

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Jennie Macfie

Timing

RFO organisations from all art forms all apply for awards from the same pot at the same time and at the same time as their equivalents are applying for their three-year awards from Arts Council England. It's all or nothing for everyone, so there's no possibility of protecting one's work by co-operating with another art form or with an ACE funded company.

Duration

Because of the above, CS is stretched to capacity to deal with hundreds of applications simultaneously and the process takes at least six months; in the last case, nine months.

Complexity

The application process is exhausting and exhaustive for organisations and prohibitively so for individuals. Months of preparation are required, using up a considerable portion of an organisation's capacity.

Stasis

Because of the above, during one year in every three, very little, if any, forward planning can happen because everything is dependent on the RFO awards. Non-RFO organisations and individual artists are left in limbo.

Capacity in CS

Because CS capacity is strained, other funding applications and functions are strained and irrational and often unfair decisions are made under stress by CS. I have seen examples of simple arithmetical errors by those assessing applications in carrying budgets across to their own systems (see below) which have then been cited as grounds to disallow the application. By the time feedback is received and contested, a process which can take months, it's too late.

Design of forms

a) Language: Despite extensive and expensive consultation, the application forms for both RFO and OP funding are not clearly written (it would be helpful to all if CS adopted the Campaign for Plain English guidelines) and are full of jargon and bureaucratic language. This is an unnecessary barrier to those who are, for example, dyslexic, or for whom English is not a first language; it is mind-numbing for those for whom it is.

b) Budgets: Instead of allowing the submission of spreadsheets, forms require figures in a Word table. This wastes everybody's time, both applicant and assessor, and leads to errors.

c) Online submission: There are models, for example PRSF, where applications are made online and all information is automatically compiled in the organisation's own database. This reduces the amount of work for everyone. The simplicity, clear language and ease of access of PRSF's application process is admirable.

d) Database: I am not entirely confident from anecdotal evidence that CS has a fully functioning CRM database, which would enable quick responses to enquiries about, for example, the process of any applications.

Governance

It is vital that CS' board has a good proportion of people well versed in the arts.

Remit

CS seems to have lost sight of its primary function, which is to facilitate creativity in Scotland. It seems to be trying to shape the various sectors to its own design – awarding funds to umbrella organisations who should in many cases be able to stand on their own financial feet rather than to artists making art.

Finally

While administrators and theatre technicians have regular salaries, paid holidays and pension plans, the average income from their art for a Scottish artist working in any art form is less than £5,000 a year. CS should be evaluated to see whether more and better art would be created if the money it costs were simply disbursed as stipends for artists. Freed of the necessity to spend months of nerve-wracking, brain-straining time applying for awards and waiting for the results, who knows what artists might produce?