

R&D Proposal – Liberty 2025

Introduction

Liberty aims to spotlight and celebrate the very best of d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists in London as part of a joyful, radically inclusive festival where everyone is welcome.

In 2025, Wandsworth Council will deliver Liberty as part of their London Borough of Culture year. This year, GLA is offering £70,000 for R&D work between Oct 2024 and March 2025.

Local context

Wandsworth is home to several leading organisations in the field of disability arts:

- Aligned with its vision to create “a future that is more inclusive, more sustainable and more equitable” and its commitment to embed accessibility in their creative programmes, NPO [Battersea Arts Centre](#) has offered to host a take-over by disabled artists for Liberty 2025.
- NPO Theatre company [Oily Cart](#) specialises in providing sensory theatrical experiences created for, with and alongside disabled children who experience multiple barriers to access, and their families.
- NPO [Sound Minds](#) aims to transform the lives of people with lived experience of long-term mental health problems through music, film and arts.
- [Blink Dance Theatre](#) is another disability-led NPO organisation that will move into its new home in Nine Elms in winter 2024.
- Although not headquartered in Wandsworth, NPO [Action Space](#) has been supporting Wandsworth learning disabled artists to realise their potential since 2009.
- [The Baked Bean](#) Company is a charity organisation specialised in delivering theatre, music and arts programmes to learning disabled adults.

Those 6 organisations, who actively contributed to developing Wandsworth’s LBoC bid, have now come together as a working group to define the strategic priorities for Liberty 2025 so that it supports and showcases the expertise and talent that the borough has to offer to London residents and the disability arts sector. They have been consulted and have contributed to this R&D proposal.

Strategic Priorities

The Wandsworth Liberty Working Group, composed of GLA, Wandsworth Council, [Battersea Arts Centre](#), [Oily Cart](#), [Action Space](#), [The Baked Bean charity](#), [Blink Dance Theatre](#) and [Sound Minds](#), have agreed on the following local strategic priorities:

- **Collaboration** – while each of these organisations has immense expertise in disability arts, there is a relatively limited track record of collaboration between them. By working together, we aim to grow their artistic inspiration, profile and vision in new, unexpected directions.
- **Professional development** – of artists, producers and young people who would like to make a career in the arts sector. This is a unique opportunity for local organisations to share their expertise on a national stage, and to learn from other national leading organisations, especially in supporting artists and producers with physical disabilities.
- **Access** – there are still too many barriers to engagement by artists and audiences.
- **Opportunity** – to engage, collaborate and get involved.
- **Advocacy** – so disabled people can articulate and address their most pressing issues in a creative context.

These strategic priorities will guide the local aims and objectives for Wandsworth Liberty 2025 and the basis for the R&D programme.

Aims & Objectives

Wandsworth Council aims to deliver an edition of Liberty festival that supports and showcases the ground-breaking expertise and innovation of its local organisations, supports the professional development and career paths of young disabled, d/Deaf and neurodivergent artists, producers and sector workers, and engages a wide and diverse audience across London.

This R&D programme will serve the following objectives:

1. Support disability organisations in experimenting and sharing new ways of working, collaborating and advocating for the sector through artistic cooperation.

2. Develop new and accessible arts productions, with clear potential to move towards presentation at Liberty Festival 2025 and subsequent future touring across other UK and international arts festivals.
3. Highlight and support creative career paths for disabled young people
4. Develop a local and pan-London audience for disability arts by disabled and non-disabled people

These objectives will form the basis of this R&D proposal.

Approach and Expected Partners

- 1- *Support disability organisations in experimenting and sharing new ways of working, collaborating and advocating for the sector through artistic collaboration.*

There was a strong appetite from the working group partners to ask disabled residents about what they really wanted to talk about when it comes to disability. Participatory R&D grants could offer opportunities for disabled artists and community groups to explore themes that are close to their hearts in new and innovative ways, with a view to develop socially engaged work for the festival.

This R&D work could be led either by disabled artists to work with community groups of their choosing, or by disability organisations to work with disabled artist(s) of their choice. This direct collaboration on advocacy and development of creative ideas will allow disabled artists to benefit from the trust and connection that community groups have already developed locally, and ensure access to professional artists to those groups.

Potential local organisations could include [Age UK](#), [SEND Talk and Share Community](#), to name but a few, as well as the [SEN Education settings of Wandsworth](#). An open brief will be drafted, to go live in October, disseminated through Council channels, steering group members and our VSCE sector support organisation [Wandsworth Care Alliance](#).

At the end of their R&D period, successful applicants will either be commissioned to develop an output to be presented as part of the festival weekend, or share their experience during the BAC Takeover.

- 2- *Develop new and accessible arts productions, with clear potential to move towards presentation at Liberty Festival 2025 and subsequent future touring across other UK and international arts festivals.*

Arts organisations, disabled artists and freelance producers will be invited to submit proposals for R&D projects that could lead to either a further commission for a new production to be presented as part of the festival weekend, or a sharing to be presented as part of the BAC Takeover.

There will be 4 levels of grants on offer: up to £10,000 (1 or 2); up to £5,000 (2 to 4); up to £2,500 (4); £500 (5). These opportunities will be disseminated through open calls, especially via our working partners and industry partners like Attitude is Everything, Outdoor Arts UK, Unlimited, Arts Admin, Arts Disability Online etc.

Assessors, who will be invited through partner organisations like Unlimited and the Liberty Advisory Group, will assess and shortlist projects according to the quality of the applications and their knowledge of the sector. Shortlisted artists for the larger R&D grants will be invited to pitch their projects to the steering group, who will be mindful to support a variety of artforms suitable for indoor or outdoor presentation and a balance of projects led by emerging and established artists – with at least £12,500 ringfenced for emerging artists. Those assessors and steering group members will be indemnified following the same principles as the Liberty Advisory Group.

Access – Not only will all Liberty opportunities be published in several accessible formats, but the application process for objectives 1 and 2 will be supported by a specialist consultant, who will:

- Support the Council in defining and testing more accessible grants application processes.
- Offer bid-writing support to any eligible artist who might need it.

So far, this support has been offered on an ad-hoc and project basis – which, although it has allowed for a tailored approach, has lacked consistency and proven very capacity-consuming. We are hoping to work with a specialist consultant (TBC) to develop this approach and embed it in the support that our delivery partner [Wandsworth Care Alliance](#) offers to disability-led VCSE organisations in the borough.

3- Highlight and support creative career paths for disabled young people

Wandsworth Council would like to work with [The Shaw Trust](#) or [Action on Disability](#), a West London Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) led by disabled people, for disabled people, who work to ensure that disabled people have independence, choice and control over their own lives.

We would like to commission them to design and implement an access & development plan for young disabled people to get into the arts that would include training for local organisations to become disability confident and organise supported internships for young disabled people aged 17-25 with delivery partners during the festival. Aligned with our [Horizons 24 Internships](#) and Young Producers programmes, those internships will be paid through the wider LBoC budget, with only the pre-internship consultancy and specialist support charged to the Liberty R&D budget. Follow-on access support will be offered as part of the festival’s budget, and any learning from the Liberty delivery will be embedded within the existing programmes.

Hopefully, the legacy of this R&D work would be that we can continue to offer such internships as part of our annual festivals (Wandsworth Arts Fringe, Happy Streets, Brighter Living Fair), potentially by developing a creative career path as part of the [Horizons 24 Internships programme](#).

4- Develop a local and pan-London audience for disability arts by disabled and non-disabled people

Although Wandsworth Council has a strong track-record of engaging with disabled artists in their pan-borough events (WAF and Artists Open House in particular), Liberty provides the opportunity for a more integrated approach to reflect the makeup of its population in its festival team and participating artists. There is a greater challenge to address in terms of disability representativity within audiences.

We would like to take the opportunity of hosting the Liberty Festival in 2025 to support both our cultural organisations (in particular, but not limited to, those taking part in Liberty) and ourselves as Wandsworth Council to develop an ambitious Outreach and Engagement Plan towards disabled artists and audiences in all their diversity, so that they feel excited and safe to engage with Liberty and the wider LBoC programme, as well as towards non disabled audiences so that they feel engaged and stimulated by the Liberty programme. We therefore seek to work with a Disability Arts Marketing Consultant to develop this Outreach and Engagement Plan as part of the Liberty R&D.

Expenditure breakdown

EXPENDITURE	R&D	Notes
-------------	-----	-------

Opportunities Development programme by Action on Disability or The Shaw Trust (awaiting quotes)	6,800	Career pathways for disabled people
Participatory R&D grants 6 X £1,500	9,000	Collaborative R&D between artists and community groups to articulate creative vision for socially engaged work.
R&D artistic commissions 2 X 10,000; 2 X £5,000; 3 X £2,500; 5 X £500	40,000	Focus on collaboration and professional development, ensuring that at least £12,500 is ringfenced for emerging artists
Access including – Translation of artistic and community call outs; Application support; Artists support for pitching and R&D	6,400	By arts specialist organisation (3 quotes needed as part of procurement framework)
Assessors' stipends and expenses Pitching stipends & expenses for artists and non-employed steering group members	700 2,100	2 X (£200 stipend + £150 expenses) 6 X (£200 stipend + £150 expenses)
Disability Marketing Consultant	5,000	To develop targeted engagement plans
TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURE	70,000	

Please note:

- The budget for the contracts with Action on Disability, the translation in accessible formats and the disability Marketing consultant will need to be confirmed through 3 different quotations. Any unused budget from those lines will be reattributed to R&D participatory grants and artistic commissions.
- The budgets for application support, assessors' time and pitching will be dependent upon the number of applications and level of support required. Any overspend will need to come from the grants and commission budget lines.

Timeline

Mid Sept Liberty opportunities sign off for accessible translation

October Publication and dissemination of Liberty opportunities

Upon completion of milestone 1 First payment from GLA - £50,000

- 17 Nov Deadline for R&D applications
- 2 Dec Application outcomes decided
- 20 Dec All grants contracted and paid out so that artists can start working
- Jan-March R&D work

Upon completion of milestone 2 2nd payment from GLA - £20,000 upon
Programme delivery in place and development/showcase options
for Festival agreed.

End March Review of R&D activity for further development

Please note this timeline is indicative only, and subject to change.