Partner with Lerwick 28

Partnership will be fundamental to how Lerwick 28 is developed and delivered. We want to strengthen, connect and amplify the organisations, festivals, artists, communities and networks that already make culture happen in Lerwick and across Shetland, while creating new relationships across the UK and internationally.

We are inviting organisations, networks, groups, institutions, and potential collaborators to tell us how we could work together. This is a light-touch Expression of Interest, not a full partnership agreement. At this stage we want to understand the shared opportunity: what you could bring, what you would hope to gain, who could benefit and what might last beyond 2028.

The partnership call opens on 16 September 2026 and closes on 23 October 2026.

What we mean by partnership

We are looking for partnership, not transaction. The strongest relationships will be built around shared ambition rather than a simple exchange of money or services. Partners should help shape activity and there should be a clear benefit on both sides.

Lerwick 28 will not create a parallel cultural infrastructure or replace activity that already exists. Locally, our first question will be how Lerwick 28 can help existing organisations and communities achieve things they could not achieve alone. Nationally and internationally, partnerships must create a route both into and out of Shetland.

We want partnerships to contribute not only to a successful 2028 programme, but to stronger cultural relationships through to 2038.

Two partnership routes

- Shetland partnership - for organisations, groups, networks and potential collaborators based in Shetland.
- UK / International partnership - for organisations, networks and potential collaborators based elsewhere in the UK or internationally.

Before you apply: talk to us

You are welcome to arrange a short, informal conversation with Graeme Howell, Lerwick 28 Bid Director, before submitting a partnership Expression of Interest.

The conversation can be used to clarify the partnership opportunity, discuss whether the local or UK / International route is the right one, or explore whether your initial idea appears to fit the ambitions of Lerwick 28. It is not part of the assessment process and will not give an applicant an advantage. We cannot develop or write your proposal for you.

To arrange a conversation, email martine.hall@shetlandamenity.org.

If the online form is not accessible to you, please use the same email address or ring 01595 743843 and request a callback to discuss an alternative way to submit.

Our partnership principles

Add, do not displace

Lerwick 28 should enhance cultural activity already taking place. We want to help partners become more ambitious, reach new audiences, develop new work, build resilience or create new connections without unnecessarily duplicating or competing with what already exists.

Partnership, not transaction

We want to understand what each partner brings to the relationship and what each hopes to gain. Funding may be part of a partnership, but a request for funding on its own is not a partnership proposition.

Open to new relationships

This opportunity is open. You do not need an existing relationship with Shetland Arts or the Lerwick 28 team. We want the process to reveal new ideas, new partners and unexpected connections.

Reciprocity

For UK and international partners, bringing outstanding people, work or expertise to Shetland is welcome, but it is not enough on its own. The partnership must also create opportunities for Shetland artists, makers, performers, young people, organisations or stories to reach people elsewhere.

Long-term value

Wherever possible, we want partnerships that create skills, networks, knowledge, touring routes, exchange, opportunities or relationships that continue beyond a single event or the Town of Culture year. 2028 is the opportunity to establish or accelerate these relationships; 2038 is the test of whether they lasted.

The Lerwick 28 story

Every partnership should contribute in some way to telling, sharing or strengthening the story of Lerwick and Shetland. That might be through our people, place, culture, heritage, contemporary life, language, creativity, connections, challenges or future.

For UK and international partnerships, this has an additional dimension: we want your networks, platforms and relationships to help Shetland-created culture and Shetland stories reach audiences elsewhere.

Partnership across the three Chapters

Partnerships may connect with one or more of the three Chapters of Lerwick 28:

- Chapter One: Inspiration | January-April - ideas, encounters, learning, exploration, skills and new creative relationships.
- Chapter Two: Play | May-August - participation, experimentation, visibility, spectacle and using Lerwick differently.
- Chapter Three: Launch | September-December - culmination, outward reach, touring, broadcast, exchange and the bridge from 2028 towards 2038.

You do not need to force your partnership into a particular Chapter at Expression of Interest stage. If there is a natural fit, tell us.

Partnership Expression of Interest

We have deliberately kept the first stage concise. We are not asking for a detailed partnership agreement, full budget, confirmed delivery plan or formal references at this stage.

Route One: Shetland partnerships

Shetland already has a distinctive and active cultural ecology. Lerwick 28 wants to work through it, not around it.

This route is for cultural organisations, festivals, independent artists and makers, community organisations, voluntary groups, schools and education providers, businesses, public bodies, heritage organisations, venues and other Shetland-based partners whose work could contribute to Lerwick 28.

We do not assume that every partner wants to become larger. Success might mean deeper participation, better accessibility, a new idea, greater resilience, stronger skills, new audiences or a relationship that was not previously possible.

Questions for Shetland partners

1. Tell us about you

What do you or your organisation currently do, and what role do you play in Shetland's cultural, community, civic, educational or creative life?

Maximum 150 words.

2. What would you like to achieve through Lerwick 28?

What would you like to do differently, better or more ambitiously because Lerwick 28 is happening? You might want to develop existing activity, try something new, reach different people, develop skills, improve accessibility, build new relationships or strengthen your organisation. Bigger does not necessarily mean better.

Maximum 200 words.

3. How could this help tell our story?

How could your partnership help Lerwick 28 tell the story of Lerwick and Shetland - our people, place, culture, heritage, contemporary life or future?

Maximum 150 words.

4. Who could benefit or be involved?

Who would you like this partnership to reach or involve? Are there particular communities, audiences, artists, young people or participants you would like to connect with?

Maximum 150 words.

5. What could we achieve together that you could not achieve alone?

What could Lerwick 28 bring to the partnership, and what would you bring? This could include expertise, programming, people, venues, networks, equipment, communications, funding, production support or something else.

Maximum 200 words.

6. What might be different in 2028 - and still different in 2038?

What would success look like during the Town of Culture year, and what would you hope remained stronger, different or possible ten years later?

Maximum 150 words.

7. What would you need from Lerwick 28?

Tell us what support you think the partnership might need from us at this stage.

Suggested tick boxes: funding; co-commissioning; production support; marketing and communications; equipment or infrastructure; skills or professional development; connections to other Shetland partners; connections to UK partners; international connections; audience development; other.

8. Do you expect to need financial support from Lerwick 28?

If yes, give us a rough indication of the amount. You do not need to provide a detailed budget at this stage.

9. Anything else we should know?

Optional: Is there anything important about the potential partnership that the questions above have not allowed you to tell us?

Maximum 100 words.

Route Two: UK and International partnerships

This route is for cultural institutions, broadcasters, producers, festivals, networks, educational organisations, platforms and other potential partners based elsewhere in the UK or internationally.

We want relationships that place Lerwick within wider cultural life while creating new opportunities for Shetland artists, organisations, communities and young people.

These partnerships must do more than bring activity into Shetland. They must create an outward route too, through reciprocal exchange and/or broadcast, digital distribution, touring, presentation, publishing or another meaningful way of taking Shetland-created culture and stories to audiences elsewhere.

What we mean by exchange and broadcast

Exchange can include artist or staff exchanges, residencies, reciprocal performances or exhibitions, co-commissions, skills and professional development, mentoring, placements, youth partnerships, shared research, knowledge exchange, digital collaboration or continuing relationships between organisations.

Broadcast is meant in the widest sense. It can include live or recorded television and radio, documentary, podcasts, streaming, digital commissions, social platforms, publishing, online participation, cultural platforms, gaming or other forms of distribution that help Shetland stories and creative talent reach audiences elsewhere.

For significant projects, these questions should be considered from the start rather than added later as a communications exercise, including the appropriate platform, technical standards, rights and permissions, and whether content could be co-produced with a broadcast or digital partner.

Questions for UK and International partners

1. Tell us about you

What does your organisation or network do, who do you work with, and what audiences, communities or professional networks do you reach?

Maximum 150 words.

2. What partnership are you proposing?

In simple terms, what would you like to do with Lerwick 28? Why is Lerwick or Shetland relevant to your organisation, programme or audiences?

Maximum 200 words.

3. How would this partnership help tell our story?

What aspect of Lerwick and Shetland could this partnership help explore or share? How could your organisation help that story reach people elsewhere in the UK and, where relevant, internationally?

Maximum 200 words.

4. What would the exchange be?

What would move in both directions between Shetland and your organisation, place or network? What would Shetland contribute or gain, and what would your organisation or community contribute or gain?

A meaningful answer to this question is required for UK and International partnership proposals.

Maximum 200 words.

5. How would this partnership take our story beyond Shetland?

How would the partnership enable Shetland-created work, people or stories to reach audiences elsewhere? This could be through broadcast, digital distribution, touring, exhibition, performance, publishing, existing audience platforms or another form of wider reach.

Maximum 200 words.

6. What outward route does your proposal include?

Select all that apply.

Suggested tick boxes: reciprocal cultural or creative exchange; broadcast or digital distribution; touring or presentation outside Shetland; publishing or another distribution route; more than one of these. The proposal must include at least one credible outward route.

7. Who would benefit?

Who would participate in or experience the partnership in Shetland and elsewhere? Are there particular opportunities for artists, communities or young people?

Maximum 150 words.

8. What would each partner bring?

What could your organisation contribute to the partnership, and what would you need from Lerwick 28? You can include cash, programme investment, people, platforms, venues, production, networks, marketing, technical capability, audience access or other resources.

Maximum 200 words.

9. Do you expect to need financial support from Lerwick 28?

If yes, give us a rough indication of the amount. You do not need to provide a detailed budget at this stage.

10. Why are you well placed to make this happen?

Tell us briefly about relevant previous partnerships, exchanges, broadcasts, touring, distribution or projects that give us confidence you could deliver this proposition. You may include the experience of your proposed team or collaborators.

Maximum 150 words.

11. Previous work

You may provide one optional link to a relevant example, website, programme, broadcast, portfolio or other material.

12. What might still exist in 2038?

If this partnership begins or develops through Lerwick 28, what relationship, opportunity or connection could still exist between Shetland and your organisation, place or network ten years later?

Maximum 150 words.

13. Anything else we should know?

Optional: Is there anything important about the potential partnership that the questions above have not allowed you to tell us?

Maximum 100 words.

How partnership proposals will be considered

All partnership Expressions of Interest will be assessed by the Lerwick 28 Bid Delivery Team. The process will be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the proposed relationship.

We will consider:

- alignment with the ambitions of Lerwick 28
- benefit to Lerwick and Shetland
- quality and ambition

- the contribution to telling and sharing our story
- reciprocity, particularly for UK and International partnerships
- accessibility and inclusion
- potential audience and professional reach
- deliverability and value
- contribution to skills, knowledge or capacity
- the strength of the proposed exchange or outward route for UK and International partnerships
- potential for a relationship to continue beyond 2028 and contribute towards 2038

The aim is not to collect the largest possible list of partner logos. We are interested in relationships that genuinely strengthen cultural activity, create opportunities and extend the presence of Shetland-created culture in the wider world.

What happens next?

After 16 October, the Bid Delivery Team will review all Expressions of Interest. We may contact applicants to clarify an idea or arrange a further conversation.

The strongest opportunities will move into proportionate partnership development. For significant partnerships, this is likely to include agreeing the shared ambition, what each partner contributes and receives, delivery responsibilities, financial commitments, intended outcomes, communications responsibilities, accessibility, intellectual property and broadcast rights where relevant, and the potential for the relationship to continue beyond 2028.

Submitting an Expression of Interest does not create a commitment by Lerwick 28 or Shetland Arts to enter into a partnership or provide funding. Some partnership ideas may also be better developed through another Lerwick 28 route, and we may discuss that with you.

Partnership or commission?

A partnership is built around shared objectives, mutual contribution and benefit on both sides. A commission is a defined, funded and contractual opportunity to create and deliver work against an agreed brief.

Partnerships can include co-commissioning or new creative work, but if your main proposition is to seek a Lerwick 28 commission to produce and deliver a defined piece of work, please use the Principal Commissions Expression of Interest route instead.

Ready to start a conversation?

If you have a partnership idea, complete the appropriate Lerwick 28 Partnership Expression of Interest by 23 October 2026.