Climate Change Challenge: Call-Specific Guidance

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What is the overview of this call?

Digital storytelling has played a defining role in shaping the climate change narrative. The activism group Extinction Rebellion and figureheads such as Greta Thumberg have used digital media to galvanize a global movement of eco-radicalism. There has been an upward trend from the Film, Television and Screen Industries to produce content that taps into this zeitgeist and explores the subject of climate change. The David Attenborough documentary Extinction: The Facts brought in an estimated 4.5 million viewers, similarly, the Netflix documentary Seaspiracy, which exposes the impact of overfishing to the biodiversity of our oceans hit the streaming top 10 in 32 countries across the globe in less than 48 hours.

Through the Climate Change Challenge, we want to explore beyond linear storytelling to embrace the potential of immersive storytelling to have a deeper impact on the viewer. Focusing on the affordances of immersive digital technologies, we are interested in the broadest range of technologies under the 'XR' umbrella: virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, motion and volumetric capture technologies; and industry/professional kit as well as consumer level tech. Exploring ways that XR can create experiences that present the user with agency and perspective, imagine new worlds and challenge how they perceive themselves within their environment. Through collaboration with our XR research fellows, we intend to conduct user research to establish the potential to evoke an emotional response, promote behavioural change and engagement in the climate change movement.

What are the objectives for XR Stories for this call?

The Yorkshire and Humber creative screen industries are a huge success story. The region’s strong growth over the last decade has been consolidated by high profile moves to the Leeds City Region, from broadcasters like Channel 4, and significant parts of global media organisations like Sky. The area also has a thriving independent sector, with a large number

of freelancers and micro businesses, and the games and interactive media industries are recognised as a key strength.

Digital technologies are dramatically transforming the ways stories can be told. We are increasingly seeing new forms of technology-mediated stories: Interactive narratives through subscription video on demand (SVOD) platforms, immersive narrative games, VR cinema and theatre, hybrid forms of film and TV through mobile phone augmentation and narrative experiences in augmented realities. The creative possibilities seem endless and the audience appetite for these new stories is increasing.

The Climate Change Challenge has two main objectives:

1. To enable compelling interactive stories that harnesses the power of immersive storytelling to address the climate crisis

We want to see:

- An incredible story, or a way of telling stories
- An evidence-led approach driven by scientific climate change research
- A strong argument and evidence that the story innovation proposed is new to the creative and screen industries.

2. To produce research on the impact of immersive storytelling in changing perceptions and promoting behavioural change

We want to see:

- Engagement with XR Stories and academic researchers to conduct user testing sessions with the end project prototype to produce an audience impact report.

What funding is available?

Number of projects	3
Maximum SME grant size	£25,000
Total funding available	£75,000

What information will I need to supply with my application?

Video Pitch

1. Clearly outline your concept idea and provide contextual examples to support your creative approach. Please outline any existing technology already in-market or IP which would be relevant to the project.

2. Please outline how your concept is evidence-led by scientific climate change research and how you will ensure that this is accurately represented.

3.How will your concept push new boundaries in immersive storytelling?

4. How will your concept be impactful and promote meaningful conversations on climate change?

5. What audience demographic are you targeting with your concept?

6. How would you ensure your concept would be inclusive and accessible to a diverse audience?

Project Plan and Budget

- Templates will be provided in the application process to communicate your approach to delivery of the project and your project budget.
- In-kind contributions from the company (and other partners, if relevant to your project) will be required, though no minimum in-kind contribution is prescribed.

Company Data Capture

- XR Stories has overarching objectives to support the growth of the regions' screen industries through the companies we work with. We collect information about the SMEs to be involved in the project, to revisit later and see how we can evidence your growth and the impact of our funding.

How will applications be evaluated?

Project applications will be evaluated in three stages:

1. XR Stories R&D team will confirm application meets core eligibility criteria

2. Applications will be assessed by an external panel of assessors with broad experience of immersive and interactive storytelling. Assessors will be asked to provide an overall view of whether projects should be funded, and to provide comments against the following questions:

Fit and Scope

- Is there a story at the heart of the project?
- Is the concept evidence-led by scientific climate change research?
- Does the project provide a clear outline of how it will engage audiences in meaningful conversations on climate change and promote behavioural change?
- Is the project in line with BFI EDI standards?
- Is the project inclusive and accessible for a range of audiences?

Feasibility

- Could the project approach/plan deliver the intended outcomes?
- Is the outline budget well-justified and does it represent good use of resources?

Overall

- Would you recommend that this project be funded?
- What specific improvements would you like to see if this project were funded?

XR Stories Executive Board will ratify recommendations on projects to fund.

What is the timeline for projects?

All Climate Change Challenge projects will run to the same timeline, to maximise opportunities for sharing between projects and to ensure completion of projects in 2022.

	From	To
Apply	05/05/2022	27/05/2022
Selection	**30/05/2022**	**17/06/2022**
Award and Contracting	20/06/2022	11/07/2022
Project Delivery	**17/10/2022**	**-**
Showcasing	28/10/2022	28/10/2022

What outputs are required?

All projects must include the following minimum outputs:

- An advanced prototype story experience which will be ready for user testing
- Evidence of the R&D process followed including user testing and feedback (e.g. through a project progress videos, images and prototypes)
- An end of project report

- A showcase video for each project, aligned with your onwards commercial and investment approach, and suitable to be shared with XR Stories' funders.

What other contributions are expected of companies receiving funding from XR Stories?

As part consideration of the investment in projects and as part of the ongoing initiative of XR Stories and its core partners - the University of York, Screen Yorkshire and the BFI - to develop the screen-based creative industries regionally, nationally and internationally, we will require encourage named individuals at funded companies be involved with:

- masterclasses and talks at workshops and other events hosted by XR Stories
- contributing to audio-visual content generated by XR Stories, and sharing their learning experiences on the project.

We envisage the time commitment to be around 4 working days, including prep time, in the 3 years following the project's commencement.

Can I have an Intern to work on this project?

Yes. Each Climate Change Challenge project we fund is expected to offer capacity to support an Intern with relevant skills and background to the project.

XR Stories will fund the Intern's contribution to the project and will provide advice and guidance around recruitment if needed.

If SME applicants feel that they are unable to support an Intern, reasons must be provided. Applications for OpenXR funding will not be penalised should SMEs not be able to support an Intern.

What is an Internship?

An internship is a clearly defined, paid project-based piece of work that can be completed in 12 weeks or less. It should be of a professional level and provide tangible benefits to the business as well as developing the intern on a personal and professional basis.

Your intern project must have clearly defined deliverables, outcomes and outputs and have the ultimate benefit of moving the business or your project forwards

The project must also be challenging, stimulating and rewarding to the intern with clear deliverables identified for them. The SME must be able to support the intern for the full duration of the internship.

We anticipate that some projects will be virtual and others may be able to be completed in person depending on Covid restrictions, and working arrangements and circumstances of SMEs at the time.

Internship Monitoring and Evaluation requirements

Participating interns will be requested to submit a video or short written report after the end of their internship reflecting on their improvements in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development particularly related to XR markets and technologies.

Participating SMEs will be asked to complete feedback in the form of a report / case study sharing insight and information about the benefits to their business that the internship has provided.

Eligibility of companies to have an Intern

SMEs need to be registered in the UK, based in the Yorkshire and Humber region and hold current employer liability insurance. Please note that employer liability insurance also needs to cover home working arrangements at the moment.

Internships will be open to current students and recent graduates from Universities across the region.

Funding Interns

All interns will be paid at a minimum of £9.90 per hour. Interns will be paid either directly by XR Stories or by the SME and the total cost will be met by us and reimbursed where applicable.

Recruitment

Internships are open to current students and recent graduates of Yorkshire and Humber HEIs and other academic institutions in the region. XR Stories will help you to find a suitable intern, either through advertising through XR Stories to University of York students or via our HEI partners or you can find your own. To note, interns that are recruited directly via our partner universities are funded at 80%, so SMEs are expected to contribute the remaining 20% cost for the internships.

Who can I speak to about Interns?

The scope and details of the proposed internship can be discussed in advance of any application with the XR Stories Internships and Bursaries Manager by email to wendy.sissons@york.ac.uk.

Do I need to find an academic project partner?

We are looking for a clear R&D project to be driven by the lead SME applicant, and a willingness to engage with XR Stories research fellows during the project where there is

clear potential for the research expertise to add value to the project and the outcomes for the SMEs involved.

Our research fellows research strengths are broad and include the following areas:

Interactive Media

- Interactive Storytelling Design
- Digital Narrative Design
- Inclusive & Accessible Design
- Object-Based Media
- User Experience Design
- Experience Evaluation
- Design Fictions
- Mobile Experiences
- Interaction with motion controllers and wearable motion sensors
- Spatial and 3D interaction in VR
- Motion Capture
- Data Visualisation

Computer Science

- Artificial Intelligence
- Data Analytics

Audio

- Immersive and Interactive Audio
- Environmental soundscapes
- Accessibility

How will the showcasing videos work?

Our experience of supporting previous R&D projects has demonstrated the importance of clear, visually engaging assets to demonstrate the impact of projects.

We will be commissioning a regional creative agency to work with XR Stories and funded companies to produce showcase videos at the end of projects.

Showcase videos, produced by a regional creative agency will have two core purposes:

- To support companies' onward commercial and investment strategy, showing off the creativity of the team and the storytelling innovation explored in the R&D
- To support XR Stories in demonstrating the impact of its R&D funding and approach we have pursued.