

## **National Portfolio Creatives**

The idea of Arts Council England (ACE) championing a National Portfolio scheme for freelancers has been discussed and explored for over a decade, sadly, without success to date. This proposal for ACE to pilot a **National Portfolio Creatives** (NPC) sustainability grant, direct-to-freelancers working in the arts has come via the Dance Freelance Task force, through consultation with the UK freelance artist community.

Freelancers in the arts, by definition, can offer flexibility, fluidity, and the ability to respond quickly. They can form intimate, personal, and direct connections in meaningful ways within communities. They can pilot, explore, and develop ideas in a resource-light way, from which NPOs and other partners can benefit. Innovation often comes from such outliers working outside of the big organizations. If these freelancers had access to more regular support, the impact on the national picture would be very significant.

The inherent vulnerability of freelancers working in the arts, cruelly exposed during the Covid-19 crisis, is a permanent weakness in UK arts provision. The continued lack of support or safety net available in the sector, and commitment to sustaining the careers of freelance creatives over the pandemic (and let's be honest – before) is nothing short of a sector emergency. ACE's Emergency Grant during the pandemic was widely welcomed and shone a light on the profound benefit of a sustainability fund for freelancers working across the arts.

In order to create a powerful rebalanced ecosystem for culture, freelance artists need support to do what they do best. NPC funding, specifically for individuals, would address the disparity in stability between arts organizations and the freelance creatives making work across disciplines.

Much of the work that freelancer artists do is invisible and unpaid, yet essential. Periods between contracts are inevitably stressful and worrying, and sustaining oneself as a freelancer artist often requires taking work outside of the sector to make ends meet. Creative time is left chronically under strain due to the unfunded work that takes place between projects, commissions and grant applications. Small wonder that only those who have the means to sustain themselves can survive in the sector - a situation which fosters neither accessibility nor inclusion.

Post COVID, as the sector begins to reimagine the potential futures of our great institutions, companies, networks, and infrastructure, we have the unique opportunity to finally place freelancers (who, after all, make up 70% of the UK's creative industries) at the centre of a refreshed vision for arts development, emerging stronger, fairer, and more relevant than ever. It would genuinely support freelancers who deserve their own voice and autonomy.

To address the issues above, freelancers are seeking a new balance which would embrace and enact the idea of a National Portfolio Creative (NPC). The creation of such a new sustainability funding strand would afford the freelancer more agency both in their creative decisions and in directing the nature of their practice. This would contribute to a richer, and more diverse ecosystem for the arts, and in turn increase the value that art brings to society and the communities it reaches.

As a way forward, ACE could work closely with freelance artists to co-design various NPC models (such as the two we have put forward here) and then pilot the models with a diverse group of cross-disciplinary freelancers.

## **Proposal**

This model is suggested as a way of giving freelancers in the arts unmediated access to funds to help sustain their careers. The freelance artist generally works in one of two ways.

1. Self directed practice, which involves self-producing, application writing, searching for funding and seeking ways of sustaining themselves and the work they are making. All this essential background work is unfunded.
2. Commissioned work and projects that are offered through organizations and big structures (NPOs) where staff is salaried, whilst the freelancer making the work receives a flat fee. This takes no account of all the meetings, research and planning time needed to actually deliver the work. The preparation and maintenance required, in order to deliver high level artistic work is most often on the freelancers own time and the organizations to whom they are contracted don't really recognise this or compensate them for it. Freelancers are generally paid for their time when most of the work is already done.

These suggestions of how a sustainability model could work, are just a first step in presenting a possible model to pilot. They come from our ongoing dialogue, both within Dance Freelance TaskForce and with our wider networks across various disciplines.

### **Suggested model for a 12k per annum sustainability grant**

- Individuals can apply for £36k over a 3-year period, thus providing £12k pa to help sustain their practice.
- The roster of individuals supported through NPC funding could continually rotate to ensure that the grants are allocated in the fairest and broadest possible way. This would also allow for the stability of NPC funding to be felt by a greater number of people whilst also keeping the portfolio rolling. For example, an artist who receives NPC funding for 3 years, cannot re-apply whilst in receipt of the initial funding, but would become eligible again in a following round.
- NPC funding would provide sustainability and include the option, but not the obligation, to additionally apply for ACE's other funding streams. It would provide much needed additional support to Project Grants & DYCP funding, providing sustainability, maintenance and incremental evolution of a freelancer's practice over a significant period (3 years.)

The sustainability grant could be used towards the following:

- Administration around projects
- Writing applications
- Meetings
- All preparatory work (Research, Reading, Physical training for dancers etc)
- Support artists to have an ongoing daily practice
- Paying a small freelance team (ie a producer or marketing person 1 day per month)
- Working on website/social media
- Materials
- Networking
- Overheads
- 'go see'/market research
- Professional development, to support the complete infrastructure of being a freelance creative.

This model is directly aligned with ACE's investment principles of ACE's Let's Create strategy. Such sustained investment would afford the funded freelancer the opportunity to think and plan strategically, work on longer-term projects, and be braver in their artistic decision-making and collaborations.

### **Guidelines for Application**

The following are the principles defined by the freelancers consulted in the development of this document.

- Applicants should articulate in the application how they plan to spend their time, mentioning any other creatives and/or organizations with whom they will work in pursuit of the objectives in ACE Let's Create strategy.
- Diversity, inclusion, and accessibility must be built into the application process. This NPC funding model is designed to support creative freelancers with equality and equity despite the privileges, or lack of them, that any individual may have, to enable a fairer reflection of wider society.
- Freelancers generally found ACE's Emergency Response Funds application process much more accessible than that for Project Grants, so we would recommend a similar simple application process for the NPC.
- We suggest that the finer details of this model, including those pertinent to the application process should be written up in consultation with freelancers.

### **NPC Guiding Principles:**

1. NPCs who are offered work should continue to be offered full fees in line with industry standards.
2. NPC funding should provide freelancers with a 'sustainability grant' of £12k per year that can be topped up by income from other sources, including fees from other ACE funding streams.
3. NPCs should be self-employed, responsible for their own tax and national insurance.
4. NPCs should be eligible for all other ACE funding streams without NPC status introducing bias.
5. An NPC's time should be eligible to be used as in-kind match funding for a Project Grant application (as people who are in NPOs time can be used), but should not be eligible to be used as in-kind match funding if the Project Grant application is in their *own* name.
6. NPC funding should be spread across all the regions, disciplines and art forms.

We would recommend that ACE consult with a diverse range of freelancers in the arts when refining the model-application process. This will ensure that freelancers are represented in any decision-making that affects them.

***This document has been developed by Dance Freelance TaskForce with input from Rafia Hussain.***

