

Notes from meeting with Arts Council and independent artists of Brighton & Hove

The Old Market, Hove, 22nd May 2018

Overview

22 artists and producers working in the independent sector joined Jon Linstrum (Senior Relationship Manager South East) and Anna Jefferson (Relationship Manager, Theatre) to gain insights into how the Arts Council works and how the independent sector and ACE can work better together. There were four people in the room who has never applied to the Arts Council before and a mixture of theatre, dance and visual arts makers.

The meeting

After introductions, Jon gave an introduction to ACE and an overview of the South East region.

Overview

The Arts Council is a development agency and funder of arts and culture. Investment comes from Treasury for National Portfolio (4 year) funding and from lottery for Project Grant funding.

The region is a doughnut around London. It spans from Norfolk in the East to Oxford in the West, as far as Milton Keynes in the North and Brighton in the South. The South East is home to 106 National Portfolio Organisations. This includes three Bridge organisations, another four Sector Support organisations, 12 museums and one library consortium with a total annual investment of £41.8m.. The total Grants for the Arts (project) budget in 2015 – 18 was £43.01m in the South East. The total Project Grants budget for 18-19 and beyond is subject to change as it may be adjusted to try and maintain current success rates, is subject to fluctuations in Lottery income, but is also managed carefully to try and smooth out peaks and troughs.

ACE are currently developing a 10 Year Strategy so the [five current goals](#) (2010 – 2020) will change but they can safely say that quality and engagement will remain key parts of the new (2020-2030) strategy.

The South East has a place based approach to funding and focuses on looking across the region at places where arts engagement is very low. This does not mean other places in the region are neglected, and the focus is around staff resources rather than allocating specific funds. The current focus is on supporting North Kent and Medway, Crawley and the immediate conurbation, and Slough.

Brighton & Hove

Budgets for Project Grants are allocated based on the population of a place. Between April and December 2017, 832 project applications were received across the whole region. There is an average of 40 – 50% success rate. In Brighton 205 applications were received and 83 were awarded which is a 44% success rate. 24 were awarded in Oxford (of 58 applications), 11 in Chichester (of 28 applications), 14 in Lewes (of 24 applications) and 19 in Hastings (of 53 applications) Thanet with 17 awards and Canterbury with 14 are the only other areas in double figures across the SE. East of England, as an aside, is dominated by Cambridge and Norwich.

There is a misconception that the high number of NPOs in Brighton skews the success rate of project grants. This is not true as they come from two separate pots. Applications from Brighton & Hove are not deprioritised. There is more competition in Brighton & Hove which is why it is harder to be successful.

The application is assessed according to where the applicant is based not where the activity is taking place. There is a long standing debate about trying to assess based on where the project takes place. ACE are trying to analyse data on this.

It is a good idea for artists in Brighton to talk to each other about what they are applying for and when so that ACE do not receive 5 applications at the same time to work in the same places, for example.

There are some areas that are perceived to be an area of need eg Hangleton but there are only so many arts projects that one area has the capacity to work with. Don't be tokenistic.

ACE officers are happy to meet or talk with people on the phone in advance about their projects in bespoke surgeries but it's not possible for them to read applications in advance of submission.

How less than 15k applications are assessed:

2 people will read all the applications and rate them from 1 – 5 (5 is good).

Everyone at ACE sees this scored list and can offer comments on the applications if they know about the projects or have seen the applicant's work.

There is a panel that meets weekly to decide on the success of the applications. They are not artform specific so don't assume they know who you are.

There is always a spike in the level of applications post-Christmas and post-summer holidays. The budget is allocated weekly but more is set aside for these busy periods. Never the less, it is always more competitive in January and September.

They receive between 20 & 30 applications every fortnight.

The process takes a maximum of 6 weeks. First there is an eligibility process to check your application passes all the required administrative requirements.

Do reapply if unsuccessful and you can address the feedback you were given. There will be a summary sheet with your re-application which says it is a resubmission. Use the same name for the project. Assessors do not look back at your old applications.

Applications for over £15k

Takes 12 weeks.

The assessors will look at funding history much more and will check if there are any outstanding grants.

If the activity is taking place in more than two places then it is considered National activity and will be assessed by a different panel. It's more competitive and will be judged against applications from all over the UK. There will still be regional input and expertise.

Applications are assessed wherever possible (the vast majority) by an art-form specialist. The full list of applications going to each panel is circulated to all RMs, as with U15k, and they are invited to add brief additional information if known. It is important that this is neither blatant advocacy nor an attempt to assess the application! The assessments then go to a panel which has three senior management who between them cover the full geography of the area. Panels sit every two weeks and generally have 5 or 6 applications, occasionally less, sometimes up to 10 or so. As with U15k panels, the budget is allocated as a proportion of the ask, with some flexibility to go over and an average success rate around 45%

Partnerships

A partner is someone who is enabling you deliver the work you want to do beyond just giving space to perform in for example. If venues are supporting you with marketing, participation or giving you more than just a straight hire deal then they might be seen as a partner. Support-in-kind often sits in this area.

Audience development for cross artform unusual work

Jon gave examples of outdoor arts festivals that have successfully built audiences and said that Brighton Festival have successfully built audiences for unusual work over the years, 60% of audiences surveyed said that they come to Brighton Festival to try something new.

We talked about the importance of finding champions for your work – inviting people to see it who can then recommend it to programmers.

Don't blanket market to venues, be specific about why you think you might fit into their programme.

In your application don't say your work is for everyone. Be specific. Who are you trying to reach first? Other audiences might come too but who is your first focus? Some artists in the room spoke of being wary of pigeonholing their work and therefore excluding others. Jon recommended trying to think about who you are making the work for at the beginning of the process.

Depth of engagement is as important as numbers to ACE.

They do not value audiences inside buildings more than ones outside them. They do not expect audiences of outdoor work to become audiences for indoor work although sometimes there is cross over.

Do ACE recommend having a producer? Only if you need one.

Is it better to apply as an individual or an organisation? It makes no difference. All about experience and they will check how money is being managed.