



BIF Buxton
International
Festival

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CANDIDATE INFORMATION PACK

September 2026

Welcome to Buxton International Festival

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WELCOME

A message from the Chair



Thank you for your interest in becoming Chief Executive of Buxton International Festival.

This is a rare opportunity to lead an organisation whose scale belies its artistic ambition and reach. For almost five decades, the Festival has brought exceptional artists and audiences to Buxton, with opera at its heart and a rich programme of music, jazz and books around it. Its setting in a beautiful spa town on the edge of the Peak District is central to its character: international in outlook, rooted in place and known for a warm, unpretentious welcome.

The Festival enters its next chapter with considerable momentum. Recent seasons have combined major repertoire with rediscovered works, new commissions and creative partnerships. The newly established Buxton International Festival Orchestra and the operas already announced for 2027 demonstrate both confidence and appetite for the future.

The Board is seeking a strategic, entrepreneurial and collaborative leader who can work in close partnership with Artistic Director, Adrian Kelly, the wider leadership and team, Friends, volunteers and many supporters. The next Chief Executive will protect what makes BIF distinctive while building the financial resilience, audiences, partnerships and organisational capacity needed for its long-term success.

I hope this pack gives you a strong sense of the Festival and the opportunity. We look forward to hearing from candidates who share our belief in artistic excellence, public value and the power of a festival to transform a place each summer.

Simon Haslam
Chair, Buxton International Festival

BIF at a glance

1979 FIRST FESTIVAL	160+ EVENTS IN A TYPICAL FESTIVAL	4 ARTISTIC STRANDS	6 VENUES ACROSS BUXTON	17+ SUMMER FESTIVAL DAYS	£2.26m 2026 CHARITY INCOME
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ABOUT BIF

A festival like no other

Buxton International Festival is a summer celebration of opera, music, jazz and books, presented in the historic spa town of Buxton and centred on Frank Matcham's jewel-like Opera House.

What makes BIF distinctive

- Opera at the heart, including new productions, collaborations, staged concerts and rare repertoire that audiences may not encounter elsewhere.
- Four other complementary artistic strands – classical concerts at all scales, jazz, books and talks, walks and tours, creating a festival day that can run from morning to late evening and appeal to different interests.
- An international outlook paired with a strong local identity and an intimate, informal atmosphere.
- A whole-town experience, with performances and conversations across venues within walking distance and the Peak District on the doorstep.
- A loyal community of Friends, donors, volunteers, artists, partners and returning audiences, both local, and from London and the rest of the UK, who regard the Festival with deep affection.

History, identity and opera at the heart



A short history

1903	The Opera House opens	Frank Matcham’s Buxton Opera House opens as a landmark Edwardian theatre, later becoming primarily a cinema as live performance declines.
1976	A plan is hatched	Malcolm Fraser, then a lecturer at the Royal Northern College of Music, is inspired by Buxton and helps form the idea of a festival that could revive the Opera House.
1979	The first Festival	The inaugural Festival opens with Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor. From the outset, opera provides the artistic anchor.
1980s–90s	A signature emerges	Rarely performed and unusual opera becomes BIF’s defining proposition, drawing artists, critics and audiences to Buxton.
2001 onwards	The Festival broadens	The Book Festival joins the opera and music programme, followed by a dedicated jazz strand in 2022. Learning, participation, talent development and year-round engagement extend BIF’s impact.

Opera at the heart

BIF’s reputation was built on opera that gives audiences a reason to travel: neglected masterpieces, bold rediscoveries, new commissions and fresh approaches to familiar repertoire. Under the leadership of current Artistic Director, Adrian Kelly, the Festival has also crystallised its reputation as a showcase for outstanding young vocal talent from across the globe.

Recent momentum	The 2026 season
The 2025 Festival presented five operas spanning five centuries, including a new production of Ambroise Thomas’s Hamlet, a newly commissioned set of four short operas, a Bernstein and Poulenc double bill, Mozart’s The Impresario with Opera Zuid, and Charpentier with Vache Baroque.	The 2026 programme ranged from Verdi’s La traviata and Lehár’s The Merry Widow to Handel’s Amadigi di Gaula, Mozart’s La clemenza di Tito, Pauline Viardot’s Le dernier sorcier and Francesca Caccini’s La liberazione di Ruggiero (again with Vache Baroque).

Music, jazz, books and 2027

Music, jazz and books

MUSIC

A major classical music series brings internationally renowned soloists, ensembles and orchestras to historic venues across Buxton. Programming complements the opera season and creates opportunities for established artists and for rising talent.

BOOKS

The established Book Festival brings writers, broadcasters, thinkers and public figures into conversation. Its strength lies particularly in non-fiction, current affairs, history, culture and biography, with events that stimulate debate and extend BIF's reach.

JAZZ

A professionally curated jazz programme, established as a dedicated strand in 2022, presents leading UK and international artists. The 2026 line-up ranged across contemporary, global, folk-influenced and classic jazz traditions.

WALKS & TOURS

Festival walks and special tours invite audiences to discover Buxton beyond the stage, exploring the town's history, architecture, landscape, flora and fauna, and taking the Festival into distinctive local settings.



Looking ahead to 2027

The 2027 Festival will run from 8 to 25 July. The operas already announced signal a characteristically ambitious season, balancing comic discovery, large-scale repertoire and a major world premiere.

La Gazzetta: Rossini's rarely staged comic opera.

Ariadne auf Naxos: Richard Strauss's ingenious meeting of high art, comedy and theatrical invention.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann: Offenbach's fantastical grand opera and a major audience title.

Orlando: An Escapade: The world premiere of Thea Musgrave's opera based on Virginia Woolf's Orlando.

A Festival day

Morning conversations, lunchtime recitals, afternoon concerts and evening opera can be experienced within a single day. The compact geography of Buxton allows BIF to feel both richly programmed and unusually personal.

Learning and Participation

Learning, participation and place

YEAR-ROUND	LOCAL	NORTHERN
ACTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT	SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY LINKS	TALENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Current areas of activity

- Learning and participation activity led by a dedicated Head of Learning and Participation, including creative and orchestral workshops with local schools.
- Opportunities for young musicians and rising artists, including the Young Artists programme and platforms for talent from the North of England.
- The Kaleidoscope Community Choir, led by acclaimed singer and songwriter Bella Hardy.

Participation across the Festival

- A large volunteer community and seasonal placements that support delivery, welcome audiences and create pathways into the arts.
- Partnerships that connect the Festival with Buxton, the county of Derbyshire, the Peak District and the wider cultural and visitor economy.



Year-round public value

Through schools, community activity, talent development, volunteers and local partnerships, BIF extends its impact beyond the annual Festival period and strengthens its relationship with Buxton and the wider region.

Governance

Legal structure Buxton Arts Festival Limited is a registered charity (no. 276957) and a company limited by guarantee (company no. 01393717). It trades as the Buxton International Festival. A wholly owned trading subsidiary, Buxton Festival Productions Ltd, supports the group structure.	Governance The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees chaired by Simon Haslam. The Board includes expertise spanning finance, arts leadership, major projects, business, communications and public life, supported by an Audit and Risk Committee and by a Nomination and Remuneration Committee. The Board is joined by three associate board members on two-year terms – young professionals in opera and music who function as full members of the board except for not being legally registered trustees (for liability reasons).
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Indicative leadership and functional relationships

BOARD OF TRUSTEES			
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR		CHIEF EXECUTIVE	
The Chief Executive holds overall executive responsibility across the Festival, working in close partnership with the Artistic Director, who reports directly to the Board.			
Artistic leadership	Producing and operations	Income and audiences	Finance and public value
Artistic Director Book Festival Director Jazz Director Head of Music	Artistic Manager Operations Administration Seasonal teams	Development Marketing and communications Press Friends and supporters	Finance Learning and participation Governance and compliance Volunteers

Friends of Buxton International Festival and BIF Foundation

The Friends of Buxton Festival was founded in 1980. Today, Friends of Buxton International Festival (charity no. 1184840) is an independent charity whose members (over 2,000) collectively provide an important annual income stream in return for priority booking, special events and other benefits. The Buxton Festival Foundation (charity no. 1096269) maintains an endowment to support the long-term stability and development of Buxton International Festival. Maintaining strong relationships with these two bodies is an important part of the role of the CEO.
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Financial context

BIF operates a mixed-income model, combining income from charitable activities with donations, legacies and investment income. The figures below are from the board papers for the September 2026 meeting.

Provisional 2026 figures

£2.27m	£2.23m	£40k	£1.67m	£593k	£10k
TOTAL INCOME	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	IN-YEAR SURPLUS	CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES INCOME	DONATIONS AND LEGACIES	INVESTMENT INCOME

The appointment

The Chief Executive will hold overall responsibility for the Festival’s financial health, including annual budgets, forecasts, longer-term financial planning and the effective deployment of resources. The role also requires a sustained focus on income diversification and on balancing artistic ambition with financial discipline and organisational resilience.

Role purpose

The Chief Executive is the senior executive leader of Buxton International Festival, working in close partnership with the Artistic Director to lead the organisation and secure its long-term success.

Working closely with the Chair and Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive will lead the year-round operation of a distinctive annual summer arts festival in Buxton. Opera sits at the heart of the programme, alongside music, jazz and an established Book Festival. The postholder will provide the leadership, planning and management required to deliver an ambitious, financially sustainable and well-run organisation that supports artistic excellence, broadens audiences, deepens stakeholder engagement and strengthens the Festival's reputation regionally, nationally and internationally.

The Chief Executive and Artistic Director will work in close collaboration. The Artistic Director, who is appointed by and reports to the Board, will lead the Festival's artistic development and act as a key ambassador in artistic circles. The Chief Executive will work with the Artistic Director, Jazz Director, Book Festival Director and wider permanent team to ensure that artistic ambitions are supported by strong governance, effective operations, robust financial management, successful fundraising and the highest standards of organisational leadership.

Together with the Chair and Artistic Director, the Chief Executive will act as a visible and accessible public representative of the Festival, inspiring confidence and enthusiasm among audiences, artists, funders, donors, partners, volunteers and the wider community.

Reporting and relationships

Reports to

The Chair and Board of Trustees.

Key relationships

Artistic Director, Jazz Director, Book Festival Director, senior and wider team, Friends, Foundation, funders, donors, sponsors, venue and artistic partners—particularly Buxton Opera House, civic stakeholders and volunteers.

The operating context

- A small year-round team and a substantial seasonal operation.
- A complex programme delivered across multiple venues and artforms.
- A charity, an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and a high-profile civic and cultural presence.
- A relationship-led organisation with loyal Friends, donors, volunteers, artists and audiences.

Job description

1. Strategic leadership and organisational development

- Lead the development and delivery of the Festival's strategic plan, ensuring a clear vision for artistic ambition, audience growth, financial resilience and organisational sustainability.
- Advise and support the Board of Trustees on strategy, risk, business planning, governance and performance; providing high-quality information to enable effective oversight and decision-making.
- Identify and develop opportunities to strengthen the Festival's long-term sustainability, profile and impact, including through partnerships, earned income, philanthropy and public funding.
- Champion a culture of collaboration, accountability, inclusion, innovation and continuous improvement across the organisation.

2. Executive leadership and Festival delivery

- Hold overall executive responsibility for the effective year-round management of the Festival and the successful delivery of the annual programme.
- Oversee the integration of artistic and organisational planning, ensuring that programming ambitions are supported by realistic operational, financial, fundraising and audience development plans.
- Work in close partnership with the Artistic Director, who leads the Festival's artistic development, and collaborate with the Jazz Director and Book Festival Director to support a distinctive, high-quality programme that reflects the Festival's identity and ambitions.
- Ensure all Festival activity is delivered to a high standard, on time, within budget and in accordance with agreed artistic, operational and financial objectives.
- Maintain oversight of contracts, production planning, venue relationships, logistics, audience services, health and safety and all operational matters required for the smooth running of the Festival.

Job description continued

3. Financial leadership and commercial sustainability

- Hold overall responsibility for the Festival's financial health, ensuring robust financial planning, control, monitoring and reporting.
- Lead the preparation of annual budgets, forecasts and longer-term financial plans, ensuring resources are deployed effectively and in line with strategic priorities.
- Monitor financial performance closely, identifying risks and opportunities and taking timely corrective action where required.
- Drive the diversification and growth of income from appropriate sources, including ticket sales and other earned income, trusts and foundations, public funding, individual giving, corporate support and membership or Friends schemes.
- Ensure the Festival meets statutory, regulatory and charity reporting requirements, including annual accounts and reporting to funders and other stakeholders.

4. Fundraising, external relations and advocacy

- Lead the Festival's external relations and, together with the Chair and Artistic Director, act as a principal ambassador for the organisation.
- Build and sustain strong relationships with key stakeholders, including Arts Council England, local authority partners, trusts and foundations, corporate supporters, donors, artistic partners and sector contacts.
- Work with colleagues and Trustees to cultivate, solicit and steward major donors, supporters and sponsors, increasing philanthropic and partnership income over time.
- Nurture productive relationships with the Friends of Buxton International Festival and other supporter groups, recognising their importance to the Festival's financial and community base.
- Promote the Festival's reputation and interests locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, positioning it as a leading cultural organisation and a significant contributor to Buxton and the wider region.
- Together with the Chair, serve as a visible public face of the Festival, being present at performances, events and stakeholder occasions and accessible to audiences, supporters and partners.

Job description continued

5. Audience development, public value and reputation

- Lead work to grow and diversify audiences for opera, music, jazz and books, embedding audience development across planning, marketing, fundraising and programming.
- Oversee marketing, communications and brand positioning, ensuring that BIF's profile, messaging and public engagement reflect the quality, distinctiveness and ambition of its programme.
- Support strategies that increase attendance, deepen audience loyalty and strengthen year-round engagement – especially for under-served audiences.
- Ensure the Festival articulates and evidences its public value, including its artistic contribution, place-based impact, community benefit and role in talent development and cultural tourism.
- Champion an excellent visitor and stakeholder experience across all touchpoints, building affinity, advocacy and repeat engagement.

6. People leadership and organisational culture

- Lead, motivate and develop the permanent team, fostering a positive, inclusive and high-performing organisational culture.
- Ensure clear structures, responsibilities, objectives and communication, enabling effective collaboration between artistic, producing, development, finance, marketing and operational functions.
- Support and appraise direct reports and ensure staff, freelancers and volunteers are appropriately managed, supported and valued.
- Promote best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, wellbeing and environmental responsibility.

7. Governance, compliance and risk

- Act as lead executive for governance matters or ensure appropriate governance support is in place.
- Ensure the Festival operates within relevant legal, regulatory and policy frameworks, including charity and company law, employment obligations, health and safety, safeguarding, data protection and licensing requirements.
- Maintain an effective risk management framework and ensure major organisational, financial, operational and reputational risks are identified, assessed and managed.
- Support the Board and its committees through timely reporting, sound advice and effective implementation of agreed actions.

Person specification

A rounded leadership profile

The Board is seeking candidates who combine artistic and sector credibility with strategic judgement, commercial discipline, strong relationships and the capacity to lead a complex annual Festival calmly and effectively.

Essential experience and knowledge

- A successful track record in a senior leadership role within the performing arts, cultural, charitable or live events sectors, with responsibility for strategy, finance, operations and people leadership.
- Wide-ranging knowledge of opera and opera repertoire, together with a strong understanding of the UK and international opera sectors, key partners and current opportunities and challenges.
- Demonstrable experience of leading a complex organisation or programme with multiple stakeholders, competing priorities and significant public profile.
- Strong financial and commercial acumen, including budget management, business planning, financial reporting and the ability to balance artistic ambition with financial discipline.
- A proven record of securing income from a range of sources, including public funding, trusts and foundations, philanthropy, sponsorship and/or earned income.
- Experience of building and managing high-level relationships with funders, donors, trustees, partners, public bodies and other external stakeholders.

Essential leadership capabilities

- The credibility, judgement and interpersonal skills to represent the Festival publicly and act as an effective ambassador with audiences, artists, supporters and civic partners.
- Strong people leadership skills, with experience of leading, motivating and developing teams and creating a collaborative, high-performing culture.
- Excellent strategic thinking and planning skills, with the ability to convert vision into practical and deliverable plans.
- A sound understanding of governance, risk management and organisational compliance in a charity and/or company context.
- A genuine commitment to the role of the arts in public life and to Buxton International Festival's mission, values and future development.

Person specification continued

Desirable

- Experience in a festival, producing, touring, opera, music, literature or wider performing arts environment.
- Knowledge of the UK arts funding landscape, including Arts Council England and individual giving in the cultural sector.
- Experience of working closely with artistic leaders and balancing artistic priorities with operational and financial realities.
- Understanding of audience development, place-based cultural partnerships and the role of festivals in tourism, regeneration and civic identity.
- Knowledge of Buxton International Festival, Buxton Opera House and/or the cultural ecology of Buxton, Derbyshire and the Peak District.

Personal attributes

Collaborative

Collegiate and confident in working in partnership with artistic leaders, Trustees and external stakeholders.

Visible and approachable

Relationship-led, with the presence and warmth to act as a public face of the Festival.

Entrepreneurial and resilient

Resourceful and able to lead through complexity, pressure and change.

Organised and decisive

Sound judgement and a calm, solutions-focused approach.

Credible and persuasive

Diplomatic, clear and compelling in written and oral communication.

Terms and conditions

Employment terms

Salary	£85,000 to £100,000
Contract	Permanent, full-time role
Location	Buxton, Derbyshire. It is considered important for the role to be anchored in Buxton, although occasional remote working would be acceptable
Working pattern	Substantial presence during the Festival build and Festival period, including evening and weekend commitments. During the Festival period the postholder is expected to be 'on duty' while any Festival activities are taking place.
Pension	4% employer contribution, 4% employee contribution to defined contribution pension plan
Annual leave	25 holiday days plus public holidays, and typically 8 days paid time off in lieu to cover overtime worked during the Festival period; office closed between Christmas Eve and New Year.
Notice period	3 months' notice – such notice not to expire during the months of May, June and July
Start date	1 March 2027

The working context

A highly seasonal role

The Chief Executive leads a small year-round organisation that expands substantially during the Festival build and Festival period. A visible presence in Buxton, including evening and weekend commitments during key periods, will be fundamental to the appointment.

Access and flexibility

Supporting the strongest candidate

BIF welcomes candidates from different backgrounds and recognises that reasonable flexibility or adjustments may be required to enable the strongest candidate to take up and fulfil the appointment. Any agreed arrangements must also reflect the seasonal and public-facing nature of the role.

How to apply

Applications are being managed by AEM International.

Application materials

Please send the following to Helen Sprott, Managing Director of AEM International:

- A comprehensive CV.
- A covering letter, no longer than two pages, explaining your interest in the role and the experience and qualities you would bring. Applications should be sent to applications@aeminternational.co.uk

Confidential conversation

For a confidential conversation about the opportunity, please contact Helen Sprott at hsprott@aeminternational.co.uk.

Closing date

5pm on Friday 9th October

All applications will be acknowledged.

Equality, diversity and access

Buxton International Festival is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and actively encourages applications from people with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Selection decisions will be based on the requirements of the role and the evidence presented through the recruitment process. If you require any support or adjustments to participate, please contact Helen via the email address above. Applicants will also be invited to complete a separate, voluntary equality monitoring form.

www.buxtonfestival.co.uk