

Open Call Shifting Grounds: Design Practices in Contested Geologies

This document is a descriptive translation of the original Dutch Open Oproep Shifting Grounds. The English translation is provided for reference purposes only, and in all instances the original Dutch text takes precedence. If you would like to report a translation error or inaccuracy, we encourage you to contact the Creative Industries Fund NL.



**creative industries
fund NL**

**design
architecture
digital culture**

p.o. box 29066
3001 gb rotterdam

groothandelsgebouw
entrance c, 5e etage
weena 723, rotterdam

+31 (0)10 436 16 00

The Creative Industries Fund NL invites designers, makers, spatial practitioners and collectives based in the Netherlands to collaborate with one or more partners in African countries on projects centered around contested geologies. This open call aims to support transnational projects that, rooted in design practice, critically engage with the entangled (post)colonial legacies and contemporary planetary crises. From this starting point, these projects should contribute to research and discourses on environmental crises and/or current geopolitical and socio-economic tensions affecting human settlements and ecological systems. This open call specifically addresses contested geologies on the African continent.

Tensions within land, water and natural resources continue to be shaped by imperial geologies and modern industrial societies. In many cases, the geographical landscapes of conflict intersect with dynamics of power, displacement, and resistance linked to processes of extraction and expulsion, as well as escalating climate crises.

These processes frequently result in pollution, depleted ecosystems, mounting waste, rising carbon emissions and disrupted labour relations. They are often defined by an ongoing push to extract and transform materials. In these contested territories, space itself can become volatile and is continually reshaped, for example, into spaces of displacement or dead land.¹ Tensions within these shifting geologies involve not only territorial disputes and the exploitation of land and resources, but can also lead to the erasure and re-inscription of histories and identities. For example, the disappearance of material and immaterial heritage and traditions related to land/earth. Or how disrupted labour relations mark workers as invisible within systems, despite the materiality of their bodies.

The open call *Shifting Grounds: Design Practices in Contested Geologies* invites reflections on the role that architecture, design and digital culture play in (invertedly) shaping spaces of conflict and tension around geologies. This includes, for example, the material consequences of expanding digital infrastructures, or the large-scale deforestation and mineral extraction on the African continent that fuel technological and industrial development, as well as consumer markets in the Global North. Yet, these extractive dynamics seem to intersect with tensions within the Global North itself - including unsustainable consumption patterns, an overabundance of goods, and a relentless drive for innovation - raising urgent questions about what is being innovated, for whom, and under what conditions. Within these pressures, communities are compelled to find ways to build, resist and repair social and ecological spaces. They do this through other structures and systems, and in ways that sustain resilience amidst a rapidly changing global order. Architecture, design and digital culture here have the potential to function as fields of insurgency and to confront these terrains as well as to unearth its impacts and implications. Their potential lies not only in challenging dominant paradigms, but also in the imagination and creation of regenerative futures grounded in care, collectivity, and spatial justice.

what is this open call's objective?

This is an open and inclusive call that welcomes a wide range of initiatives and perspectives. It encourages collaborative and transnational projects, the sharing and deepening of knowledge and the building of reciprocal networks. The aim of the call is to contribute to current discourses, designing and embracing approaches in spatial, design and digital practices that have the potential to inform and alter how we regard and engage with geologies.

¹ The term 'dead land' is a reference to the chapter Dead land, Dead Water in Saskia Sassen's work *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Harvard University Press, 2014

Various questions could be considered: What are the spatial and ecological consequences of resource extraction for digital technologies? How can design practitioners make the hidden ecological impacts of digital infrastructures visible and contribute to discourses in the field or public domain? What are the (in)visible ramifications of territory considered detached from its ecological, social, or economic value due to extraction? How can or do design practitioners contribute to new and/or existing forms of belonging or restoration? How can design, digital culture or architecture be used to preserve and strengthen intangible heritage or knowledge about land and natural resources?

who is this open call for?

- You are a professional designer, architect, maker, thinker, curator, researcher, collective, platform or cultural organisation, active in the fields of architecture, digital culture and/or design.
- You are established in the Netherlands, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius or Sint Maarten (Kingdom of the Netherlands).
- You are working with at least one partner (for example a designer, cultural organisation, community representative, social justice activist and/or researcher) based in one of the African countries that fall within the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation policy of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Angola, Benin, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe. These partners may include representatives of communities, social initiatives, social justice activists, as well as scholars/researchers within the social, economic, political, cultural and spatial fields.

Please note: this open call is not for institutions with BIS funding from the central government nor for parties that receive a subsidy under the Creative Industry Fund NL's Four-year Institutional Grant Scheme 2025-2028, the Talent Development Grant Scheme 2025, the Open Call Emerging Design Practices 2025 or the Open Call Self-taught Designer 2025.

which projects are eligible for a grant?

- Projects should have a Dutch partner who is the applicant and a partner based in the African continent. Proposals should provide insight into how and why different partners will be involved and how reciprocal collaboration and exchange will be achieved. The perspectives of all partners should be anchored in the project, with a preference for introspection and reflection on the theme from collaborators' own contexts.
- Proposals should take a clear position in relation to the theme of the open call, and substantiate the proposed topic and the questions it raises. Additionally, proposals should consider the different local and/or regional contexts of the project.
- Proposals may take different forms, from artistic or design-based research to the implementation of interventions, initiatives, or programmes. All types of approach are possible as long as a clear link is made both to the theme of the open call and to one or more design fields.

Further requirements:

- The applicant positions themselves as a professional designer, architect, maker, thinker, curator, researcher, collective, platform or cultural organisation, active in the fields of architecture, digital culture and/or design.
- Registration with Dutch Chamber of Commerce or Kingdom of the Netherlands is obliged for the lead applicant.
- Only one application per applicant can be submitted.

- Projects cannot take place in areas where a red travel warning is in force at the time of submission. Travel costs may only be submitted for journeys to green, yellow or orange areas outside the Netherlands. Always check the travel advice from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in advance and take local measures into account in your plan: www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl
- The project should follow EU sanctions regulations. The board cannot support activities that are contrary to EU sanctions rules. In principle, the board bases this on the EU sanctions map: www.sanctionsmap.eu, with the understanding that the official texts from the EU Official Journal are always decisive. It is the applicant's own responsibility to check whether they are not acting contrary to the applicable sanctions. When the requested grant will finance activities taking place in countries listed on this EU sanctions map, the applicant must contact the Fund before applying. Based on Article 23, the board can then decide whether the application can be admitted to the grant round.

three phases

Only proposals meeting the above conditions will be submitted to the external advisory committee for evaluation. The Open Call Shifting Grounds operates through three distinct phases: research and exploration (phase 1), implementation (phase 2), and modes of engagement (phase 3).

When submitting a proposal, applicants are expected to fully elaborate on the research and exploration (phase 1) and provide a clear outline or framework for the implementation during phase 2. Selected projects will receive funding to conduct phase 1 over a maximum three-month period. At the end of phase 1, projects must submit documentation presenting insights and findings from their research. Phase 1 must commence no later than 31 January 2026.

Before phase 2 funding is awarded, all selected projects will participate in the first meeting of the Community of Practice: a curated programme where teams present their phase 1 results to peers and the external advisory committee. Following these presentations, projects can receive funding to proceed with phase 2 implementation.

community of practice around Shifting Grounds

The Creative Industries Fund NL will facilitate a Community of Practice, a collaborative framework that brings together the supported projects and their coalitions. By connecting past, present, and future, and by integrating systemic, lived, and physical realities, it contributes to comprehensive perspectives. Through in-person knowledge exchange sessions, the Community of Practice aims to foster a collaborative space for critical dialogue, peer learning, and reflection across diverse geographical and creative contexts. This format runs in parallel with the selected projects, supporting participants in activating their practices within their local environments and encouraging reflection on their choices and possible methodologies.

Participation in the community of practice is required for all selected projects. During the in-person sessions each design coalition is expected to appoint two representatives: one project partner based in the Netherlands and one international partner. At the start of phase 1, the eight selected projects will be informed by the Fund regarding participation in the Community of Practice. In their phase 1 budget applicants must include a budget for travel and accommodation costs related to participating in the first Community of Practice meeting, for the two representatives. The first multi-day meeting will take place in the Netherlands in week 21 of 2026.

phase 1: research and exploration

- **Deadline:** 22 October 2025, 16:00 hours CEST
- **Number of grants:** up to 8 projects
- **Grant:** maximum of €15,000
- **Decision date:** 17 December 2025
- **Starting date:** between 17 December 2025 and 31 January 2026
- **Duration:** maximum 3 months after the starting date (end date: no later than 30 April 2026)

submitting proposals

Proposals in phase 1 may be submitted on the Creative Industries Fund NL application platform by 22 October 2025 at 16:00 hours CEST. To do so, select the scheme 'Open Call Grant Scheme' and the round 'Open Call Shifting Grounds'. Please note: make sure you create an account for the application platform in good time, as it takes one working day to activate a new account.

The phase 1 proposal should consist of:

- a fully completed application form;
- a research plan including project goals, set-up, and timeline (no more than 6 A4 pages in PDF, 8MB);
- letters of intent from collaborators (single PDF file, maximum 2 A4 pages per letter, 4MB total file size);
- cv's of applicants and key collaborators (no more than 6 A4 pages in PDF, 4MB);
- balanced budget for phase 1 complying with Fair Practice Code (no more than 2 A4 pages in PDF, 4MB);
- portfolio materials demonstrating team's relevant work (no more than 8 A4 pages in PDF, 4MB).

Phase 1 assessment criteria:

The proposals will be assessed by a committee of at least four independent external advisors, chaired by a technical chairperson. The advisory committee assesses the extent to which the proposals are consistent in their purpose, their design, and the extent to which they respond to this open call. The assessment criteria for the first phase are:

- Project topic, its questions, and the value of its artistic content:** The committee assesses the proposal's analysis and substantiation of the chosen topic, its ideas and questions in relation to the theme of the open call. The committee also assesses the proposal's consideration of its different local and/or regional contexts, and how the project topic and its questions are translated into an artistic form. Which specific idea or approach is central to the project and why?
- Positioning and potential for engagement:** The committee assesses how the proposal positions itself in relation to existing developments and knowledge within and outside the field. Does the proposal contribute to discourse and/or to the field of architecture, digital culture and/or design, expand knowledge or challenge these? Does the proposal promote diversity in subject matter, participants, and audience? The committee also assesses how applicants and partners position themselves in relation to the topic and contexts of the proposal. To what extent does the proposal show confidence in dealing with its own blind spots in relation to the theme?
- Collaboration:** The committee assesses whether the proposed collaborations provide sufficient confidence in a full project proposal making a relevant contribution to addressing the theme of the open call. The committee also assesses the complementary expertise and the roles of collaborators within the proposal, as

well as a fair division of roles and budgets among them. The ways in which local knowledge and expertise within specific social and cultural contexts of the project are also assessed.

phase 2: implementation

- **Deadline:** 1 May 2026, 16:00 hours CEST
- **Number of grants:** all projects selected for phase 1 are eligible
- **Grant:** maximum of €50,000
- **Decision date:** 3 June 2026
- **Starting date:** 4 June 2026
- **Duration:** maximum 12 months after the starting date

submitting proposals

Selected phase 1 projects must submit phase 2 documentation via email to the Creative Industries Fund's Internationalisation team by 1 May 2026. During the Community of Practice programme, participants will pitch their phase 2 project plans to fellow cohort members and the advisory committee, followed by reflective discussions.

The phase 2 proposal consists of:

- project plan with elaboration of purpose and set-up, including a detailed timeline, the proposal's positioning in relation to the theme of the open call, as well as the existing developments within and outside the field relevant to the chosen topic and the contexts (conceptual, social, geographical, or otherwise) in which the project takes place (no more than 6 A4 pages in PDF, 8MB);
- signed collaboration agreements from each collaborator (single PDF file, maximum 2 A4 pages per letter, 4MB total file size);
- communication plan outlining approach to sharing project outcomes (no more than 2 A4 pages in PDF, 4MB);
- balanced budget with explanatory appendix complying with [Fair Practice Code](#) (no more than 3 A4 pages in PDF, 4MB).

As part of this phase, the Fund will host two Community of Practice sessions, including an online seminar focused on reviewing project progress, as well as a curated programme on a to be determined location on the African continent.

Phase 2 assessment criteria:

The advisory committee evaluates proposals and presentations based on:

- Topic relevance:** The committee assesses the relevance of the proposed topic, its resulting questions and the artistic content of the proposal relating to the theme of the open call.
- Quality and feasibility:** The committee assesses the quality and feasibility of the proposal, such as the elaboration of purpose and set-up, its plan of approach, its budget and financial planning.
- Positioning:** The committee assesses the proposal's positioning in relation to the theme of the open call, as well as the existing developments within and outside the field relevant to the chosen topic and the contexts in which the project takes place.
- Collaboration:** The committee assesses the design of the collaboration, such as the expertise and roles of the collaborating partners and the ways in which they will work together.
- Outcomes:** The committee assesses the proposal's approach to sharing the projects expected outcomes.

The phase 2 proposal must achieve an average score of 3 or higher for phase 2 funding

to be awarded. In this phase, the advisory committee also critically examines the feasibility of the submitted budget and the quality of the collaboration agreements. Should the advisory committee find these aspects insufficient, the Fund reserves the right to withhold financial support for phase 2. The advisory committee will issue a written review on the phase 2 proposal and the presentation, including a score of the proposal's strengths and weaknesses based on the specified criteria. The committee may also issue suggestions on how to improve the proposal during its execution.

phase 3: modes of engagement

This phase supports coalitions in sharing and embedding phase 2 outcomes within relevant local, regional, or international contexts. It provides space to explore where project findings might resonate, consider their potential futures, and reflect on how they could take new forms or meanings in different settings.

Coalitions will receive detailed phase 3 information no later than three months before phase 2 conclusion.

selection process

Proposals for this open call will be assessed in the form of a tender (phase 1), meaning that, within the Fund's available budget, some proposals will be preferred over others. Only positively assessed proposals will be supported. The handling and assessment of submitted proposals take place according to the framework of the Open Call Grant Scheme of the Creative Industries Fund NL and, in particular the extent to which proposals meet the criteria of this open call. For each proposal, the advisory committee will issue a recommendation to the Fund's board.

acknowledgement of receipt and announcement of selection

Applicants will receive confirmation of receipt no later than one week after the closing date through the Creative Industries Fund NL application platform. The selection of phase 1 will similarly be announced through the application platform no later than 17 December 2025.

contact

For more information about this open call, you can contact the Internationalisation team via internationalisering@stimuleringsfonds.nl or call on +31(0)10-4361600. You may not submit a draft project plan however you may ask specific questions in the preparation of your submission. On 9 October 2025, the Fund will hold a consultation hour about this open call. See the [website](#) for more information.

context

This call is part of *Design in Contemporary Spaces of Conflict*, a four-year programme (2025-2028) funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the International Cultural Policy framework. Through this open call, the Creative Industries Fund NL seeks to promote the application of design as a driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, with specific attention to fostering safe and sustainable cities and the protection of world heritage (SDG 11), as well as supporting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies (SDG 16). In doing so, the Fund directly contributes to strengthening the international position of the Dutch cultural sector and leveraging the creative industries in support of bilateral relations with other countries.

During the previous policy period, the Internationalisation programme issued several thematic open calls to support cross-geographical and cross-disciplinary research and collaboration projects. For the 2025–2028 policy period, the Creative Industries Fund NL has been tasked with implementing a programme that maintains a continued geographic focus on the African continent, while building on successful elements of the previous programmes, including the thematic structuring of activities.

The programme engages with complex and urgent spatial questions - including those related to contested geologies, migration, the climate crisis, and broader issues of social inclusion and environmental sustainability. It encourages reflection on how these disciplines intersect with global challenges. As part of this effort, the Fund focuses on two thematic trajectories: *Shifting Grounds: Design Practices in Contested Geologies* and *Shifting Perspectives: Design Practices in Contested Ideologies*. This open call places particular emphasis on geographies within the African continent and their historical and contemporary connections to the Netherlands.

references

This programme draws inspiration from a number of sources, such as Shoshan, M., Schoonderbeek, M. (eds.) 2016. Footprint 19 Spaces of Conflict. Vol 10, no. 2. [View of Issue # 19 | Autumn / Winter 2016 | Spaces of Conflict.](#)