

# University of Sussex

## Researcher-Led Initiative Fund Application Form

[View full entry at CognitoForms.com.](#)

### Entry Details

#### About the lead applicant

NAME

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SCHOOL OF LEAD APPLICANT

Media, Arts and Humanities

ARE YOU A DOCTORAL OR EARLY  
CAREER RESEARCHER?

Doctoral researcher

#### About your application

WHICH OF THE FOUR RLI STRANDS  
DOES YOUR INITIATIVE FIT INTO?  
CHECK THE GUIDELINES ON OUR  
WEBSITE IF YOU'RE NOT SURE.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

#### About your equality, diversity and inclusion initiative

TITLE OF INITIATIVE

Neurodivergent Art Jam

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVE

This initiative consists of ten weekly two hour art and writing workshops for neurodivergent individuals at Sussex (students at all levels and staff), culminating in a short exhibition of participants' creative work at the Phoenix Artspace in Brighton. Each workshop has space for fifteen individuals and the schedule will be comprised of both prompt-led and free creating time; with an emphasis on play, exploration, materiality, process and embodied ways of thinking through experience or academic/creative ideas.

**WHEN IS THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE RUNNING?** On multiple dates

**START DATE** 24/01/2022

**END DATE** 10/04/2022

**HOW WILL YOUR INITIATIVE PROMOTE AWARENESS OF EDI ISSUES, ENCOURAGE GREATER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN DOCTORAL/EARLY CAREER RESEARCH, OR OFFER SUPPORT TO UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS IN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT SUSSEX?**

This initiative is designed for neurodivergent individuals (autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, anxiety, depression etc.) to have access to a safe and validating creative space where they are among other individuals with similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and support. Neurodivergent people are often forced to mask their true selves in public and learning environments for fear of discrimination and oppression, which is both exhausting and detrimental to our mental health and wellbeing. But a dedicated community would potentially render masking unnecessary for its activity duration. The presence of this community on campus and at the Phoenix Artspace will intentionally raise awareness of neurodiversity and neurodivergent identities in both public and university social spheres, much like the Neurodiversity at Sussex Society. This initiative will also be an explicitly LGBTQIA+ safe space, recognising the ways in which neurodiversity intersects with sexual orientation and gender, and the high numbers of neurodivergent individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or neuroqueer. This will be made explicit by the use of affirmative language and the progress flag on promotional material, and reinforcing this stance during the workshops.

Embodied ways of thinking, such as art-making and creative writing, are often a neurodivergent individual's mode of expression, thanks to our divergent minds and ability to make connections. Therefore, a regular space in which individuals can have free access to art materials and creative prompts would provide a perfect environment to engender embodied exploration and play.

**WHO IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AND HOW WILL YOU ENGAGE WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY? IF YOUR FOCUS IS ON A SPECIFIC GROUP OF RESEARCHERS, HOW COULD YOUR**

The target audience for this initiative is students (at all levels) and staff at the University of Sussex. Rather than focusing this initiative on postgraduate researchers, I have specifically designed it with a broad scope of participation in mind. I have done



**INITIATIVE BE ROLLED OUT TO OTHERS?**

this for the following reasons: to foster a sense of community across the university not dependent on academic level, to give undergraduates an awareness of how neurodivergent individuals move through academia, and to generate an equal space between all levels to see what creative practice might emerge. As this initiative is aimed at neurodivergent individuals, it is not my intention to roll it out to those who don't identify as a neurominority.

To effectively engage my target audience, I will contact each of the university's departments, the student's union and student ambassadors to ask them to send out promotional material for the workshop series. I will also distribute flyers on university bulletin boards and on all available social media channels.

**WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF YOUR ACTIVITY? LIST THE STEPS YOU WILL TAKE TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTIVES.**

The objectives of this initiative are:

- To cultivate a space in which a neurodivergent community can be built, where members feel a sense of freedom to be themselves.
- For community members to have a space to explore, play and process everyday experience and academic/creative ideas through visual and embodied thinking, art-making and creative writing.
- To raise public and university awareness of neurodivergent identities and experience.

The workshops will be held at the Sussex Humanities Lab, which is a good sized creative space with access to facilities and an outside area. In order to create a neurodivergent friendly and safe space, several factors must be considered. Those with sensory sensitivities often find lights, sound and certain social interaction challenging to process. Therefore, I will ensure that I am able to have access to the SHL's lighting rig to alter glare and brightness, reduce noise interruption where I can (electrical equipment for example), and make it clear at the beginning of each session that social interaction is not expected and creative work can be carried out alone or in a quiet area of the room if desired. The use of headphones and earplugs will also be welcomed, as will items such as fidget spinners and tactile comfort objects. The benefit of the SHL is its outside space, which I will encourage participants to make use of if they so wish. For those with physical disabilities, I have chosen the

SHL for its step-free access and will ensure that all entry points are fully accessible both before and after the sessions. All written material and verbal prompts will be made fully accessible following the guidelines available from CHANGE (2016). I will supply participants with images of the SHL space before the first workshop and continue to send outlines of the structure of each session for those that prefer to know what to expect ahead of time. Participants will have the freedom to bring their own equipment to the session if they're more comfortable doing so, or to use the same equipment each session (in this case, I will create a designated box for each person to put their equipment in). In order to make the workshops ADHD friendly, reminders of the sessions will be regularly sent out via email ahead of time and physically moving around during the sessions will be welcomed as will the freedom to go off on as many creative tangents as desired. In order to make all this possible, I will send out an inclusivity statement ahead of the first session (and thereafter for new participants) and then go through it as a group, so that each participant knows their needs will be met with validation and acceptance. I will of course maintain this stance with affirmative behaviour and speech throughout the workshops and exhibition, and welcome suggestions for adapting the workshops to better suit individual needs.

To engender a sense of embodied exploration and play, art-making and visual or storied thinking of everyday experience and academic or creative ideas, I will use the budget to buy a wide selection of art (such as pencils, acrylics, paintbrushes, easy-use clay, fabrics, paper, card, glue) and writing (pens, notebooks, paper) materials. The sessions will be split into a period of guided prompts verbally given by myself (also accessible in text form), and then a period of free time to create. The prompts will be varied in order to be as inclusive as possible, but will be inspired by current scholarship in visual thinking and storymaking.

To raise awareness of neurodivergent identities and experience on campus, I will ask all available channels at Sussex (social media, Student's Union, mailing lists) to disseminate content created by me (and participants if they are willing and able) about



the Neurodivergent Art Jam community across the university. In the mid stage of the ten weeks, I will ask the Sussex Research Hive if I can write a guest blog post to raise awareness of the community and neurodiversity itself.

To raise awareness of neurodivergent identities and experience in the wider public domain, there will be an optional culminating exhibition at Phoenix Artspace, which will be a chance for participants to exhibit work they produced during the workshops. Although the end product itself is not the goal of participating in these workshops, I have found through personal experience in such initiatives that a culminating event can generate otherwise unforeseen avenues of creative exploration, as well as solidifying community bonds in the process of putting on an exhibition. The exhibition will have a private view opening which can be attended via invite, and then it will be open to the public for the rest of the weekend.

#### Sources

<https://www.changepeople.org/getmedia/923a6399-c13f-418c-bb29-051413f7e3a3/How-to-make-info-accessible-guide-2016-Final>

**HOW WILL YOUR ACTIVITY BE ORGANISED? INCLUDE DETAILS OF WHO WILL BE INVOLVED, HOW THE INITIATIVE WILL BE MANAGED, AND HOW IT WILL BE PROMOTED.**

I will be organising the initiative myself, with help from a fellow PGR to design promotional material such as workshop and exhibition flyers. I will distribute the workshop flyers on bulletin boards, via university mailing lists and on social media (on the various Sussex University and Student's Union channels, as well as creating a Neurodivergent Art Jam Twitter and Instagram account), both before the end of semester one and throughout semester two.

Participants will not be expected to sign up for the whole ten weeks, rather they can chose which sessions to attend to suit their schedule and personal needs. There will be space for fifteen participants at each session and each participant will need to sign up each week via an eventbrite page, which will be made accessible via links on promotional material and social media channels. Phoenix Artspace will advertise the exhibition on their website and social media channels. I will advertise the exhibition by distributing flyers on campus and around Brighton, and on the

aforementioned social media channels.

There will be ten workshop sessions in total, with two hours per session. Each session will start with a series warming up exercises and prompts given by myself (lasting 50 minutes in total), where participants can write or use any art material they would like to. A ten minute break will be followed by an hour of free creating time, where participants can use any material they like and talk freely or have quiet time. The workshop sessions will take place weekly on a weekday late afternoon in the Sussex Humanities Lab, which I have already enquired about and received a positive response.

At the end of the ten weeks, the members will be asked if they would like to exhibit any piece of work (visual and written) made during the workshops. A short weekend exhibition will be held at the Phoenix Artspace in Brighton, which will be put up and taken down by myself and participating members. I have discussed the prospect of this exhibition at Phoenix Artspace, to which they are supportive and await confirmation.

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**WHAT IS THE TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT? INCLUDE START AND END DATES, AND KEY MILESTONES.**

The ten weekly two hour workshops will begin in week one of semester one and end with the exhibition on the weekend of either the 2nd or 9th April, depending on space availability at Phoenix.

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**GIVEN THE CURRENT PANDEMIC, HOW WILL YOU ADAPT YOUR PLANS IF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS MEAN AN IN-PERSON ACTIVITY IS NOT POSSIBLE?**

The workshop sessions themselves could easily be held on zoom, which have proven to be successful in arts-based, creative writing and neurodivergent communities since the beginning of the pandemic. If a move to online session was necessary, I would send each participant an art materials package ahead of time and continue with the above session plan. In order to generate a sense of community and discussion in such a situation, I would reserve 15 minutes at the end of the session for both whole group discussion or smaller break out room discussion, depending on the needs of the community members.

If an in-person exhibition is not possible due to restrictions, I would create a virtual exhibition space by building a dedicated website to exhibit work and organise a virtual launch event where I (and willing community members) discuss the work produced.

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**HOW WILL YOU MEASURE SUCCESS AND IMPACT, AND WHETHER YOU HAVE ACHIEVED YOUR OBJECTIVES? CONSIDER HOW YOU WILL EVALUATE AS THE INITIATIVE PROGRESSES, AS WELL AS AT THE END OF THE PROJECT.**

During week five, I will send out a digital survey to all participants to gather feedback on how they have found the sessions so far, what they feel could be improved (for example: different art materials, changing aspects of the physical space, more or less prompts/free creative time etc), their views on the shape of the community and specifically what they have discovered through the process of art-making and creative writing.

I will put a comment box in the exhibition space for public engagement and invite exhibition attendees to complete an online survey. After the exhibition, I will send around another summative survey to workshop participants to ascertain what impact the series of workshops has made on their wellbeing. I will then write an evaluative document to assess the initiative's achievements.

**THE RLI FUND IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE SHORT-TERM SUPPORT TO RESEARCHER INITIATIVES. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR INITIATIVE WILL BE SUSTAINED IN THE FUTURE (IF THAT IS THE INTENTION). WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL LEGACY OF THE PROJECT?**

I have already developed a relationship with the organisational staff at Phoenix Artspace with the explicit intention that a regular Neurodivergent Art Jam could be held there in the future once a community has been established. Phoenix's community engagement policy seeks to engage the Brighton and Hove community with art-making, and they are fully supportive of incorporating the Neurodivergent Art Jam into their community intervention projects in the future.

## Budget

### Budget details

#### Item 1

##### ITEM DETAILS

Exhibition space at Phoenix Artspace for one weekend (3 days)

£

£300.00

#### Item 2

##### ITEM DETAILS

Art materials (paints, brushes, pencils, charcoal, paper, card, clay), from either a university approved outlet or Cass Art, who offer discounts for institutions and students

£ £350.00

### Item 3

ITEM DETAILS Exhibition mounting costs (frames and hooks) from IKEA

£ £100.00

**£ TOTAL** £750.00

TOTAL REQUESTED £750.00

BUDGET CODE

## Supporting statement

UPLOAD YOUR SUPPORTING STATEMENT HERE

██████████.pdf

## Declaration

I UNDERSTAND THAT IF I AM SUCCESSFUL I WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT A SHORT REPORT AND FINAL BUDGET STATEMENT AT THE END OF MY INITIATIVE. Yes

I UNDERSTAND THAT I MUST INFORM THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ANY BUDGET AMENDMENTS AND AWAIT APPROVAL BEFORE MY INITIATIVE TAKES PLACE. Yes

I UNDERSTAND THAT ANY FUNDING MUST BE SPENT BY THE END OF THIS FINANCIAL YEAR (31 JULY 2022) - IF THIS WILL CAUSE PROBLEMS PLEASE EMAIL [RESEARCHER-DEVELOPMENT@SUSSEX.AC.UK](mailto:RESEARCHER-DEVELOPMENT@SUSSEX.AC.UK) TO DISCUSS ONCE YOU'VE SUBMITTED YOUR APPLICATION. Yes