

## **Strategic Touring Evaluation – response**

Strategic Touring is about creating positive change in the arts and cultural landscape – for audiences, arts organisations and arts and cultural practitioners. It is designed to help improve access to great art and culture – particularly in places and with people who don't currently engage with the arts - helping to transform and enrich lives.

We undertook this evaluation as part of our commitment to continuous development of the programme. While the evaluation highlights the successes of Strategic Touring, it also identifies areas for development. In responding to its recommendations, we will ensure that the programme continues to remain focussed on its original aims of improving access to great art for people across the country.

We welcome the findings of this evaluation, and are encouraged to see the statistics and case studies which demonstrate the range, value and impact of activity delivered through the programme. The fund is also making a strong contribution to the regional balance of arts and culture, with 91% of funding supporting touring outside of London.

### **In response to the recommendations:**

- We agree with the recommendation that Strategic Touring projects should be able to focus on retaining new audiences once they've been attracted.
- The longer term sustainability, impact and legacy of the activity on audiences and delivery partners is important. We will ask applicants to describe their approach to this, and will include additional monitoring and evaluation requirements to test and measure the changes achieved.

- We will consider how we can work with successful applicants to disseminate key learnings from the programme to support the development of good practice. In line with this, we would like successful applicants to write a short standardised case study of their project and share these resources on [CultureHive](#).
- We will also strengthen the Arts Council's own monitoring and evaluation of projects. We recognise that there is a great wealth of knowledge and learning that would benefit the wider sector, and we will do our best to support this sharing.
- Though the findings show that the development work that applicants are doing before submitting applications is used to good effect in delivering their projects, we know that submitting a Strategic Touring application is time-consuming. We will streamline the application form so that it takes less time to apply, but without reducing the emphasis on building strong partnerships ahead of submitting an application.
- We feel that a two stage application process (expression of interest and full application form) could reduce the number of funding rounds each year, which would provide fewer opportunities for applicants. We also think that the mandatory conversations required before application provide an opportunity to make connections with other projects, partners, models and approaches, as well as testing the project's suitability for the Programme, so we won't introduce a two stage process for Strategic Touring.
- For applications under £100,000, we plan to move the requirement for a full audience development plan from the initial application to a condition that is tied to the release of the first funding payment. This would give applicants the knowledge that their application has been successful before they embark on this work. Audience development is critical to the programme, and applicants will still need to continue to provide convincing plans and evidence of demand at the application stage, including strong evidence of how the plan relates to their partners. We will also limit the size and number of attachments that applicants can include.

- We will devise a stronger activity report form which requires grantees to report back against the programmes aims, and in a consistent way for data reporting. We will also encourage grant recipients to share their learning on [CultureHive](#).
- We think that funding projects for up to three years provides the opportunity for reasonably long-term initiatives. It is already possible for applicants to reapply for further support to develop, extend or adapt their original project where appropriate.
- The evaluation highlights challenges around accurate forecasting of audience figures. We recognise the challenges involved when working with new partners, when the target audiences are people and places of least engagement, when venues might have less capacity to work on the projects than anticipated, and where there is a desire to be ambitious. We will encourage applicants to set realistic audience projections and to maximise attendance and engagement.

**We will take the opportunity to further improve the programme, by introducing the following updates:**

- We will ask questions in the application form about how the project supports the Creative Case for Diversity, and how the project partners will deliver data collection and sharing in line with best practice.
- In the application form we will seek a demonstrable commitment from partners as to the outlined activity, budget and plan.
- We will make sure that the programme aims, overview scores, priority criteria and rejection reasons are as clear as possible, and that there are questions on the application form that relate more directly to them.

- We will ensure that prospective applicants know that it is permitted to apply for money to make new work, but given that this fund focuses on reaching new audiences, there will need to be a convincing rationale to explain why investing in new work is the best approach.
- We will provide more guidance about what we look for in further applications to extend or develop an initial award. This could include a thorough evaluation of the completed project or, if not complete, of the work delivered to date, a reducing dependency on Arts Council funding, an increasing commitment from partner venues in taking on the work and a development of the learning.
- We will provide clearer definitions about what activity by National Portfolio Organisations is eligible for Strategic Touring, such as remounting productions or exhibitions.
- We have already introduced refreshed guidance for Grants for the Arts about how to describe international touring activity as part of an application, and we have introduced new and better definitions of tour date status for tour schedules. These two changes will apply to Strategic Touring from November. [Read the guidance >](#)
- We will make sure that we provide a comprehensive and useful toolkit, and signpost prospective applicants to further resources to support project conception, delivery and evaluation. We are developing increasingly useful interpretations of data to provide the sector, the public and Arts Council staff with more information about places and people of least and lower engagement, as well as underserved areas, which we will publish on our website over the coming months. The 18 case studies written as part of the evaluation are a good resource. [Read the case studies >](#)

## **For more information**

We would like to thank Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd for their work on the evaluation of the Strategic Touring programme, as well as everyone who took the time to contribute by responding to interviews and surveys.

We think that the quality, breadth, reach and impact of the many projects delivered through Strategic Touring is extraordinary. Striving to make and tour great art, combined with the intention of sharing it as widely as possible, gets to the heart of the Arts Council's aims. We are delighted and grateful that it is also evidently central to the work of the arts and cultural organisations who have been part of this programme. Their ambition, capacity and generosity has succeeded in bringing audiences and culture together across the country.

Note: We will publish refreshed guidance and new application form questions in May 2016. This new guidance and application form won't take effect until 5pm on 18 November.