for your town, village or hamlet in Dorset to work together and deliver a year's worth of extraordinary cultural activity. This can include new and existing creative events and projects that your community and visitors can enjoy.

Would you like your hometown or village to be the next cultural capital of Dorset? We're selecting one place in the Dorset Council area to become the creative hub of Dorset in 2025, and thanks to Dorset Council, up to £30,000 will be awarded.

If you're interested in making the place where you live even more culturally vibrant, please read on...



Ancient Technology Centre by Jayne Jackson

## Context

The aim of County of Culture is to celebrate and shape the identity of a place through creative and cultural projects and events. We want it to be a celebration of community and creativity.

We expect it to attract both internal investment from local businesses and individuals, and external investment from national public funders. We hope that it secures the legacy of the cultural activity initiated by the project.

We expect it to also increase the profile of culture in Dorset and of Dorset in the cultural sector, providing paid work for the county's many freelancers and aiding community cohesion.



Charmouth to Stanton St Gabriel boundary marker by Alex Brooks and Emma Molony. Image by Pete Millson

## Inspiration

In 1985, Athens was the first European Capital of Culture. To date, more than 60 cities have held the annual celebration, including cities in Serbia, Norway, and Turkey. There are now three festivals every year.

Inspired by Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008, the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) launched UK City of Culture, with Derry-Londonderry hosting the inaugural festival in 2013. These now take place every four years.

The London Borough of Culture was launched in 2017, with Waltham Forest taking the first title in 2019. This repeats annually. Greater Manchester Combined Authority announced Stalybridge as its first Town of Culture in 2021 in an annual competition.



Museum of East Dorset by Jayne Jackson

## **Information**

Arts Development Company, as a key strategic cultural partner of Dorset Council, plan to run an annual County of Culture initiative.

The first full year will be in 2025, with a two-stage application process. Expressions of Interest will be followed by an invitation for full applications (see next page for details).

We expect proposals to be highly collaborative but with a single organisational lead. It is most likely that this will be a Parish or Town Council.

We welcome Parishes and Towns working together towards a shared bid. If this approach is taken, there should be a single lead applicant that is contractually responsible for delivery of the County of Culture.

We would advise against setting up a new entity to deliver a County of Culture.

Dorset Council will make a seed investment of £30,000 per year. This must be matched pound-for-pound by the Parish and/or Town Council. This funding must be 'new money' for culture, it shouldn't be a reallocation of funding already agreed for cultural partners.

There is an expectation that the County of Culture will attract additional funding, from both local and national sources.

Arts Development Company will support the awarded Town and/or Parishes on fundraising, including with bids to Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery Community Fund.

We expect this to be a highly collaborative endeavour, working with a wide range of cultural, civic and community partners to deliver a game-changing County of Culture.

## **How to Apply: Expression of Interest**

To apply for County of Culture, please send an Expression of Interest to Rosanna Sloan: [rosanna@theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk](mailto:rosanna@theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk) **by 9am Monday 18 March 2024.**

### **For an Expression of Interest we want to know:**

- What is the existing culture of your town(s) and/or village(s).
- What is the change that you'd like to see.
- How you'll know if you've been successful.
- Who you'd like to work with and your approach to collaboration.
- Your commitment to inclusion.
- How your activity will align with Dorset's Cultural Strategy (view the strategy: [theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk/dorset-cultural-strategy](http://theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk/dorset-cultural-strategy)).
- What theme, if any, you'll focus on.

### **We'll also need you to confirm:**

- The lead/accountable partner.
- That you'll be able to match-fund the investment from Dorset Council.
- That you have, or will undertake to secure, the necessary legal arrangements (liability insurance, events licences, safeguarding policies, etc.).
- That you will pay everyone, particularly artists, at the appropriate level (for more information, please consult union guidelines including Equity, the Musicians Union, Artists' Union England).

Please include as little or as much information as you'd like. We welcome Expressions of Interest in whatever form best suits you.

Decisions will be made based on a wide range of criteria including, but not limited to:

- How significant the change will be for your town(s) and/or village(s).
- How collaborative and inclusive you are in your approach.
- How well your activity aligns with the Dorset Cultural Strategy.
- How original and distinctive your offer is.

Assessments will be based purely on application and will be assessed by a panel of internal and external professionals from the creative industries.

## **Full application**

We'll invite a maximum of four applicants to a full application. For this stage, we'll ask for more detail on your proposal.

### **We'll want to know more about your approach to the following:**

- Community involvement
- Cultural ambition
- Financial contribution and fundraising plans
- Business partnerships
- Involvement of local professional creatives
- Involvement of children and young people
- Access and inclusion
- Environmental responsibility
- Governance and leadership
- Management
- Risk
- Press and media
- Legacy

## **Community involvement**

We'd like you to involve a wide range of people from your community, including in governance, leadership, and curation.

We'd like to know:

- Who your community or communities are.
- How they will be involved in the County of Culture.
- What involvement have they had in the development of your plans.

## **Cultural ambition**

We'd like you to deliver a County of Culture that has a high level of cultural ambition. This will be relative to the existing cultural life of your town and/or village.

We'd like to know:

- How you will ensure the level of quality in your programme.
- Which artists or companies you'd like to work with.
- What themes – if any – your cultural programme will coalesce around.

## **Financial contribution and fundraising plans**

We anticipate each County of Culture having a budget in excess of £200,000. We expect this to come from a range of national funders, philanthropy, corporate support and earned income from events.

We'd like to know:

- What is your planned approach to national fundraising.
- What is your planned approach to raising funds locally.
- What help – if any – you'd need to secure funding.
- How you'll manage the programme if you have lower than expected income.

## **Business partnerships**

We'd like the County of Culture to engage everyone in the town and be central to local businesses.

We'd like to know:

- How you've involved local businesses in the creation of your proposal.
- How businesses can get involved in the County of Culture.



## **Involvement of local professional creatives**

Local professional creatives are a vital part of our cultural community. It is essential that they are invited to be involved in the County of Culture.

We'd like to know:

- Which local creatives you'd like to work with.
- What original work you're planning to make with local creatives.
- How professional organisations across the Dorset Council area can be involved in your County of Culture.

## **Involvement of children and young people**

Similarly, we're keen that all children and young people in a place take part in a County of Culture.

We'd like to know:

- How you plan to work with children and young people.
- Which schools, colleges, and youth groups you intend to partner with.
- What safeguarding policies you have in place and what process you'll go through to ensure these are developed and adhered to.

## **Access and inclusion**

Everyone should have access to a County of Culture and we're keen to celebrate a cultural offer that is inclusive.

We'd like to know:

- How you'll ensure your programme is accessible to as many people as possible.
- Which groups of people you'll work with to include in your County of Culture.
- How will they be involved in the County of Culture.

## **Environmental responsibility**

We live in a climate emergency and cultural activity can have a damaging impact on the environment.

We'd like to know:

- How you will ensure your programme is environmentally responsible.
- Who will manage this area of your work.

## **Governance and leadership**

It's important that your project is governed and led collaboratively, effectively, and transparently to ensure the County of Culture is successful.

We'd like to know:

- How you will ensure collaboration is at the centre of the project throughout.
- How you'll communicate clearly with all partners and the public.
- How you'll lead your project and whether you'll appoint someone to oversee it.

## **Management**

We expect the County of Culture to be a complex event with multiple partners, events, and spaces. It is important that the project is managed thoroughly and clearly.

We'd like to know:

- What approach you'll take to managing the County of Culture.
- What process you'll use to monitor the management of it.

## **Risk**

The more ambitious the project, the more potential for risk. We understand this and that successful creative endeavour also contains space for safe failure. Managing risk is vital to success.

We'd like to know:

- Which key risks you've identified to the successful delivery.
- What is the likelihood and impact of these risks.
- How you'll manage the risks.

## **Press and media**

There's the potential for a large amount of local attention and some national attention for the County of Culture.

We'd like to know:

- How will you work with local press and media to promote the County of Culture.
- Are there any key partnerships that are unique to your proposal.
- What opportunities or angles do you see for national press and media attention.

## **Legacy**

This final part is one of the two most important. We want this County of Culture to make a step-change in the cultural life of your town and/or village.

We'd like to know:

- What plans you have to ensure the legacy of the County of Culture continues beyond.
- What options you're considering to resource this.

## Pilot Year

We are delighted to announce that Bridport will pilot County of Culture in 2024. From July to December Bridport's creatives, arts organisations and communities will create a vibrant and diverse cultural programme for residents and visitors.

Bridport is currently planning their activities. If you'd like to get involved or find out more please contact Rosie Russell: [townofculture@bridport-arts.com](mailto:townofculture@bridport-arts.com)

County of Culture is an initiative created by Arts Development Company. Bridport 2024 is funded by Dorset Council with match funding from Bridport Town Council.



Audience at a LANDANCE performance by Jayne Jackson

## Timeline

### 2024

9am Monday 18 March: deadline for Expressions of Interest.

April: Assessment of Expressions of Interest and invitations sent for full application

June: Submission of full applications

July: Decision for County of Culture 2025 and Bridport's pilot begins

September: Public announcement of County of Culture 2025

December: Bridport's County of Culture ends

### 2025

1 January - 31 December: County of Culture 2025



Swanage Blues Festival by Jayne Jackson

## Recap of Key Information

- County of Culture will take place in 2025.
- Dorset Council will contribute £30,000 as seed investment.
- This must be matched pound-for-pound by the applicant(s).
- There must be a lead applicant, which will likely be a Town or Parish Council.
- Joint bids are welcome.
- Collaboration, community involvement, and legacy are key.
- Email any questions to Rosanna Sloan:  
[rosanna@theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk](mailto:rosanna@theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk)



Museum of East Dorset by Jayne Jackson