

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Rural Engagement Arts Programme

Round 1 Evaluation

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Undertaken on behalf of the Arts Council by:



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SUMMARY

In Round 1 of the Rural Engagement Arts Programme (REAP), ACNI awarded £493,602 to 71 organisations across Northern Ireland. The key findings from an analysis of applications, End of Project Reports and a survey of unsuccessful applicants are that:

GRANTEES WERE ABLE TO EVIDENCE OUTCOMES FOR SOCIETY

INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY COHESION

100% of grantees showed their project reduced isolation or promoted social inclusion. 86% of grantees said that all or part of the project was cross-community. 54% grantees said that all or part of the project was intergenerational. 48% grantees said the project included a public launch or celebration.

WELLBEING

All grantees showed their project enhanced the wellbeing of participants or audience members. 60% of grantees said that the project included specific support for participants' mental health.

VOLUNTEERING

84% of the grantees said that volunteers helped to deliver the project. The total number of volunteers involved in the projects was 622.

SUSTAINABILITY

13% of grantees said the project addressed local environmental issues.

GRANTEES WERE ABLE TO EVIDENCE OUTCOMES FOR THE ARTS SECTOR

EMPLOYMENT FOR ARTISTS

95% of the grantees said that artists were involved in delivering the project, with a total 308 artists employed. More than half of these live in a rural area.

DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT

87% of grantees said their project included artist-led workshops with local people. 56% of these said that 90-100% of their participants attended three or more workshops. 97% of grantees said their project developed the skills of participants or audience members.

ACCESS

78% of grantees said that the project was free to all participants. 37% of grantees said that free transport was provided to grantees.

QUALITY

92% grantees showed the grant allowed their organisation to deliver higher quality artistic work than they had delivered previously.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

19% of grantees said that the activity included taking participants to a show or exhibition in an arts venue.

THE PROGRAMME WORKED WELL

ADDITIONALITY

Additionality was high. 76% of grantees said their projects were new. 79% of grantees said they wouldn't have been able to deliver any of the project without ACNI funding.

DESIGN

98% of grantees said the REAP programme was a good fit with the project they wanted to deliver. 98% of grantees said the application form was easy to understand. 97% of grantees said they received the support from ACNI that they needed to complete their application. 100% of grantees said they would apply to REAP again.

DEMAND

78% of grantees said the project increased their organisation's interest in delivering arts projects in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

REAP has started well and reached a competent and eager group of grantees. The programme is to some extent a victim of its own success because the increase in demand will require ACNI to narrow objectives in the next round if it wants to avoid a higher rejection rate (which wastes applicants' time). The social objectives are relatively broad and so compatible with the existing ethos of rural organisations (in terms of reducing isolation) and the power of the arts (in terms of enhancing wellbeing) as to provide a crude filter. I recommend that ACNI reflect on, prioritise and communicate more precisely its arts development aims. This should include specifying the desired balance of support as between new grantees and repeat applicants.

2 BACKGROUND ON THE PROGRAMME

2.1 Objectives

The Rural Engagement Arts Programme (REAP) was launched in August 2022 in response to strong demand from the community. The direction of REAP is set by ACNI policy, informed by the Rural Policy Framework for NI (March 2022) and the Revised Lottery Policy Directions to ACNI (2008), three documents that have overlapping themes and approaches.

ACNI's stated purpose is to: "provide an integrated, cohesive approach to the needs of local rural communities as they emerge from the global Covid pandemic, recognising the specific issues they face as a result." An integrated, cohesive approach is consistent with the Rural Policy Framework for NI principle that: "Many of the issues pertaining to rural employment are cross-cutting and therefore an integrated strategic approach is required."

"The overarching theme is combatting isolation and loneliness, and promoting social inclusion. The pandemic and the resulting lockdowns across the UK have taken a toll on individual lives, with mental health and well-being adversely affected as families and friends were separated for sustained periods of time. Intergenerational family relationships being particularly affected. This has been compounded in rural communities which are characterised by smaller and more dispersed populations."

The Revised Lottery Policy Directions to ACNI give these aims (slightly reworded by the evaluator to reflect logic model thinking):

- Inspiring children and young people and increasing their interest in the arts.
- Bringing people together in order to strengthen community spirit and enrich the public realm.
- Encouraging volunteering in the arts. This is consistent with the Rural Policy Framework for NI which states that: "Volunteerism should be encouraged."
- Supporting innovation, excellence and skill development, including new talent. The value of the arts and culture to innovation is recognised in the Rural Policy Framework for NI: "To prosper in a global economy, our social, economic and cultural assets need to work together to foster greater creativity, innovation and inclusiveness and to create an environment where arts and culture can flourish as part of an ever more innovative, creative society."
- Supporting the development, production, distribution, and promotion of films.

These are in addition to the standard conditions of ensuring public benefit rather than private gain, financial viability, sustainable development, Lottery branding and reasonable partnership funding. Other stated desirable criteria are: access and participation for all, geographical spread, contribution to reducing deprivation and partnership working.

2.2 Activity

In the first round, ACNI made 73 awards, totalling £499,868, an average award of £6,847. Eight applications were judged to be ineligible and 22 were not funded, a 76% success rate (not including ineligibles). Two of the awards were not taken up, which gives 71 REAP projects.

The funding criteria are:

- Grant of £500 to £10,000 for one-off projects or a programme of events.
- Contribution to social inclusion, reducing isolation or loneliness as well as positive effect on physical, mental and social wellbeing. This priority is consistent with the Rural Policy Framework for NI (March 2022) comment that: “The health and wellbeing thematic pillar should be a central hub for other themes and not standalone.” REAP seems to contribute to: Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: Intervention 3 - Reduce: Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Collaborative working. The Rural Policy Framework for NI (March 2022) emphasises that: “A bottom-up community development approach is most effective empowering people to better tackle their educational, employment, training, health, socioeconomic issues.”

Following discussion at the Rural Deliberative Forum, these parameters were added:

- Existing projects can apply as long as they contribute to one of the strategic themes.
- Organisations based in Belfast cannot be the lead partner on the application.
- The list of allowable expenses explicitly mentions transport costs.
- Applicants are welcomed from “the widest possible range of organisations”, so long as they have a legal constitution. This includes artists and communities who don’t have a track record of running funded projects.

The usual exclusions apply: that projects shouldn't have started before the decision, events shouldn't promote religious or political views, and projects should not involve travel to events outside Northern Ireland (except for projects in border communities).

2.3 Evaluation brief

The evaluation brief is to:

- Clearly define programme objectives and establish a logic model in consultation with key partners.
- Design ways of measuring programme outcomes that can be applied across participating organisations.

- Ensure learning is captured in order to improve the programme, create a sustainable legacy and communicate value to the wider partner/stakeholder group.

I will be writing an evaluation report after each round of REAP.

2.4 Methodology

The methodology consisted of:

- Clarification of objectives through team meetings and review of documentation including consultation and policy context.
- Analysis of all applications.
- Creation and analysis of End of Project Reports. I have 63, 89% of the round 1 projects.
- Surveying of groups who were not successful with their applications.

We designed the End of Project Report so that it would give sufficient information to produce case studies without further need to interview grantees. I would like to thank grantees for the detailed and balanced responses that they gave for the evaluation.

3 CONCEPTUALISATION

3.1 Introduction

Evaluation is composed of four interlinked strands:

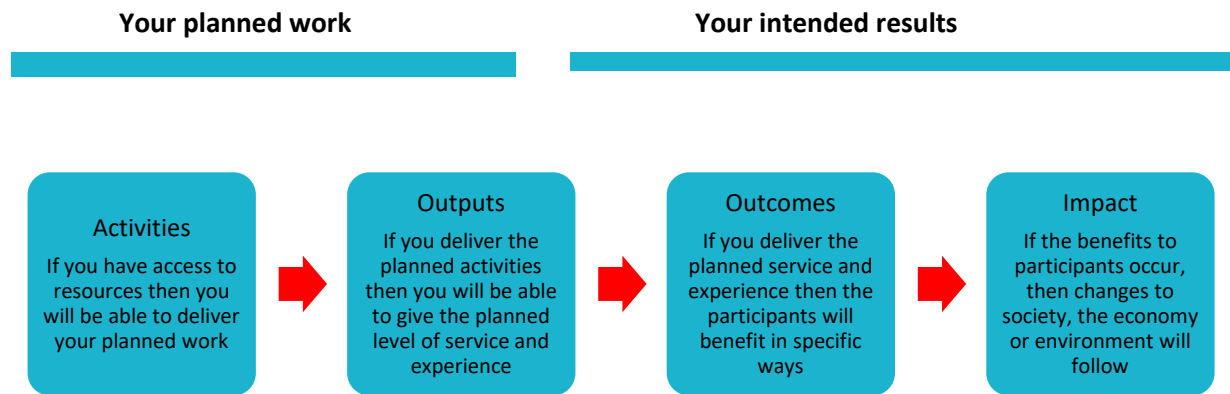
- **Thinking.** Framing, focusing, conceptualising, interpreting, synthesising.
- **People.** Motivating, training, involving, reassuring, listening, informing, influencing.
- **Systems.** Planning, gathering data, entering data into a system, analysing data, disseminating findings.
- **Action.** Making recommendations, implementing recommendation.

Evaluative thinking has these benefits:

- **Ensuring a clear direction.** Creating a logic model in a group helps to generate a consensus about the precise intended outcomes.
- **Creating a lean evaluation system.** Being precise about intended outcomes and critical success factors helps evaluation to focus on key questions.
- **Bringing the different elements of the evaluation system together.** Articulating the theory of change helps test the implied connection between actions and expected outcomes, and produces in a balanced evaluation system that covers both.
- **Testing the logic behind the programme.** Checking that the ideas behind the programme are sound can identify potential hurdles in its delivery. Clear thinking strengthens not just the evaluation but also the implementation of a programme.
- **Ensuring expectations are realistic.** Depicting the chain of logic graphically illustrates the time lag between short terms outcomes, long term outcomes and impact.
- **Customising the evaluation.** Exploring the organisation's thinking helps ensure the evaluation captures what is special about the programme.
- **Summarising the project.** Connecting activities and their impacts gives a concise description and explanation of the work.
- **Providing a structure to capture programmatic learning.** Comparing what happens with what was expected or planned leads naturally to questions about programmatic lessons.

3.2 Explanation of logic models

A logic model is a visual depiction of a programme or project. Logic models were originally developed and popularised by The Kellogg Foundation in the United States in 1998. By plotting the different stages in a programme – the actions and assumed consequences (outcomes) - logic models provide a simple but powerful way of interrogating the causality assumed by a programme. Logic models are read from left to right:



3.3 Language

This is my definition of the terms used in a logic model:

- **Activities** are the actions taken by the programme: the choices made in how the programme is to be delivered.
- **Outputs** are measures of effort to show that the programme took place, and can be defined from the supply side (number of events), or the demand side (number of participants).
- **Outcomes** are changes in the attitudes, skills, knowledge, behaviour, motivation, feelings, priorities, connections or aspirations of participants; or the culture, structures, systems, partnerships or processes of organisations.
- **Impacts** are the direct and indirect effects for society, the economy and the environment.

3.4 Logic model

This is the logic model we created together in the first meeting:

ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	LONGER TERM OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Creative workshops	Number of applicants	Participants enjoy the project, increase their confidence, self-esteem and	Participants sustain their interest in the arts, and enhance their wellbeing	Contribution to: Rural development
Showcases	Number of creative workshops and contact hours	motivation, develop their communication skills, increase their wellbeing and sense of place	including reducing isolation and loneliness, and increasing positive community identities and tolerance of difference	New audience development
Sharing events	Number and profile of people taking part	Grantees develop their interest in and capacity to deliver high quality arts activities	Grantees continue their interest in delivering arts activities in rural areas	Community cohesion
Exhibitions	Artworks	Artists enhance their creative practice and feel more confident about being able to have a career in rural areas	Artists deepen their connections with rural communities	Mental health, wellbeing and aspiration
		ACNI deepens its knowledge about how to support rural arts and broadens its connections in rural communities	ACNI deepens its knowledge about how to develop the rural arts sector and maximise impacts especially on wellbeing	Environmental sustainability

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Partners builds ownership and so attendance, especially in rural areas where much marketing is word of mouth.
- That barriers to attendance are often multiplied in rural areas e.g., rural poverty increases transport barriers because of fuel poverty.
- That creativity is needed to engage communities and overcome practical barriers to attendance.
- That participation in the arts can be hidden in rural areas e.g., engagement in music, crafts etc.,
- Artists have unique insights and processes that can support rural communities address issues relating to community cohesion, mental health, wellbeing.
- Outcomes are higher where artistic quality is higher.

4 DESCRIPTION OF PROJECTS

4.1 Reach

Round 1 of REAP had a wide reach. This is evidenced by:

4.1.1 THE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS

As mentioned above, two projects did not take up the award, which is why the success rate is higher than the approvals figure below would suggest.

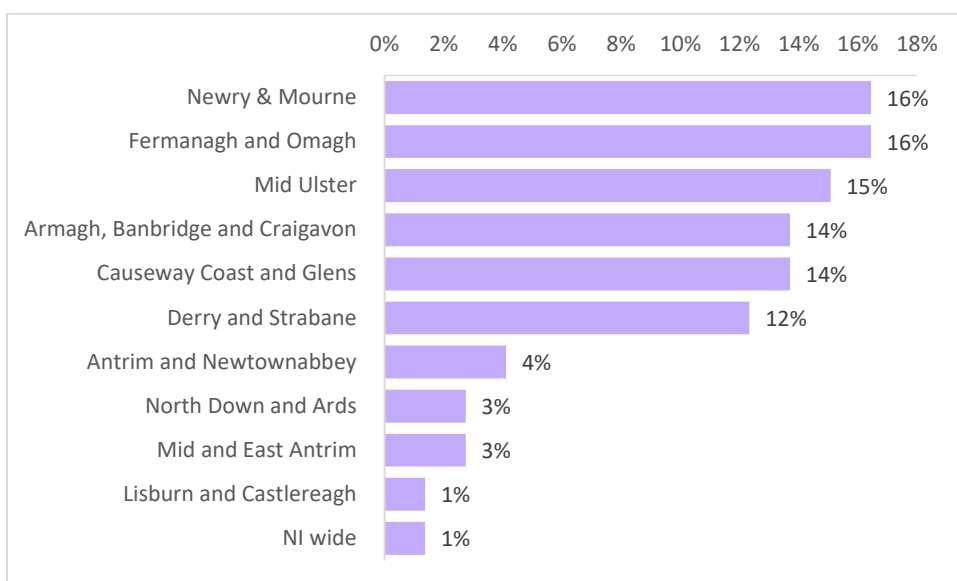
Figure 1: Applications and approvals

ROUND	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS	NUMBER OF INELIGIBLES	NUMBER OF APPROVALS	SUCCESS RATE	TOTAL AWARDED	AVERAGE AWARD
1	103	8	71	71%	£493,602	£6,952

4.1.2 GEOGRAPHICAL REACH

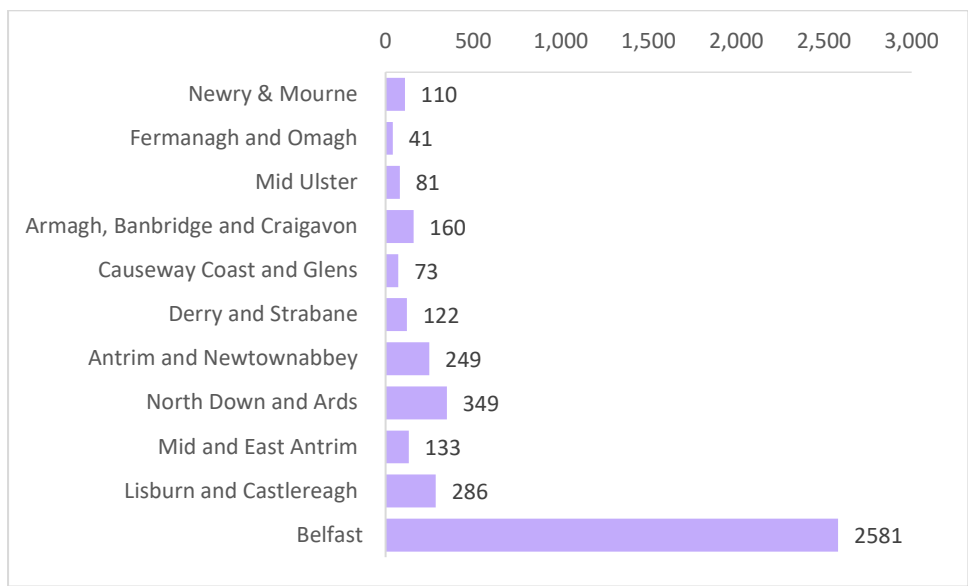
Round 1 reached all Council areas.

Figure 2: Council area of project (ACNI board paper)



An analysis of population density per km² as a measure of rurality suggests that the number of projects does to some extent reflect the level of rurality: the four Council areas with the lowest population density in 2021 are in the five areas with the most applications.

Figure 3: Population density per km2 by council area (source: 2021 census)



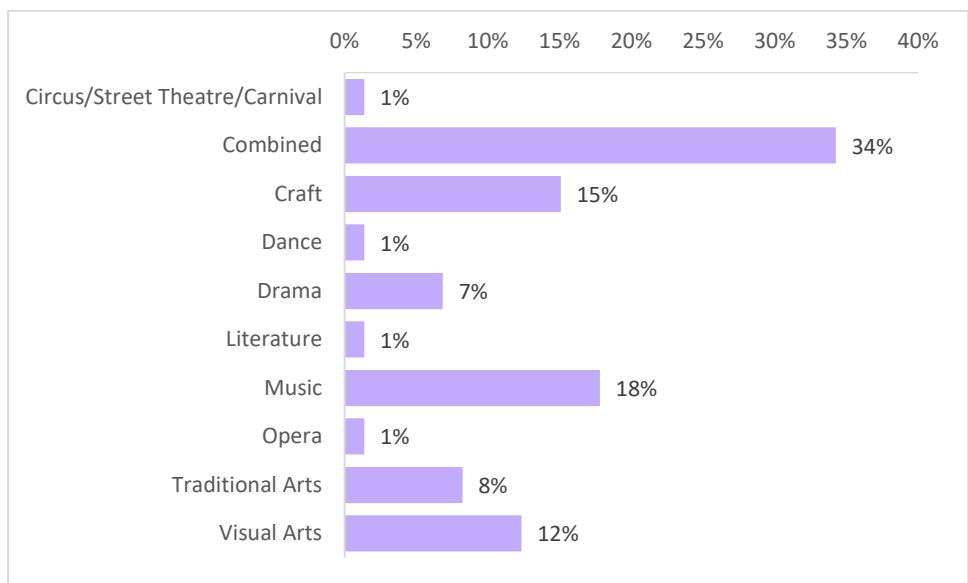
4.1.3 SIZE OF ORGANISATIONS

In round 1, half of the applicants had no staff.

4.2 Artform

Analysis of the application form gave the impression that reach was not well spread in terms of artform. However, this was partly because the question asked for main artform, which didn't give a full picture, with the most common option being Combined.

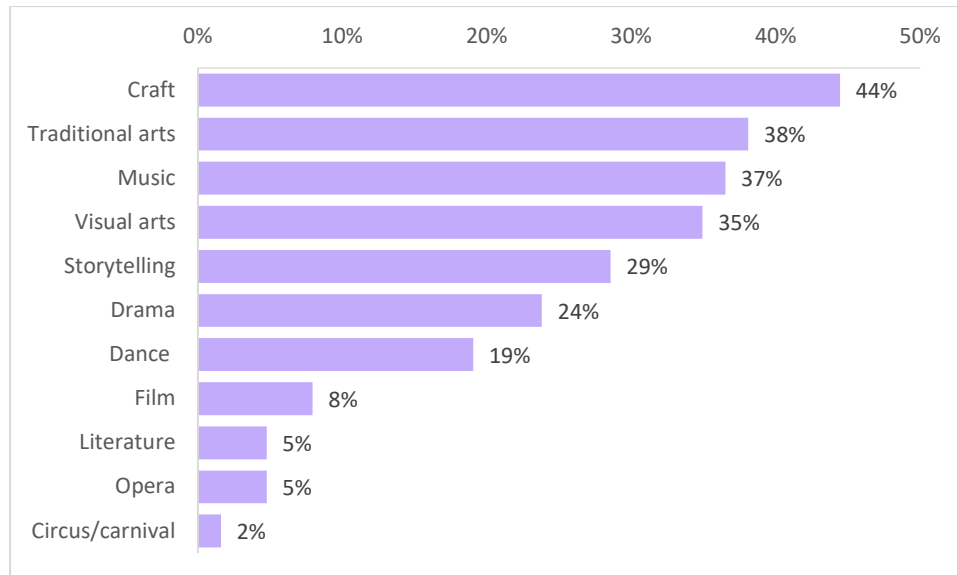
Figure 4: Main artform (application forms)



End of Project Reports give a fuller impression of the artforms, with craft the most common artform, followed by traditional arts, music and visual arts. Circus/carnival are underrepresented. The

heading that I suggested adding (to reflect the language I observed in the application forms), storytelling, was identified by grantees far more than literature.

Figure 5: What artform(s) were represented in the project? Please tick all that apply (End of project reports)



4.3 Volunteers and employees

The application only asked about the number of volunteers for the organisation, which is useful to judge organisational size. I suggested adding a question about the number of volunteers involved in delivering the project to the End of Project Report to test performance against the Revised Lottery Policy Directions objective. The responses are that 84% of the grantees said that volunteers helped to deliver the project. The total number of volunteers involved in the 63 projects was 552. Scaling this up for the whole round gives a figure of 622.

60% of grantees said that employees helped to deliver the project. The total number of employees involved in project delivery was 117 (131 scaled up).

4.4 Partnership

Grantees mentioned more than 120 partners, including:

- Clubs and community groups.
- Schools (mainly primary schools).
- Community buildings such as churches and leisure parks.
- Care homes.
- Local businesses.
- Charities such as the National Trust.

- Borough councils.
- Bodies such as hospitals, libraries, care trusts, development associations, committees or partnerships.
- Local foundations.
- Arts organisations.

Partners often had an important role in the project including being involved in the original concept the design, publicising the activity and recruiting participants, hosting workshops or providing equipment, transport, or in some cases matched funding. The range and depth of partnerships is another indication of the reach of the programme.

4.5 Artists

In their application forms, round 1 grantees estimated that their projects would give employment to more than 250 artists. Three grantees had yet to select their artists and one said the REAP project would involve an artistic company, without stating the number of individual artists included.

Turning to the End of Project Reports, 95% of the grantees said that artists were involved in delivering the project. The grantees give the total number of artists employed through these REAP projects as 446, which seems too high. Looking at the data, two projects give large numbers of artists (131+41), and both are choirs/music groups, which suggests this is the number of participants. Excluding these two, brings the total down to 274 (308 scaled up). This is an estimate because the choirs might have had a small number of professionals involved (which would make the figure too low) but, also, we know that one artist was employed in multiple projects (which would make the figure too high).

Grantees said that 325 (73%) of these artists live in a rural area; and that 275 (61%) had worked for the organisation before. Adjusting for the two organisations that seem to have given figures for participants, changes these figures to 54% and 42%.

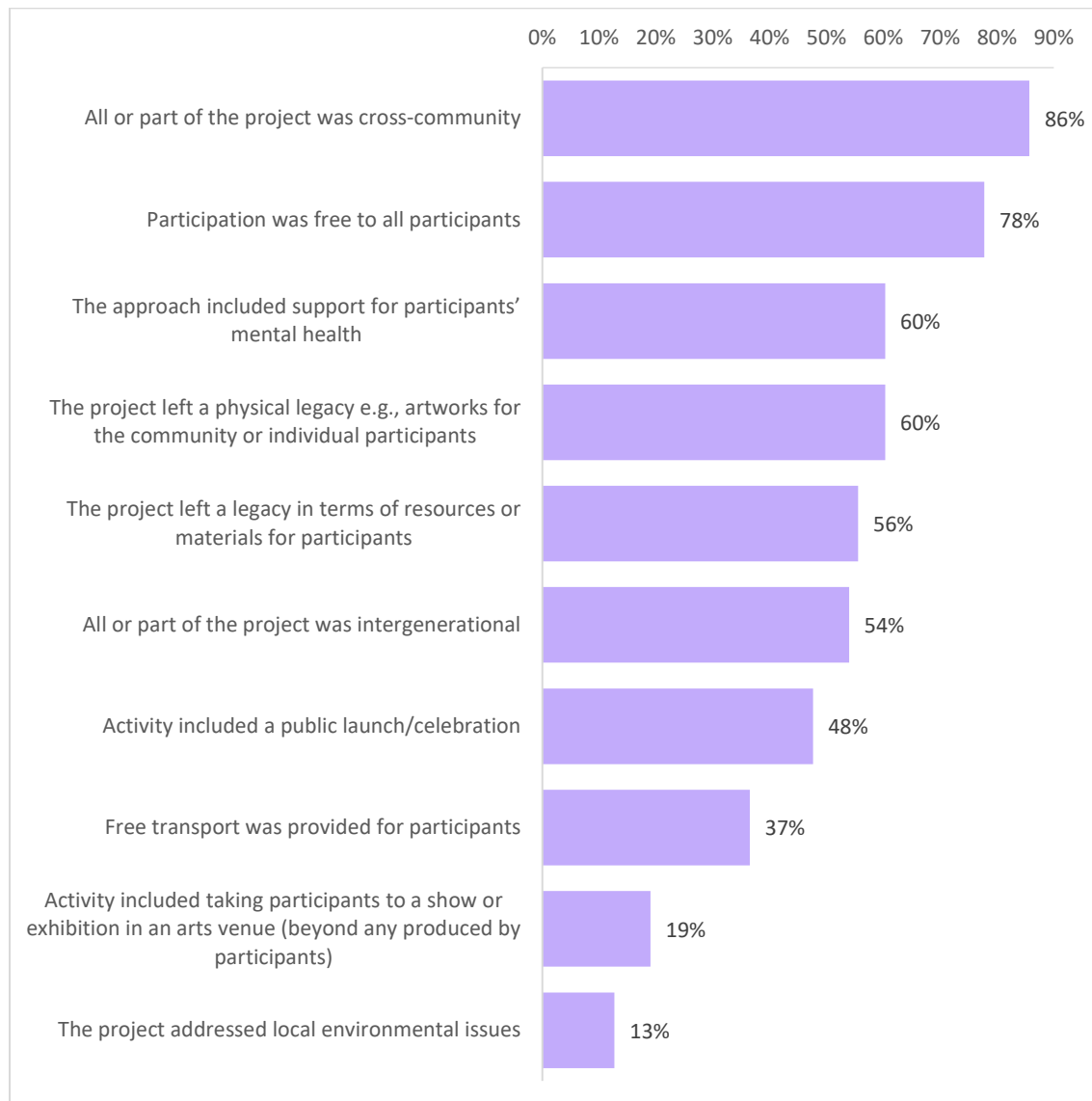
4.6 Themes

In the End of Project Report, I created a question to ask specifically about indicators to explore the way the process of delivering REAP projects contributed to local and national objectives. Answers show benefits in terms of:

- **Community cohesion.** 86% of grantees said that all or part of the project was cross-community. 54% grantees said that all or part of the project was intergenerational. 48% grantees said the project included a public launch or celebration.
- **Access.** 78% of grantees said that the project was free to all participants. 37% of grantees said that free transport was provided to grantees.
- **Wellbeing.** 60% of grantees said that the project included support for participants' mental health.

- **Value for money.** 60% of grantees said that the project left a physical legacy such as an artwork. 56% of grantees said the project left a legacy in terms of resources or materials for participants.
- **Audience engagement.** 19% of grantees said that the activity included taking participants to a show or exhibition in an arts venue.
- **Sustainability.** 13% of grantees said the project addressed local environmental issues.

Figure 6: In order to describe the overall programme, we want to quantify some themes across projects (End of project reports)

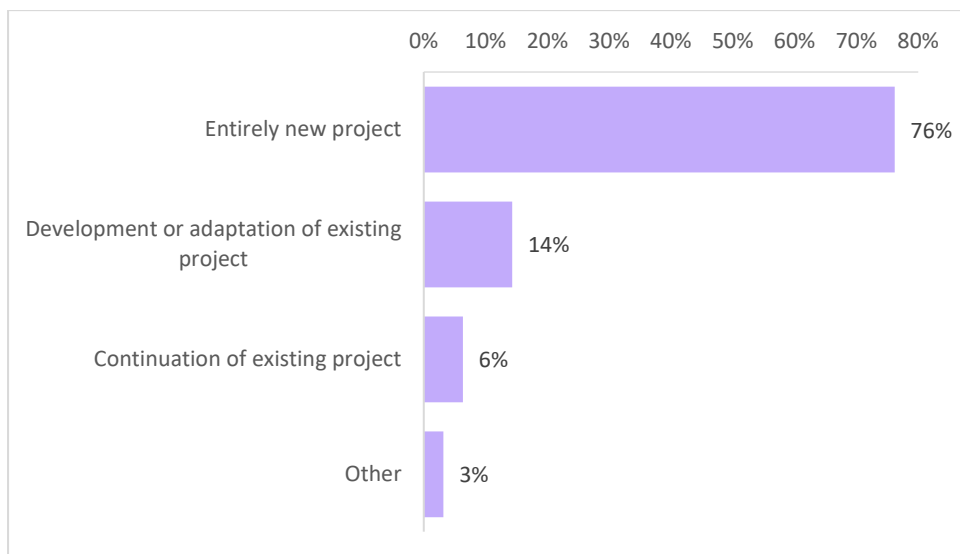


4.7 Additionality

Additionality was high.

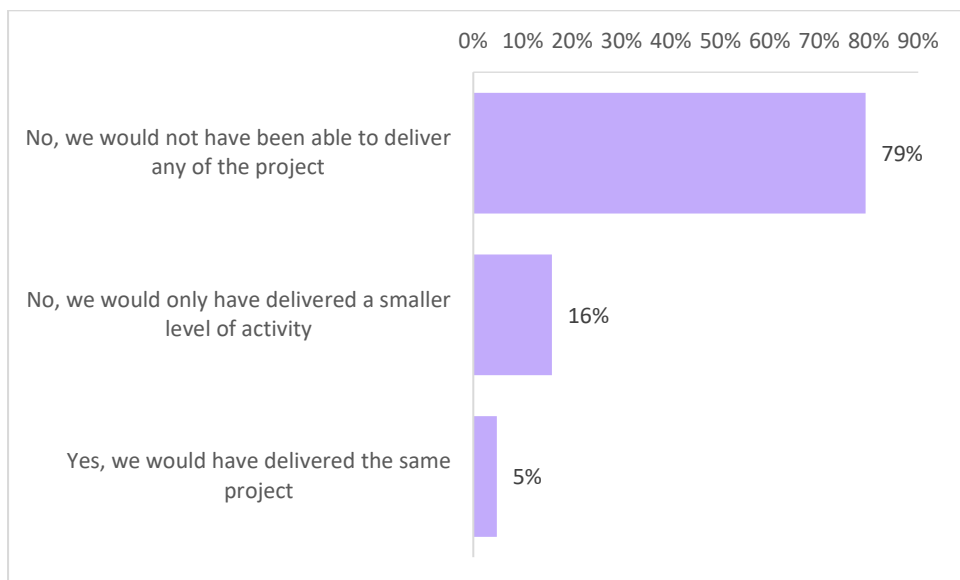
76% of grantees said their projects were new. The two “other” responses were about new strands for an existing project/festival.

Figure 7: To what extent was the REAP project new, to what extent a continuation of an existing activity project? (End of project reports)



79% of grantees said they wouldn't have been able to deliver any of the project without ACNI funding. 16% of grantees said they would have been able to deliver a smaller level of activity, with more than half of these saying they would have delivered 25% or less of the activity.

Figure 8: Would you have been able to deliver this project without ACNI/Lottery funding? (End of project reports)



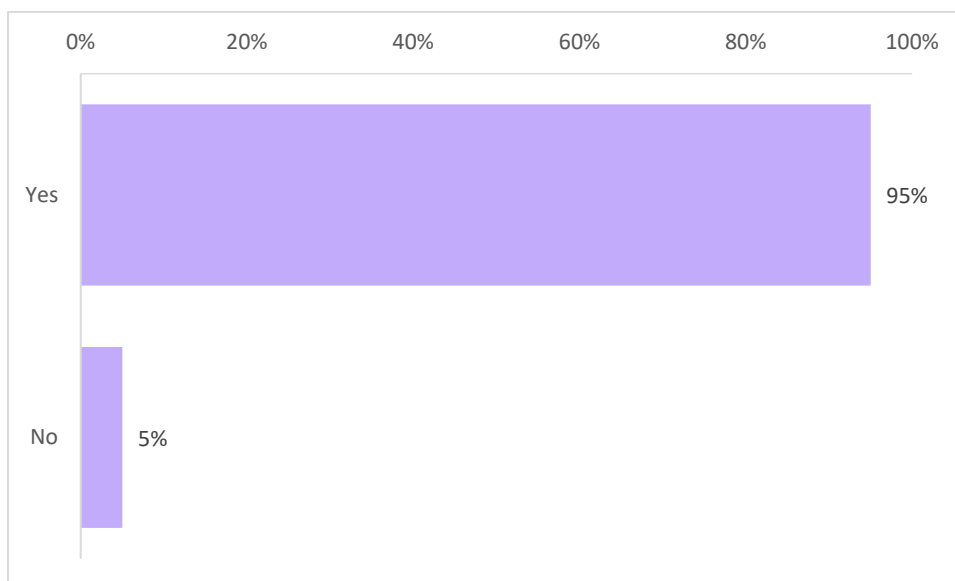
4.8 Leverage

40% projects in round 1 have a total cost £1,000+ above the application amount. This suggests that REAP is bringing in additional funding to the arts.

4.9 Organisation's objectives

One of the standard questions in ACNI's End of Project Report, (which has Social Desirability Bias), is about whether the organisation met its aims and objectives. 95% of grantees said "yes". One said "no" and explained this was because illness in the partner school meant that the intergenerational element of the project didn't happen. This grantee (correctly) didn't identify its project as intergenerational in the themes question, although this had been an intention. Another grantee said attendance was low in two of the areas and next time they would choose different partners or places.

Figure 9: Does your organisation feel that it fully met the aims and objectives of the project, including the projected budget, as stated in the application?



4.10 Programme objectives

Most applicants ticked multiple objectives in the application form.

This is positive in terms of programme reporting, but could justify deeper analysis, questioning whether:

- The listed objectives are not distinct from each other.
- The objectives are relatively easily met.
- Arts development objectives are underrepresented.

5 OUTPUTS

5.1 Projections

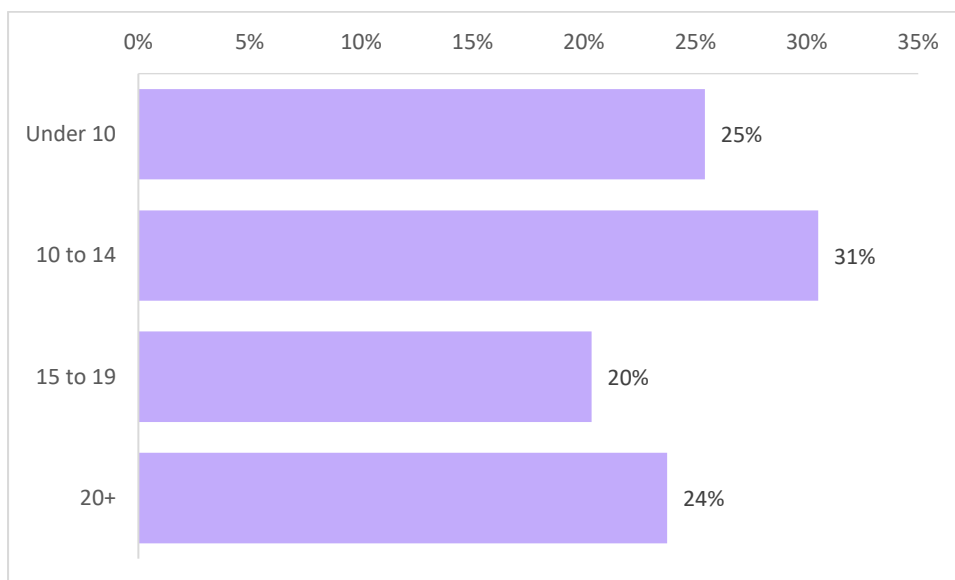
Grantees whose applications were approved projected that their projects would reach 12,089 participants and 159,134 audience members. However, this included one outlier with a projected online audience of 103,700.

5.2 Creative workshops

In the End of Project Reports, 87% of grantees said their project included artist-led workshops with local people. The total number of workshops delivered was 1,341, amounting to 3,246 contact hours. The average of the average number of participants at a workshop was 17. The total number of participations was at least 6,047: there was an error with the first version of the End of Project Report format, which only allowed numbers up to 255, which was ticked by four grantees, two of whom commented that their actual number was far higher than this.

56% of the grantees who had artist-led workshops said that 90-100% of their participants attended three or more workshops. These figures suggest that grantees tend to prioritise depth of participation over breadth, with many having extended engagement with a relatively small number of people. This is presumably at least in part because of the lower population density in rural areas but it is still good practice in terms of impact maximisation.

Figure 10: Average number of participants at a workshop (End of project reports)



5.3 Shows/concerts

44% of grantees said their project included a show or concert, adding up to 204 concerts/performances with a total audience of 3,545.

5.4 Exhibitions

35% of grantees said their project included an exhibition, with an estimated audience of 2,558.

6 OUTCOMES

6.1 Information

Information for this chapter comes from reflecting on the End of Project Reports. I take a Scientific Realist approach to analysis, which deconstructs text to draw out details of outcomes (including their meaning and importance), mechanisms (as a way of exploring causality) and elements (how aspects of process are associated with outcomes). I have anonymised quotes because I am evaluating the programme, not comparing individual projects within it in a competitive sense.

6.2 Reducing isolation

All grantees said their project reduced isolation or promoted social inclusion. Many grantees emphasised that reducing isolation is the main objective for their group and that they were formed in reaction to rural problems such as gaps in services and lack of transport.

The evidence mentioned in the reports referred to:

- Level of attendance (quantified above) and a feeling of closeness in the group.

“The project inevitably brought people together, to share experiences, have fun, learn new skills and develop networks and connections amongst their peers.”

“As well as the funded workshops, the young musicians met for unsupervised rehearsals on no less than 20 occasions.”

“We had total audience numbers of 684 over the project so the impact in terms of reducing isolation is quite significant in proportion to our rural population.”

“By offering a variety of activities and events over a four month period, participants always knew that an opportunity to socialise was never too far away. In many cases, this project provided the sole social activities for some participants. Without the grant, we wouldn’t have been able to provide this. Participants have developed positive relationships and plans are in place to continue socialising after the project.”

- Interaction.

“The school workshops enabled the participants to not only develop their music and drama skills, but also their teamwork through singing as a group.”

“Each concert included an artist Q&A after the concert to promote social interaction with the group. Many audience members remarked on how they met new people and wouldn’t usually be able to experience classical music.”

- Social element to activities.

“Our project tackled isolation and loneliness by providing opportunities for participants to come to the Hub to engage in community arts activities. We provided opportunities for social interaction, such as taking a break during the workshops for tea and a chat. This gave participants the chance to meet new people in a safe and relaxed environment. One lady told us that she used to go to the shops and not speak to anyone, but since attending the arts workshops at the Hub all of that has changed. She said it takes her twice as long to go to the shops as she is stopping so often to chat to neighbours and new friends.”

“Each group was made up of local residents. They all got to know each other over a cup of tea, refreshments and shared engagement in the art project. The artist paced and planned the sessions to be varied, giving everyone a chance to find their favourite art and craft form and also providing a platform to reflect on everyone's work and share tips and successes. We added a celebration event at the end of the second course giving all participants a chance to meet each other and see what each other had created. Beyond this we also hosted two tea dances which were attended by folks from greater distances. Project participants set up an exhibition of their work for these dances alongside the artist and they stayed to help out with the tea dance interval.”

“Many members live alone and feedback indicates that they would be uncomfortable going to the theatre alone and that they appreciate the social aspect of going as a group.”

- Targeting of participants with low levels of social contact before the project.

“The project brought together women who had experienced significant isolation due to the affects from domestic abuse during COVID and the lockdowns. The women had experienced heightened fear, disconnection and inability to access services and support.”

“It was evident through consultations before the project commenced that there was a gap in services for children with learning disabilities who reside in rural areas, and there was a lack of after schools' activities for them to become involved in.”

“The participants who resided at the nursing home suffer issues of isolation due to being in a rural care home and having complex needs. Some were unable to leave their rooms, and many would suffer from communication problems. Many participants would have very few daily visitors, due to a lack of friends and family nearby and other factors.”

“Working with a mental health charity brought the project to people suffering from mental health issues - some of the most socially excluded within society.”

“The project enabled our participants to come together on a regular basis and maintain social contact with one another, helping to sustain and build new friendships. All of our participants live in rural areas, with over half of the participants living alone.”

“This project allowed us to bring four groups of rural seniors together for storytelling, music and reminiscence sessions. Many of these individuals had been isolating due to COVID and the sessions we provided were often the first opportunity they had to socialise once again.”

“Those people in residential homes, the hospice and the hospital, in particular, were able to be socially included at a time when they couldn’t actively seek social inclusion. The social aspect went to them and included them in Christmas celebrations.”

- Intercommunity connections (and see heading below).

“This project helped to reduce isolation as it brought groups together from different communities, some whom had never met before. The project promoted social inclusion as everyone was given a chance to share their favourite songs and their associated memories.”

“Music is one of the most uniting forces that there is and our shows brought people together from across the spectrum of our rural community, particularly on a cross community basis.”

- Referral.

“We were able to provide signposting information, resources and to link into other services and local groups.”

“Through this project, we encouraged more people to join our organisation, and membership increased by 83 over the course of the project, a considerable proportion of our current total of 280 for the area.”

“We were able to signpost participants to other services including luncheon clubs, friendship clubs and local seniors’ groups. Members now call into our office for a cup of tea, information, support or for a cup of tea and friendly chat.”

- Evaluation data.

“100% of participants strongly agreed that they had an enjoyable social experience that wouldn’t usually have. 83% of school pupils who took part in the intergenerational element said that they had an enjoyable social experience that they wouldn’t usually get to take part in. 45% of participants said that they had not taken part in an arts project.”

“85.7% of our survey responses between the two projects said that the project greatly increased opportunity for social interaction.”

“100% of participants mentioned the time spent with like-minded people as a key benefit.”

“87% of the choir members felt the experience made them more connected to others in the Society, and 71% agreed that it made them feel more connected to their community. Participants specifically said that “it really felt like a team project,” and they enjoyed “being part of a bigger picture.””

“Evidence from the post project evaluations completed by the 48 participants of both the adult and inter-generational workshops indicated a clear ‘yes’ when asked if the project had successfully helped reduce isolation and promoted social inclusion: on a scoring system of 1 = Low and 5 = High, 8% scored this question with a 4, and 92% scored with a 5.”

- Positive feedback from participants.

"I attended the event with three of my children and they absolutely loved it. The session with the two ladies was a lovely way to get the children involved and was pitched at the right level for all involved. My children loved the stories/game and it was especially great for two of my children who are very shy, to get involved in a fun and enjoyable way. The flower making was a great way for the children to be creative and be proud to show what they had made. As we were leaving to go home my son said to me that he hadn't been looking forward to going to the event (he is shy and doesn't always like new things) however, he stated that he was really glad we had gone and he really enjoyed the whole morning. Thank you for a lovely morning and we still have our flower arrangements on the kitchen table." Parent

"This gave me something to get up for on a Monday morning. Mondays are the worst, the thought of a long and lonely week ahead. Knowing I had this to come to really helped me."

"I feel like a different person, it helped me all week to cope."

- Positive feedback from partners.

"The Activities Co-Ordinator from the care home is very keen for the connection to continue having observed the positive impact of our visits."

"It was important that our students heard about how exciting music is and how exciting singing is. It was just too good an opportunity to miss, you're giving them opportunities to develop their singing strategies, their drama strategies and just working as a team. It's lovely to be able to do it after Covid." Primary school Vice Principal

6.3 Delivering higher quality artistic work

92% grantees said the grant allow their organisation to deliver higher quality artistic work than they had delivered previously. The evidence given was:

- Lack of previous experience of working with a professional artist (in part because of the need to keep the cost of attendance free/affordable).

"We have never taken a professional arts-based approach to our work before, but through this funding, it meant we were able to buy professional artists' expertise and can fully appreciate the value, importance and impact on our work with the families and children."

"This was our first commission and it excelled expectations in terms of artistic merit and collaboration."

"Previously without funding we have not been able to deliver any quality artistic work. This grant allowed us to engage with the best musicians available to us in the area and the standard of output was of the highest calibre."

“The grant allowed us to deliver high quality, world-class artistic work. Many of the young people who participated in the project had never experienced live theatre before.”

“Thanks to the programme we were able to work with professional artists to deliver top quality arts programmes to the community at accessible costs. Without funding support, we cannot commit to the delivery of such high quality and consistent programming which has proved beneficial to the local community for people of all ages.”

“With the support of ACNI's funding, we've enhanced the quality of our artistic work by engaging professional performers and artists. While many of our usual art activities rely on the valuable contributions of dedicated volunteers, for whom we are immensely grateful, this funding has provided our volunteers with opportunities to participate in activities themselves. It has also enabled them to acquire transferable craft skills that can be applied to other programmes.”

“The grant enabled us to engage professional tutors who taught the novice participants about the basics of painting materials and techniques. As a result, they produced very high-quality work, well beyond their expectations. All the participants have continued to paint outside the classes given.”

- Creation of a new model or approach.

“This process championed the art of devising and the young people taking ownership over their own artistic expression through writing, acting, video, theatre making, dance and movement. This was a unique experience for the group and for us as an organisation. The results were quite astounding. The programme revealed poets, singers, dancers, writers and theatre makers that we were unaware of prior to this. By allowing the young people the opportunity to craft something new and exciting, we feel there was a newfound energy of richness discovered within our youth theatre and we feel incredibly proud of the growth, professionalism and talent they displayed. The work is of a higher quality than we have seen of this age group before.”

See Conductology case study in the next chapter.

- Wider range of artforms.

“Our tutor taught us water colour painting, wax resist and how to assemble a wreath using our paintwork. We also learnt a lot from her booklets.”

“We had never before had the opportunity to provide a programme of art work like this where painting and use of colour were the main focus. The work with clay and patchwork were also a new experience, working with clay was a completely new adventure as none of us had ever done this before. The members and tutor were all extremely proud of their finished pieces.”

“Some participants had previous experience of craft activities but for most the workshops introduced new crafts that they had not experienced before such as Dorset button making and braid making.”

“Without the grant, the stunning internal mural that we now have would not have been possible. The more common alternative of a board listing names would have been a poor substitute and would not have been received with such universally high acclaim. The mural is also a high quality artistic showcase of the local artist’s creativity and talent.”

“The fund allowed us to work with three musicians on each session- Therefore we were able to offer participants a mixture of different instruments at sessions, giving a more varied palette for musicians to play with.”

- Access to higher quality arts materials or equipment.

“Printed books supported engagement both during workshops and at home and hopefully after completion of the sessions. These books contain detailed instructions and also images to inspire participants to continue practicing the skills learnt.”

“Firstly, the centre now has a set of materials that participants are familiar with. Secondly each participant was given their own kit. Each kit included tools, materials and printed resources. The booklets and printed sheets have been well received and appreciated and has been a great help in raising expectations and aiding those to continue at home beyond the workshops to do so with confidence. Thirdly the artist spent time making example pieces for each and every workshop with the given materials. This combined with her step-by-step demonstrations really helped inspire participants to go for it – participants said that the work was of a higher standard than they expected.”

“Such is the quality of the arts venue that we have created through this grant and a previous Small Grant from ACNI and the National Lottery, that internationally acclaimed, multi-instrumentalist Dirk Powell said of the venue 'it sounds like a recording studio'.”

- High quality of work created.

“The funding enabled a sustained focused effort by the artists to draw out participants’ negative emotions felt during the pandemic and enable them to express these creatively through purposeful activity. Participants were also able to weave a renewed sense of hope into their creative work thereby nurturing their enhanced wellbeing through group work activities. The artistic quality was, as a result, of a higher level.”

“This was our first time to do a wall mural. The quality of this artistic work is amazing and has received extremely positive feedback from all. We have had a request to do another mural in the town.”

- Time for development.

“The young people in the music development programme are also better performers as a result of the workshops. The more opportunities they get to hone and develop their skills will ultimately result in higher quality performances from them.”

“Top class musical facilitation by the musical producer and musicians. The funding allowed for substantial tuition and performance classes.”

“Half of the project funding enabled us to run a continuous six-month programme of art classes led by a professional artist during which time participants were able to benefit from the continuity of weekly classes and also from the very high level of artistic input, guidance and supervision for our professional artist tutor. This was evidenced by 92% of our adult and intergenerational workshop project participants reporting that the classes helped develop their artistic skills (13% scored this question with a 4 and 79% scored it with a 5).”

“The funding allowed for a longer project than our usual 6-8 weeks. Within 12 weeks we were able to get deeper into material - develop trust with participants - in turn deepening relationships providing grounds for a richer experience for all.”

“100% of project participants rated the level of instruction, guidance and support received highly with 17% scoring with a 4 and 83% scoring with a 5 (1 = Low and 5 = High).”

- Increased scale and range of presentation.

“The grant covered about one-third of the artist fees for the Festival (eight of the 41 musicians), and two-thirds of artist accommodation costs. It enabled us to deliver a Festival twice the size of the previous year, albeit still on a smaller scale than pre-pandemic years. Each Festival has a unique combination of musicians and aims to introduce something new to the audience: this was to first to feature a large amateur pipes-and-percussion band from Portugal. It also featured the piper Cillian Vallely and a renowned classical ensemble, the Fidelio Trio, playing a suite of newly commissioned music inspired by the paintings of Armagh artist J.B. Vallely; and a new collaboration, 'inB', featuring two Scottish and two Irish pipers all playing in the unusual key of B.”

“To date we have had 4,400 views on YouTube, 898 downloads on Podbean and 5,530 views of the podcast promotional clips on social media. Feedback has informed us that the YouTube views are very often families watching together. Children putting them on 'the TV' for their elderly parents who are watching with grandchildren for example.”

- Legacy for the future.

“Building the skills of young performers through school opera workshops means that the artistic quality of community choirs will increase in the future, as there will be a more developed foundation of artistic ability in local rural communities.”

6.4 Developing the skills of participants or audience members

97% of grantees said their project developed the skills of participants or audience members. The examples given were:

- Creative/artistic skills e.g., storytelling, devising, writing, dance, singing, acting, floral arrangements, watercolour including wash and was resist, landscape painting, silk painting,

willow weaving, uilleann piping, pottery, decoupage, watercolour wax resist, filmmaking software, photography composition and lighting, graphic design, music production, weaving, puppeteering, silversmithing, poetry etc.

- Environmental skills e.g., knowing about trees and the environment and biodiversity.
- Wellbeing skills e.g., noticing things while walking - being mindful, breathwork, awareness of posture, writing techniques.
- Personal skills e.g., confidence trying something new, confidence performing, cognitive skills (including for the project that worked with people with brain injuries), communication skills.

“Many of the participants reported that they felt they had to move out of their comfort zone and were glad that they did. Some of the participants have continued practising their new skills at home.”

“Participants who had for the most part absolutely no artistic experience whatever have been able to plan and organise drawing space, mix and experiment with colours and shades, manipulate clay to create a clay plaque---which they also decorated. All this required improving abilities to comprehend and follow instructions and the patchwork especially supported dexterity and agility of hands and fingers.”

“Competitors performed quality material drawn from the fields of humour, music, song, dance, mime and the spoken word (storytelling, poetry, prose readings, short sketches but excluding plays). The members are responsible for all aspects of the performance, from script writing, choreography, set design, sound and lighting pathways, music, costume, hair and make-up.”

Comment from the artist: "Each project involved incremental tasters that built up confidence. I could feel the nervousness at the start but bit by bit the confidence definitely grew and chats started happening about placement, composition, colour combinations etc - some really fine tuning - which has been great to witness. Feedback is that they are not ready to carry on without an artist but are very keen to engage with some more artist led sessions."

“Learning new skills uses other areas of the brain, which helps with brain injuries.”

“Programme participants were introduced to a range of new skills from ceramics to photography and metalwork. In many cases, it was a first time experience, with brand new tools and techniques including throwing on a pottery wheel, using cameras in manual mode and using metalworking tools. In addition to learning skills within the projects we provide a safe place for members of the community to continue to develop their social skills and confidence beyond the project.”

“One participant was so inspired by a writing masterclass that he began his own poetry collection and is writing on a daily basis and sharing with a newfound following on social media.”

“Participants learned how to recall stories, memories, write creatively, tell their story effectively and how to act. They learned how to recall their stories, talk to the camera, express their thoughts etc. These were skills participants never had the opportunity to develop before. Many stated that they always had an interest in the arts, but given their history and the impact of the conflict,

opportunities to participate in the arts never materialized. As a result of this proposal many have developed a taste for acting and creative writing.”

“According to project feedback, on average, those who took part in the project felt their confidence/skills specifically in their artistic ability rose by 40% - with no one saying they felt the project had a negative development on their skills/ confidence development.”

6.5 Increasing community connections

92% of grantees said that the project increased community connections, with one saying the community was already well connected. This outcome overlaps with the one above on reducing isolation, so I only report additional elements:

- Awareness of local services.

“66% of attendees reported feeling better connected and more aware of locally available services after attending the programme.”

- Time with the family or care giver.

“Particularly in the case of the care home, the project improved relationships with staff offering a place for them to engage in fun social activity together, where they are singing alongside each other, changing the dynamic of the relationship which is often a more medical/ caring relationships.”

“Having returned to work full time recently, I felt I wasn’t getting the same opportunities to spend quality time with my children, the retreat was the perfect remedy to that. It allowed us to chat and spend time together in a calm and engaging environment, making memories and reconnecting”.

Parent/participant

- Ongoing engagement with the grantees as a volunteer.
- Cross community engagement (also measured above as a theme).

“We were able to connect participants from different sides of our community including both unionist and nationalist backgrounds. A particularly moving and important part of the process was exploring the diversity of these communities but also their undeniable links. One of the sessions included a Drum performance from a local unionist participant who plays in a marching band. Within the same session we had a participant from a nationalist community playing the bodhran. The two began to play together, discussed the similarities and shared that they felt unified through art. The entire group contributed to this discussion and expressed their excitement about understanding each other more deeply. The final performance was delivered to teachers, councillors, MLAs, council staff and officials, parents and guardians and the Arts Council.”

“The choice of a Presbyterian church and the (Church of Ireland-affiliated) Robinson Library as concert venues challenges the perception of traditional music as the ‘property’ of one section of the community. It is likely to have provided opportunities for connection and conversation across perceived barriers.”

“Cross-community work is essential to creating a peaceful, fair and inclusive community free of discrimination, and this project enhanced the goals of the choir as a cross-community organisation.”

“The participants in the four groups came from a cross section of the community and bringing them together in a devised production offered them the opportunity to get to know each other in a more meaningful way.”

“The project has developed a strong bond between all families involved that are parent/carers of a children with a learning disability.”

- Contact with other community members during the project.

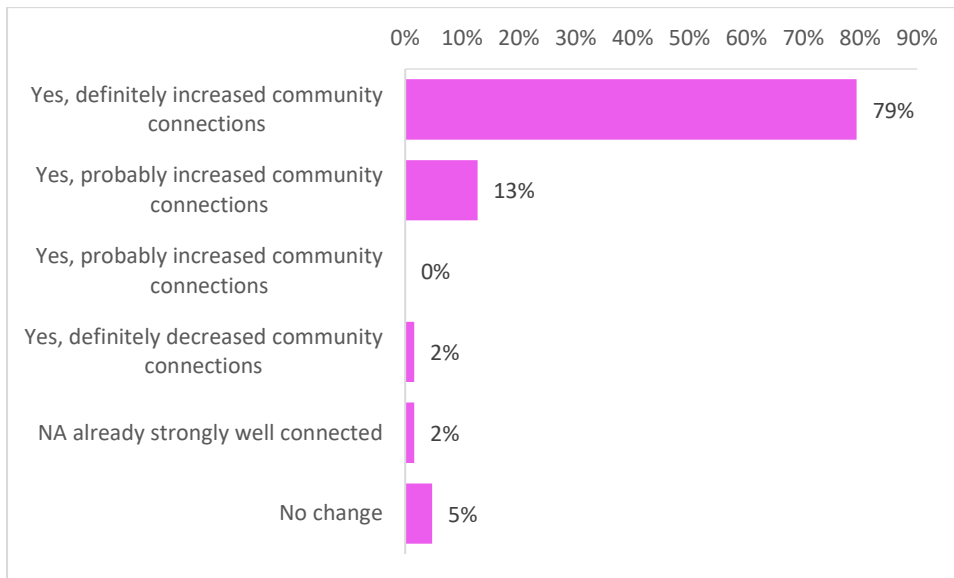
“The project got members thinking outside the box and working with their local communities in building their sets, asking for advice and assistance with the musical aspect also.”

“Participants were able to share moments of joy and laughter with a small audience of fifty people per performance. Audience members were actively encouraged to participate and support fellow audience members who volunteered to support the artists on stage. Fifty people from different cultural and religious backgrounds also danced freely in a circus tent in the snow as part of the finale of the performance. This image of complete strangers of all ages having a lot of festive fun provided a very welcome relief from the loneliness and social isolation experienced through the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.”

“The celebration day which concludes our project ensures that the different age groups and mediums will be celebrated as a whole, encouraging the sharing and participation of mixed ages, abilities and mediums.”

“In our professional evaluation 98% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had reconnected with other people during the project. In addition, 93% of respondents to the final questionnaire showed that all participants had got to know others in their group better. Qualitative feedback was that the group felt a sense of identity and considered themselves 'a wee community' as a result of participating.”

Figure 11: Did the project result in participants developing stronger bonds with other members of the community? (End of project reports)



6.6 Enhancing the wellbeing of participants or audience members

All grantees said their project enhanced the wellbeing of participants or audience members. Evidence was:

- Subjective data e.g., enjoyment, anticipation, sense of achievement.

“It was evident throughout the sessions that there was a huge sense of enjoyment and interaction between participants. Members were keen to state how much they looked forward to each session and an important element was the refreshment slot which allowed time for chat and social interaction.”

“The joy of seeing their finished pieces and the sense of achievement at mastering hitherto non-existent skills boosted morale and self esteem.”

“The success of this project is obvious when you enter the room during the classes. There is a lovely sense of friendship & enjoyment of what they are doing. Laughter is a big part of the class. During the tea break it is lovely to see everyone moving about the room admiring each other’s work and sharing ideas. Many have said how much they enjoy the class & being part of our art family.”

"You brought so much joy and happiness to every one of the residents and staff and we are all so grateful for your time and the effort you put into each performance. It's a delight to see the joy on the resident's faces when you come into the home." Care home activity co-ordinator

“One of the participants on our printing programme developed a deep love for the process of Lino cutting. Her skillset has grown significantly and the work she is producing now is off an extremely

high standard. The lady in question is terminally ill and is so grateful to have found something she can do as a mindful and still activity. She explained how the act of carving the Lino block provided her with much-needed focus and escape, which in turn improved her mental health.”

- Evaluation data.

“95% of attendees reported that attending the programme helped to improve their mental health and wellbeing. 4% reported that it helped their mental health and wellbeing, but that it was an ongoing issue for them. 1% reported that their mental health remains a big challenge despite the programme.

“When asked how the programme had supported their wellbeing, responses varied widely but included: walking and being out in the woods, wellbeing ideas, having fun and laughing, noticing things while walking- being mindful, being happy by doing things together, being with your family, arts and crafts and storytelling.”

“Before the workshops, 54% of students were happy. After the workshops, this metric increased to 76% of students.”

“In their written feedback 31 of our 49 respondents spontaneously mentioned how the project enhanced their well-being. None of the written responses expressed any kind of negativity.”

“The Project Coordinator has utilised the Edinburgh Warwick scale pre and post project which has shown an overall improvement.”

“Participants attending our adults and inter-generational workshops were asked in the post project evaluation to rate whether attending improved their overall sense of wellbeing. 96% responded that it had with 17% scoring this question with a 4 and 79% scoring with the highest rating of 5. Comments from participants used words like relaxing, calming, fun and therapeutic.”

“90.5 % of our survey responses across the two projects stated that the project had a positive effect on their health and wellbeing.”

“Over 80% of members indicated in the evaluation that after the project they felt more confident, less isolated, have improved mental health and are happier more content with their lives.”

“Mental health and wellbeing improved in 50% of participants after taking part in the project. After taking part in the project 34% of participants felt more optimistic about the future.”

- Health advice.

“We offered all of our participants the opportunity to take part in mini-health checks in January 2023. 90% of participants availed of the offer and as a result many improved their diet and made an effort to be more physically active. These changes helped them improve their mental well-being. One of our facilitators incorporated short meditation sessions into her workshops and posted affirmations around the room for participants to read during the session.”

“Our project partners created three videos for us: top tips on stress, sleep and relationships which were made available on our virtual channel. Our team also signposted audiences to these films.”

- Other research.

“There is a vast body of research evidence that music contributes positively to wellbeing. It releases endorphins and dopamine, is a source of pleasure and contentment, can add energy and vitality, reduce anxiety and depression, improve memory, and above all, when live it provides opportunities to socialise and interact with others. We are very confident that the festival, featuring 41 musicians of great skill and experience in 30 separate events, would have delivered these positive outcomes to most if not all those attending.”

- Relevance.

“The new commission was directly inspired by the area and with the people, which gave it a hugely emotional impact. The premiere performance resulted in a standing ovation and two encores, with a huge number of people feeding back on how special the experience had been and suggestions for how they would like to see the piece be shared and developed.”

- Respite for carers.

“Classes not only benefit the brain injury survivor but, when the brain injury survivor is content and happy to attend an activity we put on, the impact also relates to the carer who is receiving that respite for the duration of the class.”

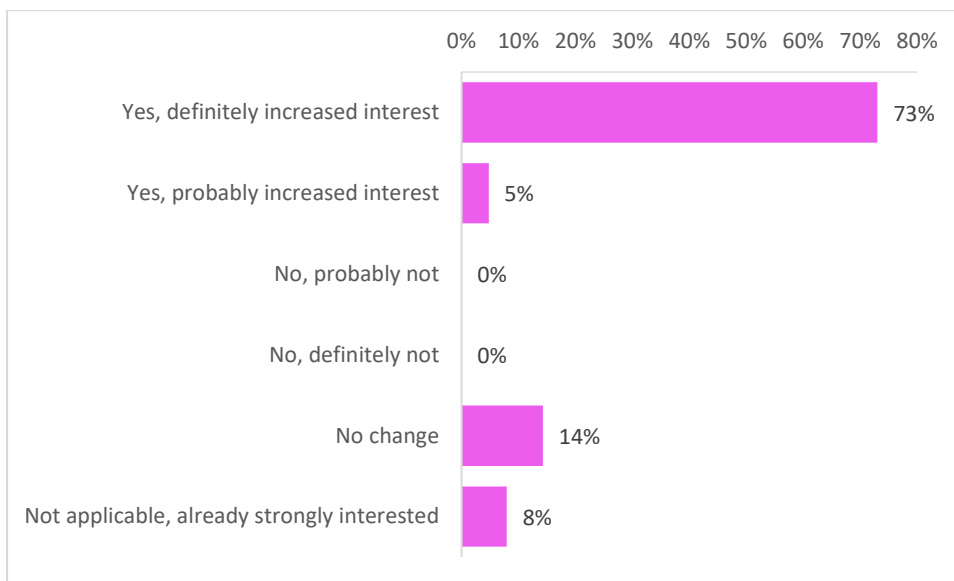
- External recognition.

“The wellbeing impact of this project’s work was recognised by the BBC, who sent a reporter to attend one of the workshops.”

6.7 Organisational impact

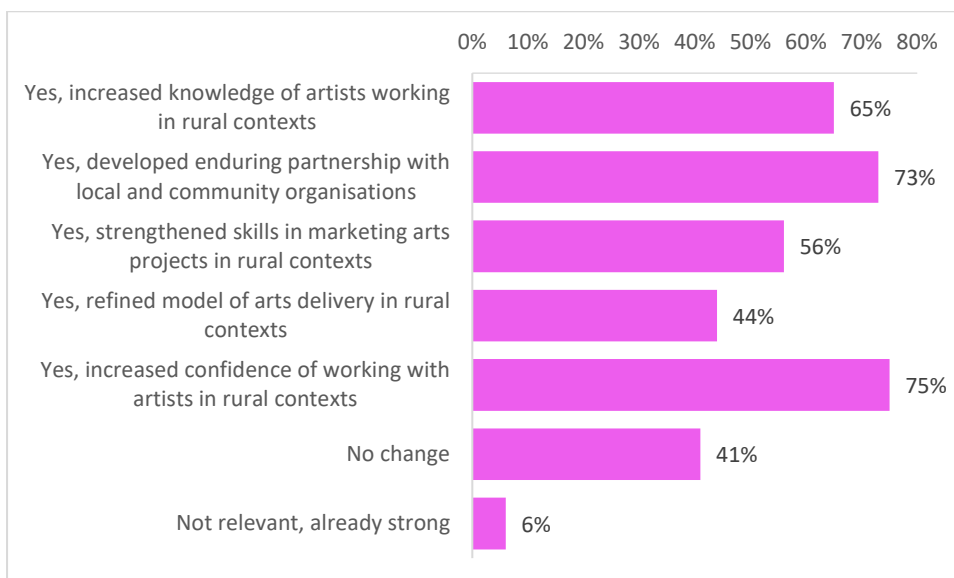
78% of grantees said the project increased their organisation’s interest in delivering arts projects in rural areas.

Figure 12: Did the project affect your/your organisation's interest in delivering arts projects in rural areas? (End of project reports)



59% of grantees said the project increased their/their organisation's capacity to deliver arts projects in rural areas, although when prompted, some of the others also identified impacts. The main effects were in increasing confidence, developing partnerships and increasing knowledge of artists working in rural contexts.

Figure 13: Did the project affect your/your organisation's capacity to deliver arts projects in rural areas? (End of project reports)



"We had never delivered arts-based programmes, but having done so, we would certainly be motivated to do so again. It brought an entirely new dimension to our workshops which everyone enjoyed and benefitted from immensely."

“The project has given our organisation confidence that we can achieve excellent artistic and community outcomes through innovative partnerships.”

“This was the first time our organisation has delivered an arts project and we have learned a great deal in the process. With support and guidance from our artist and art tutor, we have learned how to develop an arts project involving community input through arts class delivery and the formation of a project committee with representatives from various stakeholders, partners and age groups. We also learned how to mount and run an art exhibition which we had not done before. We plan to make this an annual event in future, as long as we are able to continue providing art classes for all age groups. With our new knowledge and skills, we will be able to build on what we have learned from this project to help grow interest in the arts locally and increase access to artistic development opportunities for local people in the form of classes, art exhibitions and other visual arts projects.”

“We have greater understanding of the costs involved to run a visual arts programme. We are familiar with companies that supply art good quality art materials. Our advertising has brought folk from neighbouring villages and towns to our community facility on a weekly basis. We have developed a strong working relationship with the artist. She has been able to give folk direction on exhibitions to visit and the work of other local artists. We feel confident in working with her again and with other artists in the future. The storage and materials we bought provide an excellent foundation for delivering future art projects. This project uncovered hidden creativity in our community; each week folk were surprised by the work of each other and were full of praise for what they had produced.”

“We have a long history of delivering events locally, but learned about the pitfalls of working in a rural setting: the impact the weather can have, the need to provide transport if necessary; also the need to liaise with local community and voluntary groups; the dynamics of telling a story where everyone knows everyone; the most effective method of marketing arts events, namely word of mouth.

"I'm more and more impressed by Chandler's House as a venue with every visit. In the short space of time since its opening, it has quickly developed into a vibrant, well-run and well-supported performance space. The atmosphere is always good, the performance sound is spot on, and more importantly it has already developed its own faithful following and a strong reputation. At a time when working musicians are still reeling from the after effects of Covid and the depletion of the touring circuit, places like this are vital - and hugely appreciated." Testimony from an artist about organisational development

“We have an appetite to deliver in our local area, where as beforehand we shared information on events happening in other areas and then transport and time commitments prevented people from attending.”

7 LEARNING

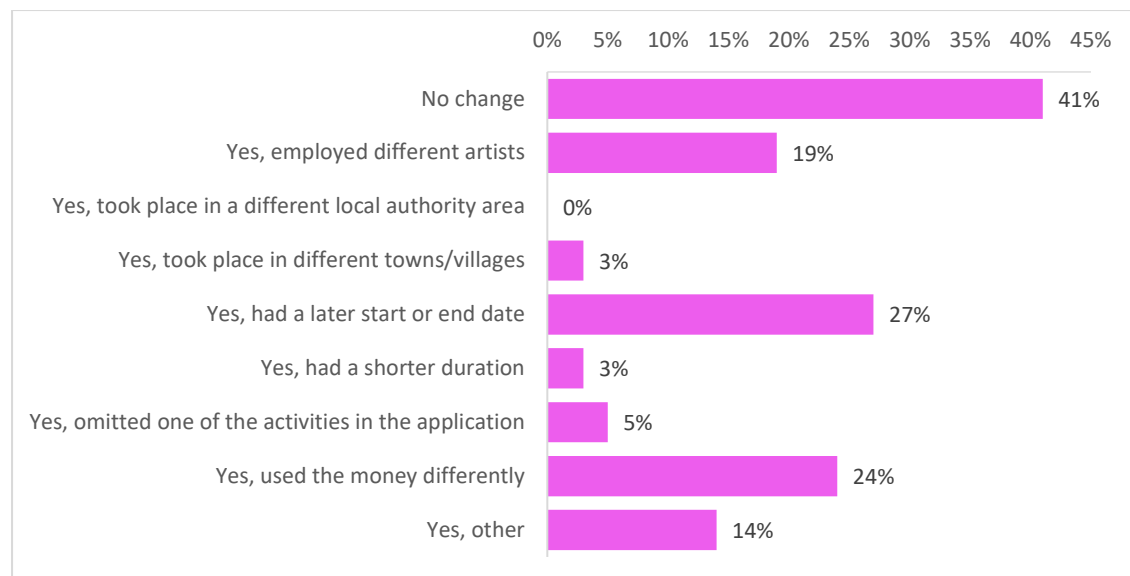
7.1 Introduction

71% grantees said they evaluated their projects.

7.2 The grant process

59% of grantees said they developed their project from the description in the application and all said they discussed this with an ACNI officer, in a couple of cases after the event (e.g., because the change was positive rather than negative). That 59% of grantees said they changed their application is quite high which could be because: the grantees are inexperienced or the projects new, costs exceeded expectations perhaps because of inflation, or because I changed the wording of the question from a more formal/punitive tone and gave prompts (which stimulate memory).

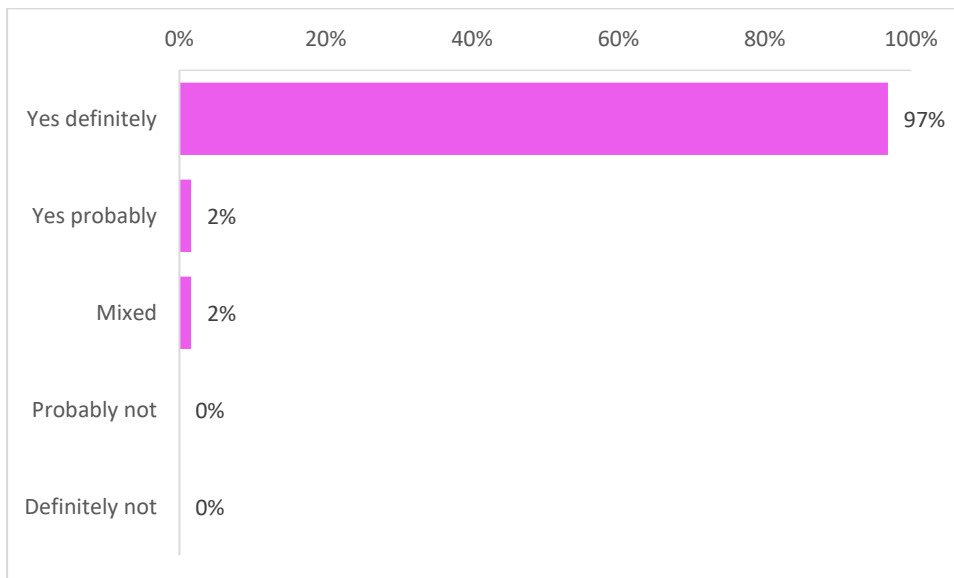
Figure 14: Did you change your project from the description in your application? (End of project reports)



7.3 REAP programme

98% of grantees said the REAP programme was a good fit with the project they wanted to deliver.

Figure 15: Was the REAP programme a good fit with the project you wanted to deliver? (End of project reports)



Positive comments were about:

- The importance of the programme in terms of need (including lack of other funding) and impact.

“This is an excellent programme that has made a big difference in terms of reducing rural isolation, creating a stronger sense of community and being a catalyst for change in terms of health & well-being for so many of our participants.”

“It was a tremendous help to us in a year in which we faced a large shortfall in non-festival income; in other years we have dipped deep into our limited reserves to cover substantial deficits on the festival side of our balance sheet, but in 2022 we were able to keep that subsidy down below £700.”

“The Arts Council REAP Grant was a vital funding stream in meeting the needs of rurally isolated vulnerable communities. It showed how the arts played a key role in rebuilding the resilience of our communities in a time of societal strain post pandemic and in helping to us sustain preventative services.”

“This support comes at a crucial time for the community, as we are adjusting to the end of the pandemic and also the cost-of-living crisis. This project not only enabled our Society to continue operating, but also to achieve high artistic standards and fully meet the needs of our organisation and members.”

- The relevance to grantees’ objectives.

“As a rural arts provider with intentions to improve wellbeing as well as skill at the core of all our activities the REAP programme is ideal for us.”

- The flexibility of the funding terms.

“The inclusion of rent in this grant is such a big help to rural groups like ourselves.”

“The free coached visits from schools and older persons in rural areas was a very positive part of this project, which could not have been delivered without the support of the REAP Programme. The project allowed us to help address some of the challenges of social isolation and loneliness in rural areas.”

“The programme had a degree of flexibility which was essential for our organisation and also enabled us to take some controlled risks and offer workshops which wouldn’t otherwise have been possible.”

“We found this grant scheme to be complimentary to the work that we undertake and with the support of the Arts Council NI and the assigned project officer, we have been able to not just meet out project objectives, but exceed them.”

The only negative comment was about elements or projects that were not funded:

“We were disappointed that our members creativity through chocolate making and decorating, mosaic art and cooking could not have been considered for funding.”

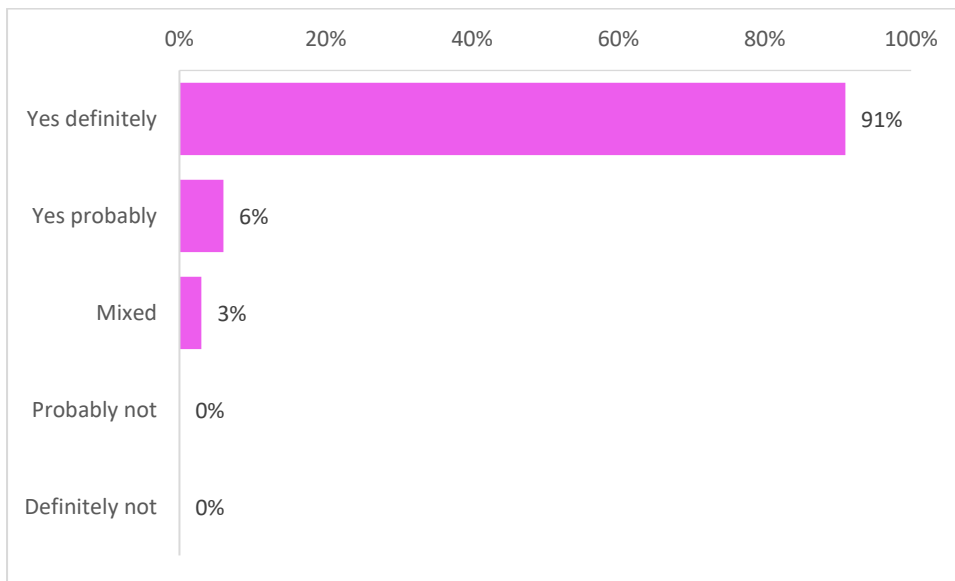
“This was a wonderful programme for us to offer to rural communities, audiences, participants and partners. It built upon the success of previous rural programmes such as ACNI Rural Needs Programme (2020), DCSDC Good Relations Programmes, and others. We were so disappointed not to continue this project in 2023/24 but look forward to the opportunity of re-applying for 2024/25.”

97% of grantees said the information on the programme was clear and easily available. The only negative comments were that a delay in issuing the End of Project Report format delayed payment and prevented an organisation from applying for round 2; and that one group were didn't know how to use the digital portal because the person who had made the application had left the group.

“Arts Council website is easy to navigate. The Arts Council staff were happy to answer queries, and did so promptly.”

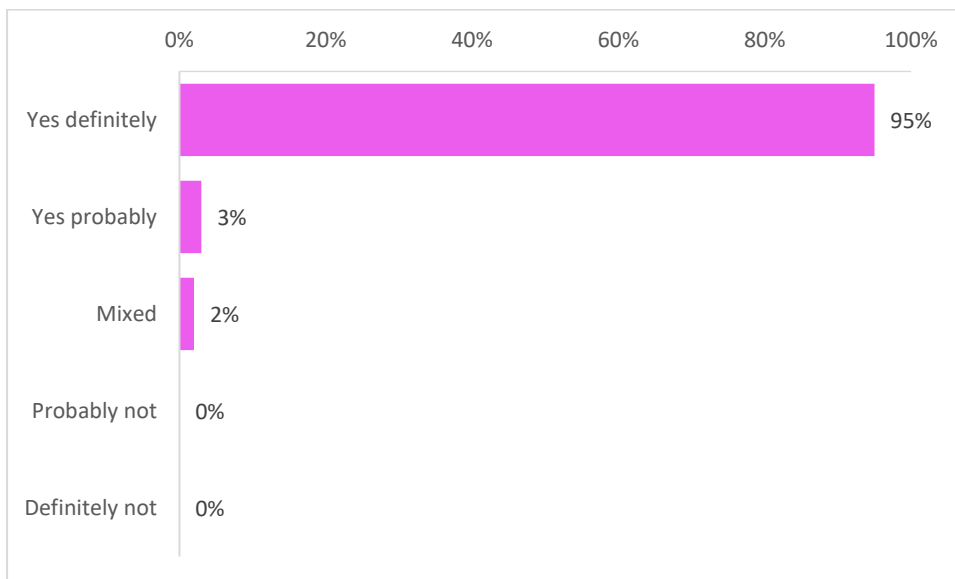
“We found it difficult with the digital portal, a member that submitted the application left the group so we were not able to access the form and until recently we have not been able to access this evaluation form so we did not know what we would be asked. Having gone through that difficult process we found that we can meet expectations and fulfil criteria. We learned from this that we should not depend on one person to take charge of the funding aspect of the project we need more team work to manage this side of the project.”

Figure 16: Was the information on the programme clear and easily available? (End of project reports)



98% of grantees said the application form was easy to understand.

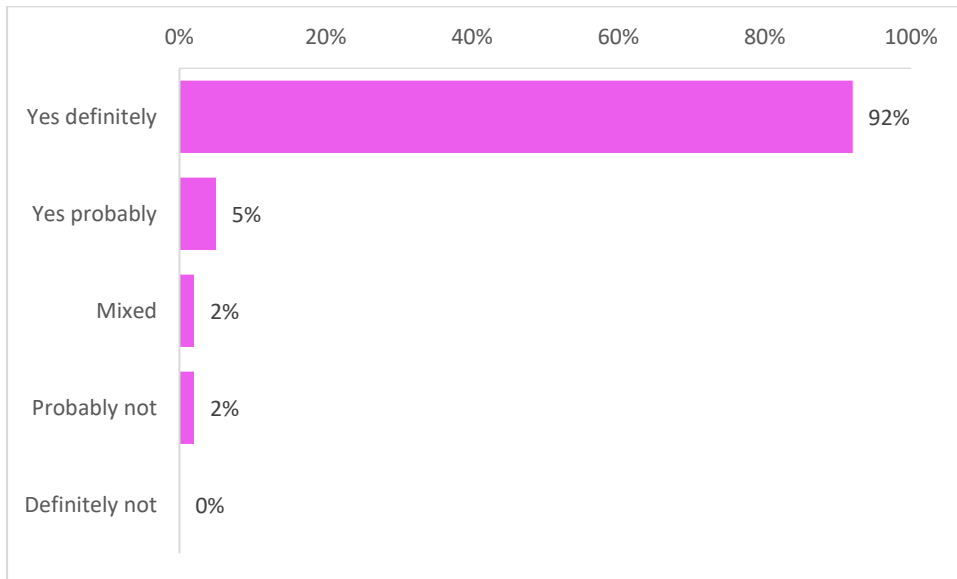
Figure 17: Was the application form easy to understand? (End of project reports)



“The application form was accessible and the fact that you could work on this in stages and save your work and return was a very useful feature.”

97% of grantees said they received the support from ACNI that they needed to complete their application.

Figure 18: Did you receive the support from ACNI that you needed to complete your application? (End of project reports)

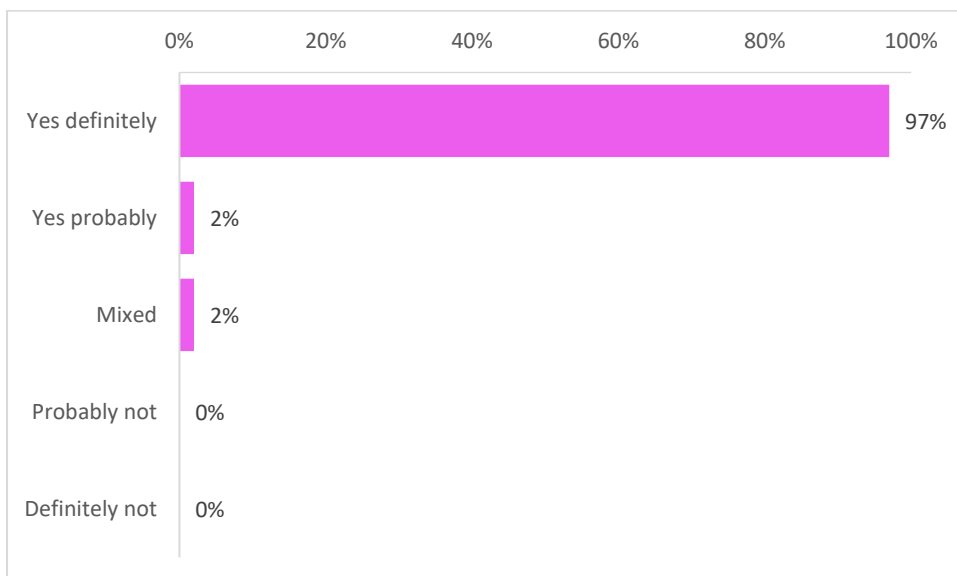


99% of grantees said they received the support from ACNI that they needed to manage their project. One grantee said that they lost contact with the Arts Council at one stage because their grant officer left.

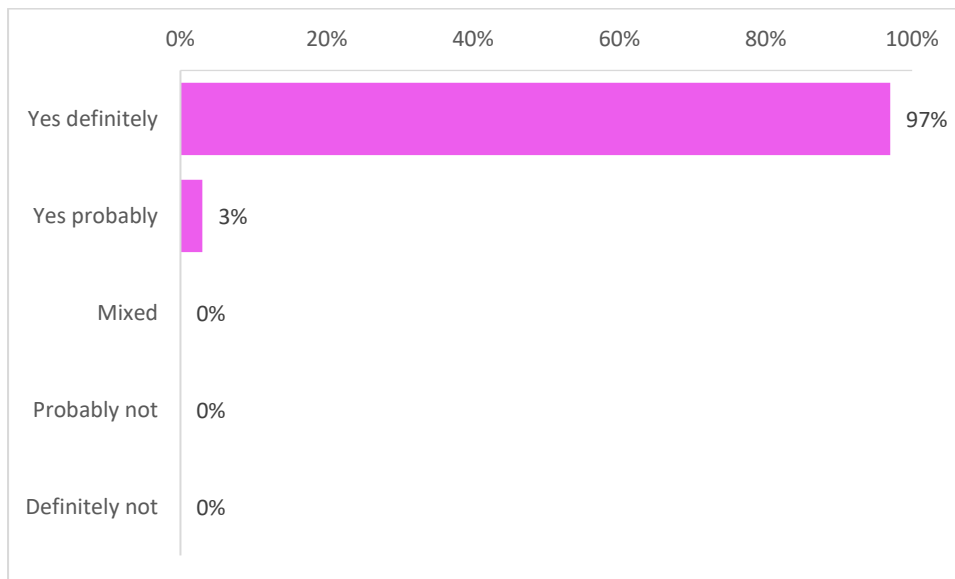
“When we contacted ACNI, our query was managed in a friendly, professional manner and we were provided with the necessary information to move forward.”

“The ACNI was very supportive during the number of difficulties we faced during the project.”

Figure 19: Did you receive the support from ACNI that you needed to manage your project? (End of project reports)



All grantees said they would apply to REAP again.

Figure 20: Would you apply to REAP again? (End of project reports)

“Three of our current participants forwarded emails about the 2023/24 REAP programme opening and asked me to apply again.”

“This was a pilot project - and our first large application of this nature and we have learned a lot throughout the process. We will definitely apply again in the next round.”

“We hope to apply for an award for this funding for 2023, as all the venues have asked us to return.”

“We definitely would reapply. In fact, we did re-apply this year but we were informed that our application was ineligible as we had not yet submitted the End of Project Report for this current application. This was extremely disappointing as we were hoping to be able to continue to build on the huge success and progress this current funding has facilitated for our local community and our organisation.”

“We really hope to put this programme on again for our residents. It was a huge success. We have had several exhibitions, and the participants now watch all the art shows on TV and go to all the exhibitions in the local area.”

“This grant opened up a lot of opportunities and has given us the know how to deliver again.”

“This is an excellent programme which allowed us to run an incredibly successful and rewarding project. We would look forward to applying again.”

7.4 Evaluation

58 grantees filled in some or all of the optional evaluation section of the End of Project Report.

We asked if grantees and their partners encounter any challenges in delivering the project and 22 said “yes”. The challenges were:

- Barriers to engagement e.g., weather or personal circumstances.

“In the care home, unfortunately some residents were simply unable to engage due to mental and physical health reasons and they were not happy to have music near their spaces. Therefore, the original plan to take music into corridors and individual spaces did not work. However, we did perform on the different floors of the home, so that residents living on different levels who did want to participate were able to more easily and at their convenience. And it was harder to reach family members of the older people than we had anticipated. Although families were invited to the sharing events, very few turned up.”

“Several parents and carers attended some of the art sessions, but we struggled to regularly attract attendance. We feel this was due to the timing of the sessions, as the majority of parents and carers were busy with work and other commitments, and those with children under five did not have childcare available.”

“As it was an outdoor project, we had to reschedule times due to adverse weather, thankfully no other major challenges.”

“Heavy rain and winds on multiple days did affect the number of audiences in the locations.”

“Rural audiences are incredibly impacted by the farming seasons. We could not run the project during May/early June due to silage/the hay season. No one was available to come along. Lambing and calving season (February into March) also had the same effect during late winter/early spring.”

“We learnt that it is important to include additional delivery time to a project if project delivery is over the summer months. The additional time would accommodate community groups and participants taking summer holidays.”

- Difficulties with venues/locations.

“Finding and choosing rural locations with good internet connections was challenging. This factor determined where we placed the project.”

“The venue was opened for reduced hours for many months due to staff constraints - this did cause delays, but is unlikely to happen again the future, as the problem is now resolved.”

- Omission of a key element of cost (transport) from the application budget.

“Coach collection of school groups had not been accounted for in original budget. Schools did not have the budget or facilities to arrange their own transport, to allow them to participate in the project. A partner provided additional sponsorship to allow this to happen. We will factor this in to this type of project going forward.”

- Increase in costs.

“Material, facilitation and transport costs have all gone up considerably since the application was approved and the grant offered. This left us having to constantly negotiate with facilitators and reduce the quantity of materials within some of the workshops.”

- Withdrawal of funding from another source.

“Our other funder created problems by first approving in writing a substantial payment towards artist travel, and then, when we sent in the vouching documentation, deciding that it wouldn't cover travel after all.”

- Difficulty sourcing materials.

“We had great difficulty sourcing playground paint that would be safe for the children to use and which would be delivered to Northern Ireland. In agreement with ACNI, we decided to paint the wooden shed instead with eco-friendly paint.”

- Change in the availability of an artist.

“After the fifth session, the artist, informed us she was unable to complete the project due to other commitments.”

We asked if there was anything the grantee would do differently? 26 said “yes” and answers were:

- Employ more artist so participants had even more choice.
- Offer more workshops.
- Have a wider range of days and times for workshops.
- Agree dates and schedules with partners/venues earlier.
- Be more ambitious.
- Increase marketing to ensure good attendance throughout the project.
- Apply for project management costs.
- Creation a subcommittee to manage the project.
- Organise transportation for participants.
- Deliver the project over a longer time period.
- Concentrate delivery on a narrower area.

We asked if there was anything they think should be changed about the Programme. Only eight replied:

- Clarify whether the rural targeting applies to the venue location or the audience: a rural location near Belfast might attract a mainly urban audience.
- Widen the range of artforms e.g., to include cooking.

- Phase rounds further apart.
- Continue after the planned three rounds.
- Provide the End of Project Report in Word form.

We asked about the extent of community ownership in the project: whether this was an aim and if so, how it was achieved. 42 grantees described the process which included:

- Recruiting from across the community.
- Involving participants in the planning and development of the project e.g., choice of activities.
- Adapting the timing of activities to suit the location of participants and avoid clashes with their other events.
- Employing local facilitators.
- Employing artists who took had an interactive rather than a didactic style.
- Involving participants in delivery e.g., as volunteers.
- Encouraging participants to meet outside the project.
- Having an elected board.
- Being structured as a membership organisation.
- Setting up a project committee.
- Working with community groups.
- Raising sponsorship locally.
- Ensuring venues were accessible.

The Rural Deliberative Forum asked for REAP to increase understanding of rural audiences, so I suggested a question on the Project End Report that asked about the platforms or approaches to marketing that were most effective in reaching rural audiences. Answers were:

- Working with/through an established group.

“Working with identified groups who meet regularly and have an active membership was key for us. This meant that we were guaranteed engagement and an audience.”

- Broadcasting the project in the organisation’s newsletter or through its database.
- Posting leaflets to potential participants’ homes.
- Mobilising word of mouth.
- Communicating through local organisations such as churches, sports clubs, the borough council and the library.
- Going to places where catering for the target audience e.g., for older people: luncheon clubs, folds, drop-in centres and residential homes.
- Giving taster sessions or performances.
- Using rural publications such as Farming Life, The Farming Times and the Sunday Life.

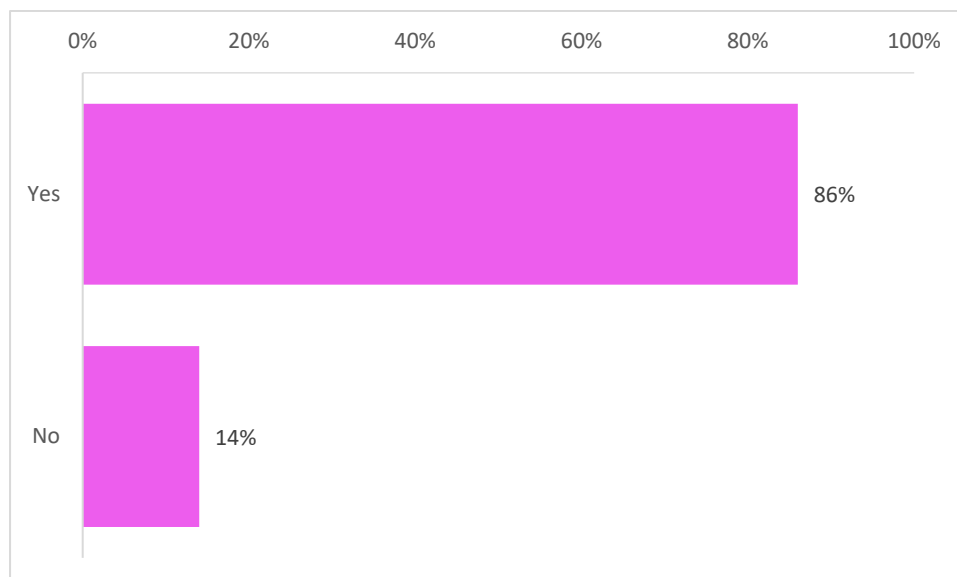
- Using multiple methods including social media (especially Facebook), local print, flyers, posters and specialist arts magazines.

“Having the support of volunteers from local community organisations was invaluable as a way to reach people living in rural areas. They were able to speak to people directly and promote the project to a wider local audience. By speaking to people on the first visit to the location, we noted an increase in our audience numbers on the return visit.”

58 grantees answered our question about legacy, and 86% answered in the affirmative. Examples include:

- Artwork including murals, photographs and films.
- Relationships.
- Knowledge e.g., about artforms or project management.
- Attitudes e.g., greater priority to the arts.
- Content for social media.
- A venue with a strong arts programme and following.
- Funding for follow on work.
- Examples of participants who have progressed in their art.

Figure 21: Is there any legacy from the project?



There is more detail on these subjects in the case studies.

8 CASE STUDIES

8.1 Introduction

The applications, End of Project Reports and evaluation reports (which 36 organisations sent over) give ample information to produce case studies. The case studies illustrate different aspects of community engagement, artistic quality, innovation, personal and organisational outcomes.

8.2 Glenlough Community Choir, Pick-Me-Up Chorus

The Pick-Me-Up Choirs had 262 participants over the two months of the project, with 55 of these attending regularly. 86% said that they had not done a lot of singing, 36% had sung in a choir in the last five years, 51% had not sung since school, and 10% had been told at some point that they couldn't sing. 49 took part in a performance, as part of a wider group of 80 singers.

The grantee held workshops in eight venues (e.g., luncheon clubs, community centres, residential homes). The funding allowed the group to raise its aspirations in terms of artistic quality, as the End of Project Form explains:

“We were able to afford to pay excellent musicians and soloists to accompany us, including award-winning Mezzo-Soprano Sarah Richmond, Singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Una McCann, guitar virtuoso Colin Reid, and the award-winning Open Arts Community Choir. We were also able to afford to hire excellent performance and rehearsal spaces. We were directed by Anne McCambridge and accompanied by Mary Spence. Anne was inspired by the song choices of our participants to create an eclectic programme ranging from Pop, Folk, and Classical - including 'Va Pensiero' from Verdi's Nabucco - sung in Italian. This was beyond anything our Glenlough Choir had ever attempted before.”

To measure the impact on isolation and social inclusion, the grantee created an anonymous survey using the statements from The Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool (<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-Measurement-Guidance1.pdf>). 49 of the Pick-Me-Up participants at the Performance Day filled out this survey and the results demonstrate contributions to wellbeing, social inclusion and interest in the arts:

- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that: I am more content with my friendships and relationships.
- 71% agreed or strongly agreed that: I have increased the number of people I feel comfortable asking for help.
- 76% agreed or strongly agreed that: I have deepened existing relationships.
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that: I have made new friends and connections.
- 84% agreed or strongly agreed that: I have developed new skills.
- 88% agreed or strongly agreed that: I have achieved more than I expected.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed that: The Pick Me Up rehearsals have increased my confidence.
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that: I am more open to taking part in singing events.

- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that: I felt welcomed and supported by my conductor.

Comments from the participants describe the experience as uplifting, inspirational and sociable. This story gives a vivid illustration of the personal impact of REAP:

“The conductor asked everyone if they had a favourite song and one of the participants, who is four years four years old, was born with cerebral palsy and is non-verbal suggested *I’ve had the time of my life* from the film *Dirty Dancing*. The little girl loved this song so much that her family sang it to her at her fourth birthday party instead of Happy Birthday. So, the conducted decided that the choir would learn the song and perform it at their performance day. The little girl’s mother sang the first solo line on her own, hoer local group joining in for the second solo line, then the whole 80-strong choir and the band joined for the “I’ve been waitin’ for so long, now I’ve finally found someone to stand by me.” The grantee commented that: “It was an incredibly special, emotional moment of connection, love, and communication within the whole group channelled by a little girl who, by typical metrics, cannot communicate at all. Together we shared a musical hug. I don’t think anyone who was there at that moment will ever hear that song in the same way again. It was a moving reminder of the power of music.”

8.3 Conductology, CREAM (Conductology Rural Engagement and Access to Music)

Conductology has the vision to: “enables musicians with and without special needs to fulfil their creative potential, enhance their personal wellbeing, create extraordinary music and be recognised for their achievements.” Conductology uses technology to help participants create cutting edge, high quality music, so challenging expectations about the potential of musicians with a disability. Conductology has a system of 18 universal gestures that enable the participant to improvise electronic music, using Apple software such as Launchpad and Thumbja, which can be enhanced with acoustic instruments, voice and objects.

The REAP grant allowed Conductology to form an orchestra with eight participants, and to rehearse on eight Saturdays at Roe Valley Arts Centre. Individual assessments of musical abilities showed clear progress on items such as understanding of timbre, ability to distinguish high and low sounds and fast and slow, ability to describe the texture of a piece, ability to identify which note is longest, and ability to play loud notes followed by high notes. Conductology believes that an inclusive orchestra of this kind is the first in the world.

Feedback illustrates the strength of the achievements:

“Once I start playing with the Conductology Orchestra, my anxiety disappears. I purely concentrate on the gestures.”

“I found this incredibly emotional, inspirational and excellent quality. This project needs to be ongoing.” Audience member

“I am a music therapist and know some of the participants. I find it incredible that you got them to not only perform in front of an audience but the discipline of the musicians, focus and creativity, and the performances were incredible. This needs to continue.” Audience member

“You bring the best out of each and every one of them. I have never seen my son so engaged in a project.” Parent

8.4 Friends of Glenariffe, Glenariffe Community Arts Project

The project brought together a number of groups at the Glenariffe Community and Recreation Centre. Glenariffe Oisins CLG, a local hurling club, helped promote the project, and provided access to their grounds for outdoor promotional events.

Half of the funding was used to deliver a six month programme of weekly intergenerational art classes led by a professional artist. Half of the funding was used to commission a mural to acknowledge the donations to help equip and furnish the new Community Centre. As the grantee explained in the End of Project Report: “The more common alternative of a board listing names would have been a poor substitute and would not have been received such universally high acclaim.”

Feedback from workshop participants was that:

- 92% said the classes helped develop their artistic skills.
- 94% said the project enhanced their sense of feeling connected.
- 95% said the project enhanced their overall sense of wellbeing.

Project participants in the adult and intergenerational workshops were asked in the post project evaluation to rate the impact of attending the classes on their sense of feeling connected. 94.34% responded positively with 16.98% scoring this question with a 4 and 77.36% scoring with a 5 (1 = Low and 5 = High)

The project illustrates the ways REAP projects sought community ownership. The grantee set up a project committee of eight members at the start of the project with representatives from all partners and stakeholders and a brief was to help shape the interpretation of the tree mural design brief together with the artist. The project committee’s main proposals included:

- Mural design to be a windswept tree to reflect the kind of trees growing in the Glens of Antrim with the names of businesses, individuals and families who supported the Centre fit out on the leaves.
- Most of the branches/canopy to be on the left-hand wall with a small section to the right for balance.
- Animals/birds native to the Glens to be included e.g., hares, squirrels, blackbirds/crows etc.
- Leaves to be realistic and painted in different colours within the same palette.

- All leaves (which contained the names of sponsors) to be similar sizes – i.e., no differentiation between leaf size and style to reflect whether donations were made by corporates, individuals or families or the amount donated.

The project brief and project committee's proposals for the tree mural were presented to the management team, art class participants and various community groups and gatherings for consultation, feedback, suggestions and input. This included a presentation at a family Easter Egg Hunt Coffee Morning event attended by 140 local people including 93 children. Over the four months of the mural painting, centre members were invited to give feedback and suggestions, as they passed the artwork on their way up the stairs.

This was the first time the organisation had delivered an arts project and they learnt how to form a mount an art exhibition, which they had not done before.

“With our new knowledge and skills, we will be able to build on what we have learned from this project to help grow interest in the arts locally and increase access to artistic development opportunities for local people in the form of classes, art exhibitions and other visual arts projects.”

The project motivated the organisation to continue working with the arts.

“The main legacy is a stunning visual artwork adorning the central staircase of the Community Centre which is not only seen but commented on and admired by all visitors to the Centre and everyone who attends our community gym, range of fitness, arts, crafts and cultural activities and the many community social events, meetings and training sessions that take place in the building. The fact that the tree mural's leaves display the names of all those who helped contribute towards the Centre build project constitutes a fitting legacy of our local community's strength, support and collaboration. We also have a fantastic collection of arts materials, paints, brushes and paper etc which will enable us to continue delivering art classes to all ages beyond the lifetime of this project in future.”

8.5 Big Telly Theatre Company, The Living room

The project was an interactive piece of hybrid street theatre, an outdoor domestic installation combining live action, in the format of a chat show, a digital interface and smart technology. Tackling loneliness and promoting connection was in the DNA of the project. The interface overcame the access barriers of a physical venue, and was designed to connect people in real life and online via TV screen. For example, participants called family members living overseas and introduced them to people they had just met in the physical space. Online participants had the option to join in the conversation or be a fly on the wall. The Living Room toured to six rural locations in Northern Ireland, with venues partly determined by Internet access.

Big Telly received additional funding from Enkalon, Halifax Foundation, and Causeway Coast and Glens. The project was delivered with mental health charity Aware and Inspire to ensure that vulnerable people in the community could engage and receive the correct safeguarding. Inspire, created three videos for the projects: top tips on stress, sleep and relationships which were made available on Brick Moon the organisation's virtual arts venue. Big Telly's team also signposted

audiences to these films and if they were relevant to conversations taking place in The Living Room, then we shared them on the TV screen as a way to inform audiences of further help and support available to them.

Publicity for the Living Room included a feature on a segment of UTV Life with Pamela Ballantine – pre-recorded with Zoe Seaton, Big Telly’s Artistic Director, in Portstewart alongside two members of Portstewart Community Association, which aired in advance of the project start date as a joint promotion for The Living Room and The Red Sails Festival. As Zoe explains in the project evaluation: “This project brings together all of our favourite things – playfulness with technology, rural communities and the warmest, most charismatic actors we know, so that whatever the elements of the Internet throw at us, it will be gentle, joyful and maximum craic.”

In each location, big Telly supported local businesses and organisations to have a webcam on in their shop/business to showcase/promote their business to audiences. This feed was available on Brick Moon, between 2pm-4pm each day. Some audience members visited these businesses as a direct result of seeing the business online. These interactions created an appetite for further digital tourism opportunities helping to strengthening community/business connections.

Overall, the Living Room reached 900 people who physically came to the locations, 50 people who took part in conversations from online, and 200 people globally who watched the livestream.

8.6 Women's Aid Armagh Down, A New Beginning

Women's Aid Armagh Down provides trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive services including accommodation for women, children and young people who have experienced domestic/sexual violence and abuse, with an average of 250 women and 20 children/young people being supported at any one time. Women’s Aid had been interested in the arts for some time as a way to engage women who would otherwise be reluctant to make contact. The project, A New Beginning, worked specifically with older women in rural areas taking a theme of isolation, drawing parallels the lockdowns and experiences of domestic abuse. This was a new project for the organisation, and they would not have been able to deliver any of it without ACNI funding.

The group met weekly with three elements:

- A six week Wellbeing programme including the Time for Me Mindfulness and Being Connected Programme.
- An eight week painting and textile arts programme including Identity and Connections through Art and Looking to the Future with Ceramics.
- An art exhibition and celebratory event.

16 women from different religious backgrounds attended.

Women’s Aid observed that the project enhanced participants’ wellbeing through:

- Giving them a sense of competence and pride in the craft work they created.

- Enhancing their social connection with each other and with organisations in the community.
- Giving them a sense of purpose.
- Providing a safe therapeutic space to explore and document their emotions.
- Increasing their resilience through the creative process.
- Providing creative therapeutic tools and resources.

In the project evaluation, 90% of participants rated the project as excellent. Participants were asked to identify the most significant outcome for them and the top two were “Learning new skills” and “Becoming aware of my wellbeing needs.”

8.7 Verbal Arts Centre, Reading Rooms

The Verbal Arts Centre delivered its 12 week Shared Reading model in which Verbal chooses reading to reflect the intended purpose, and provides prompts for discussion using psychological frameworks such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to change unhealthy thoughts and behaviours.

The REAP project focused on topics related to loneliness and wellbeing:

- Creating connections and building trust
- Healthy communication and assertiveness
- Understanding anxiety and mood management
- Self-compassion and self-esteem
- Being open to new experiences
- Grief and relapse prevention.

The sessions were delivered by ten local partners after training by the Verbal Arts Centre:

- Flawsomes
- Strabane Community Project
- Rainbow Community Centre
- Older People North West
- 040 Cookstown
- Strathfoyle Community Association
- Castleberg Healthy Living Centre
- Ederney Community Hub
- Eglinton Carers Group
- Eglinton Monday Club.

111 people participated in the project with aged 61+. Analysis of pre and post surveys found that 50% of participants improved their wellbeing (measured using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale), 44% said they felt less lonely (measured using the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale) and 36% said they felt more connected to others. Improvements in mental health were highest in the most deprived communities: six times higher in the most deprived community compared to the least deprived community. In addition, 33% of participants showed an improvement in cognitive ability (measured using the AD8 Dementia Screening Interview).

“Listening to stories is a relaxing experience for participants that helps them to create connections with others during discussion breaks.”

8.8 New Town Together, Flax to Linen

New Town Together is an umbrella name for Newtown Men’s Shed and The Women’s Group. The group also worked with Saintfield Men’s Shed. New Town Together had not previously offered arts project and would not have been able to deliver any of the project without REAP funding. New Town Together worked with:

- Hilltown Community Association
- Community Art's Partnership
- Southern Age Well Network
- Confederation of Community Groups
- Rural Health Partnership
- Bannvally Heritage centre, Laurencetown
- Mallons Farm, Cookstown
- Linen Biennale
- Archive NI
- McConville's Flax Mill Dromore.

The participants were involved in seeding the flax, harvesting the flax using traditional methods and then watched it being turned into thread and then linen. The Shed members researched the local history of flax and crafted tools to process flax. They also visited the Linen Museum in Lisburn and also talked to camera about their experiences. The original plan had been to create flat caps for the participants and create a photographic record and exhibition, but these elements were not practical in the time allowed. The change was positive, as the grantee explained: “Things change and evolve as we made our way through the workshops - the process became much more interesting than the piece that we anticipated producing. The journey to flax production took much longer and engaged our attention so much more that making something from it in the end.”

The group delivered 20 workshops, 45 contact hours, with an average of 48 participants at each workshop. 284 attended a celebration day which had dancers and demonstrations of flax processing.

The heritage element gave the project a stronger impact, with some participants having family connections to flax.

The project has stimulated the group's interest in arts and crafts. They have fibres left that they are intending to weave into pieces for display in the shed.

"This is one of the most interesting projects that we have been involved in since we began."

9 SURVEY OF UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

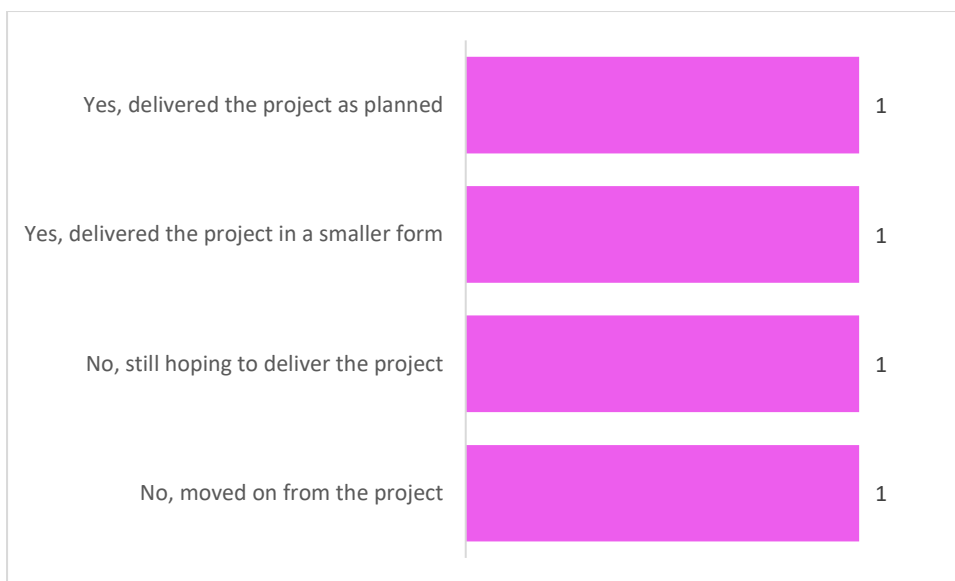
9.1 Responses

We had four replies, surveys of unsuccessful applicants tend to have low response rates.

9.2 Outcome

Two respondents delivered the project or part of the project, and two didn't. The organisation that did deliver the project said it wanted to demonstrate its commitment to the work and the impact.

Figure 22: Did you deliver any of the project?



Two weren't able to raise any money for the project, and none raised funding from foundations, which could be seen as an indicator of the need for REAP.

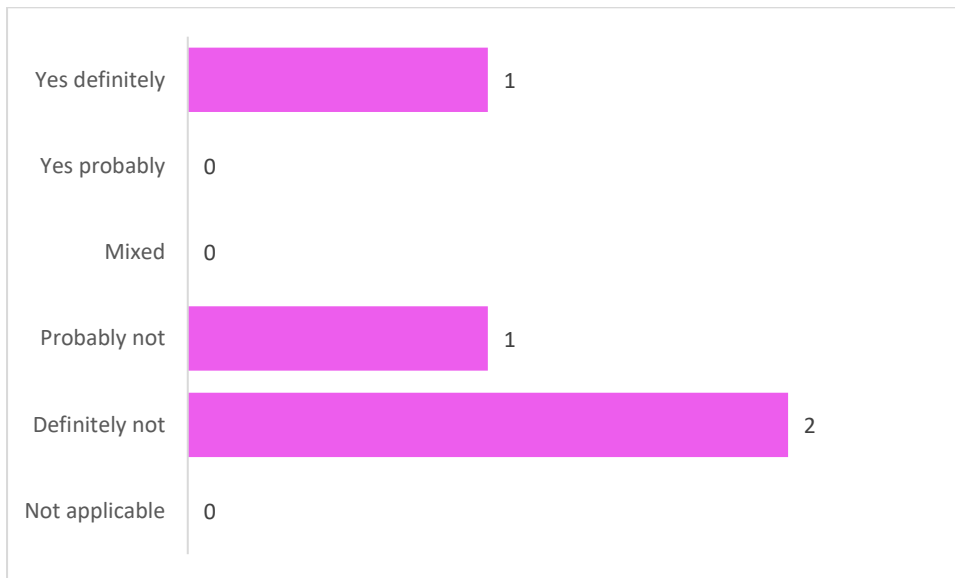
Figure 23: Did you raise any money for the project?

9.3 Process

Two respondents said the application process was helpful and two said it wasn't.

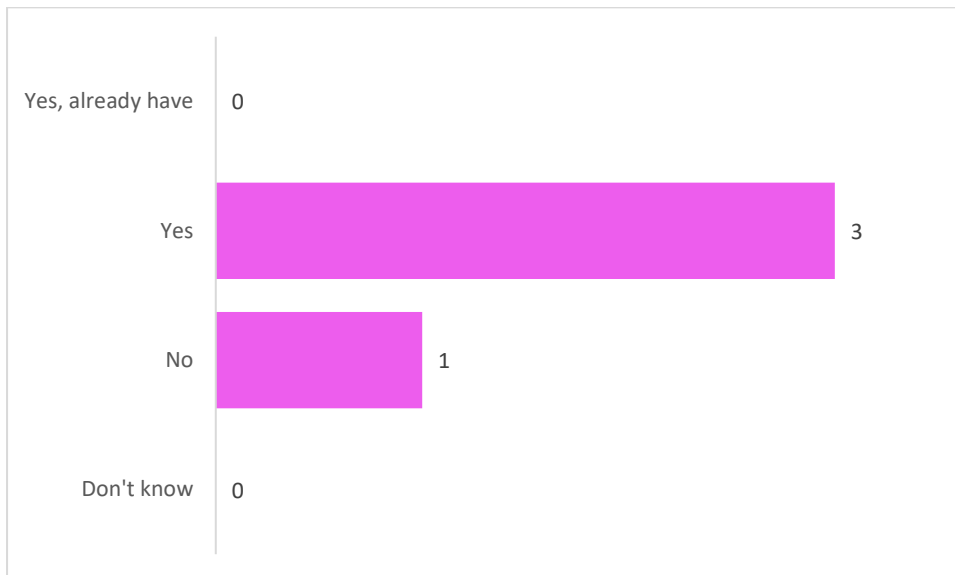
Figure 24: Was the application process helpful in itself?

One unsuccessful applicant said the feedback on the application was helpful. One complained that the feedback was that they lacked experience of facilitating workshops, but they have been facilitating since 2021.

Figure 25: Was the feedback on your application helpful?

9.4 Overall views

Three respondents said they would apply to REAP again. One said they wouldn't because they had been rejected by ACNI before (so twice).

Figure 26: Would you apply to REAP again?

Respondents said the strengths of REAP are:

- That it exists.
- Congruence with organisations' objectives around tackling loneliness and building communities.

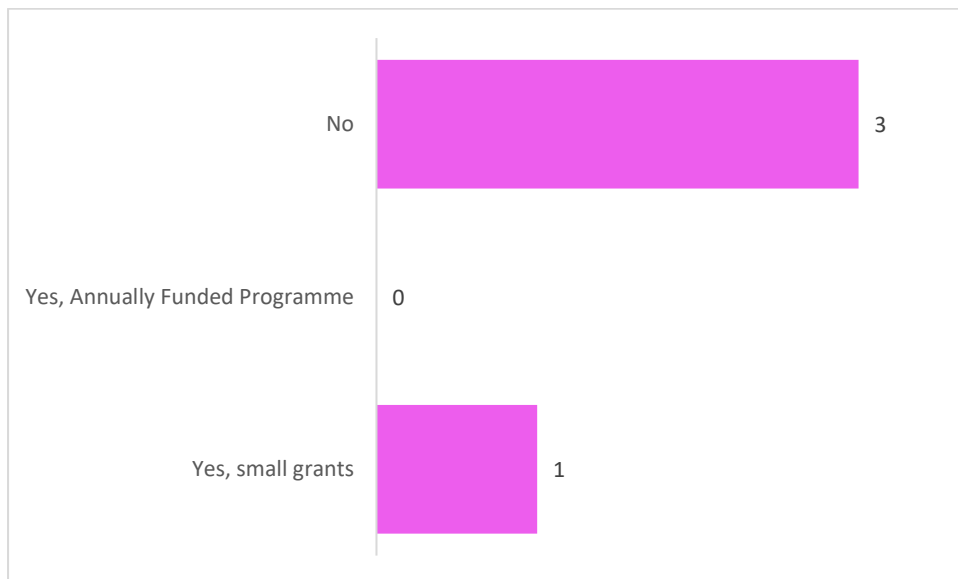
Respondents said the weaknesses of REAP were:

- Not understanding/appreciating innovative approaches.
- Giving money to the usual organisations.

9.5 Background

Three of the respondents hadn't applied to ACNI before.

Figure 27: Had you ever had funding from ACNI programmes before applying to REAP?



10 CONCLUSIONS

10.1 Outcomes for society

10.1.1 INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY COHESION

100% of grantees showed their project reduced isolation or promoted social inclusion. 86% of grantees said that all or part of the project was cross-community. 54% grantees said that all or part of the project was intergenerational. 48% grantees said the project included a public launch or celebration.

Reducing isolation and promoting social inclusion was inherent in the work of most of the grantees. Grantees tended to work in a highly collaborative way in designing, marketing and delivering projects. What REAP did was give the groups: an additional attraction to reach people who would not seek help in a more direct form; an intensive activity that drew people back; a positive structure for cross community work; and an identification and often a celebration of the history and special nature of the place.

10.1.2 WELLBEING

All grantees showed their project enhanced the wellbeing of participants or audience members. 60% of grantees said that the project included specific support for participants' mental health.

Projects enhanced wellbeing by: providing enjoyable creative activities which gave a sense of achievement and distracted participants from their worries with the feeling of flow and absorption; targeting people or groups who were isolated because of gaps in services or lack of transport; giving families time together including respite for carers; fostering interaction between participants, including social contact; producing an artwork that represented pride of place and an aspect of hope; and referring participants to other services or sources of support.

The contribution of the arts to wellbeing is well known and well evidenced. REAP simply extended these benefits to rural areas.

10.1.3 VOLUNTEERING

84% of the grantees said that volunteers helped to deliver the project. The total number of volunteers involved in the projects was 622.

10.1.4 SUSTAINABILITY

13% of grantees said the project addressed local environmental issues.

10.2 Outcomes for the arts sector

10.2.1 EMPLOYMENT FOR ARTISTS

95% of the grantees said that artists were involved in delivering the project, with a total 308 artists employed. More than half of these live in a rural area.

10.2.2 DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT

87% of grantees said their project included artist-led workshops with local people. 56% of these said that 90-100% of their participants attended three or more workshops. 97% of grantees said their project developed the skills of participants or audience members.

10.2.3 ACCESS

78% of grantees said that the project was free to all participants. 37% of grantees said that free transport was provided to grantees.

10.2.4 QUALITY

92% grantees showed the grant allowed their organisation to deliver higher quality artistic work than they had delivered previously. This was particularly in terms of: employing professional artists (often their first experience of doing so); experiencing new and often specialist artforms; accessing higher quality arts materials or equipment; and having time to develop the work.

10.2.5 AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

19% of grantees said that the activity included taking participants to a show or exhibition in an arts venue.

10.3 The programme

10.3.1 ADDITIONALITY

Additionality was high. 76% of grantees said their projects were new. 79% of grantees said they wouldn't have been able to deliver any of the project without ACNI funding.

10.3.2 DESIGN

98% of grantees said the REAP programme was a good fit with the project they wanted to deliver. Grantees emphasised the value of the programme in filling a long recognised gap, and the flexibility of the funding terms and sensitivity to the realities of rural communities.

98% of grantees said the application form was easy to understand. 97% of grantees said they received the support from ACNI that they needed to complete their application. 100% of grantees said they would apply to REAP again.

10.3.3 DEMAND

78% of grantees said the project increased their organisation's interest in delivering arts projects in rural areas. They gained an understanding of the value of working with professional artists; relationships with local artists; increased their confidence working with professional artists; widened their community partnerships and skills in marketing arts projects; and developed a model for a project that they would like to continue. Grantees experienced many challenges that increased their learning about how to deliver arts projects in rural areas, for example they learnt about the need to have contingency plans that allowed for: bad weather; venues becoming unavailable due to financial or other problems; a budget to provide transport if participants could not otherwise attend; time to source materials; and changes in the circumstances of their preferred artist. An overall and highly positive outcome from this round is that grantees felt they should and could be more ambitious next time.

10.4 Going forward

REAP has started well and reached a competent and eager group of grantees. The programme is to some extent a victim of its own success because the increase in demand will require ACNI to narrow objectives in the next round if it wants to avoid a higher rejection rate (which wastes applicants' time). The social objectives are relatively broad and so compatible with the existing ethos of rural organisations (in terms of reducing isolation) and the power of the arts (in terms of enhancing wellbeing) as to provide a crude filter. I recommend that ACNI reflect on, prioritise and communicate more precisely its arts development aims, for example:

- Projects vary in ambition. Is it part of ACNI's objective to raise ambition?
- Some of the projects are similar e.g., the same artist or artform. Does this matter? Should later rounds encourage applications from underrepresented art forms like circus. Should ACNI encourage similar projects to connect so they can learn from each other?
- Only three applicants are AFP. Is this good or bad? Does ACNI want to support arts organisations to work in rural areas (which experience might inform their programming or marketing) as well as encouraging community organisations in rural areas to develop their arts activity?
- Relatively few applicants took participants to a show or exhibition in an arts venue. Should applicants be encouraged to include this as an element in their project? This would support venues and support new audience development.
- Is ACNI seeking to build art's infrastructure in rural areas? If so, what are the priorities for this? What is ACNI expecting to be the legacy from REAP?
- All the grantees who have submitted End of Project Reports expressed a desire to reapply. What proportion of projects are expected to receive funding in later rounds? How should ACNI prioritise continuing and new projects?