Royal Docks Originals Engineers: resident artists programme

Royal Docks Originals 2027: Overview

Built more than a century ago, the Royal Docks played a central role in London's economic development. Today, the Royal Docks is London's only Enterprise Zone and home to one of the capital's youngest and most diverse populations. It is still a place of work, in new and changed ways. Factories produce art, water trading features wellness, new food markets celebrate the area's diversity, and innovation abounds.

Royal Docks Originals is the flagship cultural festival of the Royal Docks; a bold celebration of creativity, community and place that showcases the original stories, talent and ideas shaping one of London's most vibrant destinations as London's Cultural Engine.

Developed by and with the people of the Royal Docks, the festival brings together the area's artists and cultural organisations, residents, businesses and young people to create bold cultural experiences that reflect one of London's most diverse, dynamic and fast-changing locations.

Rooted in the unique land and waterscape of the Royal Docks, Royal Docks Originals showcases work inspired by the area's heritage, people and emerging future. The festival creates participation and collaboration opportunities, ensuring culture is not something presented to communities, but shaped with them.

Royal Docks Originals is built on four guiding principles:

- **It's a movement, not just a moment:** key to the festival is the two-year creative development process, in which people from across all sectors of our community work together to help plan the festival and develop festival projects
- **Original work made here:** demonstrating the area's developing role as a place of cultural production, the festival showcases culture and creative industries made here and the potential for the Royal Docks to become a key to London's cultural infrastructure

- **By and with the community:** residents, workers and students are invited to make festival projects, influence decisions, participate in large scale arts activities and take part as volunteers and Festival team members
- **Inspired by and rooted in the Royal Docks:** all Royal Docks Originals projects respond to the area's iconic land and waterscape and its diverse community.

Royal Docks Originals 2027: Festival Influences

Royal Docks Originals 2027 builds on the success of the first edition last year, creating space for creatives, communities and audiences to explore the histories, identities and possible futures of this extraordinary historic London district. The programme will respond to the area's changing offer and landscape including activation of Royal Victoria, and a growing food and hospitality offer.

An important development in London in 2027 will be the installation of The Wake by Khaleb Brooks, London's new memorial to the victims of transatlantic slavery, located in nearby Canary Wharf.

Alongside marking the installation of this important memorial and its links to Royal Docks own history, the 2027 festival programme (presented in September/October next year) will also explore new developments within the Royal Docks including plans for a major new floating wellness centre at Royal Victoria, and the emergence of new food and beverage offers. These will offer opportunities for communities to explore new places to gather, eat, make, play and experience culture – while also looking ahead to the future arrival of London's wholesale markets at Albert Island.

Royal Docks Originals 2027: London's Cultural Engine

The Royal Docks has an ambition to become **London's Cultural Engine**: a thriving centre for creative innovation, cultural production and inclusive growth. Royal Docks Originals Festival is a flagship expression of that ambition, bringing together artists, creatives, communities and audiences in a unique festival of new work made here.

As the Royal Docks develops both its cultural ecosystem and its identity as a distinctive waterfront destination, the festival will showcase the area's creative energy, diversity and talent, while creating opportunities for participation, collaboration, creative production and sustainable cultural growth.

RDO Engineers (resident artists programme): investing in local talent

The newly created **RDO Engineers** resident artist programme is a major initiative designed to support local creatives, to develop the Royal Docks cultural ecosystem, and to build London's Cultural Engine.

The programme will support up to three creative practitioners to progress a specific developmental element of their creative work during the residency. The creative practitioner can be working within any form of culture and the creative industries (performance, visual arts, digital, film, fashion etc). Whether focused on innovative practice, extending a promising area of work, or forging a new developmental partnership, the residency is designed to enable a significant step-change in each creative practitioner's career.

The creative research and making process will involve active participation opportunities for local communities – with the process producing both new work (to be presented at the festival in September/October 2027) and a lasting legacy for the local cultural ecology.

To enrich and develop the area's cultural ecosystem this programme prioritises practitioners who live, study or work in the Royal Docks. For those interested in this opportunity who do not live, study or work in the Royal Docks there is an enhanced requirement to outline in the application how the project will benefit the local cultural ecosystem in the long term.

Each selected creative practitioner will receive a £35,000 commission and the support of a dedicated Royal Docks producer throughout their residency process, leading up to their festival presentation. The duration of the residency will be from December 2026 until October 2027.

We are interested in supporting creatives by providing an opportunity to engage in long-term deep artistic research, to develop innovative creative practice, and to build sustained trusting relationships within the diverse communities that live and work in the Royal Docks.

This opportunity won't suit everyone. It's for a creative practitioner who is at a particular moment in their practice – with an identified opportunity for a step-change and leap forward (or sideways!). This programme is not designed to support very early-career creatives, and is also less directed to well-established creatives unless there is a particularly compelling innovation opportunity. The programme will be most beneficial to creative practitioners who are at a certain point in their career to develop, innovate or deepen their creative practice.

RDO Engineers: what does the programme offer?

The programme includes:

- **Commission of £35,000:** This is to cover all fees and costs associated with the residency process and the making and presenting of a creative work for the festival. The commission is to cover all required costs such as: creative fees, research, local engagement/participation process and activities, production costs, licensing, future maintenance, project-related marketing (as distinct from festival-wide marketing). The commission will be managed via a commission agreement and payment schedule. The payment schedule will be linked to project milestones to be agreed within the commission agreement following appointment. An outline of the potential commission instalment structure is below:

Instalments	Dates
£5,000	December 2026, on signing commission agreement
£10,000	February 2027
£10,000	May 2027
£9,000	June 2027
£1,000	October 2027, on submitting evaluation report

  Please note that appointed creatives will be able to fundraise from other sources (leveraging this commission to secure funds to enhance the residency) – but the making process and festival outputs must be delivered as outlined in the commission agreement.

- **Producer support:** A Royal Docks Producer will support appointed creatives throughout the residency and the festival. This will include support on the commission agreement and any other required documents and process. The Producer will support all three RDO Engineers, and will champion your practice and research, be curious about your discoveries, offer advice and support, support developing partnerships and opportunities and longer-term development in the Royal Docks. The Producer will also facilitate connections with the wider Royal Docks Team.

- **Festival Showcase:** RDO Engineers will be celebrated and profiled throughout the “Movement” making process and will be promoted as significant creative “engineers” within the festival season and beyond. Participation activities with local communities will create meaningful opportunities for connection and visibility. Festival creative outputs will be strongly promoted to local and visitor audiences.

- **RDO Festival**:

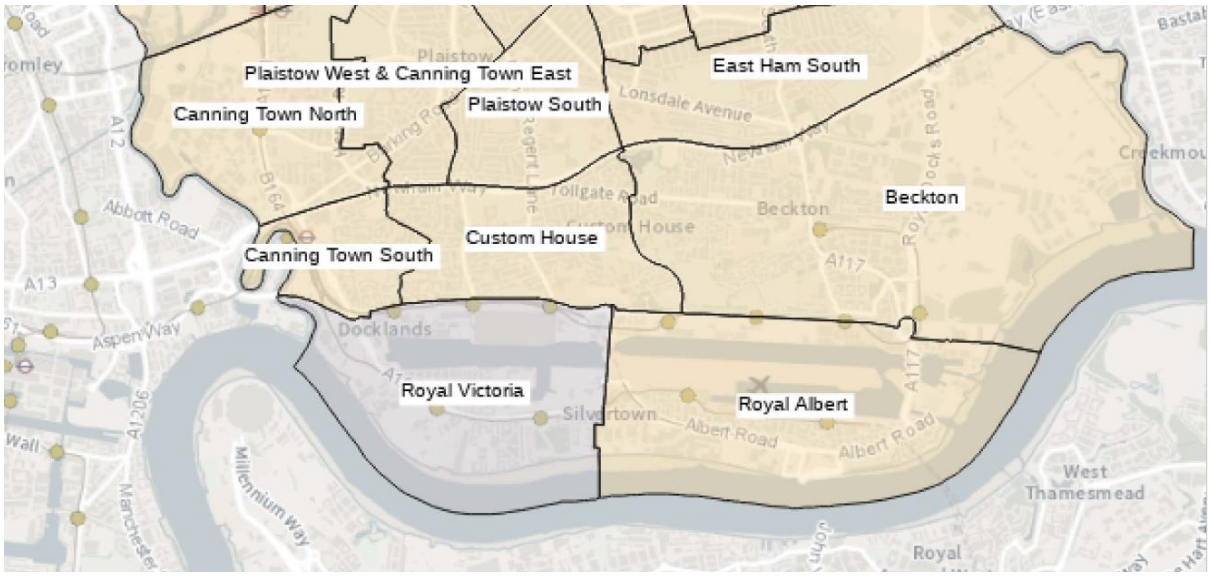
- Introduction to networks, groups, and individuals within local communities
- Access and involvement in all aspects of RDO festival, including engagement with the RDO Partner Group (a large group of local residents, creatives and stakeholders) and the RDO Advisory Group (a smaller representative group). Opportunities to connect with creatives, partners and projects across the wider festival
- Promotion via the Royal Docks Originals Marketing & PR campaign
- Invitation, hosting and tailored introductions at the RDO Festival reception
- Festival finance: during the residency as the creative work develops there is a potential opportunity to bid to a limited ring-fenced budget for additional funds in order to achieve specific enhanced elements or to respond to arising opportunities.

- **Inter-Peer Learning:** As a new programme the first three RDO Engineers will experience the residency process together, with opportunities to meet, connect and learn from shared experiences and practice.

RDO Engineers: Royal Docks based residency

RDO Engineers will be resident, and working in an embedded way, within a specific Royal Docks location or with a Royal Docks partner.

The Royal Docks area is outlined below and includes the five southern Newham wards; Canning Town South, Custom House, Beckton, Royal Victoria and Royal Albert.



The Royal Docks Originals festival programme presented in September/October 2027 will be focused in the Royal Victoria area (shaded above). RDO Engineers will produce a creative work to be presented in the Royal Victoria area.

We have set out below some potential residency opportunities. These are to give an indication of the kind of residency possible.

Applicants may apply with a proposal responding to these outlined opportunities. Alternatively applicants are welcome to research and propose their own Royal Docks locations/partners which best serve the residency objectives (creative practice development, local engagement process, creative work, cultural ecosystem legacy).

Creative Workspace – The Factory

The Factory is a work and event space developed by Projekt in East London. It is located next to the Tate & Lyle refinery in Silvertown. Spanning 9,000 square metres across a 5.2-acre site, it hosts and grows a thriving artistic and cultural community. The Factory provides a home for more than 40 creative businesses, from set designers and photography studios to music producers and furniture makers. In addition to permanent workspaces, the site has flexible facilities for film and television productions, unit bases, and photography shoots, making it a vital hub for London's creative industries.

A residency in The Factory would have use of a dedicated small no-cost space as well as access to other Factory spaces (these additional spaces may be at some cost, and according to availability). A residency here would be set within a growing and vibrant creative cluster, located close to neighbouring residential communities and local venues (Brick Lane Music Hall, Tate Institute).
https://www.thefactoryproject.co.uk/

This RDO Engineers residency opportunity is kindly supported by Projekt

Other Potentials Residency Spaces & Partners

Please note the spaces and partners outlined below are provided as an indication of the kind of residency possible and as prompt as applicants consider developing a proposal. These are not arranged residency opportunities and applicants interested in any of these would need to explore and develop this further.

Royal Docks Centre for Sustainability:
The Royal Docks Centre for Sustainability at University of East London's Docklands Campus brings together a unique collection of specialist facilities that support applied research, innovation and community engagement.
RDCS is home to TerraDock (a collaborative coworking and innovation space), the Sustainability Research Institute, the Augmented & Virtual Reality Centre, the Maker Space, the Renewable Energy Lab, and the RIX Inclusive Research Centre.
https://www.uel.ac.uk/partners/royal-docks-centre-sustainability

UEL School of Arts & Creative Industries:
University of East London's School of Arts and Creative Industries encompasses Media, Performing Arts and Fashion. Courses and research practice are grounded in creative excellence and framed by extensive community and industry collaboration. The School is part of the vibrant arts and theatre scene of East London, with the annual FUEL performance festival and youth-led venue The Source as examples of this. The School of Arts and Creative Industries is a centre of excellence for innovative and creative research, across and between a range of disciplines - among them film and media, fashion, computer games; performing arts, music, dance and drama; cultural studies and creative writing.
https://www.uel.ac.uk/about/our-schools/school-arts-creative-industries

Royal Docks Waterways:
The Royal Docks are one of London's most extraordinary places. Stretching over five kilometres, they were once the largest enclosed docks in the world, a global hub of trade, industry and human endeavour. Today, those same 250 acres of water form the setting for something new. A place being carefully and purposefully opened up, where history and ambition sit side by side, and where the water is once again at the centre of everything. The Royal Docks is made up of three docks: Royal Victoria ; Royal Albert and King George V. These docks and their infrastructure are managed by Royal Docks Waterways. Plans are currently in development for Royal Victoria Dock to have a Floating Wellness centre including lidos, saunas and café. The operator for this will be announced in early 2027. The centre won't be completed for the festival in Autumn 2027 but work will begin, with neighbouring elements in place. The Royal Docks' vast waterscape, its vessels, maritime skills and heritage and its present-day water-users all offer a rich inspiration for creative practitioners.
https://royaldockswaterways.com/about-us/

Royal Docks Creative Workspaces:
The Royal Docks has a number of creative workspaces that could provide a stimulating creative context for an artist residency. These include

- Bow Arts (Royal Albert Wharf): Royal Albert Wharf - Bow Arts
- Flying Angel Studios: Flying Angel Studios - ACAVA
- Expressway (Royal Victoria West) Expressway | General People
- Pump House (Royal Victoria West): The Pump House
- Brunel Street Works (Canning Town): Brunel Street Projekt

Please note that all of the workspaces listed above are suggested spaces which may offer a rich context for a residency. They have not pledged a dedicated in-kind residency space (as offered and noted above for The Factory) and any desired residency would require further engagement from applicants.

Residency
Applicants are invited in the application form to outline how they plan to use the residency - setting out nature of the activity and the time they will spend with their residency location/partner. This will be dependent on the nature of each creative practitioner's practice and their proposed residency approach, process, work and legacy.

There is not a prescribed number of days or format for the residency. There is a recognition that during the residency there may be periods of greater and lesser presence and activity but with some level of regular presence across the duration. Applicants will be asked to how they will approach and design the residency in order to achieve a significant and meaningful presence. The residency details will be developed further with appointed RDO Engineers and outlined in the commission agreement.

The RDO Engineers programme expects strong connections and visibility of the making process - and a tangible sense of a real residency.

RDO Engineers: what does the programme require?

The RDO Engineers programme asks that the selected resident artists engage with and deliver the following:

<u>During the Movement – the making process</u>

- An embedded creative development process, set within a significant Royal Docks location/partner residency
- A creative making process including visible and meaningful local participation with local people (this at minimum should include two local engagement/participation sessions). This local engagement will be developed with support from the RDO Producer, and resident artists may wish to engage specialist facilitators to support this work.
- A step-change in creative practice, realising an opportunity over several months to significantly progress practice, and producing enduring benefits to the creative practitioner and future work.

<u>During the Moment – the festival presentation</u>

- Produce and present original, high quality creative work, connected to the Royal Docks people and place (and showcasing the locally-embedded making process), and free for audiences to experience.

- Presented in Royal Docks Originals Festival dates (festival dates are to be confirmed, the festival will take place over four weeks during September and October 2027) in the Royal Victoria festival area.

Who can apply?

Creative practitioners of any art form within the culture and the creative industries sector may apply. The programme is more suited to single creative practitioners or creative organisations but applications from partnerships will be considered if there is a compelling rationale which demonstrates delivery against the programme's core objectives.

This programme is not designed to support new early-career creative practitioners – it is aimed at creative practitioners with some experience and established practice with a recognised opportunity for a significant step-change. If you are a new practitioner there are a range of Royal Docks Originals festival opportunities that may be of interest – please visit the Royal Docks Originals webpage at www.royaldocks.london

The RDO Engineers programme is designed to develop and enrich the Royal Docks ecosystem. Priority will be given to applications from Royal Docks based creative practitioners (those that live, study or work in the Royal Docks – see map above). Creative practitioners based outside the Royal Docks are able to apply but must clearly demonstrate strong Royal Docks connections within their work and practice, and must outline and evidence how a significant legacy will be delivered to the cultural ecosystem.

The RDO Engineers programme also has an integral requirement for local participation and engagement with the making process (the Movement) and so is suitable for creative practitioners with an active interest and curiosity to working with local communities, and a desire to connect in meaningful and relevant ways with those communities.

Application Process and Timeline

The application timeline is set out in the table below.

Timeline	**Application Process**
Mon 12 October	Royal Docks Originals Engineers programme: open call. Brief published. Applications open.
Wed 4 November	Online surgery sessions (30 mins): Clarifications and questions for prospective applicants
Mon 23 November	Application deadline.

Mon 23 November – Wed 2 December	Applications review & shortlisting
Wed 2 – Wed 9 December	Panel review and scoring of shortlist. Clarifications undertaken with shortlist as required. Panel Consensus meeting for selection.
Fri 11 December	Applicants informed

The application process is an open call – please note the information above regarding who can apply and the programme requirements.

Applicants are invited to consider how to best use this residency opportunity to enable: a step-change in their creative process, local engagement and participation in the making process, festival outcomes, and a cultural ecosystem legacy in the Royal Docks.

Applications can be made via the RDO Engineers online form – please visit the Royal Docks Originals webpage at www.royaldocks.london

The application form includes the following key areas:

- Creative practice background
- Step-change practice /evidence
- Residency Proposal: proposed process and residency partner/location.
- Local engagement activity
- Festival output: creative work presented in Autumn 2027
- Cultural Ecosystem legacy
- Summary budget
- Supporting Information: please provide 1-3 web links to documentation of your work (written, audio, images or video).

During the Application Process online sessions (30 mins, pre-booked) will be available with the RDO Engineers programme lead. These will take place on Wed 4 November and can be booked via rdo@royaldocks.london (NB: please include “RDO Engineers” in the email subject title).

Applications will be reviewed and shortlisted by two Royal Docks Team members. The shortlisted applicants (up to 12) will then be reviewed by a Panel.

The Panel will include:

- RDO Engineers Programme Lead
- Two members of the RDO Festival Advisory Group (a group made up of local creatives, communities and stakeholders supporting the festival).

The panel will be chaired by the Royal Docks Team's Head of Cultural Programme & Partnerships.

The Panel will use the criteria set out below to score the shortlist. As part of the consensus meeting and selection process they will also consider the balance and mix of applications in order to ensure the maximum benefits for both the Royal Docks Originals programme and the cultural ecosystem.

Programme Criteria & Scoring

Please note that the criteria and scoring is different for those who are Royal Docks based and those who are not. These are adapted to recognise the programme requirements for the Royal Docks cultural ecosystem.

Royal Docks based

Criteria	Weighting
Creative step-change: opportunity and evidence	30%
Making process: local engagement opportunities	15%
Festival work outputs: quality, offer, Royal Docks identity	30%
Royal Docks cultural ecosystem legacy	25%

Non-Royal Docks based

Criteria	Weighting
Evidence of significant Royal Docks connections within practice and proposed work	15%
Creative step-change: opportunity and evidence	10%
Making process: local engagement opportunities	15%
Festival work outputs: quality, offer, Royal Docks identity	30%
Royal Docks cultural ecosystem legacy	30%

Contact

Please read this brief and guidance fully before making an application.

If you have questions during your application process you can book one of the 30-minute sessions on Wed 4 November.

Other questions can be sent to: rdo@royaldocks.london (before Thursday 12 November) please include “RDO Engineers” in the subject title.