



Association for
**Science and
Discovery Centres**

Demystifying AI:
From algorithms to everyday life

Invitation to Participate

Rationale

The UK is internationally known for excellence and innovation in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning. AI has already transformed the way we live, work and connect with the world around us, with widespread use across society from finance and marketing to healthcare and security.

Yet for many people, AI remains an abstract and inaccessible concept, often surrounded by myths, hype and uncertainty. Many people are unaware of the extensive applications of AI and simultaneously have concerns about the ethics and challenges of its rapidly increasing use. Global research this year has shown that, although the majority of people feel AI will result in a wide range of future benefits, only 46% of people are willing to trust AI systemsⁱ. Children today are meeting AI before they meet critical thinking, and the Royal Society's statement on AI in educationⁱⁱ recognises these issues and calls for education that nurtures the knowledge, skills and dispositions that young people will need to detect, understand, critically interpret and thrive in the future.

AI has great potential as a powerful and enabling tool and the ambitions for AI in the UK are extensive, particularly involving public sector transformation. But rapidly moving science and technology can be controversial, shrouded in misinformation, or utilised for harm rather than societal benefit. In a recent survey in the UK by the Ada Lovelace Instituteⁱⁱⁱ, public concern across all areas of AI investigated has increased, including reports of harmful personal encounters with deepfakes, false information and financial fraud.

With a broad and inclusive reach, our network is perfectly placed to play an important role in these conversations. Could science and discovery centres and museums be the space to 'test-and-learn'^{iv}, where young people can learn the critical and relevant skills to navigate a future AI-entangled world, and where engagement and feedback from diverse communities becomes a recognised part of the research ecosystem?

The Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) is delighted to share our new funded project Demystifying AI: from algorithms to everyday life.

We are keen to support a national programme of hands-on activities, discussions, digital experiences and experiments. From digital skills and coding, to chatbots and careers, this programme aims to break down some of the complex ideas and technologies into meaningful, interactive experiences that share the UK's world-leading AI research and innovation with school children, teachers, families and communities across the UK.

Target audience

The programme can work with all ages, across schools, communities and public events.

Family interactions are a priority focus, and we would like to encourage applications that include consideration of STFC Wonder audiences^v and audiences with reduced access to STEM engagement resource^{vi, vii} or lower access to opportunities^{viii}

We acknowledge the time it takes to build relationships and work equitably with community partners. For science and discovery centres working with more marginalised audiences during development and delivery, we anticipate this is through community partners or trusted relationships that are already in place.

Reach

The big ambition for this project is to collectively reach up to 50,000 people across the UK^{1 2}. Split equally across projects, each project would be reaching over 3000 people, although some projects will be less or more depending on their target audience and approach to activities. All submissions are welcome. Importantly, this reach can include all staff, stakeholders and audiences involved in your programme development and delivery, alongside digital engagements that accompany your programme.

Types of activities you might include

We are looking forward to your thoughts on a range of activities. We expect suggestions of AI engagements that are in-person and interactive, for example:

- Interactive STEM shows
- Large-scale events with drop-in sessions in centres
- Temporary exhibitions showcasing interactive AI resources and demonstrations
- Workshops or STEM clubs focussing on skills development
- Career-relevant activities (e.g. meet the AI scientists)
- Exploratory and immersive events
- Innovative digital experiences

¹ A USP of the sector is practical, interactive and in-person STEM engagement. A project entirely delivered online is unlikely to be awarded a full grant. However, online engagement that enhances your reach (such as online delivered workshops, downloadable resource-packs for schools, podcasts or YouTube/TikTok videos produced as part of this programme) should be included in your reach.

² If you are developing a workshop, show or resource, that delivers during our timescale and continues to deliver beyond 31 March 2026, please include projected numbers of your reach in the 'Legacy' table of the proposal so we can see a clear picture of your intended impact for 2026.

Content areas

Your project content can source the multiple disciplines relevant to AI technology and its application across any of the seven UKRI research councils which include social sciences, engineering, physical sciences, medicine, biology and environmental science.

Content themes you may wish to consider include:

- **AI and its applications in everyday life**
Considering not only how AI works, but the applications that utilise AI that audiences might come across in daily life - both today and in the future.
- **AI skills and careers**
Developing skills relevant to engaging and utilising AI, and promoting the science, technology and future career opportunities linked with AI.
- **AI engagements that platform regional diversity³**
This strategic, national STEM engagement programme aims to deliver national impact with local relevance. Time to build relationships with stakeholders within your centre's regional research and innovation field is encouraged within the project budget.

Programme development and training

This programme builds from the in-person STFC Masterclass "*Emerging technologies to solve complex problems*"^{ix}. Following on from this successful event and the launch of this AI programme (Wednesday 15th October), there will be at least two more opportunities to engage with AI in professional development events led by ASDC. Please hold the following dates (11am-1pm):

- Wednesday 12th November
- Wednesday 26th November

These 2-hour online events will provide a deeper dive into AI technology itself (how it works), its application for the future of science (including a showcase of relevant research from across UK research council disciplines such as *STFC Scientific Computing*) and exploration of the ethical and sustainability considerations of AI use.

These events are open to all ASDC members, but we highly recommend individuals who have applied for the grant attend the training modules. If you find these influential for your development, you can adapt the content areas of your project in December in writing.

³ How science centres and museums can ensure content and approach of projects relates to participants' daily lives in different regions of the UK. This may include supporting pride-in-place and relevant career opportunities or exploring the benefits of AI relevant for local culture, interests, history, or for the unique environmental characteristics of your region.

In addition, if you have any specific training or development needs that would support your team please contact the project associate sophie.ward@sciencecentres.org.uk. Although we are unlikely to be able to fulfil project-specific requests, we want to design the training modules taking place in November specifically to support the confidence of the network driving these programmes forward in such a short development and delivery timeframe.

Delivery Grants

We are looking forward to working with 15 ASDC members to deliver this national programme of accessible and captivating AI engagement activities. Science and discovery centres, science museums, research and outreach centres, festivals, zoos and aquaria who are ASDC members can apply.

Delivery grants of £10,000 are available for each successful organisation.

Grants can be used for staff time, equipment, contractors, travel & subsistence (etc). Please describe your anticipated budget spend in the proposal.

Delivery is on a tight timescale, with engagement taking place from December to March 2026. We realise that some proposals may be difficult to reach anticipated numbers during this window, so we are open to zero-cost extensions to your final reporting on request. Please make this clear by indicating in the relevant section in your proposal and we will discuss dates with you in a follow up meeting.

Evaluation

This programme will have an external evaluator working with the 15 centres to collect metrics, outcomes and case studies that will be presented in a final visual and vibrant report to celebrate active AI engagement across the sector.

We will be collecting data of events and engagements to collate metrics that include:

- Numbers of events and participants
- Types of activities
- Postcode data of events and engagements that better understand the collective geographical reach of this programme

Evaluation will also explore appropriate inclusive outcomes for participants such as:

- Understanding how AI works (including nurturing critical thinking skills)
- Supporting agency and ownership with AI technologies
- Building confidence
- Broadening horizons (including AI careers)
- Perceived relevance of AI for the public benefit and for everyday life

The above will primarily be assessed through reflective practice with science engagement practitioners, community, research and industry partners involved in the projects. Exact methods of evaluation of impact and tools for data collection will be finalised at the start of the programme with the appointed external project evaluator.

Reporting requirements

In recent ASDC programmes, more regular reporting throughout the project timeline has been positively received. Therefore, delivery partners will be asked to submit any updated data in January 2026, with final reporting in March 2026⁴.

The interim report in January will be 'light-touch' and include a request for:

- Metrics sheets (number of events, number of participants, postcode data, broad demographics of audience engaged e.g. 'families', 'adults', 'school children aged 7-11', etc.).
- Description of the type of engagement.
- Photos with relevant permissions to be used on ASDC website, social media and in the final report.

The final report in March will include more details including:

- Metrics sheets (number of events, number of participants, postcode data, broad demographics of audience engaged e.g. 'families', 'adults', 'school children aged 7-11', etc.).
- Case study write-up of the activities (template provided).
- Activity/demo sheet write up (template provided, based on previous handbook pages⁵).
- Summary of professional reflections (utilising a simple form or journal tool provided for practitioners) to capture insights from observations, changes made and any unexpected outcomes.
- Photos with relevant permissions to be used on ASDC website, social media and in the final report.

ASDC will be delivering a final, vibrant and visual report that collates the metrics of who participated, numbers of participants, locations, activities and national impact of your work in early Summer 2026.

⁴ ASDC and STFC, part of UKRI are aware of the capacity issues and current operational constraints in the sector, alongside the opportunity the Easter holidays provide for extending reach and impact. We acknowledge there may be a few projects that already intend to request a zero-cost extension for full reporting on applications. However, we are due to submit our final report in early summer.

⁵ Activity write-ups from each project will be collected to create and AI 'Engagement resource hub' hosted online by ASDC for members, based on previous handbook page templates

Project timeline

2025	
October 2025	• Project launch 15th October 2025 • Invitation to Participate issues for project proposals • Development of proposal ideas with optional 1-2-1 and drop-in meetings available to support the development of your proposal (please see our commitment to you)
November 2025	• Deadline for proposal submissions 10th November 2025 • Review panel and successful proposals selected • All successful and unsuccessful projects notified of panel decisions w/c 17th November • Training online modules due to take place (11am-1pm) 12th & 26th November, (open to all ASDC members)
December 2025	• Successful proposals contracted • Stage 1 grants distributed • Successful delivery partners announced publicly w/c w/c 8th December • Online group meeting with the external evaluator taking place to discuss evaluation approach with all grantees • Early delivery of '<i>Demystifying AI</i>' can start
2026	
January – February 2026	• Ongoing communication with the external evaluator taking place to discuss evaluation approach • Delivery of '<i>Demystifying AI</i>' in process • Facilitated check-in and networking meetings available to share practice, ideas, techniques and challenges across the network of delivering partners. • Interim report due 31 January 2026 (Reports to include metrics, delivery photos) • Stage 2 grants distributed
March 2026	• Delivery complete, with final reporting 31 March 2026 • Final project report co-delivered by ASDC and project evaluator due for publishing early Summer 2026

Our commitment to you

At ASDC we promise to practise the following principals in the ongoing communication, monitoring and administration of these grants and aim to be transparent at every stage:

- **Equity:** We are open to challenges of the structures we have in place that may contribute to these opportunities being less equitable across our sector. We commit to addressing all those within our power and remain transparent on decision-making processes, including who received funding and under what conditions these decisions were made.
- **Humility:** We do not presume to know the best methods or approaches to address these grant criteria within your context and will openly challenge explicit and implicit power-dynamics emerging from these presumptions within our funding partnership.
- **Evidence:** Where it is within our power, ASDC commits to using evidence to inform and justify all decisions on funding criteria and will value evidence-informed, professional proposals.
- **Service:** Through listening to the sector, we aim to ensure that grant seekers are being provided for with this fund and, wherever possible, the grant proposal processes we have in place support the needs of the grant seekers above the needs of the funders.
- **Diligence:** We encourage open and honest feedback on our process, are willing to listen, consider timelines, provide 1-2-1 support and will work to the best of our ability to allow for grant seekers to make the best of this grant opportunity.

Application process

All ASDC members can apply for the grant programme.

To apply, please fill in the Programme Application Form which will be available on the [ASDC project webpages](#) from 17th October 2025.

- Please send the application form to us as a word document.
- Please save your application form in the following format: "Demystifying AI Application [name of your centre]".
- **Please email your application to admin@sciencecentres.org.uk** and ensure you get an email response saying your application has been received within 48 hours (re-send or call us if you do not).
- **Any questions, please contact the project director Shaaron Leverment shaaron.leverment@sciencecentres.org.uk**

We are looking forward to receiving your application and working with you.

Deadline for Applications: Monday 10th November 2025

Please work to a 'close of play' 6pm deadline and inform us in advance if you need an extension. However, decisions must be made by the panel in the w/c 17th November, so extensions of only a few days are available.

End notes

- ⁱ [Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025 \(KPMG\)](#)
- ⁱⁱ [Artificial Intelligence in Education \(Royal Society, January 2025\)](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ [How do people feel about AI?](#) A nationally representative survey of public attitudes to artificial intelligence in Britain (Ada Lovelace Institute & the Alan Turing Institute, 2025)
- ^{iv} [The Prime Minister's AI Exemplars programme: A portfolio approach to public sector innovation](#)
- ^v [Public engagement: Wonder Initiative](#) (STFC, part of UKRI)
- ^{vi} [Science engagement and inequity in the UK \(BSA/London Economic, 2022\)](#)
- ^{vii} [cold spots](#) of engagement identified by STFC
- ^{viii} [The Opportunity Index](#) (The Sutton Trust, 2025)
- ^{ix} [News article: STFC Masterclass 'Emerging technologies to solve complex problems'](#)