

Royal Docks Team: Invitation to Tender

Associate Director – local creative content for ‘Water Commission’

Headline event in Royal Docks Originals Festival

Thursday 25th – Saturday 27th Sept 2025

Deadline for submission: 09:00, Monday 24 March 2025

1. Summary

The Royal Docks Team (RDT) is seeking an Associate Director to work on the Water Commission (working title) which will take place on 25-27 September 2025 and will be the headline event in the Royal Docks Originals Festival 2025. The theme of the festival is ‘Transformation’ and the festival programme will explore Royal Docks past, present and future, its land and waterscape, and its local community.

The Water Commission will be made up of three parts:

- **A spectacular Fire installation** - on the Royal Docks land and water, evoking the heritage of the Royal Docks, and creating a visual framework for a narrative about the areas’ past and future
- **Commissions for Local Musicians** - live local performances within the Fire installation, and potential for recorded music
- **A Soundscape of local community stories** - of Royal Docks past and aspirations for its future embedded in the Fire installation.

The Associate Director’s role will work closely with the Water Commission’s Creative Director (Jonathan Holloway <https://www.jonathanholloway.com>) and international Fire artists (Compagnie Carabosse <https://ciecarabosse.fr/en>) and will help build the Royal Docks narrative for the work and to take directorial control of the local creative content (primarily, the **Local Musicians** and **Soundscape**). This will involve commissioning, and having creative oversight of the music commissions and the soundscape – which will be made from oral histories recorded by Eastside Community Heritage earlier in the development process, plus possible inclusion of other content. There will be opportunities to explore additional local resident or artist involvement in the Water Commission. Key to the success of this role will be ensuring at all times that this local creative content is of high quality, that it enhances the Water Commission and that local artists and residents involved are provided with a valuable and enjoyable creative experience.

Main tasks include:

- Building the narrative for the Water Commission through blending the fire installation with local commissions and community stories

- Overseeing the selection of local commissions and the development of a soundscape made up of community stories, and exploring any further opportunities for community participation in the water commission.
- Developing and overseeing a process to integrate the local components into the piece in collaboration with the Commission's Creative Director and the Fire Artists
- Provide creative oversight of the development of the local creative content, ensuring that it contributes effectively to the overall narrative, and directing the local artists and soundscape creative team, organising workshops and rehearsal schedules as required

The Associate Director will be a vital member of the creative team. The Associate Director will report to the Creative Director who is the overall creative lead of the Water Commission, and through them to the Royal Docks Team's Creative Programmer who is executive producer of the event. The Associate Director will be supported by a producer of local creative content and a small creative team involved in developing and recording the Soundscape. The Water commission will be developed alongside other Royal Docks Originals Festival events. As a key member of the creative team, the Associate Director will work with Royal Docks stakeholders as required and will participate in cross-festival consultation with local creatives and communities to ensure that the programme as a whole comes forward cohesively and supports the area's developing cultural ecosystem.

2. Context

2.1. Royal Docks Cultural Placemaking Strategy

Once London's gateway to world trade, today the Royal Docks is one of the UK's most important regeneration stories. This vast area in the London Borough of Newham is re-emerging as an exciting urban waterfront and a commercial and cultural hub of global significance. A joint initiative of the Mayor of London and the Mayor of Newham, the RDT is a multi-disciplinary team helping deliver the cohesive transformation of the area.

In March 2021, the RDT launched an ambitious vision for the Royal Docks to become London's Cultural Engine, highlighting the area's potential to become a place of creative production and water-based arts and events. Local community participation is at the heart of the strategy. For further information see the Royal Docks' Cultural Placemaking Strategy <https://www.royaldocks.london/media/Royal-Docks-Cultural-Placemaking-Strategy-March-2021.pdf>

2.2. Royal Docks past and present

An incredible feat of engineering, Royal Victoria Dock opened in 1855 - the first of three 'Royal Docks' that made London into a global trading capital. At the same time,

the demand for more factory space had exploded, and by the 1880's Silvertown, equipped with the latest dockside cranes, became one of London's biggest bases for the cargo industry.

Now, the Royal Docks is home to some of London's youngest and most diverse communities. Committed to equality and sustainability, the area is transforming into London's newest cultural hub – driven by its inclusive communities and fuelled by creativity. Detailed resources on Royal Docks heritage, its community and regeneration plans will be available to the successful bidder including a recent oral history project called 'For the Record', that will form the basis for the Soundscape used in the Water Commission.

2.3. Royal Docks Water Arts and Events Strategy

In 2022-23, Royal Docks commissioned a water strategy called 'On the Royal Docks' exploring the potential to develop world-class cultural activities on the water. 'On the Royal Docks' vision is for the area to become London's International Centre for Water-based Arts and Events. The Water Commission comprising a bespoke fire installation on land and water has been planned in response to this strategy and in consideration of some of the challenges it recognised, including the proximity of London City Airport, residential accommodation, and security measures around City Hall.

2.4. Royal Docks Originals Biennial Festival

Royal Docks Originals is a biennial festival. A large-scale creative collaboration, the festival involves the whole Royal Docks community. Residents, workers and students join together with leading Newham creatives and businesses to create a fantastic celebration of the area's heritage, people and places, and to stake a claim in shaping the area's future. The programme comprises strands focused on Placemaking and Profile raising, Showcasing and Innovation, and Community events.

The theme of Royal Docks Originals 2025 is Transformation, and the programme will reflect the evolution of the area and its pivotal role, past and present, in London's story as a global city. Built over 100 years ago, the Royal Docks was a crucial part of the industrial revolution and British colonial trading. Today it stands as a beacon for more sustainable, inclusive and equitable growth.

3. Water Commission Objectives and Overview

3.1. Objectives:

- Raise the profile of-
 - RDO Festival – The plan is for a mid-scale, highly accessible and 'Instagrammable' spectacle that has the potential to gain 'cut-through'.

- On the Royal Docks –launching Royal Docks’ vision to become London’s International Centre for Water based arts and events
- Test and pilot the Royal Docks water as a stage for cultural projects - exploring the opportunities and limitations for events on the water identified in ‘On the Royal Docks’
- Excite and attract people, creatives and businesses as participants and audiences – supporting the holistic success of the festival, and acting as a beacon for excellence and ambition
- Create a unique, authentic, locally embedded piece that transcends spectacle – promoting Royal Docks unique identity, its heritage, people, and place through a strong and compelling narrative

3.2. Overview and Fire Installation

The Water Commission, is the headline event of Royal Docks Originals Festival 2025 and it incorporates the **Fire Installation, Local Musicians** and **Soundscape**.

The Fire Installation is planned to be a sculptural installation made with fire and positioned on the Royal Victoria Dock water and on neighbouring uninhabited land. The area that has been identified for the installation is Silvertown Quays, a development site near Millenium Mills, a derelict turn of the 20th century flour mill. A well-loved icon of post-industrial Britain, Millenium Mills has frequently been used as a film location, and in television productions.

The proposal is for a beautiful, spectacular and evocative Fire Installation that audiences of up to 5,000 people can walk through and dwell in over a period of 3 to 4 hours for three consecutive evenings in late September (ideally Thursday 25th, Friday 26th and Saturday 27th September 2025). The Fire Installation Artists will work with the Creative Director to conceive the exact form of the installation, including whether the element on the water can be accessed by audiences. The creative structure of the installation will incorporate platforms/opportunities for live music from the **Local Musicians**, and the recorded **Soundscape** (local community stories of the past and future of the area) which will be experienced via listening posts, or on headphones, or in another way. Aesthetically, there are two key creative requirements of the Fire Installation:

- **Narrative:** The installation will be site-specific, and its aesthetic will be reminiscent of the Royal Docks past as a place of sea-faring trade, industry, and manufacturing.
- **Spectacle:** As the headline commission for Royal Docks Originals Festival, the Fire-Installation will have impact as a compelling spectacle.

3.3. Water Commission key milestones:

February 2025	Appointment of Creative Director & Fire Artists
March 2025	Appointment of Associate Director

April 2025	Creative development. Early production plans to LB Newham
May 2025	Finalise full artistic proposal and production
June 2025	Two-day Royal Docks Originals creatives meeting at Royal Docks.
July 2025	Final production plans approved LB Newham
September 2025	Performances

4. Local creative content – the subject of this tender

4.1. Local Musicians/musical content

Newham is one of the youngest and most diverse communities in the UK. It has a rich musical heritage including pivotal musical movements such as the South Asian Day raves, and – together with Tower Hamlets – Newham is seen as the birthplace of Grime. Local, world class music development organisations include Newham Music and UD. The Royal Docks is home to a diverse musical offer including London’s newness large-scale outdoor festival Silverworks Island, underground clubbing venue The Cause, and perennially popular Brick Lane Music Hall, whilst BBC Music is soon to open in neighbouring East Bank at Stratford.

The planned Fire Installation is as much an auditory experience as a visual one. Live music plays an integral role. The musical component should not be overpowering; but instead accompany contemplation, guiding visitors gently through the experience. Performers will play from kiosks or move among the audience, adding an interactive layer to the soundscape. The Associate Director will work closely with the Fire Artists to identify local musicians who will be invited to collaborate on the installation with local composers, bands, rap artists or others commissioned to create pieces responding to Royal Docks’ transforming identity. This blend of musical styles, rooted in the local community, will create an emotional resonance. The Royal Docks Team has a distinct budget for these commissions (see 5.1).

4.2. A Soundscape of local community stories.

In 2024 and early 2025 RDT worked with Eastside Community Heritage on an oral history project called "For the Record" exploring the festival theme of transformation and capturing members of the local community’s stories of the past and hopes for the future of the Royal Docks. The outcomes of this work include 7 long oral history interviews and 37 vox pops.

Local voices will play a central role in the Fire Installation, which is planned to amplify the unique qualities of its Royal Docks setting - historical, cultural architectural, and human. It is proposed to artistically arrange the local stories collected by Eastside Community Heritage, setting and combining these with music, spoken word and other local source materials (a relevant example is poem [Silvertown](#) by Venus Ex Machina) to create a soundscape embedded into the Fire

Installation. The preferred installation listening method is via listening posts. A separate budget exists for writing, editing and recording the soundscape (see 5.1).

4.3. Potential or additional resident engagement.

The Water Commission may include other opportunities for local residents to participate, for instance the flames may be lit one by one by members of the local community selected through a process devised with the Associate Director, Also local residents may assist with installation structure assembly, sharing effort and skill exchange. The Associate Director will explore and establish these options with the Fire Artists and with the RDT's Creative Producer with Community focus.

5. Local creative content budget, timeline,

5.1. Creative content budget

Producer (working with Associate Director)	£8,000
Music commissions	£20,000
<u>Soundscape</u>	
Writer/Dramaturg	£8,000
Sound editor	£2,000

5.2. Timeline

March 2025	Recruitment complete, contract signed Commission event site confirmed.
April 2025	Develop brief for the role of local producer to assist with delivery of the local creative/participation content. Appoint local producer Full core creative team meeting Creative research and production development Develop and Initiate Community Engagement process. Music commissions: Artist call out Soundscape: Review Writer, Dramaturg, Sound Editor roles and fees, and appoint.
April 2025	Creative development Sound / Music: content finalised Ongoing local engagement
May 2025	Additional resident engagement: Call out Finalise full artistic proposal (identifying gaps and needs).
June 2025	Two-day Royal Docks Originals creatives meeting at

	Royal Docks (10 and 11 June) All content: Rehearsals begin Additional community work as necessary.
July 2025	Planning and creative work as necessary Rehearsals continue Soundscape: Recording
August 2025	Rehearsals continue as required
September 2025	Final rehearsals. Final artistic elements. Event performances (25, 26 and 27 September, dates TBC)
October / November 2025	Debrief and reports

5.3. Management and key personnel:

The Associate Director will work closely with and report to the **Creative Director** (Jonathan Holloway) and will work with:

- **RDT Creative Programmer** who is the executive producer of the Water Commission
- **Fire Installation Artists** (Compagnie Carabosse) who will be responsible all elements of the installation and how the integration of local content enhances the installation, (in particular live music)
- **Producer, local creative content**, this post will support the Associate Director in the delivery of the local creative content
- **Writer/Dramaturg and Sound Designer** – creative posts supporting the Associate Director on delivery of the soundscape
- **RDT's Production Company** and an experienced water/arts **Production Manager**

The Associate Director will also work closely with Anila Ladwa (RDT Creative Producer, with community focus) and with Delia Barker (consultant, Local Engagement) alongside key partners such as Culture Within Newham (Creative People & Places Newham), the RDT marketing team, and local creatives.

6. Associate Director role

6.1. Responsibilities

Below are the main responsibilities of the Associate Director:

- Work closely with the Commission's Creative Director and Royal Docks Creative Programmer to build the narrative for the Water Commission through blending the water installation with local commissions and community stories, enhanced by interpretation and documentation
- Oversee the selection of local music commissions that will enhance the narrative of the water commission and will complement and work in the context of the artistic goals and logistical requirements of the water commission. Always involving the Creative Director and Fire artists
- Oversee the creative development and production of a soundscape made up of pre-recorded community oral history stories of the area (plus other recordings as appropriate) that will enhance the narrative of the water commission and will complement and work in the context of the artistic goals and logistical requirements of the water commission
- Develop and oversee a process that integrates these local components into the water installation in collaboration with the Commission's Creative Director and Fire Artists
- Direct local artists in their commission contributions to the production, organise workshops and rehearsal schedules and providing guidance and creative oversight to ensure their performances contribute effectively to the overall narrative.
- Explore further opportunities for community participation in the water commission, which can be managed within the scope of the commission budget and within this contract and put forward proposals for managing this involvement
- Support the marketing team to develop promotional materials by providing content that highlights the local creative and community's involvement in the water commission

7. Proposal

7.1. Candidate specification

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- Significant experience in directing large-scale community productions or similar.
- Proven ability to work collaboratively with diverse community groups.
- Strong organisational and communication skills, with the ability to manage multiple aspects of a large project simultaneously.
- A background in theatre, dance or community arts
- Experience of working in outdoor arts

7.2. Your Proposal

Please provide a brief proposal of your approach to this commission, which demonstrates your:

- Interest in the role and your relevant experience alongside a short summary of your proposed approach to the requirements of the role referencing section 4 and 6 of the brief
- Proposed number of working days (we expect this brief to require between 15-20 days) alongside your proposed fee. Please note the proposed total payment should not exceed £20,000, excluding VAT, and should include all costs including expenses. Fee payments will be paid in instalments aligned with work phases and agreed project milestones.
- A detailed CV highlighting relevant experience - please include links to photos, videos and reports
- Two references from previous projects that involved community engagement

Proposals will be evaluated using the criteria below

Criteria	Weight
Relevance of previous experience	40%
Understanding of and approach to the role	30%
Organisational and creative skills	20%
Cost-effectiveness and value for money	10%

Tender Process - key dates

Associate Director	Date
Tender brief clarifications timeslots CONTACT: Sarah.Barrow@RoyalDocks.London or Kate.Anderson@RoyalDocks.London to request a time slot for questions	Fri 14 March - Sarah Barrow Thurs 20 March - Kate Anderson
Tender brief response deadline TO: Sarah.Barrow@RoyalDocks.London	Mon 24 March 2025 09:00
Royal Docks Team scoring process	week commencing: Mon 24 March 2025
Royal Docks Team appointment of Associate Director	Fri 28 March 2025

8. Compliance with IR35 Legislation & your employment status

To ensure the GLA is complying with recent changes in legislation, please answer the following questions.

Please Note: This is a PASS/FAIL section, therefore a negative response to questions 1c) & 2 will result in your tender being rejected.

1.

A) Please state if you are an individual providing your services via a personal service company (i.e. a limited company that typically has only 1 or 2 directors, where some of the individuals providing the services hold more than 5% share in the company) or via a partnership (typically where the individual providing the services is a partner, and is entitled (alone or with one or more relatives) to 60% or more of the profits). YES/NO

B) Are you self-employed? YES/NO

C) If you have answered YES to 1. A) or 1. B), please confirm that should you be awarded the contract to deliver this requirement you agree to undertake an employment status assessment and to accept the GLA's decision to alter the engagement route if the arrangement falls within IR35 Intermediaries Legislation or if the engagement is deemed to be one of employment for tax purposes. YES/NO

2. Please confirm that should you engage personal service companies to deliver the Services you are expressing an interest in, you will inform GLA that this is the case and co-operate with GLA in relation to any questions raised to identify whether the Intermediaries Legislation applies; and if GLA confirms that it does, you will make all relevant deductions for tax and national insurance (in accordance with Chapter 10 Part 2 ITEPA 2003 and NIC legislation). YES/NO

Please include clearly in your submission your answers to the questions above as part of your bid, if you fail to provide answers to this section we reserve the right to reject your submission.

9. Deadline for proposals

Tender brief responses should be sent to Sarah Barrow sarah.barrow@royaldocks.london by 09:00 Monday 24 March 2025.