EDINBURGH FESTIVALS RESPONSIBLE AI ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGE GUIDANCE NOTE
Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

1. About the call 1
2. About BRAID, Deaf Action and Festivals Edinburgh 2
3. Responsible AI in festival settings 3
4. Challenge Areas 4
5. What We Are Looking For 6
6. Budget 9
7. Intellectual Property 10
8. Timeline 11
9. Eligibility 12
10. How to apply 12
11. Equality, diversity and inclusion 12
12. How proposals will be assessed 13
13. Privacy and data protection 14
14. Ethics and research governance 15
15. Post-award process 15
16. Reporting 15

KEY INFORMATION

BUDGET	up to £220,000
CALL OPENS	3 September 2026
PILOT/EARLY PROTOTYPE	Edinburgh Festivals, Summer 2027
PROJECT COMPLETE	by 30 September 2028

1. About the call

Bridging Responsible AI Divides (**BRAID**) in partnership with **Festivals Edinburgh** (on behalf of the Edinburgh Festivals) and **Deaf Action** invite proposals from interdisciplinary teams to address accessibility challenges in festival settings through Responsible AI innovation.

Up to £220,000 is available to develop, prototype and evaluate an innovative and Responsible AI-assisted solution or solutions that meaningfully improve how cultural festivals support and enable deaf community participation.

A core requirement of this challenge is that the D/deaf community is meaningfully engaged as co-designers and co-evaluators throughout the project actively shaping the work. To ensure D/deaf community engagement throughout delivery, applications must include Deaf Action as a formal partner, engaging at minimum in line with the role and ringfenced budget set out in Section 5 below. Applicants are welcome to engage further deaf-led organisations or individuals as part of a broader community engagement and co-design approach. See UKRI Guidance on Co-production in Research for information and guidance.

Successful projects will combine academic research with practical R&D. Depending on project requirements, project teams are invited to deliver a demonstrator for the Edinburgh Festivals in summer 2027. Alternatively, projects may wish to trial an early-stage prototype at the Edinburgh Festivals in summer 2027, with a full demonstrator to be delivered at a suitable festival event by August 2028.

This opportunity works to support the Scottish Government's British Sign Language (BSL): National Plan 2023 to 2029 and endorses the British Deaf Association's Artificial Intelligence, British Sign Language, and the British Deaf Associations discussion paper of April 2025.

Glossary and terminology

The term **D/deaf** is used to encompass both Deaf people (the capital D denoting those that identify with Deaf culture and community, including BSL and ISL users) as well as the wider group of people in society that have different levels of hearing loss.

BSL means British Sign Language. It is used by approximately 25,000 people as their main, everyday language, while there are around 120,000 people who are able to use BSL to differing extents, including hearing family members, friends and communication professionals like sign language interpreters.

ISL means Irish Sign Language. It is used by approximately 5,000 people in Ireland as their preferred language, while another 40,000 people use ISL to communicate more broadly, including hearing friends, family, and co-workers.

A **demonstrator** is a functional, tested solution deployed with real users in a real festival or cultural event setting. It shows the proposed approach works in practice and has the potential for wider adoption and commercialisation. It is not required for the demonstrator to be a finished or commercially deployable product by the end of the project, but it should be sufficiently developed to provide credible evidence to evaluate how the solution performs and how it is used by the community it is designed to serve.

BRAID defines **Responsible AI** as AI technologies being transparent, fair, accountable and beneficial to people and the environment. It includes an interdisciplinary field of research, a corporate governance agenda, a designed standard of AI products, and a broad ecosystem of stakeholders that continue to shape what "responsible" means in practice.

2. About BRAID, Deaf Action and Festivals Edinburgh

Bridging Responsible AI Divides

BRAID is a six-year programme funded by UKRI's Arts and Humanities Research Council and delivered by the University of Edinburgh in partnership with the Ada Lovelace Institute and the BBC. The programme is dedicated to bringing arts and humanities knowledge more fully into the Responsible AI ecosystem, supporting research and innovation fellowships, scoping projects, demonstrators, and translational research. We work to widen access to Responsible AI knowledge and practice in the UK and to demonstrate its value in concrete, real-world contexts.

Deaf Action

Deaf Action is a deaf-led charity based in Edinburgh, supporting and celebrating deaf people and culture. Established in 1835, the organisation works to empower all deaf people to achieve their

potential and fully participate in society, with equality of rights, access and opportunity. Deaf Action also runs the Edinburgh Deaf Festival, which aims to bring the arts to deaf audiences, giving deaf people access to Edinburgh Festivals in a way that they haven't had before. As part of this work, the organisation collaborates with the Edinburgh Festivals, working to provide the public with opportunities to learn more about D/deaf culture while widening access to a variety of performances. Deaf action sits on Festivals Edinburgh's access working group and their involvement as a formal partner on the project reflects the organisation's unique position and ability to ensure genuine D/deaf community engagement between the project teams and Edinburgh Festivals.

Festivals Edinburgh

Festivals Edinburgh is an umbrella organisation that brings Edinburgh's leading festivals together to work on major collaborative projects and strategic initiatives. Festivals Edinburgh is the challenge holder for this call, on behalf of the Edinburgh Festivals. This challenge aligns with its City of Imagination: 2030 Vision and was shaped by engagement with Festivals Edinburgh's access working group, which brings together accessibility expertise from across 11 of Edinburgh's most significant festivals to identify priority areas, as well as the Festivals Edinburgh's AI working group, which is exploring the conditions under which Responsible AI innovation can have lasting and sustainable impact for the festivals.

Edinburgh's Festivals are among the world's largest and most internationally attended cultural events, encompassing the peak August period with six festivals: Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe (the world's largest arts festival), The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh International Book Festival and Edinburgh International Film Festival. There are a further five festivals throughout the rest of the year: Edinburgh's Hogmanay, Edinburgh Science Festival, Edinburgh International Children's Festival, Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival and Scottish International Storytelling Festival.

They attract hundreds of thousands of audience members from across the UK and internationally, but supporting the D/deaf community to access the full cultural offer remains challenging for festival organisers.

3. Responsible AI in festival settings

We are looking for proposals that address Responsible AI considerations arising from at least one of three priority areas set out below. These areas have been identified by BRAID working with Festivals Edinburgh and Deaf Action and centre on improving how cultural festivals support and enable the participation of deaf audiences, artists, creative practitioners and communication professionals in festival activity.

Responsible AI innovation in this context must explicitly address the following guiding principles to align with Festivals Edinburgh's priorities when engaging responsibly with AI technologies:

1. **artistic freedom, human creativity and intellectual property:** issues of central importance to the creative and cultural industries. For instance, there are legitimate concerns when it comes to using AI technologies to assist with captioning or interpreting services about whether an artist, creative practitioner or communication professional's (including BSL translator's) IP is being used to train AI models without consent or compensation. This also

relates to issues of **data protection and privacy** and whether terms of service of AI solutions contain appropriately limited use of performance content;
2. **social impact and ethical review** and the **monitoring of bias and fairness**: disabled people, the D/deaf community and others with access needs must not be subjected to solutions that reduce their access experience, expose them to unreliable information or undermine their culture and language;
3. **quality assurance, human oversight and editorial control**: solutions must not displace the work of communication professionals (e.g. BSL interpreters, audio describers, captioners) but should work to support and extend the reach of human expertise. Proposals must be explicit about how human oversight is maintained and how the role of communication professionals and the festival workforce is protected and respected.

See Festival Edinburgh's latest AI & the Festivals Report (May 2026) for more information.

Additionally, in line with the British Deaf Association's: Artificial Inelligence, British Sign Language and the British Deaf Association, we also wish to ensure that:

4. BSL as a distinct language and the **unique skills and expertise of BSL Interpreters are respected and protected**, and that BSL interpreters work or materials (including prior recordings) are only used fairly (including recompense, attribution, and clear consent for the use of their contributions) in the development and/or deployment of this solution.

Proposals that do not explicitly address these principles and cannot demonstrate how the D/deaf community will co-design and meaningfully be involved throughout delivery and evaluation of the project will not be considered for funding.

4. Challenge Areas

Proposals must:

1. be co-designed with the D/deaf community including BSL users from the outset, not as end-users of a pre-designed solution, but as active partners in determining what is worth building and how to evaluate it; and
2. address one or more of the following challenge areas via an innovative Responsible AI solution or solutions. Proposals addressing more than one challenge should demonstrate a coherent and strong rationale for doing so and show that the scope is achievable within the budget and timeline; and
3. aim to generate impact that can be sustained beyond the Edinburgh Festivals to improve how the broader creative and cultural sector across the UK and internationally support inclusive audience engagement.

Proposals are to demonstrate at least one approach during at least one of the Edinburgh Festivals in summer 2027. However, where more lead time is required, there is an option for proposals to pilot an early-stage prototype at the Edinburgh Festivals in summer 2027 on the way to delivering a full demonstrator and evaluation in the context of another suitable festival in 2028. This later demonstrator could be either during at least one of the Edinburgh Festivals or elsewhere, for example Deaffest or Signs Alive Festival.

Challenge Area One: empowering deaf-led priorities

We welcome proposals that address the D/deaf community's priorities when it comes to Responsible AI innovation in the context of cultural access and participation. The challenge should

relate to improving how festivals enable participation by audiences, artists, creative practitioners and/or communication professionals in festival activity.

The following two additional challenge areas represent some priorities that have been identified by Festivals Edinburgh's access working group in collaboration with Deaf Action.

Challenge Area Two: Festival Experience

Festivals are already engaging with AI captioning and sign language access tools in an environment where there remain unresolved questions around data privacy, terms of service, content licensing and the impact of technology on communication professionals and festival workers. BSL forms part of the accessible experience for deaf people alongside captioning and other approaches. The demand for such sign language access and captioning significantly outstrips what festivals can currently provide.

Alongside the performances themselves, festivals offer public spaces for community engagement that enrich the festival experience. A lot of the communication taking place at these hubs (most notably public announcements and live updates) do not reach the D/deaf community and so limits the ability of festival organisers to engage this audience. Additionally, when an accessibility request is made resulting in a show becoming accessible (for instance, using SignPort) this update of status is not widely communicated in real time, leading to missed opportunities for audience engagement.

The ways festival organisers are able to engage with deaf performers, creatives and festival workers is also hampered by limitations in communication technology and available resources.

While AI-assisted approaches may offer partial solutions, significant ethical and assurance questions remain about quality and the impact of such technologies on artists, creative practitioners, communications professions, festival workers and audience experience, and on language and culture.

The challenge is to explore how Responsible AI innovation can improve the deaf audience's experience of attending festivals while protecting the community and the rights of artists, creatives, communication professionals and festival workers.

Proposals may wish to consider:

- the capacity for synchronised sign language services in a live production setting via technical cues (lighting, sound) or speech-to-text NLP tracking and the potential to improve on-demand access to interpretation services;
- the evaluation of AI-assisted tools for sign language and captioning: critically assessing quality, ethics, and environmental impacts as well as how technology interacts with human expertise, issues of IP and licensing, as well as audience experience;
- the development of a centralised platform or integrated access solution to improve how festivals engage the D/deaf community;
- the deployment of novel AI-assisted tools for complex live events that might involve, for instance, a mix of scripted performances and the participation of deaf performers and audience members.

Challenge Area Three: Show Discovery

Disabled people, the D/deaf community and others with access needs have no single and reliable way to find out which shows across the Edinburgh Festivals they can access. Festivals Edinburgh offer the Edinburgh Festivals Listings API (Application Programming Interface), a free to use service (subject to approval for an API key and compliance with license terms) providing machine readable access to official event listings of 11 of Edinburgh's major festivals and intended for use by media and application developers among others.

Whilst listings data is well structured, the accompanying access information is much less consistent in terms of quality, format, structure, and it is often held only by individual organisations and may not be tagged in a way that would allow automated systems (including AI systems) to reliably retrieve and aggregate it.

The challenge is to explore how data infrastructure work, as a component part of Responsible AI innovation, might support the development of an inclusive tool for discovering shows and planning itineraries based on access requirements. While the focus of this challenge is to improve access for the D/deaf community it may encompass or contain learnings or data approaches that can be applied to and benefit diverse audiences with other accessibility requirements.

Proposals may wish to consider the following:

1. How can the underlying data quality, standardisation approaches and governance challenges be resolved? How does data infrastructure form a prerequisite for Responsible AI innovation and the delivery of an AI-assisted demonstrator? Where does responsibility lie and how is it operationalised in data infrastructure work?
2. What are the duty-of-care implications of AI-generated access information? How can AI-enabled tools support this? What human oversight is required?
3. What AI tools are genuinely useful and trustworthy for deaf audiences specifically and what does co-design with deaf users reveal about what matters most and how AI innovation is operationalised in cultural and festival contexts?
4. Is AI the right tool or part of the solution? Demonstrators should set intentional limits around the use of AI to ensure it remains targeted, fit for purpose and adds value. Where AI provides no utility it is important to understand why and how this was assessed. In all cases, AI use should be considered against other solutions based on data infrastructure, and other (non-AI) tools and resources.

Useful resources include: the venue access guides (AccessAble and Euan's Guide) along with the Edinburgh Festivals Listings API as well as applications like SignPort and Signapse. Data aggregation will require agreement with several stakeholders and proposals should include a viable plan and, where obtainable, letters of support from relevant industry and third-sector organisations.

5. What We Are Looking For

Project Structure

Proposals should combine three central elements:

1. Deaf Action as formal partner, co-delivering the project. Project teams may also involve additional deaf-led organisations as part of their approach.
2. A research contribution that advances our understanding of Responsible AI innovation for cultural access and participation for the D/deaf community. We expect this to include the

embedding of a research fellow drawn from the arts and humanities disciplines. We welcome the full range of arts and humanities knowledge, including but not limited to sociotechnical evaluation, ethical review, HCI, human-centred design or sociolegal expertise. This BRAID Responsible AI Research Fellow will be embedded within the project team and will also join the BRAID Fellowship Cohort.

3. An R&D and demonstrator element responsible for the design, build, prototyping and evaluation of an innovative practical solution that can be tested and trialed with real users.

Ideally, these elements should be integrated throughout the project. The deaf partner(s) should be an active partner throughout, the research contribution should inform the design of the solution from the outset, and the research and development process should generate research insight not merely a product.

Team Composition

Project teams should comprise:

- a university or research organisation as lead applicant or grant holder;
- Deaf Action as formal partner, engaging at minimum in line with the defined role and ringfenced budget set out below, with genuine influence over direction of the work;
- an embedded research fellow contributing arts and humanities expertise; and
- technical expertise sufficient to design, build, and evaluate the working prototype, preferably including experience or capabilities to take a successful prototype forward to market

Cross-sector partnerships involving universities, third sector organisations and industry partners including SMEs are encouraged to help maximise potential for real-world deployment and adoption of the solution or solutions.

The demonstrator

In developing proposals, applicants should also be realistic about the relationship between cost, feasibility and function. We are seeking innovative and responsible use of AI, noting that this may involve the development of new approaches, or may involve the thoughtful and responsible tailoring, adaptation or fine tuning of existing technologies or approaches. Adoption of technology in practice is always shaped by budget and operational constraints, and the most technically or ethically sophisticated systems are of little value if they are too costly, complex or resource-intensive to be sustained in real-world settings. Meaningful and sustainable Responsible AI innovation requires solutions to also be practical, affordable and useful.

Working with Edinburgh Festivals as challenge holder

Festivals Edinburgh (on behalf of the Edinburgh Festivals) as challenge holder will work with the successful team over the course of the project. They will initially meet the team to review and refine the project plan and timelines and provide suitable point/s of contact for liaison with the Festivals Edinburgh Access Group (including all of the 11 major festivals they represent) and any other relevant Edinburgh Festival(s). They will provide access to relevant data, resources and contacts.

Festivals Edinburgh will also set up an advisory steering group of representatives to meet with the project team on a regular basis to stay informed of progress and provide additional support and guidance.

Working with Deaf Action as project partner

At the baseline level of engagement, Deaf Action will provide an initial deaf awareness and cultural briefing for the project team at the outset; a named point of contact for the life of the project, available at regular intervals; structured input at defined project milestones (e.g. at project set up, in lead up to trials/demonstrators and at time of evaluation); and review of BSL and accessibility quality of up to five public-facing outputs. This baseline level of engagement will be available equally to all proposals and covers Deaf Action's named point of contact's time together with the internal coordination and specialist input required to their engagement, project management, monitoring and evaluation input. The budget should ringfence £20,000 to enable this minimum level of engagement, which will be available equally to all proposals.

Deaf Action provide a range of services that project teams may wish to utilise. These include:

- Community engagement and co-design: recruiting co-design participants and user testers; access to participant network; support for cultural and linguistic quality assurance activity.
- BSL and communication production and support: BSL video translation and production services, in-house studio, professional deaf presenters and experience producing promotional web and event content. Live captioning and streaming support. Interpreting and communication support.
- Training and capability building: deaf awareness training and digital inclusion services.
- Delivery and operational experience: support for festival programming and delivery of festival activity; venue and room hire; specialist equipment expertise; market research.

Any project-specific delivery roles for Deaf Action is a matter for applicants to propose, cost and negotiate as part of the application. Applicants should set out how the project team proposes to work with Deaf Action and Festivals Edinburgh over and above the baseline, with the associated costs identified in the project budget.

Additional Deaf Action services commissioned by the project team (community workshops, BSL production, market research, user testing, participant recruitment) should be budgeted within the **D/deaf community engagement and co-design** budget category, not within the ringfenced Deaf Action partner costs.

Applicants anticipating significant additional Deaf Action involvement should indicate this in their expression of interest. Where needed, BRAID can facilitate introductions with Deaf Action to scope and cost additional activities before the full application deadline.

All Proposals Must

- Demonstrate genuine co-design with the D/deaf community throughout the project;
- Explicitly address the Responsible AI dimensions of the work;
- Offer a new or innovative solution that has the potential to meaningfully improve the experience of deaf audiences, creatives and/or communication professionals;
- Show awareness of what has already been tried in this space, and why the proposed approach is likely to succeed where previous attempts have not;
- Produce a prototype or intervention ready for trialling and evaluation at early-stage trial and later demonstration (see timeline below for more information);
- Include a credible plan for evaluating impact;
- Include a plan for longer-term sustainability and impact beyond the funded period, acknowledging that this is one-off funding. The BRAID team will be happy to discuss

potential sustainability plans (including appropriate IP and licensing models) at any stage of the application and/or with the successful application at any point during the project.

What this challenge will not fund

The following activity is out of scope for this call:

- Foundational or purely academic research that does not lead to a suitable demonstrator;
- Projects without meaningful co-design with deaf people as a core component from the outset;
- Generalised sign language translation or speech-to-text tools without a specific application to accessibility in festival settings;
- Projects that replicate tools already deployed or in active development without clear differentiation or improvement; and
- Projects led by a for-profit organisation without a university as lead applicant.

6. Budget

Up to £220,000 is available and must cover all project costs including research, technical development, community engagement, and dissemination. Please note that this call **does <u>not</u> operate on a fEC (Full Economic Cost) model.** 100% of Directly Incurred costs are eligible. Estates and indirect costs or overheads are ineligible.

Proposals should provide a clear, costed budget breakdown in which:

- We anticipate that depending on the proposal a significant portion of the budget will need to be allocated to deaf community engagement and co-design. This does not include the £20,000 ringfenced for Deaf Action baseline involvement (which sits in the Partner and subcontracting costs). It does include direct costs associated with other deaf partner organisation(s) plus any requested additional involvement of Deaf Action towards community engagement and co-design activities. Costs may include partner organisation fees and participant involvement. Other standard accessibility costs such as captioning, audio description are budgeted separately as accessibility costs;
- Directly incurred costs only of the embedded research fellow should be costed in (i.e. no indirects or overheads). We would anticipate that a minimum time requirement of 0.2 FTE is required for this post;
- Technical development costs should reflect the complexity of the proposed prototype. Proposals should be realistic about what demonstrator is achievable within the budget and timeline;
- Dissemination and impact evaluation costs should be included in the costing.

Budget categories (all 100% Directly Incurred)

- **Staff and salary costs**
  Salary plus applicable on-costs (e.g. national insurance, pension) for all project staff, excluding estates and indirects or other overheads. This includes embedded research fellow, technical/development staff, project coordination, and community engagement roles.
- **Partner and subcontracting costs**
  Costs for the deaf-led partner organisation and any other named project partners, including their staff time and direct costs but excluding organisational overheads. A minimum of £20,000 must be ringfenced for Deaf Action's baseline involvement within this category.

- **Deaf community engagement and co-design**
  Payments to community participants, community researcher fees, deaf advisory input, and facilitation of co-design activities (distinct from accessibility costs).
- **Accessibility costs**
  Examples include: BSL/sign interpreters, live captioning, audio description, accessible formats, access support workers, specialist transport, childcare and carer support.
- **Technical development and R&D**
  Examples include: Design, software development or adaptation, API access and data licensing, cloud computing and hosting, hardware for prototyping, technical testing, and user testing.
- **Research-related expenses**
  Examples include: Venue hire, materials, AV/IT equipment hire, design and production services, facilities charges, dissemination, and publication costs.
- **Travel and subsistence**
  In line with your employers standard university travel policy. See UKRI guidance for Travel Subsistence and Expenses Policy for guidance.

Matched resource

We welcome and encourage financial and/or in-kind contributions from project partners. These contributions work to strengthen stakeholder commitment, ensure appropriate acknowledgement of value generated, and demonstrate good value for money for the funder.

Where feasible, aim to match your BRAID request with financial and/or in-kind contributions from partners. In-kind contributions may include partner staff time or other direct costs such as data/compute, facilities, event costs, and travel. Financial contributions include funding provided by partners towards project costs including salary costs. Such contributions can significantly help stretch ambition and impact and it is expected that commercial partners will add value to projects in this way rather than claim costs out of the project budget.

Where it is not possible to secure in-kind contribution, reduced costs or matched resources, you will still be eligible to apply. We appreciate that many partnerships will involve working with charities/SMEs or community partners with limited or stretched resource. In all cases, proposals must evidence genuine partner demand and commitment and requests must be justified.

Please contact braid@ed.ac.uk if you have any queries in relation to matched resourcing.

7. Intellectual Property

The applicant/research organisation will retain ownership of all foreground intellectual property (IP) (including all IP, results and analysis created during the project).

In line with BRAID and the AHRC's commitment to open and responsible AI innovation, applicants are encouraged - but not required where unsuitable - to adopt open-source licensing frameworks for software and code outputs (e.g. MIT or Apache 2.0 licences), open access licensing for research outputs, and Creative Commons licences for other outputs to support the project's sustainability and impact goals. This helps to maximise public benefit from publicly funded research and supports broad accessibility and reuse of project outputs and helps ensure compliance with UK subsidy control rules.

Applicants are required to propose in their applications how foreground IP will be owned, managed and made available and this must be consistent with UKRI funding terms and conditions. The IP strategy must support longer-term sustainability and adoption of the solution.

Where project teams include commercial partners, proposals must demonstrate that IP arrangements are consistent with UK subsidy control rules. Any commercial exploitation of foreground IP developed using public funding must occur on market terms. Open source or open access licensing is one recognised route to ensuring compliance.

The BRAID team is happy to discuss IP arrangements at any stage. Please contact braid@ed.ac.uk.

8. Timeline

Milestone	Date
Challenge published	3 September 2026
Applicant briefing webinar / workshop	7 September 2026
Expression of interest	23 October 2026
Application deadline	27 October 2026
Awards announced	Late November 2026
Project start	Early 2027
Project close	30 September 2028

Demonstrator delivery

All projects must deliver a working demonstrator tested with the D/deaf community in a real setting. Two pathways are available:

	Pathway A	Pathway B
Summer 2027	Full demonstrator at the Edinburgh Festivals	Early-stage pilot at the Edinburgh Festivals
Spring / early Summer 2028	—	Full demonstrator at a suitable event

Projects are likely to have less than six months before Edinburgh Festivals in Summer 2027. This is a tight window for a project that must include community co-design, ethics and data approvals, and any necessary recruitment, which can take weeks to months. Pathway A may be achievable for projects with strong existing community relationships and a clearly scoped technical approach. However, to enable projects more leeway, Pathway B gives teams more time to co-design and develop before a full demonstrator, with the Summer 2027 trial serving as a genuine early-stage pilot that informs subsequent development.

Projects following Pathway B should identify their 2028 demonstrator venue in their application. Options include cultural events such as Deaffest, Signs Alive Festival, and Clin-Doeil Festival, as well as the Edinburgh Festivals.

Proposals must specify which pathway they are following and explain how their project timeline reflects that choice.

9. Eligibility

Applications are open to interdisciplinary teams meeting the following criteria:

- The lead applicant and grant holder must be a UK university or research institution eligible to receive AHRC funding.
- The project team must include Deaf Action as formal partner (as well as any other named deaf-led organisation).
- Project teams to include industry and third-sector partners as co-investigators or named collaborators.
- International collaborators are welcome as named partners, subject to AHRC eligibility rules.

If a deaf-led organisation wishes to lead a consortium, be the grant holder or host the research fellow, please contact us prior to the call opening and we will discuss options and alternative arrangements with our funder.

10. How to apply

To assist BRAID prepare for the review process, we encourage applicants to complete a short Expression of interest form as soon as possible and by **23 October 2026**.

Before submitting a proposal, we strongly encourage applicants to engage with Deaf Action and Festivals Edinburgh through the webinar on 7 September 2026 (which will be recorded and made available on the call webpage), as well as through a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and a limited number of 20-minute drop-in sessions to meet with the BRAID team during the open call period. Sessions are available to book using this bookings page. Please otherwise write to braid@ed.ac.uk with any queries.

The application form is available online. If you require this in another format, please email braid@ed.ac.uk.

Project duration

Projects can start once the award letter is issued and required approvals/contracts are in place. The demonstrator must be delivered by early to mid-Summer 2028 and all remaining activity must be complete, and all eligible costs incurred (goods/services received; staff time worked) by **30 September 2028**. No spend after this date will be eligible and no further project extensions will be possible.

11. Equality, diversity and inclusion

This call is committed to equality of opportunity and seeks to amplify under-represented voices in Responsible AI. Both the AHRC and the University of Edinburgh have a long-standing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and to promoting a positive culture, which celebrates difference, challenges prejudice and ensures fairness. We welcome applications from research-active staff at all career stages and particularly encourage applications from marginalised and under-represented groups.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks;
- support for people with caring responsibilities;
- flexible working; and
- alternative working patterns.

During both the application and delivery stage, if you require additional support relating to accessibility please contact braid@ed.ac.uk or alternatively our operations manager Tina Donnelly (tina.donnelly@ed.ac.uk) to discuss how we can best support you. Financial support to remove barriers to participation is available via our separate BRAID accessibility fund, rather than being drawn from your project budget. Any request will not affect your assessment and you can write to us at any time pre or post submission

You can find more information at UKRI's equality, diversity and inclusion pages and at the University of Edinburgh equality, diversity & inclusion pages.

12. How proposals will be assessed

All eligible proposals will be reviewed by an assessment panel convened by BRAID. The panel will include representatives from BRAID, our programme partners the Ada Lovelace Institute and BBC, the AHRC, the challenge holder Festivals Edinburgh and at least one deaf person. It will comprise expertise in Responsible AI, experience in arts and cultural organisations, and at least one external independent reviewer.

Following eligibility checks, each application will be reviewed by a panel convened to make funding recommendations. Panelists who are involved in any application or otherwise have a conflict of interest will be required to declare the conflict and will be recused from decision-making.

To support the programme's aims, BRAID, in consultation with the AHRC, reserves the right to use the funding recommendations to create a balanced portfolio of projects across the ecosystem, considering the diversity of disciplines, backgrounds, and researchers, research themes and objectives, and the geographical scope of projects. Decisions are final and cannot be appealed, and the university reserves the right to amend the application process at any time.

Proposals will be scored against the following criteria:

(a) Vision

Does the proposal address a genuine and significant accessibility challenge for the D/deaf festivals community and is the approach original and innovative? Does the proposal demonstrate awareness of what has already been tried in this space and go beyond existing solutions currently available? Is there a credible case that the project will meaningfully improve access to Edinburgh Festivals programming for D/deaf communities? What change will the project enable and at what scale?

(b) Approach and methodology

Does the project have a credible methodology that centers D/deaf community as co-designers shaping project not just consulted as end-users? How will the team work with Deaf Action and

what additional deaf-led involvement is planned? How well-planned is the delivery pathway, including in the summer of 2027 and any subsequent demonstrator?

(c) Impact and legacy of outcomes

Who are the primary beneficiaries and how will the project reach and serve them? How will deaf communities continue to benefit from project outputs, analysis and data beyond the project period, including through access to foreground IP? What impact metrics and measures will be put in place to track project success?

(d) Responsible AI dimensions

How does the proposal reflect the Festivals Edinburgh AI framework and engage with the British Deaf Association's discussion paper? How does the proposal align with BRAID's programme aims? Does the approach identify and mitigate risk to potential harms or unintended consequences? Is there a well-considered approach to ethics, data sharing, and IP management?

(e) Team, budget, feasibility, and financial sustainability

Is the team well-constituted to deliver the project with the right expertise across research, technology and D/deaf community practice? Are any capability gaps address through partnerships or advisory arrangements? Is the plan realistic within the timescale and budget? Have major risks to delivery been identified and are plans in place to mitigate against them?

Is the budget clearly well-justified and proportionate to the proposed activities and outputs? Does the budget represent good value for money for public investment? Is there a credible plan for financial sustainability beyond the funded period (for example, through licensing, earned income, partnership funding or commitments)?

If you would like to know details on who is on the panel, please contact braid@ac.ed.ac.uk

13.Privacy and data protection

In applying for this opportunity you are giving explicit consent for us to process your personal data as part of programme delivery (e.g. peer review, correspondence and entering into a contract), as well as monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Your data will be managed confidentially. It will be held by the BRAID's delivery team based at the University of Edinburgh, with some data shared with our delivery partners BBC and the Ada Lovelace Institute, and with our funder the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and for this call specifically, Festivals Edinburgh and Deaf Action. When reported for monitoring and evaluation, your data will only be presented in anonymous aggregated form.

Your personal data will always be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in line with the University of Edinburgh's data protection policy and the BRAID Privacy Policy.

Data retention period: We will hold this information for a period of 5 years from the end of the AHRC grant award, after which it will be disposed of.

14.Ethics and research governance

Projects involving data collection (e.g. observation, interviews, surveys, or the use of personal data) will be required to complete a research ethics review before the project begins. The lead applicant is responsible for obtaining ethical approval from their own institutional ethics review board or from another independent ethics review process approved by BRAID. Applicants should indicate in their application whether their proposed research activities will require ethics approval and, if so, which ethics review body will be used. A Data Protection Impact Assessment must be completed before any personal data is collected or processed.

15. Post-award process

Successful applicants will receive an award letter from BRAID. The project can begin once the award letter has been countersigned by the lead applicant and any required institutional approvals are in place. We expect the project to start on or before 1 April 2027, though BRAID will work with the successful team to confirm the precise date. Funding will be paid by quarterly payments in arrears and will be subject to satisfactory progress reports.

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a collaboration agreement with Festivals Edinburgh and Deaf Action within 8 weeks of the award and are to provide a copy of the completed agreement to BRAID. The agreement will cover intellectual property, data sharing, publication, and the terms of engagement with Festivals Edinburgh and Deaf Action.

16. Reporting

Reporting will be kept to a minimum and completed through report gathering and online meetings. Projects will be required to submit a brief progress report at the six-month milestone covering progress against the project plan and early findings from the August 2027 pilot and any emerging risks. A full interim report will be required at the project midpoint, including any evaluation data and reflections from the D/deaf community. A final report will need to be submitted one month after project completion covering all project outputs, evaluation findings and a sustainability plan. The reports will be shared with the AHRC and summary findings with Festivals Edinburgh and BRAID's programme partners.

Project leads will be required to participate in at least two BRAID programme events during the project period. Project leads will also be invited to actively participate in other regular cohort support sessions with the BRAID programme throughout the project to help build, strengthen and sustain the community.

These engagements are intended to encourage open discussion and explore opportunities for BRAID to support efforts to connect your activities with the wider Responsible AI ecosystem and amplify impact.

Update 30 September 2026: Following feedback, we've extended the deadline for the expression of interest (previously called the registration of interest) to 23 October 2026. Submitting the form is no longer a requirement for eligibility, but we still encourage applicants to submit one as early as possible as it helps us manage workloads and plan the selection process.