

# SIGN First Grants Scheme

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# Background to SIGN



# Background to SIGN



The Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN) is a unique, business-facing initiative supporting the TV, film and games industries in Yorkshire and the Humber. SIGN aims to make this region the UK's centre for digital creativity, and a model of diverse and inclusive activity. In order to do this, SIGN connects companies, support agencies and universities through a programme of training, business development, research and evaluation.

SIGN is a £6.4M project, starting in Summer 2020, and funded by [Research England](#), [the University of York](#), and its partners. The University of York leads the initiative, working with [Screen Yorkshire](#) and eight other Yorkshire universities. An extensive network of collaboration ensures that SIGN is equipped to deliver maximum impact across the region.

SIGN builds upon and extends the work of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) [Creative Economy Programme](#) funded project [XR Stories](#) (led by University of York); and the work of [Screen Yorkshire](#), the [British Film Institute \(BFI\)](#) and [ScreenSkills](#).

SIGN is organised around four work strands: [Diversity and Inclusion](#) - [Research](#) - [Skills and Training](#) - [Business Support](#)

# Diversity and Inclusion



Our commitment to diversity and inclusion feeds into and underpins all that SIGN does. We recognise the strength and creativity that a diverse and inclusive workforce brings, and aim to increase access to opportunities across the screen industries.

Striving towards a more diverse workforce will lead to a larger pool of skills and talent, and help to make the Yorkshire and Humber region the UK's centre for expertise in digital creativity.

Over the next three years, SIGN will work with the screen industries to initiate and support change.

- We will launch paid placements across the sector for Black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants, for women, for disabled people, for those from low socio-economic backgrounds, for those who want to return to work after raising a family, and for those identifying as LGBTQ.
- We will make bursaries available for necessities ranging from childcare costs to travel and training.
- We will set up a mentoring programme and work closely with the sector to support the revision of diversity and inclusion policies and practices of hiring.
- We'll also map the statistics of the screen sectors in Yorkshire and the Humber, creating a solid and agile database to show and share the state of diversity in the region.

# Research



SIGN works collaboratively with higher education institutions and industry partners to generate new and valuable insights. Our research will strengthen understanding of digital creativity and screen storytelling across interactive media, AI, film, TV, games and other digital screen-based technologies. We want to enhance our region's competitiveness, and secure the future of our screen-related industries.

We are committed to undertaking research that will make a significant positive impact on culture and society. By identifying and analysing challenges, future requirements and best practice, we aim to provide evidence-based solutions.

SIGN will also identify new opportunities across skills, training, talent development, business support, diversity and inclusion. Striving to be at the forefront of industry knowledge and academic understanding, our research will involve horizon scanning for new technologies, production models, modes of storytelling and routes to market, in order to facilitate new ideas for growth and innovation.

# Skills and Training



SIGN will provide a comprehensive range of training and development schemes, designed to create a larger, more diverse, more creative and more entrepreneurial screen industry workforce. Our training experts will facilitate and enhance the industry's talent by ensuring relevance, enabling upskilling and tailoring offers to pressing needs.

Activities will include:

- Online and face-to-face opportunities, from workshops and mentoring programmes to webinars, immersive experiences and beyond
- Developing technical, creative and professional training programmes to generate new skills amongst the region's workforce
- Identifying and attending to current and future skills gaps
- Talent development, and management and leadership training, including bespoke consultancy programmes
- Skills acquisition, including career development workshops and internships.

This workstream is led by the University of York and includes a £400k training fund.

# Business Support



SIGN will provide sector-specific business support within the screen industries in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Liaising with industry professionals, we will identify areas of need and develop ways to provide support to businesses, from start-ups to established indies.

Our objective is to ensure that our world-leading research can be adapted and utilised to strengthen the region, support economic activity and promote growth.

Activities will include:

- The establishment of a £1.3m city-centre innovation hub
- Bespoke consultancy opportunities
- The development of appropriate mechanisms for stimulating innovation, managing risk and strategising for economic growth
- The creation of online tools, resources and information-sharing through this website, for freelancers, start-ups, indies and other micro businesses and SMEs
- Support for management and leadership development

The business support workstream is led by the University of York and includes a £400k business development fund.



# Research Already Supported by SIGN and XR Stories



# SIGN and XR Stories Research

SIGN and XR Stories undertake and support research activity in a number of ways:

Research staff - employed by the University of York

Responsive research schemes - funding research on-demand

SIGN Collaborative Research Scheme - designed to foster collaborative research between Yorkshire and Humber HEIs

Strategic research projects - working with key partners on strategic areas of research

COVID-19 research scheme - designed to support research to assess the impact of the pandemic on the screen industries

First grants scheme - aimed at supporting people who haven't had significant research grant income before

XR Stories R&D - funding for SMEs to undertake R&D activity

# Current Research Projects

**Creator Labour: Screen Production Cultures and Transmedia Intersectionality in Yorkshire** - University of Huddersfield and University of Sheffield (more [here](#))

**Accessible Audio for Autistic Individuals** - University of York and University of Sheffield (more [here](#))

**Video games as grief management** - York St John University, University of Hull, University of York, University of Huddersfield (more [here](#))

**Diversity and Inclusion in Informal Learning Spaces in the Videogame Industry** - Anna Ozimek

**The Time Project** - Jon Swords, Dr Anna Ozimek (York) and Laura Mayne (Hull), with Share My Telly Job (and BECTU)

**Creative Worker Precarity - Career Disruption and COVID-19 in TV Production** - Jon Swords and Jennifer Johns (Bristol)

**The Currency of Gratitude** - Rowan Aust (Huddersfield)

**Routes to Content** - Cathy Johnson (Huddersfield)

**Back from the Brink** - Raising Films and University of Southampton

**White Rose Early Career Screen Industries Research Network** - Anna Ozimek, Sam Stockley-Patel and partners from Universities of Sheffield, York and Leeds

**Conceptualising R&D in the creative industries** - Claire Ingram, Marian Ursu, Sam Stockley-Patel, Jon Swords and Nathan Townsend (York)

**The role of intermediaries in creative industries R&D** - Sam Stockley-Patel and Jon Swords (York)

**Inclusive Growth Deep Dive EDI Programme** - Kate O'Connor (SIGN) and Heather Carey (PEC)

**XR Media Accessibility** - Lauren Ward

**Live Performance and XR Storytelling: the XR Stories Playhouse** - David Gochfeld

**Space and Time Within Immersive Technology** - Nick Bax

**Interactive stories and AI need ethics** - Jenn Chubb

**Destigmatising Disability, Chronic and Mental Illness in Current and Future Stories** - Anna Bramwell-Dicks



# Completed Research Projects

**Industry Voices** - Beth Johnson and Wendy Sissons

**The Time Project Pilot** - Jon Swords and Anna Ozimek

**Skills Shortages, Gaps and Training Needs in the screen industries in Yorkshire and the Humber** - Anna Ozimek

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Screen Industries** - Anna Ozimek

**XR Stories and Screen Industries Growth Network: Potential of Creative and Digital Economies (Workstream 1)** - BOP Consulting and SIGN/XR Stories

**XR Stories and Screen Industries Growth Network: Impact of XR Stories and SIGN (Workstream 2)** - BOP Consulting

**Channel 4: The Impact of Moving the National HQ to Leeds** - Nathan Townsend

**The Impact of COVID-19 on the Screen Industries** - XR Stories and SIGN teams

**Exploring Engagement between the Social Sciences and the Creative Industries** - Sam Stockley-Patel

**XR Futures Report: International Perspectives on the Trajectory of Immersive and Interactive Media and Technologies** - Sam Stockley-Patel

**Mapping the Scale and Scope of the Creative Industries in Yorkshire and the Humber** - Jon Swords and Nathan Townsend

For XR Stories R&D projects, see: <https://xrstories.co.uk/projects/>

See our publications page for more details: <https://screen-network.org.uk/our-work/publications/>



# First Grants Scheme



# Background to first grants scheme

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## Motivation:

Declining funding opportunities for early career researchers or people new to research

Increased competition for remaining funding scheme suitable for people seeking first grants (e.g. British Academy/ Leverhulme Trust small grants scheme)

Screen industries research sits across AHRC and ESRC eligibility criteria, so hard to identify where to submit bids

SIGN aims to “foster new and innovative screen industries research, which is theoretically informed, empirically rich and provides useful insights”

## Developed with input and advice from:

SIGN team (particularly Anna Ozimek, Wendy Sissons, Andrew Higson, Emma Brown, Catherine Hardman, Sophie Palmer)

Prof Paul Benneworth

Early Career Researchers Network

SIGN Higher Education Institution Partners Group



# Key Criteria



The scheme will fund projects of relevance to the Yorkshire and the Humber screen industries. This could include researchers undertaking work:

- about, with or for the screen industries of Yorkshire and the Humber (eg through co-design or co-production)
- addressing challenges facing the Yorkshire and the Humber screen industries
- generating knowledge of use to the Yorkshire and the Humber screen industries

Research is defined broadly and can include creative practice, as long as it meets the scheme criteria (see Q&A slides)

The screen industries are also defined broadly and includes film, TV, video games and other digital media.

Proposed projects should also address at least one of SIGN's key challenge areas:

- Current skills and talent shortages
- Barriers to entry and lack of diversity
- Anticipating future skills and talent needs
- Preparing for new digital storytelling
- Understanding future audiences and users
- Routes to market for new products
- Underdeveloped business and leadership skills
- Sector resilience and agility post-Covid
- Virtual production

# Key Criteria

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All applicants must confirm they have not been a principal investigator or co-investigator on a grant worth more than £5000 (this does not include PhD studentships).

All applicants must name a colleague who acts as mentor, line manager, critical friend etc and is able to support you in the completion of your project.

You must be in a position to receive the funding via a UK higher education institution.

Call launch – 20/09/21

Deadline for proposals – 15/11/21 at midday

Award decisions – by end of November 2021

Project start dates – between 31st Jan - 31st March 2022 Post-project report/evaluation - six weeks after project end

Projects can be up to 12 months in length.

# How to apply

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Please use our online application portal: <https://xr-stories.submittable.com/submit>

You should complete all boxes and attach a costing spreadsheet, a CV and a letter of support from your institution.

Research design (including sampling) and implementation should be undertaken in ways which uphold progressive approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will award at least two grants to applicants from groups underrepresented in the higher education sector. This includes people with disabilities, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and people who are LGBTQ+. Please use the section of the application dedicated to EDI to elaborate on how you qualify for any of these categories.

Detailed guidance is available here: <https://screen-network.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SIGN-First-Grants-Call-updated.pdf>



# What makes a good bid?



# Writing a good proposal

Writing research applications is difficult. What follows are some tips on putting together a successful bid.

## 1. Make sure your project fits the criteria

SIGN is dedicated to support the screen industries in Yorkshire and the Humber, so please ensure you clearly demonstrate you meet the requirement your work is of relevance to this region. The research doesn't need to be done on the Y&H: it could focus on issues Y&H is facing, but analyse a place/sector where these issues have been addressed and thus generate best practice that can be shared in Y&H. If this is the case, please ensure you include pathways to disseminate in our region (we can help with this through our publications scheme, industry briefings, and industry partners which you will have access to if successful).

# Writing a good proposal

## 2. Make sure your proposal makes sense.

You may have been developing an idea for years and know the subject matter intimately. But remember that this is not the case for the reviewers, so justify why your project is important, what you want to do, and how you plan to do it. Consider:

- a. Why is this research important?
- b. Why is now the time to do it?
- c. Why is your methodology the most appropriate?
- d. Why are you the best person to do it?
- e. Why do you need these costings?

Answering these questions in your proposal will make it much easier for reviewers to understand your research.



# Writing a good proposal

## 3. Don't try to do too much

It can be tempting to list lots of aims, objectives and research questions because the topic you want to research is fascinating. But be realistic with what you can achieve in 12 months and with a maximum of £10,000. Spoiler: it is often much less than you think. That's OK. We recognise who will be applying for this scheme and have our expectations set appropriately.

## 4. Plan your time carefully

Closely related to 3. is to ensure you can achieve what you want to in the time period. Consider the other commitments you will have during this time period: will there be times when your workload is dominated by other activities (e.g. marking)? If you're planning on interviews or participant observation, are there times people will be unavailable? Do you have blocks of time you can dedicate to analysis? How long will it take to get ethical approval? When will you be taking leave?

Also be realistic in how long planning can take (arranging interviews can take weeks) and if you want to work with groups who don't know you, how long will it take to gain their trust?

# Writing a good proposal

## 6. Run your ideas past someone more experienced

Draw on the experience and expertise of your colleagues. Get someone with experience of successful grant applications to read your proposal and ask them if it makes sense. Use your university's research support team for advice on costings and planning. Check with colleagues if the methodology will produce the data you need to achieve your aims and objectives. The earlier you can do this the better.

## 7. Get an idea of your costings asap

Finance staff and research support teams have been under a great deal of pressure during the pandemic so speak to them early about getting costings sorted.

Budget for what you need and know you can spend in the time period. £10,000 is the maximum you can apply for, not a target so don't worry if you can't get the budget that high. Similarly, consider what your institution might be able to provide as in-kind support so you can spend the funding on other costs.

# Writing a good proposal

## 8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EDI is a central element of SIGN's funding and we have a work stream dedicated to addressing some of the challenges faced by people facing exclusion, discrimination and exploitation in the screen industries. The parallels with academia are striking and that's why we want to make two awards to people from groups underrepresented in the higher education sector. This includes people with disabilities, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and people who are LGBTQ+, amongst others.

If you think you qualify here, please make it clear in the EDI section of the application form. You could also use the section on career development too.

Please note we will not share this information with parties outside of SIGN.

# Writing a good proposal

## 9. Grant writing resources

Many universities and funding bodies provide tips on preparing a research proposal. See for example:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/grantapp>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/how-win-research-grant>

<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/external-funding/applying/tips/>



# Q&A

See here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xtRIOCQpG4JqDQcSJVK2wnVVgcjzUFjg2y0Vy63vzhE/edit?usp=sharing>





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