

I Am Festival 2026

Brief for artists and organisations

Overview

In March 2026, A New Direction will be delivering the 11th annual I Am Festival. The I Am Festival is a yearly celebration empowering Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent young people to explore their creativity. Over the past 10 years, the festival has provided a platform for hundreds of young people to showcase their talents, leadership, ideas, and opinions.

We are looking for expressions of interest from artists and organisations interested in exploring the theme ‘Journeys’ with the I Am Network schools and Cultural Ambassadors.

Commissioned organisations/artists will deliver a workshop in two schools in the lead up to the I Am Festival as well as workshops during I Am Festival 2026. This activity will be curated through planning sessions with teachers and in-school workshops with students.

The commissioned organisations/artists will also provide inspirational and hands-on opportunities for the Cultural Ambassadors through leading an interactive masterclass to share their practice and meet one of the key aims of the programme (detailed below).

We are particularly interested in hearing from those who identify as Deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent, and from disabled-led arts organisations.

Budget: Up to £4,000 including VAT (to include all resources, facilitator costs and any other materials needed to fulfil the scope of this work)

Please note we may be able to provide additional funding to support any costs associated with access requirements that do not fit within the above budget. Please detail this in your EOI.

Timescale:

Planning:	July – December 2025
Delivery:	January 2026 – March 2026
I Am Festival:	W/C 9 th March 2026

During I Am Festival 2025 we worked with artists, and teachers in our [I Am Network](#) to deliver projects in schools, local communities and cultural venues exploring the theme of Make Some Noise! This included a parade with Watergate School and Haringey Shed through the Young V&A, exploring the ‘Joy of Sound’ with Design for Disability, light play with Groundswell Arts and much more.

Following on from this exciting work, for I Am Festival 2026 we will explore the theme ‘Journeys’. The festival week will be co-created with our brilliant I Am Network and fantastic cohort of Cultural Ambassadors.

About the I Am Network

A New Direction's I Am Network is a free professional development programme for educators working with Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent children and young people in London's schools and specialist settings. The Network meets twice a term over the academic year, working together to improve creative and cultural opportunities for children and young people who are Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent.

I Am Network members are supported to share good practice with other teachers working across a huge range of settings in London. The network also provides an opportunity to meet and share strategies and ideas for bringing the curriculum to life in ways that meet students' needs as well as connecting with various cultural organisations across the city.

About the Cultural Ambassadors

This year will be our 6th year collaborating with charity AFK to provide a work experience programme for disabled young adults. This iteration of the programme will involve up to 10 young people working collaboratively with A New Direction, artists and arts organisations for 22 weeks. Alongside developing employability skills, they will meet the commissioned artists and cultural organisations to learn about the cultural sector and test ideas for school workshops, lead a festival project, and support the delivery of events throughout the festival week.

This year the Cultural Ambassadors programme has 4 key aims:

- To develop skills in creativity, communication, teamwork, problem-solving and independence.
- To enable the Cultural Ambassadors to become leaders and role models.
- To support readiness for future work-experience opportunities and employment
- To enhance knowledge of the roles and opportunities available in the creative and cultural sector.

This year we will also be working with alumni from the 5th year cohort to consult on various areas of the I Am Programme, including the artist commissions.

You can find out more about AFK on [their website](#).

Details

We are looking for artists/ cultural organisations who have a practice which may be rooted in...

- Digital Arts/ animation
- Textile design
- Puppetry
- Visual art

We would also be interested in hearing from organisations/artists whose practice may not be defined by the above.

Area of focus

Please note these are initial ideas to help guide expressions of interest. Once commissioned, artists/organisations will take the lead on shaping these.

- Make a visual statement!
 - o A workshop that introduces a visual art skill – for example; painting, printmaking, animation, puppetry, **using the theme of Journeys as inspiration**
 - o This skill is developed to create a communal artwork that the school community can contribute to
 - o The communal artworks created in the 2 schools prior to festival week are then displayed at the festival with the commissioned artist/organisation leading a drop-in workshop on 1 day of the festival to create a 3rd communal artwork

You will commit to working in collaboration with A New Direction to:

I Am Festival		
Deliver	Detail	Approximate time commitment
Plan an activity or engagement piece to be delivered during the I Am Festival.	<p>Consult with A New Direction and the lead teacher from the selected I Am Network school to shape a workshop that can be delivered in school in the run up to the I Am festival and shape the performance for the I Am Festival week.</p> <p><i>The aims of this aspect of the commission are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet and understand the school and students that could engage with the activity 	2 days planning with A New Direction and selected schools
Deliver workshops in two I Am Network schools	<p>Deliver a workshop exploring the project focus with students from two different I Am Network schools.</p> <p>The aims of this aspect of the commission are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce and explore your creative practice with students - Engage school students in the creation of a festival activity 	2 days delivery in schools (N.B. We anticipate this delivery will need to be split over a number of sessions depending on the students' learning styles.)
Workshop delivery at I Am Festival 2026	<p>Lead the delivery of a workshop as part of the I Am Festival week.</p> <p>The aims of this aspect of the commission are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To engage visitors (students/teachers/cultural sector and/or the general public) in creative activity - To champion the creativity of Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent young people 	0.5 days set up 1 day delivery
Evaluation	<p>Take part in a project evaluation call with A New Direction</p> <p>The aims of this aspect of the commission are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To aid the evaluation of the whole I Am Programme 	1-2 hours
Cultural Ambassadors		
Deliver a masterclass for Cultural Ambassadors	<p>The aims of the masterclass workshops are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respond to one or more of the key aims of the Cultural Ambassador programme - Introduce your practice through a creative workshop - Introduce different progression route options by sharing the pathways into employment of masterclass facilitators - Signpost any personal and professional development opportunities available e.g. young company/internships/youth board 	1 day planning 1 day delivery (workshop delivered between 10:30 am – 2:30 pm on a Thursday)

Expression of Interest

To express your interest in working with us to deliver masterclasses and workshops, please send us an expression of interest (EOI) outlining the following:

- Your organisation's ethos and approach to working
- A brief idea of a workshop for I Am Festival 2026 which explores the area of focus
 - What would this look like being delivered in a school setting?
 - What would delivery look like during the I Am Festival week?
- A brief idea for a Cultural Ambassador masterclass and which of the 4 programme aims you will address
- An indication of available dates to deliver:
 - Cultural Ambassador masterclass (any Thursday between October – February, not including school holidays)
 - Availability for 1 day during the I Am Festival (W/C 9th March 2026)
- An estimated, outline budget (e.g. practitioner fees, materials and applicable VAT)

EOIs can be sent to iam@anewdirection.org.uk in any format, e.g.

- Up to 2 sides of an A4 Word document
- Up to 5 minute video or audio

Deadline: Friday 18th July at 5pm

If you have questions about this brief or would like to have an informal conversation about our work, please email iam@anewdirection.org.uk to arrange a time.

Safeguarding

Please note that any organisations that work with us need to complete an Organisation Declaration Form stating that relevant DBS checks have been undertaken for any practitioners involved in this project.

Any individuals/freelancers will need to undertake an Enhanced DBS check or be on the DBS update service. They must also be eligible to work in the UK and registered to pay their own taxes.

Access

It is really important to us that there are no barriers to anyone applying for opportunities at A New Direction. Please let us know if you have any access requirements and/or would like to submit your application in a different format by contacting iam@anewdirection.org.uk.

If there is any additional support, we could offer to enable you to participate in either the selection process or potentially working with A New Direction, please include this in your application.