

Collaborate project proposals

Crafts Council <https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/>

What do you want to explore and why?

We aim to disrupt the Eurocentric/global north craft canon and the cultural norms that are limiting our understanding of craft's potential cultural value. We wish to achieve a sector understanding that instead reflects the impact of immigration, migration, movement, displacement and community on cultural production and making.

We therefore wish to develop a method for a future study that will:

- explore the meanings of craft in the diversity of UK communities
- foster a sense of local pride in the diverse making traditions and practices in different areas, encouraging community cohesion and supporting levelling up
- produce evidence to inform policy and practice that in turn assist our sector to challenge racism in the aesthetics of UK craft, growing participation and economic opportunity across communities and challenging monocultural definitions
- challenge traditional models of generating evidence, using co-creation, collaborative making and co-production, supported by our participation team
- provide an effective model for exploring the limited canon in other creative industries.

We recently published [Making Changes in Craft](#), the report of a small partnership ethnographic study with Dr Karen Patel of Birmingham City University that explores the challenges faced by women of colour in the craft sector. Patel highlights the hierarchies of craft value in which the craft expertise of makers of colour is being devalued or misrecognised. We now wish to extend our evidence base about the direction of change needed.

As a non-academic development agency, however, we lack the in-house expertise to design a method to build on Patel's work and explore what craft means to a wider range of communities and individuals. We wish to fundraise for a clearly articulated and more extensive study that would use snowballing sampling and networking referral techniques within a selection of communities to redefine craft as it is practiced, across UK communities.

Craft generates economic wealth, enhances and connects communities, and is a vital part of cultural expression. As the national charity for craft, the Crafts Council has worked across the sector to inspire making, empower learning and nurture businesses over five decades. We are now pursuing a step change in our progress in tackling racism and inequality in all its forms, locating this at the heart of our activities. We have rightly received criticism of our progress in demonstrating our commitment to diversity and inclusion with visible actions.

The key themes underlying Patel's work with us are:

- the narrow craft canon and Crafts Council's place in it
- the lack of alternative histories and narratives in craft
- the need to de-colonise the craft curriculum.

Patel's work with makers about their lived experience is now informing our actions going forwards. We're responding by actively working with an emerging Global Majority Branch steering group to identify new opportunities to tackle representation. The Craft UK network (which we facilitate) is developing a Toolkit for Change that draws together resources and actions the craft sector can take to be part of this positive step change.

A well-defined larger study would build on the findings from Patel's ethnography of 21 interviews, extending the sector's evidence base about making and reflecting ACE's Inclusion and Relevance principle. The method and future findings would help us and our sector to build more meaningful relationships across craft communities, working to strengthen trust and a sense of belonging, tackling barriers and increasing access, opportunity, participation, and involvement. It would extend and develop the sector's models for participation programmes, curatorial practice, awarding panels and selectors and business support.

Such a method would also provide a model for other sectors' and industries' research, both within the creative industries and in the academy.

What are you looking for in an academic research partner?

We seek:

- A strong understanding and practice experience of research methods that reach deep into communities, including consultation and participatory techniques such as snowballing and methods that work closely to build trust.
- Knowledge and understanding of the literature on cultural inclusion and relevance.
- A knowledge or understanding of craft.
- Skills in how to identify and capture the cultural meaning and emotional value of craft that is practiced by individuals or takes place within communities in domestic, community, liminal and unfamiliar spaces.

We would wish to work closely with the academic partner in designing a method, sharing our relevant networks (including the involvement of our Global Majority Branch), our understanding of craft and its practices, and our skills in and knowledge of craft participation, curatorial practice and business support.

We would offer the skills and time of our Head of Research and Policy and Head of Participation and Learning (and team) to shape a method which, if successful in attracting future funding, would shape and involve our participation programme and approach, as well as our wider direction. We would also aim to involve other craft organisations in the research.