

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:		Participatory Arts and Place-Making: Cultural Regeneration in South Bank, Grangetown and the wider Tees Valley communities	
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>		This project explores how participatory arts can address the intersecting challenges of economic decline, migration, and social fragmentation in post-industrial areas such as Middlesbrough. Despite these pressures, local communities continue to generate creative practices that reimagine belonging and collective futures. In collaboration with Citizens UK and Boro Doughnut, the doctoral researcher will combine archival research, oral histories, and participatory creative methods- such as storytelling and community arts workshops- to co-produce new approaches to regeneration. The project will generate critical insights, co-created creative outputs, and policy recommendations supporting inclusive and sustainable place-making.	
Host University:		Teesside University	
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. Citizens UK			
2. Boro Doughnut			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Graham Brownlee	Email:	graham.brownlee@citizensuk.org
Name:	Emi Imai	Email:	borodoughnut@gmail.com
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>		Choose an item.	
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?		YES ☒	NO ☐
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES ☒	NO ☐
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Please note that your application will be assessed by the relevant primary AHRC subject area review panel. However, in this space you should indicate which other subject areas your proposal covers and how your methodology is genuinely interdisciplinary.)</i>			
This project is interdisciplinary in both focus and method, combining cultural studies, migration research,			

community arts, anthropology, and place-based design. It integrates archival analysis, oral history, and ethnographic research with creative, practice-based methods such as participatory storytelling and co-produced artistic outputs. By bridging critical and creative approaches, the project enables the student to explore both historical and contemporary processes of cultural regeneration. The combination of theory and practice fosters original insights that contribute to academic debates in the humanities while generating applied strategies for inclusive, sustainable place-making with communities across South Bank, Grangetown, and the wider Tees Valley.

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)

Post-industrial towns such as Middlesbrough face intersecting challenges of economic decline, migration, and social fragmentation. These conditions have produced high levels of deprivation, weakened civic trust, and limited cultural infrastructure. Yet local residents continue to generate creative practices- from grassroots arts initiatives to community-led celebrations- that reimagine belonging and foster collective resilience. What remains under-examined is how participatory arts can function not only as cultural expression but also as a tool for regeneration, social cohesion, and ecological resilience.

This research is grounded in South Bank and Grangetown- two post-industrial neighbourhoods in Middlesbrough- and extends to the wider Tees Valley region of North East England. Historically shaped by steelmaking and heavy industry, these areas have faced long-term challenges linked to deindustrialisation, unemployment, and social fragmentation. Yet they remain defined by strong community networks, cultural diversity, and traditions of mutual support. The wider Tees Valley- including Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton, Hartlepool, and Darlington- is undergoing significant regeneration efforts aimed at balancing economic renewal with social inclusion and environmental sustainability. These neighbourhoods provide a rich context for exploring how participatory arts can contribute to cultural regeneration and collective wellbeing.

This project is timely in light of the *Creative Health Review* (NCCH/APPG, 2023), which calls for embedding creative practice across health and social policy, and UNESCO's *Culture: Urban Future* report (2016), which frames culture as central to inclusive urban regeneration. Academic debates also highlight this need: research on participatory arts and democracy (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011), decolonising place-making (Sandercock, 2003; Madanipour, 2010), and cultural policy and migration (Stevenson, Ball & Parkinson, 2021) underscores the urgency of rethinking participation in diverse, post-industrial contexts. Locally, barriers such as financial hardship, digital exclusion, and weak cultural infrastructure compound inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires research that not only documents community practice but also co-creates new, sustainable approaches to cultural and civic regeneration.

This Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) will investigate how participatory arts can strengthen cultural regeneration, social cohesion, and ecological resilience in Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley. The project will ask:

1. How do participatory arts practices respond to challenges of economic decline, migration, and social fragmentation?
2. In what ways do residents use creative practices to reimagine belonging and resilience in post-industrial contexts?
3. How can interdisciplinary methodologies- combining archival research, oral histories, and participatory arts—generate new frameworks for cultural regeneration?
4. What models of practice and policy recommendations can be co-produced with partner organisations to support inclusive, community-led regeneration?

Despite extensive work on creative health and social prescribing, little research has examined participatory arts as a nexus of regeneration, migration, and ecological sustainability. This project addresses that gap by

integrating humanities research with participatory practice to ensure both academic rigour and community relevance.

Methodology:

- **Archival Research:** Analysis of local archives, policy documents, and cultural records to trace historical patterns of migration, cultural participation, and regeneration.
- **Oral Histories and Ethnography:** Interviews and ethnographic observation capturing lived experiences of community members engaged in participatory arts, documenting how they articulate belonging, exclusion, and resilience.
- **Participatory Action Research:** In collaboration with Citizens UK and Boro Doughnut CIC, the student will co-design workshops involving storytelling, performance, visual arts, and ecological practice. Residents will act as co-creators of cultural interventions, research tools, and public outcomes.
- **Adaptive Participatory Storytelling:** Building on Roberts et al. (2023), the project will test adaptive storytelling approaches combining digital and in-person co-production.
- **Creative Dissemination:** Findings will be shared through exhibitions, digital storytelling, and public events to engage diverse audiences.

The project will be co-delivered with two key community partners whose complementary expertise grounds the research in lived community practice.

Citizens UK is a national alliance of civil society institutions dedicated to developing leaders, challenging injustice, and strengthening communities. With over 20 chapters across England and Wales, it has pioneered community organising for more than three decades, including the national Living Wage Campaign. Citizens UK will embed the doctoral researcher in its Teesside networks, providing mentorship from senior organisers, and opportunities to apply participatory action research through local alliances in South Bank, Grangetown, and Park End.

Boro Doughnut CIC is a Middlesbrough-based community interest company applying the principles of Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2012) to local regeneration. Its work connects environmental awareness with creative practice, from the *Edible Forest Garden* and *Data Portrait* initiatives to *Systems Change* workshops and community co-production with partners such as Ubuntu Multicultural Centre, Repair Café, and the National Trust. Boro Doughnut will provide workspace, mentoring, and opportunities for the student to engage in regenerative, distributive, and participatory place-making practice.

The participatory research design draws on Citizens UK's *Community Organising Cycle of Change* and Boro Doughnut's *Doughnut Economics* framework, combining civic participation with regenerative and distributive principles. The student will co-develop SMART objectives and milestones with both partners to ensure a feasible, outcomes-driven research process reviewed annually by the project steering group.

Contributions and Impact:

- **To Scholarship:** The project advances debates in cultural studies, migration, and community arts through an in-depth case study of participatory arts in a post-industrial context. Drawing on Belfiore

(2022), it critically examines the cultural labour of socially engaged arts and its implications for sustainability.

- **To Policy and Practice:** Responding to the *Creative Health Review* (2023) and UNESCO's call for cultural mapping, the project will produce a digital toolkit and archive capturing methods, narratives, and outcomes, ensuring replicability beyond the PhD. Findings will inform policy roundtables and regional strategies for inclusive regeneration and ecological place-making.
- **To Communities:** Co-created workshops and outputs will provide platforms for residents to articulate experiences, challenge inequalities, and imagine alternative futures. A Community Advisory Panel will ensure accountability and that community voices shape the research process.

This CDA offers the student access to rich community networks and specialist training in oral history, ethnography, and participatory arts. They will gain experience in co-production, creative dissemination, and applied cultural policy, supported by expert supervision in cultural studies, anthropology, and storytelling. For partner organisations, the project offers a framework for evaluating cultural impact, strengthening capacity, and informing strategic approaches to inclusive regeneration.

By situating participatory arts at the heart of regeneration in Middlesbrough, this project addresses urgent social, cultural, and ecological challenges in post-industrial towns. Its interdisciplinary methodology- combining archival research, oral histories, participatory arts, and adaptive storytelling- will generate new knowledge, empower local communities, and inform cultural policy and practice. Through this CDA, the doctoral researcher will produce work that is academically original, socially impactful, and practically sustainable, leaving a legacy of co-created outputs, toolkits, and community leadership beyond the doctorate.

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)

The PhD candidate will be supported through a combination of university, partner, and Northern Bridge DTP resources. Core facilities at the host university include access to library collections, postgraduate workspace, digital humanities labs, and recording equipment for oral histories. Training in research design, ethics, oral history, ethnographic methods, and participatory action research will be provided through Teesside University's Graduate Research School. Northern Bridge Consortium students are also eligible to apply to the Northern Bridge Training Fund for additional specialist trainings.

Project-specific costs:

- **Fieldwork and community workshops:** £2500 over three years to support participatory arts and community engagement activities in South Bank and Grangetown. This includes workshop materials and equipment (art supplies, craft and storytelling materials), participant incentives (vouchers, travel reimbursement), catering and refreshments to support inclusive sessions, accessibility provisions (translation, interpretation, childcare, transport support, or disability access)
- **Conference dissemination:** £2,000 over three years to support attendance at two national conferences (e.g. AHRC Connected Communities, Association of Critical Heritage Studies) and one international conference to present findings and build collaborative networks.

- **Transcription services:** £1,200 over three years to support transcription of up to 25 research interviews.
- Total £5700

Partner contributions:

- **Citizens UK:** Mentoring and community access.
- **Boro Doughnut CIC:** Workspace, mentoring, and community access, plus guidance on applying for small-grant opportunities.

Together, these resources ensure the project's feasibility and provide the student with rich training and community engagement opportunities.

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)

Strong and consistent communication between the host university and partner organisations will underpin this project. A formal **Project Steering Group**- comprising the primary and secondary supervisors, the student, and representatives from Citizens UK and Boro Doughnut CIC- will meet three times a year to review progress, refine plans, and address challenges.

The student will attend **monthly supervision meetings** with academic supervisors, with partner representatives joining as appropriate to align research activities with community priorities. Informal contact will be maintained through email and shared online workspaces to ensure transparency and responsiveness.

The student will spend substantial time embedded with both partners, attending community events, shadowing staff, and contributing to ongoing projects.

At the start of the project, an **initial joint planning meeting** will establish shared aims, coordination protocols, and a timeline with short-, medium-, and long-term milestones. The Graduate School's monitoring requirements (annual learning agreements and progression reviews) will be harmonised with partner reporting, ensuring accountability to both academic and community stakeholders. This multi-layered structure combines formal oversight with flexible, practice-based collaboration, fostering a genuinely co-produced research culture.

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

(Maximum 200 words)

The PhD candidate will gain a distinctive training environment combining academic research with community-based practice. They will acquire skills in archival research, oral history, ethnography, and participatory arts facilitation, supported by specialist training through Teesside University and Northern Bridge DTP. Embedded with Citizens UK and Boro Doughnut CIC, the student will gain hands-on experience in community organising, co-production, and cultural regeneration- developing transferable skills for careers in academia, cultural policy, heritage, and the third sector.

Through **Citizens UK**, the student will mentorship from senior organisers, and experience in civic participation and leadership development. Through **Boro Doughnut CIC**, they will engage directly with regenerative, distributive, and ecological practices inspired by Doughnut Economics, gaining insight into sustainability challenges and funding realities for small community organisations.

For the partners, the project provides research capacity and critical insight into how participatory arts can strengthen civic infrastructure in Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley. The student's work will contribute to

community assemblies, creative workshops, and public engagement events, while co-produced outputs- such as exhibitions, storytelling projects, and digital resources- will expand engagement tools and amplify community voices. Together, these benefits ensure mutual value and long-term collaborative impact.

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

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

Citizens UK and Boro Doughnut CIC will provide substantial in-kind contributions that are essential to the project's success.

Citizens UK will contribute mentoring, and facilitation of neighbourhood teams in South Bank, Grangetown, and Park End, and access to Citizens UK's national learning networks and campaigns. These resources will equip the student with professional leadership and civic engagement skills while embedding them in live community initiatives.

Boro Doughnut CIC will provide workspace (e.g., the Edible Forest Garden hut and partner venues via MVDA and Ubuntu Multicultural Centre), mentoring, access to community networks, and logistical event support for participatory workshops and dissemination activities. Boro Doughnut will assist the student in identifying and applying for small-grant opportunities, offering practical insight into the sustainability and funding realities of small community organisations.

Together, these in-kind contributions represent significant added value, embedding the doctoral researcher within dynamic civic and ecological networks and ensuring the project's collaborative integrity, applied relevance, and long-term community impact.

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

(Maximum 200 words)

The collaborative arrangement embeds the student within the day-to-day work of **Citizens UK** and **Boro Doughnut CIC**, ensuring that research and practice are fully integrated. The student will spend one to two days per week working alongside partner staff, with activities tailored to each stage of the project.

In the **early phase**, the student will map existing community initiatives and conduct archival and policy research with partner support. This will involve shadowing staff, attending assemblies, and contributing to community meetings to build trust and contextual understanding.

During the **core research phase**, the student will design and facilitate participatory arts workshops with local residents, co-producing creative outputs such as storytelling projects, performances, and exhibitions.

With **Citizens UK**, they will undertake participatory research using the Community Organising Cycle. With **Boro Doughnut CIC**, they will engage in regenerative place-making, co-facilitate creative workshops, and participate in sustainability and systems-change projects such as the *Edible Forest Garden* and *Data Portrait* initiatives.

In the **final phase**, the student will collaborate with partners to translate findings into creative and policy outputs for dissemination, grounding the research in real-world civic and ecological practice across Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Professor Azadeh Fatehrad
School or Department:	SACI
Email Address:	a.fatehrad@tees.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr. Sally Blackburn-Daniels (Teesside University)
School or Department:	SSSHL
Email Address:	S.Blackburn-Daniels@tees.ac.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Emi Imai
Organisation/Institution:	Boro Doughnut
Email Address:	borodoughnut@gmail.com
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Graham Brownlee
Organisation/Institution:	Citizens UK
Email Address:	graham.brownlee@citizensuk.org
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	
Name:	Prof. Antonia Liguori
Organisation/Institution:	Teesside University
Email Address:	A.Liguori@tees.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>	
The supervisory and advisory team brings together internationally recognised expertise in participatory arts, storytelling, cultural policy, civic engagement, and community-led regeneration. This combination ensures the student is supported across academic, methodological, and applied dimensions of the project. Primary Supervisor: Professor Azadeh Fatehrad (Teesside University) Professor Fatehrad is Professor of Art and Public Policy and Co-Director of the Institute for Collective Place Leadership (ICPL). An internationally recognised scholar-practitioner, her research bridges participatory art, ethnography, and public policy, focusing on migration, integration, and social cohesion. She has led more than 20 funded projects, including <i>Nature-Based Integration</i> (British Academy/Nuffield Foundation) and <i>Pathways to Policy</i>, developing innovative participatory and arts-based methods for community-led regeneration. Her work combines deep mapping, participatory storytelling, and creative toolkit development, positioning communities as active knowledge producers. As primary supervisor, she will guide the student in designing interdisciplinary, co-produced research that generates academic originality and real-world impact in cultural regeneration and inclusive place-making. Co-Supervisor: Dr Sally Blackburn-Daniels (Teesside University) Dr Blackburn-Daniels, Research Fellow in ICPL, specialises in cultural history, digital humanities, and impact-driven participatory practice. Her recent projects- <i>Redcar Community Kitchen</i> and <i>Flippin' Pain through Storytelling</i>- demonstrate her ability to connect literary-cultural expertise with applied community research. She will advise the student on digital humanities methods, evaluation of participatory processes, and creative dissemination. Her expertise ensures the student develops advanced skills in evidencing impact across academic, policy, and community contexts.	

Co-Supervisor: Professor Antonia Liguori (Teesside University)

Professor Liguori, Professor of Participatory Storytelling and Public Policy and Co-Director of ICPL, is a world-leading expert in digital storytelling methodologies. Her research applies storytelling to cultural heritage, climate resilience, and education, including collaborations with UNESCO and an AHRC Fellowship at the Smithsonian. She has an outstanding record of designing and leading participatory projects across Europe, Africa, and North America. She will support the student in developing participatory storytelling and co-production skills, ensuring the research produces creative and accessible outputs that engage diverse audiences.

Non-HE Partner Advisor: Emi Imai (Boro Doughnut CIC)

Emi Imai is founder of Boro Doughnut CIC, a Middlesbrough-based community interest company applying regenerative and distributive principles inspired by Doughnut Economics. With international experience in education and community development across Japan, Thailand, China, Germany, the USA, and the UK, she brings a global perspective to local civic and ecological challenges. Through projects such as the *Edible Forest Garden* and *Boro Story: Journeys and Voices*, she has pioneered participatory initiatives linking ecological sustainability with storytelling and wellbeing. As external mentor, she will provide the student with workspace, mentoring, and access to grassroots networks, ensuring the research remains grounded in lived community priorities.

Non-HE Partner Advisor Graham Brownlee (Citizens UK): Graham Brownlee is Senior Community Organiser for Citizens UK in the North East and has over 20 years' experience in community leadership, social enterprise, and civic engagement. He has worked extensively across Teesside and the wider region to develop grassroots alliances between communities, universities, faith organisations, and local authorities, focusing on building leadership capacity and fostering civic participation. Within this CDA, Brownlee will oversee Citizens UK's contribution, including mentoring and integration of the student within neighbourhood teams in South Bank, Grangetown, and Park End. His expertise in relational organising, leadership development, and cross-sector collaboration will provide the student with a grounded understanding of how civic partnerships can drive inclusive, community-led regeneration. Working closely with the academic supervisors and partner organisations, he will ensure that the research remains embedded in lived practice while contributing to wider Citizens UK campaigns and policy learning networks.

Together, this team offers a unique blend of academic, civic, and community expertise. Fatehrad, Liguori, and Blackburn-Daniels provide academic guidance in participatory arts, storytelling, and digital humanities, while Brownlee and Imai contribute civic and ecological practice leadership. This balanced combination guarantees comprehensive supervision for an ambitious interdisciplinary CDA that is both academically original and socially transformative.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

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

(Maximum 500 words)

Through active collaboration with **Citizens UK** and **Boro Doughnut** - organisations rooted respectively in civic participation and regenerative community practice- the student will work directly within neighbourhoods across Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley, ensuring that the research is both embedded in and transformative for local contexts. The project sits within a dynamic research environment that combines academic excellence with strong civic and community partnerships.

The project is embedded in the **Institute for Collective Place Leadership (ICPL)**, a new interdisciplinary centre clustering research around three themes: *Empowered and Inclusive Places*, *Imaginative and Innovative Places*, and *Sustainable and Resilient Places*. The student's work directly aligns with the *Empowered and*

Inclusive Places strand, providing opportunities to participate in cross-disciplinary seminars, workshops, and collaborative projects. ICPL's emphasis on co-production and place-based research ensures the student joins a research culture that prioritises social impact, civic engagement, and applied collaboration.

At the host university, the project is based in the **Teesside University's School of Arts and Creative Industry**, home to internationally recognised research in cultural studies, migration, and participatory arts. Staff contribute to leading networks on integration, arts for health, and community regeneration, offering the student a vibrant intellectual home and access to wide-ranging methodological expertise.

In addition, the **Graduate School** and **Northern Bridge Consortium DTP** provide a comprehensive doctoral training programme covering research design, oral history, ethnography, ethics, and participatory methodologies, alongside workshops on impact, knowledge exchange, and academic writing. Tailored development in areas such as digital storytelling, creative dissemination, or community facilitation can be pursued through Northern Bridge's training fund, ensuring professional and methodological breadth.

The collaborative environment with partner organisations further enhances the student's experience. **Citizens UK** and **Boro Doughnut CIC** are well-established and highly networked, offering access to community leaders, policymakers, and civic initiatives. Regular engagement with community groups, assemblies, and participatory workshops will provide a distinctive fieldwork context that complements academic supervision. The partners' mentoring and guidance will help the student situate academic learning within real-world settings, testing approaches and sharing findings through public engagement and collaborative outputs.

The student will benefit from in-kind facilities including workspace, meeting rooms, and ongoing mentoring from senior partner staff. This dual location- university and community- reflects the project's interdisciplinary ethos, grounding academic inquiry in lived practice.]

Overall, the combination of disciplinary expertise, interdisciplinary centres, vibrant postgraduate networks, and embedded community collaboration ensures the student will thrive in an environment that is intellectually stimulating, professionally supportive, and socially impactful- ideally suited to producing a doctoral project of originality, rigour, and real-world relevance.