

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from The Touring Network

Background and Context

The Touring Network supports, represents and connects a vibrant community of independent promoters in the Highlands and Islands - people who transform remote community spaces into cultural centres and performance venues.

We were successful in our application for RFO funding for 2018-21, making this our 2nd consecutive RFO funding period.

This paper has been prepared by me, Jo Mclean as CEO and has been approved by our Chair.

The process of applying for Regular Funding for the 2018-21 period and your experience of that application process.

The application for Regular funding is a significant milestone in any organisation's schedule – but particularly a small organisation such as ours (i.e. 2 full time members of staff). The process is lengthy and takes months to complete fully and uses a huge amount of staff resources.

The deadline for the most recent round was set way in advance of the end of current funding packages (more than 1 year) to enable unsuccessful applicants, or those with significant changes to their funding, to plan changes in how they operate or how they are supported.

This failed dramatically as the actual announcements were made in January 2018 (2 months ahead of the end of current funding packages). I understand that these were partly due to budget announcements from Scottish Government, but there was a further 4-week delay in Creative Scotland announcing their plans.

The actual administration for the application was more streamlined than the previous round (2015-18); the application form and business plan were more complementary and involved less repetition.

The process however induces a huge hiatus where everything grinds to halt months before funding announcements are made; our business plans encourage us to plan 3-5 years ahead, but we are then unable to continue to deliver and prepare for the work we have planned as we don't have confirmation of continuation funding. This has a monumental knock-on effect for the sector as a whole.

With the messaging coming from Creative Scotland that no-one should expect an uplift in funds (stand-alone at best), as well as large cuts expected to the portfolio of funded organisations, morale was low – probably the worst I have felt in 20 years of working in Scotland.

The importance of Regular Funding to you or your organisation.

Regular Funding enables us to be strategic; it enables us the flexibility and security to respond to the challenges we face – whether that is creating new business models or developing programmes which interrogate some of the issues in the arts and the region which contribute to falling audiences, migration away from rural areas etc. It allows us to support a creative region where there is little or no support from Local Authorities (in our case, Argyll and Bute Council and Highland Council).

Our network members are largely a community of volunteers, whose passion and love of the arts enable high quality professional live performance to tour to remote and rural locations across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. They operate on tiny budgets and have access to little in the way of support or other resources. As an advocacy and network organisation, we are able to build capacity by offering them a solid base to draw upon for training, support, networking and small pockets of financial support. We would not be as effective or strategic if we were limping from year to year with project funding. Our development programmes respond to consultation in the region, and our youth programme in particular has responded to a lack of informal arts training in the region. These programmes take time to develop effectively and require a long term approach.

The challenge that Creative Scotland faces in allocating funding when applications for funding exceed the funds available.

We all acknowledge that this is a reality. And I also accept that it is impossible to please everyone. In my view it is important to fund good quality work which is responding to need – this means difficult decisions need to be made, but spreading funding thinly to please many people will only dilute the quality of work being made. There is a lack of transparency in understanding the process – i.e. what gets rejected and why, when it has often been recommended by an assessor to be funded. This lack of transparency contributes to a lack of trust from the sector.

The challenges that Creative Scotland faces in supporting individual artists and organisations from different areas of the arts.

Again there is a lack of transparency in the strategy. There appears to be a lack of leadership which results in unclear messaging. Creative Scotland staff seem unclear on their direction. Artform specific staff were removed (a mistake everyone felt) and to some extent these have been re-instated. There may be different support needs for different genres (i.e. development work) but clear strategies go a long way to people understanding what is being funded and why.

This particular funding announcement was a good news story from the Scottish Government with increases overall to funding – but it became a bad news story with poorly communicated strategies, turnarounds on decision making and chaos over a potentially positive new funding stream (the strategic touring fund). I was part of the working group who made recommendations to Creative Scotland regarding touring funds, but this new fund was announced with no clear remit or idea of how it would work. Surely a pilot or trial period would be advised before announcing a major new development which has such a significant impact on how organisations are funded?

The extent to which you consider Regular Funding supports the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland.

Regular funding is vital to the continuation of arts organisations - now more than ever. If we are to be sustainable and develop new models for income generation, we need support during this time to find the ways forward. Arts organisations will never be able to wash their faces until arts and culture has value in our society – and that starts with its place in our education system. It is a long term investment in the health of our society.

RFO funding allows us to plan ahead and to develop long term relationships with other organisations (arts or otherwise) which in turn offers value. These long term relationships cannot happen if you are unable to plan more than 1 year ahead at a time.

RFO organisations are present throughout Scotland and show a fairly representative spread. It is clear that many artists and organisations operate within the central belt, but individuals and organisations who show strong high quality work are supported outwith this area. There are opportunities to support more regional work and some of this has been approached through the Place Partnership funding streams. I feel however, that more joined up communication could go a long way to make people aware of the strategies and direction of thinking.

The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams.

RFO funding creates a support system which individuals and organisations who are not regularly funded can access at some level. This 'eco-system' offers opportunities for individual artists/organisations to create new work/exhibitions/ creative learning packages or development programmes with RFO funded organisations. We regularly employ freelance associates/artists/filmmakers as do other RFO's, creating a complex and interdependent network of creative businesses.

Regular Funding allows us to attract other funding more readily. It acts almost as a guarantee to external funders, and a confirmation of quality. As Local Authority funding has been reduced dramatically (in our regions now non-existent) RFO funding is crucial to the sustainability of the delicate economy we operate within.

Any other issues that you consider are relevant.

There appears to be a distinct lack of strategic thought and communication from Creative Scotland to the arts community. There is a lack of trust and a sense that Creative Scotland are not sure who or what they are. Are they a funding body or are they a development agency? There seems to have been a rise in the number of advocacy agencies in the arts sector and this feels due to a lack of advocacy from Creative Scotland itself.

We need strong leadership, strong advocacy and we need to be heard. We don't need knee jerk solutions which may or may not work. We need to present ourselves as a strong and united sector which fills our stakeholders and audiences with a sense of confidence. There are many well qualified and well informed staff at Creative Scotland, but they need a direction and strategy which enables them to be their best and support the sector.