



**INVITATION TO TENDER
CREATIVE PROGRAMME CONSULTANT**

1. BACKGROUND

ArtsEkta is an intercultural arts organisation dedicated to promoting cultural diversity, inclusion and understanding through creative programmes, festivals, community engagement and artistic collaboration.

ArtsEkta is progressing new programme concepts to strengthen its future artistic and creative engagement offer, support artist development and create opportunities for intercultural participation. We seek an experienced arts management professional to undertake a focused four-month commission supporting research, consultation, co-design, feasibility and programme development.

The work will inform ArtsEkta's Annual Funding Programme (AFP) for 2027/28 and prepare potential programmes for delivery in the subsequent funding period, subject to funding and organisational approvals.

2. OVERVIEW OF BRIEF

Develop a clear, evidence-informed and deliverable pipeline of future creative programmes and engagement opportunities aligned with ArtsEkta's strategic priorities

The emphasis is on development and readiness, not full operational delivery during this commission. Operational delivery will be from 2027/8 and is outside the scope of this contract.

3. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The consultant will further develop three proposed programmes for consideration in the AFP 2027/28 funding round including:

Mela Carnival

Mela Carnival is the flagship opening event of the Belfast Mela, Artsekt's annual festival celebrating cultural diversity. Artsekt has identified the need to further develop the participatory and intercultural dimensions of Belfast Mela, through more opportunities for co-created experiences, building on the success of programmes such as *When Worlds Collide*. The ambition is to move beyond a model where communities primarily attend or perform at the event, towards one where individuals, community groups and artists are actively involved in shaping, creating and presenting the carnival itself.

A central focus will be on **increasing participation and co-creation**, working with diverse communities across Northern Ireland to develop new opportunities for creative involvement. This could include community-led carnival groups, collaborative costume and visual arts development, music and movement workshops, and the creation of new carnival elements that reflect the cultural identities, experiences and creative contributions of participants. Particular attention should be given to removing barriers to participation and engaging communities who may not previously have been involved in Mela.

The development phase will explore how ArtsEkta can establish a more structured and sustainable approach to carnival participation, including identifying potential community partners, artists and facilitators, developing accessible participation pathways, and considering how creative activity could take place in communities in advance of the festival. The intention is to ensure that the carnival becomes not simply a one-day presentation, but the culmination of a wider programme of creative engagement, skills development and intercultural collaboration.

The consultant will be expected to help translate this ambition into a practical programme model, informed by consultation and co-design with communities and creative practitioners. This should include recommendations on artistic direction, community engagement, delivery partnerships, participation targets, resource requirements and indicative budgets, providing a clear foundation for the future development and delivery of Mela Carnival as part of ArtsEkta's 2027/28 programme and beyond.

Required outputs:

1. **Community engagement and consultation:** Engage with a minimum of five community organisations or groups to explore their interest in participating in the carnival, identify barriers to involvement and gather ideas for collaborative creative activity.
2. **Co-creation framework:** Develop a practical framework setting out how community groups, artists and participants can contribute to the artistic development of the carnival, including potential themes around costume-making, music, movement, visual arts and collective performance.
3. **Participation pathways:** Identify opportunities for community-based creative activity in advance of Mela, including potential workshop programmes, partnerships and routes for engaging new participants.
4. **Mela Carnival 2027 development plan:** Produce a development brief outlining the proposed artistic approach, community partners, participation targets, delivery timetable, indicative budget, staffing and freelance artist requirements, and next steps towards implementation

Between Lands

Between Lands is a participatory rural arts project bringing together the folklore, mythology and oral traditions of Northern Ireland's rural communities with the stories, languages and cultural knowledge carried by people who have made these places their home. Through a travelling programme of community-led story exchanges, the project will explore how stories connect people to landscapes, townlands, families and places of belonging.

Led creatively by singer and storytelling practitioner Grainne Holland, *Between Lands* will bring local storytellers and heritage knowledge-holders together with cultural practitioners and community participants through a series of facilitated Story Exchanges.

The project will celebrate connections between traditions while respecting their distinct cultural meanings. Participants will help shape which stories are gathered, how they are interpreted and what is shared publicly.

A collaborative Creative Story Lab will transform selected material into a live performance, presented in an appropriate rural heritage or community setting.

Required outputs:

1. **Rural partnership development:** Identify and undertake initial engagement with at least three potential rural community, heritage or cultural partners to explore suitable locations, local participation and partnership opportunities.

2. **Story Exchange model:** Develop a proposed structure for facilitated Story Exchanges, including participant engagement, approaches to intercultural storytelling, accessibility, cultural sensitivity and appropriate consent arrangements.
3. **Creative Story Lab development:** Work with the identified creative leads to outline how material emerging from the Story Exchanges could inform a collaborative creative process and potential live performance, including artistic, technical and logistical considerations.
4. **Between Lands development plan:** Produce a programme brief identifying potential locations and partners, an indicative sequence of activities, community engagement approach, artistic development requirements, budget, delivery timetable and key risks.

Level Up

Level Up is a new pilot youth arts initiative by Artsekta for young people aged 12–16, designed to foster artistic development, intercultural understanding and meaningful youth participation in cultural life.

Bringing together young people from different communities, the programme creates a sustained space for artistic experimentation, cultural encounters and collaborative creation. Through interdisciplinary workshops, encounters with professional artists, cultural visits and youth-led creative commissions, participants explore their identities, encounter different perspectives and develop new forms of collective artistic expression.

At the heart of the programme is our *Explore, Connect, Co-Create, Act (ECCA)* methodology. This approach integrates creative learning with intercultural dialogue, enabling young people to develop artistic skills while strengthening their capacity to collaborate across difference.

The programme understands intercultural practice not simply as the celebration of cultural diversity, but as an active process of encounter, negotiation, mutual learning and shared creation.

Young people are positioned as artists, collaborators and cultural decision-makers. Their perspectives shape the creative process, influence programme development and inform conversations with participating cultural organisations.

Through this approach, Artsekta aims to contribute to a cultural environment in which young people from different communities can develop a stronger sense of belonging, build meaningful relationships and exercise greater agency in shaping shared cultural futures.

Required outputs:

1. **Youth engagement and consultation:** Undertake consultation with at least three youth organisations, schools or community partners, alongside an appropriate opportunity to gather young people's views on the proposed programme.
2. **Programme framework:** Develop an outline programme model structured around the ECCA methodology, identifying potential interdisciplinary creative activities,

cultural encounters, collaborative artistic processes and youth-led decision-making opportunities.

3. **Partnership and participation model:** Identify potential delivery partners, participating artists and approaches to recruiting a diverse group of young people, including consideration of accessibility, safeguarding and barriers to participation.
4. **Level Up development plan:** Produce a development brief outlining the proposed pilot structure, intended outcomes, participant numbers, indicative session programme, artist requirements, budget, timetable and monitoring and evaluation approach.

Across all three programmes, the consultant will:

- Review existing concepts, proposals and relevant programme information.
- Undertake further research and participant consultation including pilot workshops and events to gather feedback
- Refine artistic concepts and approaches to engagement and inclusion.
- Identify potential artists, creative partners and community collaborators.
- Develop relationships for future participant recruitment
- Identify clear links to festival showcasing at Belfast Mela 2027
- Consider accessibility, delivery models, timelines, resource needs and indicative budgets.
- Identify risks, dependencies and opportunities; prepare concise development briefs.

4. DELIVERABLES AND INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

Timing	Deliverable
Weeks 1–2	Inception meeting; agreed methodology, workplan, consultation schedule and milestones
Month 1-2	Document review, initial research and stakeholder engagement, and participant consultation/recruitment
Months 3	Draft briefs for the three new programmes
Month 4	Final programme briefs, indicative budgets, implementation recommendations and handover
End of month 4	Presentation to ArtsEkta management and final submission

The final timetable will be agreed at inception, with early delivery of application-critical materials where required by the AFP 2027/28 deadline.

5. WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The consultant will work with ArtsEkta's Head of Programmes & Development and relevant staff, artists and partners. ArtsEkta will provide available programme concepts, artistic research and previous learning undertaken to date.

The consultant will propose and manage their methodology and working time, meeting agreed milestones and outputs. This is not a staff-cover assignment: the consultant will not manage

ArtsEkta employees or assume responsibility for day-to-day operational delivery. ArtsEkta retains responsibility for programme decisions, funding applications and budgets.

6. BUDGET AND PAYMENT

The total fixed-price contract must not exceed £10,000, inclusive of professional fees, expenses and any applicable VAT. Proposals must set out estimated days, day rate, workstream allocation, expenses and VAT treatment. Payments will be linked to agreed milestones and acceptance of deliverables, as specified in the final contract. Award is subject to relevant funder approval.

7. EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

- Substantial experience developing creative programmes in arts, cultural or community contexts.
- Experience of participatory arts, co-design and inclusive engagement.
- Ability to turn artistic concepts into feasible proposals, budgets and delivery models.
- Strong consultation, partnership development, facilitation and report-writing skills.
- Understanding of intercultural practice and relevant Northern Ireland cultural contexts, or demonstrably transferable experience.
- Experience in youth arts engagement, creative heritage and artist development is desirable.

8. TENDER SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- Proposal explaining understanding, methodology and approach to all three workstreams (maximum four pages)
- Indicative four-month workplan with milestones and deliverables (maximum two pages)
- Fixed-price budget including estimated days, daily rate, expenses and VAT (maximum one page)
- CV or statement of relevant experience (maximum 2 pages)
- Two examples of comparable programme-development or co-design assignment (maximum 2 pages)

9. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Criterion	Weight
Relevant programme development and co-design experience	30%
Quality and feasibility of methodology	30%
Intercultural arts, participation and strategic development understanding	20%
Value for money and resource allocation	20%

10. CONTRACT CONDITIONS

The successful consultant will enter a written services agreement covering deliverables, milestones, payments, confidentiality, intellectual property, data protection, safeguarding where relevant, insurance and termination. ArtsEkta will assess the appropriate contractual and tax status based on the actual working arrangements. No future commission or programme delivery is guaranteed beyond March 2027.

11. SUBMISSION DETAILS

Tender deadline: 12noon, 20 th November 2027 Submission email: krishan@artsektta.org.uk Clarification deadline: 12noon, 13 th November 2027 Expected appointment date: 1 st December 2026

ArtsEkta welcomes proposals from suitably qualified practitioners from all backgrounds and is committed to equality, diversity and inclusive practice.

