Creating libraries of tomorrow with children and young people today

Children and Young People's Promise and Library Journey Refresh

Open Call for Artists Engagement Commissions:
Libraries Rising, supported by Arts Council England

Introduction

Libraries Rising is leading a co-created refresh of the Children and Young People's Promise, the Children's Library Journey and library self-assessment tool. The Children's Promise sets out what every baby, toddler, child, teenager and young adult can expect from their local library. This work is supported by Arts Council England. It is the first in-depth review in over a decade and the opportunity enables us to creatively engage with children, young people and families themselves, to inform the development.

We are seeking to commission four artists, creative practitioners or organisations to work with groups of young people in libraries, supporting them to creatively explore the key themes of The Promise, share their experiences and imagine the future of libraries.

Each commission will be a creative project in its own right, and together they will form the central part of our engagement, alongside a national survey, library-based "Library of the Future" sessions and online hackathons.

This is not a consultation exercise. What young people tell us will directly shape the new Promise, and we will show them how, through clear "You said, we did" messaging at the relaunch. Creative work sits at the heart of this: we want to provide the opportunity for young people to share their experiences and perspectives, have honest responses, and to have ownership of The Promise in their own words.

Background

The Children and Young People's Promise was created in 2013 by the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), now operating as Libraries Rising.

- Children and young people are inspired by welcoming, inclusive spaces with a range of books that mirror the diversity of our world and make reading irresistible
- Children and young people are enabled with imaginative digital opportunities, building their skills, literacy, knowledge and creativity
- Children and young people are encouraged to take part in formal and informal learning opportunities
- Children and young people are engaged by a wide range of creative and cultural experiences
- Children and young people are actively involved in decisions about service developments and offered opportunities to volunteer
- Children and young people are supported through library services and activities to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Children's Library Journey, was published in 2015 mapping the key interactions public libraries have with children from birth to eighteen:

- from prenatal engagement with expectant parents
- rhyme times and story times in early years
- literacy support at primary age
- creative, social and digital activities for teenagers

Together, the Promise and the Journey underpin all four Universal Library Offers (Reading, Information and Digital, Culture and Creativity, and Health and Wellbeing), managed by Libraries Connected and are embedded in Arts Council England's Library Development Framework.

Project Overview

Opportunity	Four creative commissions working with young people in libraries across England
Fee	£3,000 per commission, inclusive of VAT, materials, and travel.
Who we want to work	Artists, creative practitioners and organisations with experience of

with	working with teenagers (14–18) and underrepresented groups including young people with SEND, young carers, those from migrant communities and the digitally excluded.
Delivery window	December 2026 – January 2027
Deadline	5pm, Monday 16 November 2026
Apply to	michael@librariesrising.org.uk

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The commissions will reach young people whose voices are least often heard in decisions about services. We are particularly keen to hear from artists and practitioners who already work with communities including:

- Teenagers (14–18)
- Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Young carers
- Young people from migrant communities
- Young people who are digitally excluded

You do not need to have worked with libraries before. You do need to show that you can build trust with the young people you propose to work with, and that your approach is accessible and genuinely led by them.

The Brief

Each commission will design and deliver a creative engagement project with a group of young people, taking place in or in partnership with a local library. Projects will:

- Respond to one or more of the themes: wellbeing, belonging, opportunity and inclusion, and explore the connections between them.
- Deliver several engagement sessions, giving time to build trust, explore ideas, and then reflect together on what has emerged.
- Give young people creative control, enabling them to shape what they explore and create.
- Help young people explore what libraries mean to them now, what is missing or not relevant, and what they would like libraries to become.
- Be shaped by the young people taking part, allowing the room for new themes to emerge.

We will ask you to share outcomes in ways that give us usable evidence for the review, as well as creative work that can be celebrated. Outputs will include:

- Library stories: insight, lived-experience narratives and short case studies, including evidence of barriers and opportunities.
- A creative output from the project that can be displayed or shared publicly or on-line at the launch of the refreshed Promise, with the consent of participants.
- Simple documentation of the process (photos, audio, notes or similar) and a short reflective summary of what young people said, using a template we will provide.

We will work with you to agree the detail, and our Data and Evaluation Specialist will advise on how to capture findings consistently across all four commissions.

Locations:

Commissions will take place across Arts Council England's Priority Places: areas identified as having lower levels of investment and cultural engagement. Libraries Rising will work with library services to confirm the final locations once artists are appointed, we are aiming for a national spread across coastal, rural and urban areas. In your application, please tell us if you have existing connections to particular places or communities, or can travel. Local libraries will host and support the work.

Contract Management and Governance

- The contract will be commissioned and managed by Libraries Rising.
- The Development and Delivery Manager (Michael White) will be your day-to-day contact and project manager.
- Progress will be shared at regular check-ins, aligned to agreed milestones.

Timeline

Activity	Date
Open call published	26 October 2026
Closing date	5pm, 16 November 2026
Panel review and conversations with shortlisted applicants	Week of 23 November 2026
Successful applicants notified	By 27 November 2026
Delivery of engagement with young people	December 2026 – January 2027
Final outputs and documentation submitted	End January 2027
Sharing of creative work at the launch of the refreshed Promise	Spring 2027

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Budget

Each commission is worth £3,000, inclusive of VAT where applicable. This covers your fee, materials, travel and the creation of your final outputs. Libraries Rising will provide a separate budget for incentives for young people taking part, so you do not need to include these.

How to Apply

Please email your application to michael@librariesrising.org.uk by 5pm November 16, 2026. You can apply in writing (up to two sides of A4) or as a short video or audio recording (up to five minutes). Please tell us:

- Who you are, and your experience of working creatively with young people
- Your idea and how it gives young people genuine creative control
- Which communities and which places you would like to work with
- How you would make the project accessible and welcoming to the young people involved
- How you would capture what young people say and share it with us
- A simple breakdown of how you would use the £3,000
- Evidence of your commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion
- Any examples of previous work which will support your application

If you would like support with your application, need it in a different format, or would like to talk your idea through, please get in touch. We are really happy to help. If you have any access needs or additional access costs associated with the delivery, please tell us and we will support you.

Evaluation of proposals

We will evaluate proposals using these criteria:

Criteria	Weighting
Quality, creativity and originality of the proposed approach	30%
Experience of, or strong connection to, the young people you propose to work with	30%
Accessibility and inclusion: how the approach will welcome and support participants	20%
Value for money and deliverability within the timeline	20%

Safeguarding and Requirements

Because you will be working with children and young people, successful applicants will need to:

- Hold, or be able to obtain before work begins, an enhanced DBS check (we can support with this)
- Agree to work within Libraries Rising and the host library's safeguarding policy and procedures
- Hold appropriate public liability insurance
- Follow our guidance on risk assessments, informed consent and data protection, including consent for photographs, recordings and creative work involving under-18s

Compliance

Libraries Rising reserves the right to disqualify any provider's response to this open call if it does not fully comply with the requirements contained therein. This is particularly relevant in relation to the stated closing date and time of applications.

Libraries Rising is not responsible for and will not pay for any expenses or losses you incur during, but not limited to, the application preparation, visits, negotiations, or interviews in relation to this process. It is your responsibility to ensure that any consortium member, sub-contractor, and adviser abide by the conditions set out by Libraries Rising.

In submitting a response to this open call, it will be implied that you accept all the provisions of this brief including these conditions. If Libraries Rising needs to change any information contained within this brief before the closing date, you will be written to to advise you of these changes, which includes the extension of any submission deadlines.

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Libraries Rising reserves the right to cancel or suspend this process at any time but will notify you in writing as soon as possible if this occurs.

It is expected that the contractor will work within the values and behaviours of Libraries Rising and this will be part of the contract of engagement. Our values are:

- Progressive
- Collaborative
- Inclusive
- Aspirational
- Kind

Open call for proposals

Commission: Children and Young People's Promise
Return to: michael@librariesrising.org.uk
Deadline for receipt of proposals: 5pm, Monday 16 November 2026

Further information

For an informal discussion about the work, please contact:
michael@librariesrising.org.uk
07871 521 187

ENDS

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND