

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS			
Proposed Project Title:		Connecting diverse communities to the North East Coast and Countryside through socially engaged media arts based practices	
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>		This project will explore how media arts-based practices can enhance engagement between socio-economic and culturally diverse communities and natural coastal and green spaces managed and protected by National Trust (NT). This collaborative, practice-based project will be based at the NT trust site, Souter Lighthouse and the Leas, providing an embedded perspective to co-create inclusive narratives of place at the intersection of arts, natural heritage and technology. The aim is to challenge physical and perceptual barriers to engagement, empower more equitable access to our natural heritage, and ignite a sense of stewardship for its continued protection.	
Host University:		University of Sunderland	
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):			
1. National Trust			
2.			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Eric Wilton	Email:	eric.wilton@nationaltrust.org.uk
Name:		Email:	
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Do not add or amend subjects - there will not be a corresponding Subject Area panel to assess the application.</i>		Fine Art: History, Theory and Practice	
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Note, all applications will be assessed by the appropriate primary subject area cross-institutional panel.)</i>			

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

Recent literature recognises growing evidence of inequality in relation to accessibility and usage of green and blue spaces within lower socioeconomic demographics (Kindermann et al., 2021). Across the UK, significant geographic disparities within arts and cultural engagement have also been identified, as evidenced by numerous place-based policies and funding streams, such as the “Great Place Scheme” (DCMS, 2016) and the “Creative People and Places” project.

Currently, NT paid memberships are rising in higher socio-economic status communities (rising to 6 million members in 2022). To ensure continuity of the NT for the future, there is an urgent need to reduce both physical and perceptual barriers that prevent socio-economic and culturally diverse communities from perceiving the relevance of, and regularly engage with its protected outdoor portfolio. This project will support NT in gaining a deeper understanding of how to widen the demographic of communities who access its heritage sites and ensure their public offer better reflects the local communities they serve.

The field of digital cultural heritage is expanding our understanding of the role of non-art based digital technologies in heritage contexts. (Galani. et al., 2020). At the same time, there is growing evidence that engagement with arts and culture in heritage sites can support audience development agendas (Burton, 2017-20). However, that evidence is focused upon artists’ engagement with (paid for) heritage properties (Farley & Pollock, 2022). This project seeks to advance understanding how socially engaged, media arts practices can help broker more inclusive models of engagement between diverse communities and protected, outdoor heritage sites that are free to access.

This project builds upon current practice-led research exploring how hybrid (physical and digital) cross-sector models of curatorship can enhance marginalized coastal communities’ understanding of, and connection to, their local marine environment and maritime heritage through socially engaged art-making (O’Hara, S, *SeaScapes CoLab*, 2021 – 2023) led by University of Sunderland.

The student will be based at the Souter Lighthouse and the Leas, located on the boundary between two geographic areas of high socio-economic deprivation, and will develop their own unique approaches and practices derived from the following research questions:

- What models of new media art can emerge from collaborations between natural green and blue heritage sites and communities living in geographic areas of high deprivation?
- How can socially engaged new media arts broker more equitable community access to National Trust outdoor free to use sites?
- What new models of sharing and exhibition can be fostered by new media arts responding to blue and green heritage sites, in collaboration with traditionally underserved communities?

Working collaboratively with the Property team and regional consultancy experts, the student will help deepen communities’ understanding and connection to the natural heritage of our coastline through accessing the forthcoming Whitburn Coastal Conservation Centre and building upon existing NT community relationships (including Andy’s Man Club Souter Lighthouse and Apna Ghar Women’s Centre). From this embedded perspective, the student will

- Co-create equitable models of engagement between currently underserved communities and free to use natural heritage sites protected by NT.
- Develop socially engaged new media arts practices that foster an inclusive culture of belonging with our natural landscape.
- Co-author new narratives of place that reduce both physical and perceptual barriers that prevent regular engagement with natural environments with local communities.
- Develop their own practice by creating work in response to project themes and context.
- Create hybrid interventions and showcases in the Whitburn Coastal Conservation Centre, Souter Lighthouse and online space.

Methodology

The research strategy will employ a multi-methods approach and will be informed by and through practice (Gray and Malins

2004; Barrett 2010). The project will adopt the Action Research experiential model followed by “reflective practitioners” reflecting in action and on action (Schön 1983). A contextual review will be conducted, and case studies identified in the disciplines of new media (participatory, live, process-based and networked), socially engaged and participatory art, public engagement and (digital) heritage research. This research will also include iterative, practice led enquiry cycles that foregrounds the co-creation of cultural content with communities for public dissemination.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the research will include a PhD research dissertation and a body of co-created and participatory new media arts outputs (content, artworks, experiences, exhibitions). Contributions will be made to the development of a more inclusive community engagement strategy for Souter Lighthouse and the Leas outdoor offer, will feed into national NT arts engagement policy (supported by ACE), targeting geographic areas of high deprivation and inequality, and contribute new knowledge to its national research activities. Contributions will also further the aims of the recently launched Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion at University of Sunderland.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

This project will have access to cross-faculty resources; fine art studio and workshop facilities, digital fabrication resources, XR and immersive software and equipment, industry standard digital imaging and media production equipment, all of which are available in the university’s specialist facilities with dedicated technical support. The researcher will benefit from a dedicated workstation with a connected computer and access to printing facilities in the FACI Research Hub and the University’s doctoral development programme with rich VLE content, online/in person sessions, and one-to-one surgeries as well as specialist training in Art and Design practice-based research methods delivered in the School of Art and Design by Prof Alex Moschovi and colleagues. Costs will be covered by the university.

They will further benefit from a hot desk in Souter Lighthouse, extended access and online/on - site induction to the NT’s curatorial and community engagement teams, archives and displays by Whitburn Coastal Interpretation Centre staff. If needed, funds for any additional national travel will be sought from NBCDTP grants and external resources, for example the National Trust. Where appropriate the student can apply for internal funds at the University of Sunderland, for example to cover conference attendance.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

The student will have monthly academic supervisions (O’Hara/Mckay) and full supervisor/designated advisors (Wilton/Wilkie) meetings every three months which will take place at Souter Lighthouse. Wilton will provide an induction to the NT policy and management of local engagement plans, archives and curatorial / engagement strategies for the Whitburn Coastal Conservation Centre.

Deadlines for the project will be set at the start and the student’s progress will be monitored through the regular meetings, formal academic reviews (annual monitoring and progression) and at agreed points within the research. The supervisory team will be responsible for monitoring the research at PhD level and NT will provide training, support and professional development required to complete the research project.

The student will feed into NT research priorities through quarterly reporting, so the project has potential to inform service development from the onset. The supervisory team will use an online system (e-vision) to record meetings, set research goals and outcomes and support communication and planning. Supervision and attendance are regularly reviewed by the FACI Postgraduate Research Student Sub Committee.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 300 words)

Benefit for the Candidate

- Real world experience of delivering research that directly informs community engagement, natural capital management and protection strategy development, and impacts local and national policy within a national organization.

- Developing links with the national network NT researchers with unique access to meetings and networking events for potential future avenues for work or research.
- Being encouraged to present research outcomes in world leading academic platforms to further the enhancement of future career opportunities.
- Lead arts-led intervention and exhibition activity and a range of experimental research-led public engagement activities.
- Developing international research networks and leadership skills by participating in PGR and wider seminar series at UoS

Benefits to NT

- Gain new insight to support achievement of an identified core NT challenge - to increase access and engagement with a greater diversity of communities to their protected outdoor spaces (Strategic Priority 1: Everyone Welcome).
- Embedded, arts practice-led research that tackles physical and perceptual barriers to accessing free to use outdoor resources with communities living in geographic areas of high deprivation.
- Inclusive hybrid models of high-quality public engagement that provides alternative models to current “paid for entry” to free to use assets for local people.
- Co-authored narratives of place that enable NT build to public trust and foster an inclusive culture of belonging with socio-economic and culturally diverse demographics.
- Hybrid engagement methods and exhibition strategies that widen access, participation and visibility of NT online and physical venues within diverse local communities.

The project will co-create new media arts outputs which will explore and present NT natural free to use heritage portfolio with and to diverse communities of practice. Using this, UoS will be able to show the impact of their work and advocate for the further need of such arts practice-led research.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

The partner organisation will contribute in-kind support to the researcher during their academic studies by offering:

- extended access and introduction to the NT Derwent Wear portfolio of outdoor, green and blue natural heritage sites, collections, databases, and curatorial initiatives by venue-based and outdoor staff
- community engagement insight, specialist advice, and guidance via the appointed NT advisor
- Expert training in working with communities and support the candidate throughout the project.
- collaboration on public engagement initiatives
- opportunities for displaying their work on-site (Coastal Conservation Centre, Souter Lighthouse) and online

opportunities for disseminating the research findings at the NT to its staff and public the dissemination to extended networks in the region and nationally.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 300 words)

FACI has a long-standing working relationship with the NT Derwent Wear Portfolio, developed over a range of initiatives including SeaScapes CoLab, the University of Sunderland Robson Creative Internship programme and regular placement opportunities for our Arts and Design students.

Year 1: The student will become part of the Coast and Countryside team and receive an induction to NT management of green and blue natural heritage sites, collections, databases, community engagement activities and wider policies, and arts and curatorial programmes for property and outdoor spaces by advisor Wilton, who will also join tri – monthly meetings with the academic team to offer expert guidance. Further training in creative research methods will be provided and this will include specific participatory arts and design training provided by the appropriate institutes and university networks. An analysis of NT current public engagement activities, relationships, resources and policies will be completed, alongside a literature review and the selection of case studies and doctoral training sessions.

Year 2: Working closely with NT staff, the student will test and develop the practice-led research through iterative arts-led activities with identified communities. Models of practice for example completed models of socially engaged new media arts PhD research (Carpenter 2008, Sykes, 2023) will be explored through collaboration and reflected upon using appropriate research methods and analysis in-line with research questions and aims.

Year 3: The creative practice will be completed and disseminated through interventions, exhibition, publications, and platforms aligned to NT networks and the wider heritage sector and academic channels. The student will complete their Phd thesis. Discussions will also take place on how the research may inform the portfolio’s regional engagement strategies and national policy. The researcher will have the opportunity to present their research findings and work at NT during and at the end of their studies.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS			
Primary (or Co-) Supervisor: Dr Suzy O’Hara			
School or Department:	School of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries, University of Sunderland	Email Address:	Suzy.ohara@sunderland.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor: Dr Carol Mckay			
School or Department:	School of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries, University of Sunderland	Email Address:	carol.mckay@sunderland.ac.uk
Name of the Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:			
Organisation/Institution:	Eric Wilton, National Trust	Email Address:	eric.wilton@nationaltrust.org.uk
Organisation/Institution:		Email Address:	
Name of Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:			
Organisation/Institution:	Dr. Stephanie Wilkie Associate Professor in Environmental Psychology, University of Sunderland	Email Address:	stephanie.wilkie@sunderland.ac.uk
Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate: <i>(Maximum 500 words)</i>			
<p>Director of Studies: Dr Suzy O’Hara is an Early Career Researcher and Lecturer in Digital Art and Enterprise at UoS School of Art and Design. Her research explores interdisciplinary and collaborative models of art-making and curatorship and has been disseminated internationally in academic conferences and publications. O’Hara has devised and tested experimental models of cross-sector curatorship between artists, sector specialists, multi-disciplinary researchers, industry partners and communities through large scale, funded public engagement projects including; SeaScapes Co/Lab (£200k) – an art and natural heritage project for SeaScapes: Tyne to Tees shores and seas, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (https://colabsunderland.uk/projects/seascapes) and One Cell at a Time (£350k), a digital art and science project, funded by Wellcome Trust for the global Human Cell Atlas scientific research project, (https://www.onecellatotime.org/) which will be pertinent for the proposed collaboration. She is co-founder and research lead for Sunderland CoLab, an interdisciplinary research platform designed to broker new connections between art practice-based research, innovation and society and recent publications include Art Hack Practice: Intersections between Art, Innovation, and the Maker Movement (Routledge). This expertise will offer valuable context to this project. She has co-supervised</p>			

two AHRC funded students in new media arts and curating.

Co-supervisor: Dr Carol McKay is Associate Head of School (Arts) in the School of Art and Design. She is Academic lead for NEPN, a research and professional development agency for contemporary photography, based at the Northern Centre of Photography and supported by Arts Council England and National Heritage Lottery fund. She is an experienced Ph.D. supervisor and examiner, with over 20 examinations to date.

Academic advisor: Ass. Prof Stephanie Wilkie is Associate Professor in Environmental Psychology. Her research focuses on the influence of built and natural environments on health and wellbeing. As part of this research programme, her work also bridges into facilitating engagement with nature, particularly through the lens of place identity.

External Advisor: Eric Wilton, General Manager, Derwent, Weir and Coast Portfolio, National Trust has worked in the management of countryside for nature for over 20 years. The work of his team has for many years explored how people might become more connected to the natural world, particularly the former industrial coastline which for many years was unsafe and underutilised by the local people. His and his team's knowledge of the communities and how they currently engage or don't engage with the outdoor spaces on their doorstep will be invaluable to this project. The National Trust team that Eric brings with him has an incredible knowledge of the coast, its wildlife habitats, its landscape character and its heritage.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

The student will be affiliated to the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries research environment and will join a vibrant community of research students, staff, research associates and international visitors. They will enjoy an active programme of research and networking activities, including hybrid-in-form research seminars (three/month), which operate as a discursive platform for our research community to present research in progress; two doctoral symposia per year; and a range of social events. Alongside the rigorous Research Training Programme offered to all doctoral students at the University of Sunderland, the School of Art and Design delivers subject-specific research training with monthly sessions that cover Art and Design practice-led methodologies and ethics. Researchers also enjoy tailored library support by an assigned librarian, as well as specialist research technical support to access and utilise interdisciplinary and hybrid resources available across our Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries and Fab Lab Sunderland, outlined above.

The student will have access to the CRUMB scholarly archive for new media art and curatorship and the international CRUMB New Media Curating global network, initiated and hosted by the University of Sunderland.

The student will be aligned to the ongoing interdisciplinary community convened via CoLab Sunderland and will be also aligned with the U o S [Participations Interdisciplinary Research Network](#) which supports excellence for participatory research practice through a lively programme of research seminars, events and podcasts, and ArtWorks -U Network a professional facing initiative supporting people working in participatory arts.

The student will have access to the research and professional development activity of [NEPN](#) (North East Photography Network) Based in the Northern Centre of Photography, NEPN works with national and international partners to support the development of new socially engaged photography commissions, conferences and events. Recent work has included SHIFTS: a series of talks, peer discussions, workshops and symposiums, exploring the shifting landscape for socially engaged photographic practice post Covid and in the context of climate emergency. Supported by Arts Council England, the programme explored how photographers and lens-based artists can adapt to these rapidly changing contexts and share strategies for developing resilience.

Wider National Trust Research Networks.

The student will become part of the National trust national network of researchers and will attend events and meetings. Their research will support two research themes 1) "Everyone Welcome" and 2) "Curation and Experiences". The primary theme which aims to shape how NT help people to connect with nature and culture, increase the number and diversity of our visitors, and address unequal access to nature, beauty and history. The secondary theme helps people connect to NT places and enjoy their

stories, and celebrate the diversity of our heritage, culture and natural environment.

SECTION 5: RECRUITMENT INFORMATION

In the event that your project is successful it will be advertised on the Northern Bridge Consortium website to aid recruitment: <http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk/applyforastudentship/cda/>

Please therefore complete the following Applicant Criteria so that advertising can begin immediately following the outcome of the competition:

<i>For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an Expression of Interest, please contact:</i>	
Lead Supervisor (or Alternative Contact):	Suzy O'Hara
Email:	Suzy.ohara@sunderland.ac.uk
Expressions of Interest must be received no later than:	30 January 2024
Expressions of Interest must take the following format:	
An up to date two-page CV, a sample of written work (up to 2,000 words), a portfolio of creative practice, and a personal statement (up to 1,000 words) that details the applicant's academic, creative practice or professional achievement, and preparedness for this doctoral project and describes the specific academic and/or creative contribution they would make to it. If the applicant is selected for interview, at least one academic reference that describes how their skills, abilities and experience of the applicant make them suitable for postgraduate study should be provided.	
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:	w/c 19 February 2024

APPLICANT CRITERIA

Candidates must also meet the criteria for acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service. The successful candidate will be required to submit a postgraduate application to their host institution following notification that they are to be awarded a conditional CDA studentship, and meet the conditions of the offer of a place on the doctoral programme.

Education and Professional Qualifications	Essential Criteria	Applicants should hold an Undergraduate degree of at least upper-second class Hons in the UK or equivalent from a HE institution overseas and a Masters degree (either completed or due to be completed before the start of the PhD) in a relevant subject area. Applicants who do not possess these qualifications should evidence equivalent intellectual abilities through a good track record of relevant publications, exhibitions, creative practice, or work experience that evidence highly developed research skills.
	Desirable Criteria	Experience of new media art-making, socially engaged and participatory art practices, exhibition organization, environmental practices and working with communities facilitating workshops and outreach events.
Research and Impact Experience and Training	Essential Criteria	Evidence of developed research skills and working methodologies relevant to the project, proven ability to manage and deliver research projects in set timeframes.
	Desirable Criteria	
Professional Practice and Job-related Experience	Essential Criteria	Experience of designing and delivering research and/or creative projects.

	Desirable Criteria	Experience of designing and delivering art and green and blue environmental research and/or creative projects
Interpersonal Skills	Essential Criteria	Excellent communication skills, including ability to communicate ideas clearly, team working and collaboration, innovative problem-solving skills, resilience.
	Desirable Criteria	
Other Factors	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	