

Open Call for Applications from Immersive Artist Teams: Futures_Past

Deadline: 9 November 2025

The Embassy of France in South Africa, Lesotho, and Malawi, with the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) and in partnership with Electric South, invites applications from immersive artists in South Africa, Malawi, and Lesotho to take part in an exciting new initiative that reimagines the future of heritage through immersive storytelling.

About the project

Futures_Past: Amplifying Memory with Immersive Technologies is a dedicated project that supports archival and cultural institutions in South Africa, Lesotho and Malawi to explore new ways of engaging the public through immersive storytelling.

The project focuses on reanimating archival collections using digital formats such as virtual and augmented reality, spatial audio, and interactive installations. The project is also designed to support the immersive arts in the three countries through funding, support and a mobility and networking programme.

The aim is to strengthen public access to heritage by developing creative partnerships, building professional networks, and supporting the production of innovative digital works rooted in historical and cultural archives.

The project has three core components:

- A sector mapping and policy study on immersive arts in South Africa, Lesotho, and Malawi, with input from regional stakeholders and French experts;
- The creation of six original immersive digital storytelling projects, inspired by archival collections from institutions in South Africa, Lesotho, and Malawi, developed through open calls. This also includes a capacity development programme to train emerging assistant producers under the age of 30;
- A mobility and networking programme in France, connecting Southern African archivists and producers with French immersive arts institutions and festivals.

Initiated by the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) with funding from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and implemented by Electric South, *Futures_Past* contributes to the long-term sustainability of the heritage sector while fostering inclusive, cross-border collaboration and innovation.

The Six Archives

Selected Creative Producing teams will collaborate with one of six archives, using immersive formats to transform archival materials into innovative and accessible public experiences, grounded in storytelling. Together, the creative producing and archival teams will co-design and produce immersive experiences that will culminate in public exhibitions. The aim is to turn archives into dynamic spaces for dialogue, memory and imagination, while also supporting the growth of the immersive arts sector in the region.

1. National Film, Video and Sound Archives Pretoria, South Africa

The National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA) is mandated to collect any audio-visual material made in or about South Africa in multiple formats including motion-picture films and video material; sound recordings; television broadcasts, etc. It has been in existence since 1964. The NFVSA is the custodian of more than a million records pertaining to the audio-visual heritage of the country. These records consist of various formats ranging from film to video to sound, including paper records that are referred to as related materials that include museum objects.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The Moolman Opnames (Afrikaans for 'Recordings') is a historically significant film collection preserved by the National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA). Shot on 35mm film between 1960 and 1966 by Mr. Moolman, an official in the then Department of Native Affairs, these 14 reels capture a wide spectrum of South African life during the height of apartheid. Particularly significant are Reel 4 and Reel 11, which are the most frequently requested by researchers. Reel 4 documents the enforcing of the Pass Laws, including pass inspections and arrests, alongside scenes of South Africa's transition into a Republic in 1961. Reel 11 captures the forced removals from Cato Manor to Kwa-Mashu, a defining moment of South Africa's turbulent history of dispossession.

Together, these reels provide unfiltered visual testimony of apartheid's human impact and have become vital sources for scholars, educators, and documentary filmmakers worldwide. The aim was to show "ordinary" life in South Africa at that time. Various topics were covered such as work undertaken at textile factories and fishing industries; the printing of stamps used by the Post Office; the Republic Day military parade; health services in Black-only medical clinics; community life in Idas Park (a designated "coloured" neighbourhood); focus on educational school for the sons of chiefs; and Xhosa women in traditional dress and makeup. Through these reels you can step into the streets of Durban during pass law inspections, witness the trauma of forced removals in Kwa-Mashu, or walk through the factories and mines where black labour underpinned apartheid's economy.

Taken together, the Moolman films are a window into both everyday existence and the state's mechanisms of control during a turbulent decade in South African history. Their combination of banal and politically charged subjects provides fertile ground for immersive reinterpretation, inviting new reflections on power, identity, and resilience.

2. GALA Queer Archive Johannesburg, South Africa

The GALA Queer Archive is a non-profit archive based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Founded in 1997, GALA aims to act as a catalyst for the production, preservation and dissemination of information about the history, culture and contemporary experiences of LGBTQI+ people in South Africa, and beyond.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The Township AIDS Project (TAP)

We have limited material across a number of collections relating to the Township AIDS Project, but no centralized narrative of the organization and the work they did. The aim would be to tell a cohesive story of the TAP in the 1990s, a time when the HIV/AIDS pandemic was taking hold in South Africa. There is no narrative of this organization, and only passing references to their work in published articles and thesis.

The TAP was established in 1989 as a response to the lack of AIDS resources available to black South Africans. At the time, AIDS awareness campaigns were run by largely white gay organisations such as the Gay Organisation of South Africa (GASA), and because resources were often reproduced from the US and UK, they were always in English. Although the TAP was not a 'gay organisation', a number of those involved with the TAP, particularly in its early years, were gay academics, activists and healthcare workers.

Queer anti-apartheid activist and co-founder of the Gay & Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), Simon Nkoli, was one of the TAP's founding members. He worked as a community educator, was in charge of the TAP's Gay Health Program, and featured in a TAP safe sex poster campaign. In 1992, while working for the TAP, Nkoli organised the first Regional Aids Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men in Soweto. When Nkoli finally came out publicly as HIV+ in 1996, it helped others to acknowledge their status and get tested. Nkoli's health declined over the next two years and he eventually resigned from the TAP and started the short-lived, volunteer-driven Positive African Men's Project. Nkoli died of AIDS-related illness on 30 November 1998.

The TAP really took off after Enea Motaung, who became known as the 'AIDS Gogo of Soweto', took over in 1992. Motaung led the TAP until its closure, due to a decline in funding, in 2006.

3. !Khwa ttu San Culture & Education Centre Yzerfontein, South Africa

!Khwa ttu is a San culture and education centre based on an 850 hectare Nature Reserve 70 kilometres north of Cape Town, South Africa. A non-profit company, directed jointly by the San and the Swiss-based Ubuntu Foundation, !Khwa ttu has been providing jobs, and practical residential training for young San from all over southern Africa since 1999.

The !Khwa ttu San Heritage Centre is a great deal more than a collection of artefacts and historical photos. It's a pioneering initiative that embraces the principle of community curation. Our exhibitions, San-led trails and guided experiences are designed to engage body and senses, as much as the mind. They demonstrate the skills and knowledge of San from across southern Africa.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The !Xun and Khwe linocuts are striking artworks that reflect the lived experiences, memories, and imaginations of these San communities. Their style features figures, animals, and natural motifs, often echoing the ancient rock art tradition.

Themes explored include:

Nature and Survival: Frequent motifs such as antelope, giraffe, elephant, and birds represent both subsistence and spiritual connections.

Daily Life: Hunting, gathering, and traditional practices are vividly portrayed.

Memory and History: Some linocuts recall experiences of forced removals and military life.

Myth and Storytelling: Folklore and spiritual narratives appear, linking human and animal worlds.

4. Iziko Museums of South Africa Cape Town, South Africa

As Cape Town's national museum network, Iziko Museums of South Africa unites 12 iconic museum sites, including the Iziko South African Museum to the Slave Lodge, South African National Gallery, and Planetarium. Showcasing millions of art, natural history, and social history objects, Iziko has for over 200 years led cutting-edge research, bold exhibitions, and inspiring education programming that bring our, sometimes difficult, past to life while addressing today's pressing issues.

Iziko's archives encompass millions of objects spanning fossils, meteorites, marine specimens, artworks, photographs, and oral histories. Blending natural and social history with the arts, this

rich collection captures South Africa's biodiversity and cultural memory, offering a layered record of nature and humanity that inspires research, creativity, and digital reimagining.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The core focus for this project is the forthcoming Amanzi eAfrica exhibition, which explores the ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance of water in South Africa and across the continent. Artists will find a wealth of source material in multiple formats: audio recordings of indigenous oral histories about sacred rivers and springs; high-resolution images and field photographs from historic expeditions; scientific texts and field notes documenting aquatic ecosystems; and tangible objects such as fossils from ancient lakebeds, rare aquatic insects, and preserved marine invertebrates.

Key narratives connect deep time with living traditions—ranging from fossil evidence of prehistoric water environments to contemporary community rituals that honour water as life-giving and sacred. Collections span centuries: archaeological artifacts from early coastal settlements, ethnographic materials representing diverse African communities, and modern ecological research data.

This integrated archive reflects both scientific inquiry and cultural meaning, offering layered stories about water's role in shaping landscapes, societies, and spiritual practices. Its breadth and authenticity give creative teams an exceptional platform to develop immersive projects that merge sound, image, and interaction, while addressing urgent themes like climate change, biodiversity loss, and equitable water access.

5. Royal Archives, Museum and Information Centre Matsieng, Lesotho

Royal Archives and Museum is a non-governmental organization that collects, documents, preserves and promotes the heritage related to the Royal Family and Chieftainship institution of Lesotho.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The collection includes records of cultural, historical, political, legal and economic significance relating to the administration of the local, national and international affairs of Lesotho, particularly during the colonial period. The correspondence covers the headmen, area chiefs, Principal Chiefs, right to the Paramount Chief (later King). For example there is correspondence about a crisis facing a specific village, where a high-level intervention was required from the office of the Paramount Chief.

Another layer of the collection comprises the photographs of the late King Moshoeshe II and the late Queen Mother 'Mamohato Bereng Seeiso, the current King's parents, captured at church, at public gatherings (pitso), tree planting, an international state visit, Mokhibo dance for

the late Queen Mother, agricultural shows for the late King Moshoeshoe II and many more.

6. Music Crossroads Malawi Lilongwe, Malawi

Music Crossroads Malawi (MCM) is a dynamic non-profit organisation dedicated to empowering youth through music, culture, creative arts and digital skills. Founded as part of the larger Music Crossroads International network, MCM has become a driving force in the Malawian music scene, offering a platform for young, aspiring musicians to nurture their talent, build sustainable careers, and contribute positively to their communities while promoting and preserving Malawi's rich cultural heritage.

What archive are you presenting for Futures_Past?

The Music Crossroads Malawi Folksong Archive is a living collection of traditional songs gathered from diverse communities across Malawi. The archive features high-quality audio recordings performed with both traditional and modern instruments, alongside musical transcriptions in notation that make the songs accessible to performers, educators, and researchers. It also includes published songbooks, with one volume already produced and another in development, ensuring the material is preserved in both print and digital form. The collection spans songs from multiple regions, languages, and cultural groups, capturing themes such as initiation, farming, marriage, spirituality, storytelling, and social commentary. These songs reflect Malawi's oral traditions while also engaging with contemporary expression, offering creative teams both authentic roots and new reinterpretation opportunities. For artists, the archive provides rich material for immersive projects whether reimagining folk melodies in new genres, incorporating traditional rhythms into dance or theatre, or using song narratives for multimedia storytelling. Its combination of sound, text, and cultural context makes it a unique resource that bridges heritage preservation with innovative artistic creation.

Who Can Apply

We are seeking **teams comprising of at least four key roles** with experience in immersive media or related fields, and an interest in archives, history, and storytelling: **1) a creator (director, creative lead), 2) a technologist lead, 3) a producer, and 4) an emerging trainee assistant producer** who will receive training as part of this initiative.

We want to see teams that can interpret the stories held in the respective archives to create inspiring works for diverse audiences using immersive digital technology.

- All key team members must have at least three years of experience in their respective practices. This does not apply to the trainee assistant producer.

- The director must be from and/or resident in the country where the archive is based. If the director is not currently based in the city/country where the archive is located, they must be able to travel to the archive.
- While it is preferable for other key team members to also be from or residing in the country where the archive is based, teams can include members from elsewhere in Africa, as long as the director meets the requirements.
- Each team must include at least four members: **director, technologist, producer**, as well as a **trainee assistant producer**. Additional members with relevant expertise may also be included.
- The trainee producer must be under the age of 30.
- Selection will aim for gender balance among participants, but teams of any gender composition are welcome to apply.
- Team experience, cohesion, location and the balance of skills will be assessed to ensure capacity to deliver the project.
- Teams should demonstrate both technical expertise and a strong creative vision. If any of the core roles are performed by the same person, documentation of expertise in all areas is required.
- We are looking for teams who are open and collaborative. You will be working directly with archival institutions, collaborating closely with archivists and staff to develop immersive projects. Many of the institutions are already working with local communities and stakeholders. Openness, adaptability, and a spirit of co-creation are essential to ensure that the archives' collections are interpreted respectfully and engagingly.

Budget and Timeline

Each selected team will receive between R500,000 and R1,200,000 in financial support, depending on the scale and scope of their proposed work. This funding covers artist fees and production expenses, including fees, technology, overheads and all other project-specific costs. Selected teams will also receive mentorship, facilitated access to archives, and exhibition opportunities. Funds will be managed in tranches by Electric South. Co-funding, additional support, and co-production models are encouraged and welcomed.

All projects need to be completed by August 2026 - this means a production timeline of approximately seven months.

In addition, a separate fund will be allocated to support exhibition installation and management, ensuring that completed works are presented effectively and professionally.

Eligible Immersive Formats

Proposals may make use of one or more of the following formats and technologies (but are not limited to these):

- **360 Degree Video** – allowing users to look around and explore a scene in every direction.
- **Virtual Reality (VR)** – fully digital, explorable worlds.
- **Augmented Reality (AR)** – overlays digital content onto the physical world.
- **Mixed Reality (MR)** – blending digital and physical environments.
- **Extended Reality (XR)** – encompassing VR, AR, and MR experiences.
- **Capture** – volumetric, photogrammetry, and motion capture (MoCap) of people, objects or spaces.
- **Lidar** – laser scanning for 3D mapping.
- **Responsive Environments** – installations that interact with audiences.
- **Sensors** – interactive triggers responding to touch, sound or movement.
- **Haptics and Sensory Feedback** – tactile or multisensory interfaces.
- **Ambisonics** – audio that surrounds listeners from all directions.
- **Binaural Sound** – spatialised audio that mimics human hearing.
- **Quadraphonic / 5.1 Sound** – surround audio environments.
- **Exciters** – speakers creating vibration-based sound out of surfaces.
- **Spatial Audio** – 3D soundscapes with positional effects.

Please note: Projects must be innovative, immersive and/or interactive; submissions that are purely 2D, sculptural, or traditional film works will not be considered for the project.

What Selected Teams Receive

- Project funding.
- Access to archival collections and guidance from archivists.
- Mentorship from regional and international experts.
- Production support and technical resources.
- One team member from each selected team will travel to France to develop international relationships and partnerships.
- Opportunities for public exhibition in museums, libraries, and cultural venues.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of curators, technologists, and archivists. Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Originality – Innovative and imaginative use of immersive media to engage with archival materials.
- Ethics – Commitment to responsible practice, including community representation and respectful use of archives.
- Suitability of Technology – Effective use of immersive tools to support the story and concept.
- Audience Engagement – Potential to reach and resonate with diverse audiences.
- Aesthetics – Creative quality of design, sound, and storytelling.
- Archive Match – Strength of connection between the chosen archive and the proposed project.
- Practicality – Feasibility of delivering the project within the resources, timeframe, and team capacity.
- Team Composition – location, balance, experience, cohesion, gender considerations, and inclusion of emerging assistant producers.
- Touring Potential - The final project should be “portable” so that there is the potential to tour it beyond the archival institution.

Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed before the final selection is made. During the interview, the teams will be asked to explain how they intend to budget and schedule the work.

How to Apply

Applicants will be asked to submit:

1. An explanation of why you want to work with a particular archive. We want to see why you are excited to work with the archive.
2. A short proposal describing your project idea and approach.
3. Mood boards and other visual materials that give a sense of your approach to realising the project idea.
4. Information about your team members, including relevant experience.
5. Examples of previous immersive work.
6. At least two contactable references.

Deadline for applications: 9 November 2025, 23:59 SAST

Apply [here](#).

Please join us for a webinar where you can ask all of your questions on Monday, 13 November from 10:00 to 11:30 SAST. Sign up [here](#).

FAQ

Who can apply?

Teams of at least four people (director, technologist, producer, and trainee assistant producer under the age of 30). All team members, except for the trainee assistant producer, must have at least three years of professional experience in their practice. The director must be from and/or resident in the country where the archive is based.

Can one person perform more than one role (e.g., director and producer)?

Yes. However, if a single person takes on multiple roles, you must provide clear documentation showing your expertise and track record in each area. You should still complete all the role sections in the form. Where the information is the same, you may write “See Director” (or the relevant role) instead of repeating details.

Can individuals apply without a team?

No. You must apply as a team with at least four roles covered - director, technologist, producer and trainee assistant producer. This programme is designed for teams, bringing together creative, technical, and production expertise. We want to see that you have the experience to conceptualise, produce and deliver a strong project.

Does the director have to be currently based in the same country as the archive?

Ideally, yes. The director should be from the city or country where the archive is located. If they are not currently residing there, they must be able to travel to the archive during the project.

Do I need previous experience working with immersive technologies?

Yes. We are looking for experienced teams who can deliver an engaging, immersive project on time and on budget.

Do I need previous experience working with archives?

No. Prior archival experience is welcome but not required. We do want to see why you are interested in the archive you select to work with. Selected teams will receive support from the archival institutions throughout the process.

Is there a deadline to complete the work?

Yes. All projects need to be completed by August 2026, allowing for a production timeline of approximately seven months. This is an initiative with a fairly fast turnaround and there will be an exhibition as soon as production is completed. Only apply if you can work to this schedule.

Are students eligible?

Yes, if they can demonstrate three years of professional experience in immersive arts, technology, or production outside of their studies and have the time to work on this. Applicants must be at least 18 years old to apply.

Do I need to have a final concept to submit an application?

No, you will be encouraged to work with experts and representatives from the archives to refine and enrich your original concept. Applications should include a description of your ideas and approach, but we understand that these could change as the project evolves.

Do I need to own my own equipment (VR headsets, motion capture tools, etc.)?

Yes, you will need to have or source your own equipment for production and budget accordingly. Where additional equipment or software is required, teams must budget for it within their project funding. There will be additional resources to support the installation of the final exhibition.

What if my project idea requires more than one immersive format?

Projects may combine multiple technologies (e.g., VR and ambisonics, or AR with motion capture). The key is that the technology supports the story you are telling and the audience experience you are creating.

Will the final projects be exhibited?

Yes. Completed works will be presented in the relevant archival institution or a suitable partner in the same location. The exhibitions are scheduled for the latter part of 2026 and will be installed for a minimum of three months. There are further resources allocated to the exhibition of the projects.

What level of funding is provided?

Each selected team will receive between **R500,000 and R1,200,000** in financial support, depending on project scale

Who will hold the IP and Rights?

As this is a collaborative project involving the selected creative teams, the archival institutions, and IFAS, specific agreements on intellectual property, licensing, and exhibition rights will be established between all parties to ensure clarity and fair use. Teams should be prepared for their works to be exhibited by the archival institution and project partners.

What languages can I apply in?

Proposals should be submitted in English. Projects may incorporate any languages relevant to the archival material and target audiences, provided that an English version or English subtitles are included.

Important dates

Call Opens: 2 October 2025

Open Call Webinar: 13 October 2025 10:00 to 11:00 SAST (Register [here](#))

Call Closes: 9 November 2025 23:59 SAST

Applicants notified by end of November 2025

Successful projects contract with archives from December 2025 to January 2026

Project Delivery by the end of August 2026

Project Exhibition from September to November 2026

About the French Institute of South Africa

The [French Institute of South Africa \(IFAS\)](#), the cultural arm of the French Embassy, has supported creative cooperation between South Africa, France, and the continent since 1995. With a growing portfolio in the heritage and archiving space, IFAS has played a key role in major regional initiatives aimed at safeguarding memory and advancing access to historical resources. Notable projects include the [digitisation of the Rivonia Trial tapes](#) in partnership with South African institutions and France's National Audiovisual Institute (INA), as well as cooperation with the [Morija Museum & Archives in Lesotho](#) to preserve shared histories and digitise valuable collections. Recently, IFAS co-hosted the regional seminar Advancing Audiovisual Heritage: Policy, Practice, and Cross-Border Partnerships in Cape Town with INA and the Agence française de développement (AFD). This seminar formed part of the broader *Unboxing Mayibuye* programme, which also included a regional mapping study and a professional training course on managing audiovisual archives.

About Electric South

[Electric South](#) is a non-profit based in Cape Town, South Africa. The organisation contributes to building a robust storytelling ecosystem in Africa, grounded in immersive and interactive technologies. Committed to industry development, Electric South creates opportunities and resources for African artists and creative technologists through mentorship, [workshops and labs, including the flagship New Dimensions Lab](#), project funding, convenings, research, advocacy and field building. Electric South works with the ecosystem of African creators, industry, civil society, and governments, bridging these diverse sectors to create an enabling environment for artists and technologists and to reshape the trajectory of emerging technologies. Immersive projects produced with the support of Electric South have won numerous awards and been exhibited all over the world including at Sundance, Venice and IDFA DocLab.