**Arts Council England: Response to the UKCF evaluation of the Let’s Create Jubilee Fund**

May 2023

*“A big thank you! Your funding made our event possible. It also opened our eyes to just how many creative people there are in our community both as individuals… or by the many community creative groups we have… The creative arts is so good for mindfulness and our mental health – this event has definitely helped to sow the seeds of possibilities”*

*Association of Residents of Canford Heath*

**Background**

In 2022, Her Majesty The Queen became the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee after 70 years of service. In response to this historic occasion an extensive series of celebrations were planned across the UK as part of which Arts Council England created the Let’s Create Jubilee Fund - a £4.5 million fund designed to bring communities across this country together in creative celebration of The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee.

The fund offered grants for community organisations to initiate and develop creative and cultural events on or around the national Bank Holiday in June 2022; the fund was resourced via National Lottery investment and delivered through an External Delegation Agreement (EDA) between the Arts Council and UK Community Foundations (UKCF).

**Delivery of the fund**

UKCF oversaw and distributed the funding through 44 community foundations in its network across England, with individual community foundations promoting the fund, assessing applications and making decisions on funding at a local level.

We were delighted that all 44 community foundations based in England took part, achieving a broad spread of coverage and uptake from communities.

Against an initial target of 600 applications, 2715 were received, amounting to total request of over £18 million; a clear demonstration of interest in, and demand for, the Fund and its objectives. All community foundations were over-subscribed.

701 projects were funded by the National Lottery investment into Jubilee celebrations nation-wide. UKCF has reported a broad and even geographic spread of projects funded and we are delighted to see such strong diversity in the leadership of the funded projects with 19% reported to be Black, Asian or ethnically diverse-led, 17% to be disability-led, 48.5% to be female-led and 8% to be LGBTQ+-led.

We have also observed a very good range of primary beneficiaries across age and ethnicity and note UKCF’s reflections around areas of possible under-representation, alongside their ongoing work to understand and respond to this data in practice.

A reported 7000 artists were employed to work on projects supported by this fund, providing a significant artist employment opportunity around The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. It is additionally heartening to hear how volunteers across the country congregated around these creative projects to contribute to their success, amassing over 100,000 volunteer hours in total.

**Partnership between UKCF and the Arts Council**

The partnership was open and constructive with the Arts Council and UKCF teams working well together to deliver a successful outcome; working together on the fund initiated new processes around accessibility at UKCF that the team plan to continue implementing in the future, such as providing easy-read and audio versions of application guidance.

Working with UKCF enabled the Arts Council to reach a wider range of applicants and support creativity and culture beyond our usual networks. We are delighted to note the overwhelmingly positive feedback from community foundations and fund recipients. Responses have highlighted the value of the fund in bringing communities together in creative activity post-Covid, and in providing opportunities for communities to explore their creative identities and talents. We were also particularly pleased to hear of examples of ongoing connections, partnerships, ideas, and projects developing as a legacy of the fund.

An unanticipated benefit of working through the UKCF network was the leveraging of additional funding, with the network collectively contributing circa £120,000 additional investment from their own funds, topping up the overall amount from the Arts Council to support as many creative activities as possible.

Additionally, a partnership instigated by the Arts Council with the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) was able to redirect unsuccessful applicants to alternative, potential sources of funding. This helped to manage the high demand and ultimately enabled a further 100 projects to be supported with over £700,000 in additional funding. Feedback from NLCF suggests that this included applicants from places where they had previously had lower or no applicants, demonstrating the way that joined up working and collaboration between Lottery Distributors and other partners can extend our individual and collective reach.

**Learning and reflection**

The partnership with UKCF enabled the Arts Council to invest in a substantial small grants programme to mark the Jubilee, at a time when our resources were focused on the 2023-26 Investment Programme. Individual community foundations were able to manage strong local demand, decision making and distribution very well and the partnership enabled reach beyond the Arts Council’s usual networks.

However, delivery of a fund by this mechanism is not without risk and we have noted the following key learnings:

**1.** The fund garnered a large amount of interest, leading to an unexpectedly high number of applications across the country. All community foundations were oversubscribed, some by four-fold the amount of funding they had to distribute. The UKCF network successfully processed this high number of applications over a very short amount of time. Whilst this level of interest is positive for many reasons, the impact on the community foundations of receiving so many applications needs to be considered in the planning of any future joint projects. In some cases, it led to very high staff workloads and pressures, and greater consideration to the level of likely demand should form a central part of any similar programmes undertaken in the future.

**2.** The timescale for delivery of the fund was tight and each phase of delivery was intensified by this high demand. Extended timescales, particularly for assessment and funding panels, would have eased the pressure on teams and increased their ability to mitigate risks. As a separate but linked point, a longer timescale for planning and preparation of applications might also have resulted in even more ambitious and innovative community collaborations.

**3.** In order to lower barriers to uptake and increase accessibility, the programme was designed to have a light touch application and evaluation process. Even with this lighter touch, UKCF teams considered the Arts Council’s guidance complex, and our requests for data to be more than what they would usually deliver for a donor. This resulted in some frustration and at times challenges in collecting the data requested. The Arts Council should ensure that it is only seeking essential data from any future similar programmes.

**4.** The decision we took to name the Fund *Let’s Create Jubilee Fund* linked it strongly to one of the Arts Council’s core brand identities. This had the significant benefit of extending awareness of the Arts Council’s strategy to new audiences and communities. At the same time, it also led to an assumption by some that the Arts Council was responsible for individual investment decisions in relation to the Fund.

However, under the terms of the External Delegation Agreement (EDA) we had with UKCF, the Arts Council could not be involved in assessment or decision making for individual applications and relied on the decision making and due diligence processes of the different community foundations. The Arts Council will therefore need to consider carefully in future the risks associated with linking externally delegated programmes so closely to the Arts Council's core identities.

One of the decisions made by the London Community Foundation (LCF) in relation to an application by the LGB Alliance attracted significant attention and highlights the issue outlined above. There was a widespread assumption that the Arts Council was involved in both the initial decision to award and then LCF’s subsequent decision to withdraw the award. The Arts Council had to issue press lines to make clear and to correct coverage about our involvement in LCF’s decisions on the LGB Alliance’s application.

The LCF decisions highlight a particular risk in the delegated way of working, where a contested decision made by one partner can have a reputational impact on all partners regardless of who has made the decision. The Arts Council will need to consider how to address this in future EDAs whilst acknowledging that - given the intention of this programme was to reach applicants unknown to the Arts Council - very few funding decisions in programmes of this kind are entirely risk free.

**Conclusions**

External Delegation Agreements put Arts Council funds into sometimes more familiar community funder’s hands, and this can help to break down barriers and provide another route to Arts Council support for creative activity across the country.

UKCF’s reach and knowledge of grass roots communities, along with their track record in successful administration of national programmes, helped to generate a huge demand and response to this fund. This enabled the Arts Council to support creativity and culture beyond its usual networks, giving funding to communities the length and breadth of the country to creatively celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in their own extraordinary and exhilarating ways.

The fund successfully achieved each of its key outputs and demand for the fund reinforces the sense that there is still a high level of interest around the country in creative activity outside of what the Arts Council currently funds.

We will continue to give thought to how resources can best be directed towards this broader creative community activity, and the optimum design of a fund to achieve this.

*‘This felt like one of the most successful community projects we have ever delivered. The day was truly diverse and uplifting. To see the people young and old from every cultural background, hand in hand, dancing and laughing to the ceilidh dhol drum mash up was just fantastic. Can’t thank BCF and ACE enough for enabling this wondrous event to happen.’*

*Norden Farm Centre for the Arts*