

**CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY**

**SUBMISSION FROM VOLUNTARY ARTS SCOTLAND**

**Voluntary Arts Scotland**

Voluntary Arts Scotland is the national development agency for all voluntary, or amateur, arts groups in Scotland. There are over ten thousand community-led groups across Scotland, including choirs to country dancing, and painting to pottery groups. Voluntary Arts Scotland (as part of the UK and Republic of Ireland wide charity, Voluntary Arts) supports the people that run these groups through training, networking events and guidance on areas of regulation and policy. We advocate at local and national government levels for public policy that removes barriers to participation in creative, cultural activity and for greater recognition of the contribution made by everyday creativity to health and wellbeing, economic development, and artistic talent.

Voluntary Arts Scotland is in the current RFO portfolio. Core funding of £390,000, spread across three years (£135k year 1, £130k year 2, £125k year 3) gives us the stability to consolidate our support to voluntary arts groups. However, it is a modest amount for a national development agency and our small staff team (one full-time and two part-time staff) are operating at stretched capacity. We have a good relationship with our Creative Scotland lead officer who has always been very helpful in keeping us informed of the process and decision-making of funding.

**Call for evidence**

Voluntary Arts Scotland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into arts funding in Scotland but is disappointed by the relatively short time frame for submissions. It would have been preferable for us to have consulted with voluntary arts groups to gain their views and experiences in a meaningful way ahead of this submission but the one month time frame has not allowed for that. Rather, we have invited feedback through our digital platforms, including social media. This feedback has informed our response.

Groups told us that:

- schemes such as the Big Lottery Awards for All is particularly valued
- Creative Scotland's Open Project funding is so over-subscribed that amateur/ community groups are in competition with professional artists and companies and don't always have the resources or contacts to succeed with an application
- it can be very difficult to navigate the funding landscape and know where to put effort. The [Voluntary Arts guide 'Cash for Culture'](#) was produced in response to this systemic need and it has proven very popular. A newly updated guide with an overview of all the key funders and worked-examples is due for release in May 2019.

## **Process and output**

The process of assessing funding applications is as important for public trust as the resulting decisions. The U-turn in some Creative Scotland RFO decisions implied that those who shout the loudest get heard first. This undermined confidence in the system. An established appeals process would be preferable.

Trustees of funding bodies bear collective responsibility for strategic decisions.

The process should be informed by the principles of transparency, honesty, adaptability, subsidiarity of decision-making and proportionality. Proportionality is particularly relevant when considering the monitoring and reporting requirements of applicants and portfolio organisations. It is challenging for an organisation of our size to collect and analyse data to the same degree as larger performing companies or venue-based organisations that can afford to commission consultants or specialist staff.

Voluntary Arts Scotland further recognises not just the value of cultural output, but the experience of creative learning and expression. We value the impact that making, of all art forms, has on individuals, and the communities of place and interest that they are a part of.

Access, enjoyment and participation in creative, cultural activity supports several of the current Scottish Government National Performance Framework Outcomes. In addition to cultural engagement, this includes reducing inequalities, ensuring healthier lives, promoting educational attainment, supporting resilient communities and enhancing individual wellbeing. Voluntary Arts Scotland is committed to supporting and developing strong local cultural infrastructure- facilities (spaces, buildings, equipment), resources (funding, training, support), and networks. This requires recognition of the value of creative, cultural activity at national and local government levels and leadership.

## **Funding landscape**

In the last decade, and in large part due to austerity measures, we have witnessed the near demise of local authority arts development support. This has resulted in far less support- in the form of small grants and staff to signpost, network and advise. At Voluntary Arts Scotland, we are trying to plug gaps where we can by connecting people and place. For example, through our digital Creativity Map where groups can add themselves to the map and members of the public can search for participation opportunities in their area. However, with such a small staff team, we cannot offer specialised, place-based knowledge.

When we have piloted micro-grants (typically £100 - £150) during our annual Get Creative Festival (previously the Voluntary Arts Festival) these have proven a useful catalyst to help groups with publicity and hospitality.

Longterm, cross-art form development work, such as our own that is targeted at long-term, systemic change, is often ineligible for grants from trusts and foundations that want to prioritise grassroots delivery and evidence immediate results. Private investment in the form of corporate sponsorship or donations similarly favours direct delivery. We are therefore

overly reliant on Creative Scotland investment and exposed to risk in changes of funding model.

### **A good funder**

Three-year regular funding should be a minimum- and five-year cycles would be even better- because it takes time to embed a programme of work and the impact measurement process needed to evidence results. Impactful creative interventions need the space, time and flexibility to 'fail safely', learn, adapt and then thrive.

Ultimately, a good funding relationship is built on trust and honesty. It is helpful for staff at funding bodies to be able to comment and advise on early proposals and for grant recipients to be able to update funders when events or circumstances change and plans need to be adapted.

The best type of investment is not solely about money. Capacity-building in skills support, sharing of facilities and introductions can all help maximise the impact of a grant. For example, it has been extremely helpful that Creative Scotland design team have helped us with the refresh and update of our Cash for Culture guide.