

Scottish Government Consultation on International Culture Strategy

Culture Collective response

Who we are

Culture Collective is a network of 26 projects, funded by Creative Scotland through the Scottish Government, developing locally-led participatory arts projects across Scotland. The aims of the projects are to provide substantial, fair work to artists and creative freelancers, and to support communities to shape and realise their own ambitions for locally-led creative provision. The projects involved in the Culture Collective network can be viewed here: <https://culturecollective.scot/projects/>

This response about international working, culture and community-led, participatory arts, has been prepared by the Culture Collective Programme Lead team. We are a team of freelancers contracted to connect, support and champion the Culture Collective network. We have prepared this response in consultation with Culture Collective projects and creative practitioners.

International collaboration is valuable and impactful for participatory arts projects

Participatory arts projects often invest significant energy in really getting to know their community, and to working with those whose voices may typically be less heard. This means that many projects have close relationships with migrant, New Scots or displaced residents. This often brings natural opportunities for international collaboration, rooted in personal relationships and with a distinctive potential to develop meaningful, globally connected collaborations and partnerships. Participatory arts projects are enabling migrant communities and individuals in Scotland to develop confidence to express their own cultural heritage and to make new intercultural connections in their neighbourhoods.

Example: Art27 Scotland (based in Edinburgh's Southside) is an artist-led, community driven project, focusing on arts for dignity, justice and peace. Art27 Scotland are intentionally global in their ethical framework, taking their name and mission from Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("everyone has the right to freely participate in the culture of their community and to enjoy the arts"). Their explorations around Cultural Rights, as indivisible from human rights, are rooted in the experiences of the diverse neighbourhood, revealing the challenges and opportunities that this brings in the context of migration. Uniquely, all participatory projects are delivered in the first language of the leading artist. Artworks such as [City of Homes](#), created by Marta Adamowicz and Robert Motyka with members of Edinburgh's Polish community, narrate accounts of the immigrant experience. Global connections that Art27 artists bring to their work have enabled discussions between participatory artists in Scotland and the rest of the world, such as this ['International Perspectives'](#) event with Arte Moris, based in Dili, East Timor, and a current creative community exchange between Art27 Scotland and Artzone Academy in Yemen led by Art27 residency artist at risk Shatha Altowai.

Though participatory and community-led creative activity is often locally focussed, this does not mean it is insular or inward-looking in nature. On the contrary, projects often draw

inspiration from community-led work happening all over the world, and equally are keen to share skills, experiences, challenges and inspiration with participatory practitioners working in different contexts. The expertise of Scotland-based community artists is recognised and plays a welcome role in international collaborations.

Example: Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS) lead [The People's Parish](#) Culture Collective project, using traditional arts and collective memory to support communities across Scotland to "tell their stories, to themselves and to the world". TRACS takes an intentionally international view of traditional arts that encompasses the folk culture of immigrant communities. TRACS is part of the European Folk Network which is currently working on a European Folk Day (September 23) which will encourage artists and communities across Europe (including Scotland) to take part in events that highlight and celebrate the traditional arts, and to facilitate communication and interchange between members.

Often, surprising similarities can be found between projects, practitioners and communities working in very different parts of the world, and sharing knowledge globally can help spark new conversations amongst Scottish practitioners, building connection and nurturing practice.

Example: Many Culture Collective projects are thinking deeply about how to nourish and work meaningfully with creative practitioners and freelancers who bring a range of life experiences to their role. Rebecca Livesey-Wright, Co-ordinator at the [EVOLVE](#) Seedhill Culture Collective project, was curious to explore the experiences of parenting, and that of mother-artists in particular. Through Rebecca's hosting of an '[International Perspectives](#)' event for Culture Collective, projects were invited to learn from the work of MATERNAL FANTASIES, a Berlin-based artist collective centring the experience of parents in the artistic process. From there, Rebecca went on to facilitate a series of workshops and peer-learning sessions for mother-artists based in Scotland, creating a new peer group that has been enriching, validating and inspiring for the mother-artists who've taken part.

Scotland's participatory arts community is vibrant and thriving, and with projects such as Culture Collective has the opportunity to showcase this vital part of our culture sector to the world - adding to Scotland's reputation in terms of our cultural creativity and skill.

Example: In 2022 representatives from Culture Collective projects [Aiseirigh](#) (working across Skye, Raasay and Lochalsh) and [Young Quines](#) (Fife) had the opportunity to attend the Sixth International Teaching Artists Convention held in Oslo, Norway. In a [reflective blog about the experience](#), Beth Godfrey, Project Coordinator for Young Quines, described being "struck [by] how arts were used globally to build and connect community, to work through trauma, as a conduit for joy. As we experienced our international colleagues perform and facilitate workshops for us, I felt part of a much wider whole". Beth described the experience of sharing Scotland's experience on the international stage as "an encouragement that from an international perspective, Creative Scotland's Culture Collective approach to funding arts in communities is radical. People were endlessly

impressed by the innovation of our united Scottish cohort of practitioners, co-ordinators, funders and a civil servant, who was soaking it up in order to advocate for us”.

International collaboration is not always common amongst participatory arts projects

Participatory arts projects typically grow from either community projects (such as those led by volunteers, community groups or charities), or from engagement teams within arts organisations. Either way, participatory arts projects typically exist on a small scale, with activity focussed on relatively small geographic areas, and are often delivered on tight budgets. Community arts projects are often funded via project grants (rather than being recipients of longer term and more flexible core funding), which means there is typically little money for training and development or international travel, and little budget flexibility to maximise potential international collaborations. The local focus of this work means that funders do not often see the potential for international collaboration, and practitioners therefore have little time, budget or opportunity to work up substantial international partnerships.

Different support is needed to realise this impact for participatory arts projects

Culture Collective has made a budget available to support the training and development needs of participatory artists working on Culture Collective projects. We have used this opportunity to explore how best to ensure support is available to those participatory artists, including those who would typically struggle to access training and developmental opportunities. We have learned that, for funding to be most useful to community-based participatory artists, it should:

- **Be easily accessed**

Creative freelancers are often juggling multiple projects and may have little time and / or experience in applying for funding. Long, complicated forms are a real barrier, as are onerous reporting or compliance requirements. Making access to opportunities as practically straightforward as possible makes a huge difference to who can access them.

- **Be flexible to ‘non-traditional’ opportunities**

Participatory practitioners may want to develop different kinds of collaborations or partnerships than other creative professionals, and have different ways of going about it. Keeping opportunities as flexible as possible in their expectations gives practitioners the opportunity to suggest what would be of greatest benefit to them.

- **Be flexible to projects that change, or that do not have a fixed output at the outset**

It is very common for participatory and community-led creative projects to evolve as practitioners and participants get to know one another. Outputs can change, new partners or approaches may become necessary, and timings may change to adapt to the circumstances of those involved. Opportunities that do not embrace this nature, that demand certainty from the outset, or that tie creatives into rigid processes are unlikely to be realistic for maximising the potential of participatory artists.

- **Include access provision**

Many of the creative practitioners working within Culture Collective work part time, and juggle caring responsibilities, multiple jobs, and other commitments. In addition, some have disabilities, neurodivergence, speak languages other than English, or have other factors to consider in making opportunities accessible. Making generous and flexible access provision available - in addition to the costs of the opportunity - makes these fair and feasible to a wider range of practitioners.

- **Consider the costs of time for freelancers**

Salaried creative practitioners are effectively paid for their time - not only in taking part in international collaborations, but also in applying for funding, developing the early stages of a collaboration, attending planning meetings and so on. Creative freelancers are at a multiple disadvantage. At Culture Collective, we have made funding available to cover the cost of a freelancers' time in taking part in development opportunities, and many projects have trialled fairer ways to approach recruitment and selection processes. If such initiatives could be adopted in the context of international culture opportunities we expect much wider and more diverse access for creative freelancers and participatory arts.

- **Be personally communicated**

Whilst opportunities may in theory be open to all, in reality many participatory arts practitioners will not be aware of international collaboration opportunities, will assume them to not be open / accessible / relevant to them, or will assume that they will be unsuccessful in applications. We have found that consistent communication, personal relationships and regular offers of connection make a huge difference in enabling people to embrace all of the opportunities they could benefit from.

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