



The Ian Potter
Foundation

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Grantee Key Learnings

Arts

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Arts Key Learnings

Key learnings from Arts grant recipients

Introduction

This document is intended for future applicants and grantees in the Arts program area. It contains the summarised learnings of all Arts grantees over the past five years.

The information documented here has been taken from the final reports of Arts grantees, which were submitted to The Ian Potter Foundation following the completion of their projects. As such, the views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of The Ian Potter Foundation.

The learnings are grouped roughly by project type. A majority of Arts programs supported by The Ian Potter Foundation over the last five years fall under one or more of the following categories: emerging artist programs; touring programs; 'one-off' events, such as festivals or exhibitions; and education programs. The section titled 'Creative content' refers broadly to the choices surrounding creating, presenting or performing creative works, and as such is applicable to all project types.

Creative content

Select creative content mindfully. One grantee noted that the challenging and unfamiliar nature of his material led to problems retaining the interest of participants. This was counteracted by extensive utilisation of peer leadership and resulted in the majority of participants committing to the production.

Productions with content most relevant to teenagers' lives engage students most.

Embedding yourself in the communities that a work seeks to represent is imperative. An original pitch for a story can change dramatically based on genuine community consultation. One secular organisation had to alter the content of their workshop to suit the community's interest in gospel music.

People with lived experiences do not want everything portrayed negatively, nor tainted with rose-coloured glasses. Just present life as it is.

Choose titles wisely. One grantee's choice of title was considered difficult to understand for the general public and may have not gained as much recognition as a major work title, e.g. Mozart's Requiem.

Funders and stakeholders may have expectations around works that are being created. Consider engaging a third party to mediate expectations so the original artistic vision is not interfered with.

Collections and archives

Digitising archives can take longer than expected. One grantee's schedule was greatly extended due to the caution they had to take when 'baking' fragile, old music tapes.

Anticipate that you may require the expertise of professional curators or conservation staff when dealing with fragile or valuable collections.

Emerging artist programs

These programs can include mentorships, fellowships, internships, and artist-in-residence programs. For information regarding workshops or masterclasses, please see the 'Workshop' section under 'Education programs'.

Arts Key Learnings

Be sure you have the capacity going forward to support mentees. One grantee adjusted their program after one year to support only one artist per annum, due to staffing constraints posed by their international and interstate touring schedule.

Be mindful that certain programs may require a lot of adjustment for participants. One grantee noted that it was important to orient younger participants to the world of professional dance, in terms of living out of home and fending for themselves, and is now developing a pre-professional training arm to this end.

In terms of attracting participants, one grantee found that the set theme of their fellowship program was too narrow, and when they made it an open topic they attracted better quality proposals.

Mentor/mentee relationship

Ultimately, mentorship programs are dependent on the strength of the relationships formed between mentor and mentee. A number of grantees reported a need for more support and closer mentoring of the artists. In response to this need, one grantee is currently looking into developing a workshop designed for artists to gain or enhance their mentoring skills.

It pays to rigorously select artists for mentor/leadership roles, and to be clear about what's expected of them. One grantee had to terminate the involvement of an unsuitable artist and then replace them midway through their youth leadership project. Another theatre company found that mentors, who were all selected from outside the company, allocated too little time to rehearsals for a performance.

Often, mentees require continued support at the end of their mentorship to take the work they have created to a wider audience; this led to one grantee continuing to support participants beyond the twelve month period of the program.

Creating final works

Be realistic in terms of how long it will take emerging artists to complete works. One mentorship had to be extended from three to six months to allow the writer to complete a play.

Residencies and mentorships that involve outcomes should consider allocating production resources to those outcomes. One grantee reported that relying on the artists to complete this aspect detracted from the focus of the program.

Keep records. One grantee reported that improvements needed to be made in terms of documenting the development of new work as very little was undertaken.

Be prepared for mentees/fellows to pursue opportunities nationally and internationally. This can have budgetary consequences. For example, in the context of one music program, the absence of a fellow who pursued work overseas meant that a professional musician had to be brought in to fill her place.

Be prepared for success! Having a full time artist-in-residence at a small company can bring a lot of additional work, especially administrative, as one grantee discovered after the artist-in-residence at their theatre enjoyed sold-out shows.

Dance programs

A successful training program capable of developing the highest standards is totally dependent on a clearly defined training system, which is consistent in methodology. It is also reliant on adequate staffing, with fulltime teachers dedicated to each year group as well as specialist teaching staff to work across years, and appropriate administrative support to deliver the programs.

Constant evaluation of best practice is essential to maintain a high standard of training.

Arts Key Learnings

The business model of a large lower school can be very successful, not only financially, but also in embracing the company's education and outreach activities as well.

Scholarships and summer schools can be used to attract talent. Well designed and adequate facilities also play a key role in attracting talent, in enabling the main company and the school to co-exist comfortably, to collaborate and learn from each other, and in facilitating broader links with the wider community.

Touring programs

International touring

For international tours, be mindful that participants may need a full 'rest day' upon arrival. Factoring in recuperation time at a tour's commencement, whilst costly, is greatly beneficial to artists' ability to perform at the highest levels.

It pays to budget for chartered transport. One grantee did not include transfers, so musicians were sometimes forced to carry instruments and/or performance dress, and to transit between cities at odd hours, which created stress and again did not allow for proper rest before rehearsals/performances.

Regional touring

Consider storage of equipment and/or vehicles. It is also helpful to include motor vehicle registration and maintenance in a rural touring budget.

It may be difficult to book venues a long time in advance in small regional towns.

One grantee noted that it was challenging to extend their touring to a national level without a permanent core of staff. Juggling the hiring of staff while increasing a tour load is time-consuming. Another grantee planned to recruit a Part Time Administrator to manage the office while key staff were away.

Relationships are key for touring. One grantee reported that the quality of connection with the venue largely determined whether they toured to certain towns.

Regional audiences

It may be challenging to attract a regional audience to free or subsidised programs. One grantee had to work to overcome the perception held by the local community that the program was charity, as well as a tendency on the part of community members to think there were others who were more deserving. Once these perceptions were overcome, however, their audience base grew.

Consider early provision of marketing, especially for participatory programs. One grantee recommended in-person visits to regional centres prior to their tour, especially in terms of attracting participants to the workshops that accompanied their concert program.

Consider your target audience. One grantee changed their approach to building an audience base in a regional town to hard-copy advertising and membership forms once they realised their target demographic was older and less responsive to digital advertising.

Events

Events include performances, festivals, exhibitions or community events. For information regarding workshops or masterclasses, please see the 'Workshop' section under 'Education programs'.

Arts Key Learnings

Paying to attend an event usually generates a greater commitment to attend.

In order to encourage participants to linger longer at open days and attend more activities, catering (tea, coffee, light snacks etc) could be made available at the venue.

Scheduling events to coincide with larger events or festivals does not always translate into a larger audience. One grantee found that they had to compete with other major events (including large-scale free events) resulting in poor ticket sales.

Exhibitions

Budget for professional and/or maintenance services when exhibiting valuable items. One grantee received little advice on hanging tapestries from the lending institution and had to seek professional assistance.

Budget for security services. A number of grantees reported the need to increase security, in one instance due to attempted robberies.

Consider developing a catalogue to accompany exhibitions. One grantee's catalogue sold out prior to their exhibition closing, and they found that it improved credibility.

For smaller exhibitions catering to young people, consider planning activities to keep children and their parents entertained between active phases of participation.

Another grantee's exhibition involved works that were developed during the lead-in time, including plant-based installations that required time to grow. The organic nature of the exhibition placed a strain on staff resources and required on-going attention.

Community events

Collaboration between community groups who would not usually work together can be worthwhile. One grantee reported that incorporation of horticulturalists and the food industry into their arts festival proved to be highly successful.

Location/venue

Select performance venues mindfully. One grantee staged a show at a theatre that was neither well-known nor centrally located. The reduced ticket sales meant that artists received less exposure and were paid far less than was anticipated.

Another grantee reported that the marquee arrangement of the event required setting up each day due to overnight security problems, creating extra work for the coordinator and volunteers, which would have been avoided had they hired a more secure venue (although this would have incurred further costs).

If hosting events in public spaces, engage in community consultation as early as possible.

Consider alternative venue options. One grantee found that there is a strong audience for classical music being played in unique music venues (private houses, Tapestry Workshop etc).

If working with older participants, be sure the venue is suitable. One grantee reported that senior dancers found the floor of the theatre where they performed too hard, and advised that a physio-masseur could have been employed during the performance week.

On-site survey tips

Here are some things to keep in mind when conducting feedback surveys at exhibitions or events:

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- A portable tablet rather than a fixed station makes it easier to solicit participation.
- Seating for parents and carers is likely to increase participation rates.
- For maximum impact, a staff member should be available to encourage participation and guide users.
- The survey should take no longer than 4 minutes to complete.
- An incentive similar to a Prize Draw increases participation rates.
- [Culture Counts](#) has developed a standardised set of metrics that cultural organisations can use to measure the quality of their work and benchmark outcomes.

Education programs

Teaching content

Complete front-end evaluation when preparing teaching content. One grantee attributed the success of their project to extensive liaison with teachers in pilot schools to tailor content to the level and learning area of each student group.

Be prepared for varied student abilities. For instance, one grantee found it challenging to determine the most effective activities for students with low literacy levels.

Education programs need not replicate the teaching practice of the school. One grantee reported that their program's success was based upon the fact that it provided students with an experience that could not be replicated in the classroom.

Be sure to deliver content to teachers with sufficient lead time.

When developing digital education resources, consider integrating online content with face-to-face learning (if possible). Generally, an e-resource as opposed to a hard copy resource is easier to update if and when changes occur in the curriculum.

Working with students

Young people respond well when they are granted autonomy and respect. Engaging young people in the decision-making process makes for successful programs. Likewise, one grantee reported that hosting a series of workshops in a theatre instead of school contributed greatly to their success, owing to the maturity students felt due to how they were treated and the neutrality of the venue.

Students generally benefit from engaging with a program on more than one occasion.

Long lead times are required to train and up-skill young people in order to build their confidence in advance of a big public event, especially if they have little to no experience in the area of performance.

Be realistic about maintaining student engagement post-program. One grantee found it difficult to engage students online as they had to prioritise studying for VCE exams.

Regional programs

Rigorously select teachers. One grantee reported that some teachers had preconceptions that students in remote schools would not be able to move beyond the limitations of their community environment and that this was displayed in authoritarian ways to students.

Arts Key Learnings

Longer timeframes are required to deliver regional programs, in order to build relationships with participants and service providers, and to minimise the likelihood of irregular attendance/unreliable services.

Be realistic about outcomes, especially when bringing programs to regional schools. One grantee noted that students were not playing at the level that was required for their advanced music program, despite the grantee having specified the required standard, and despite students working exceptionally hard.

Workshops/lectures

In terms of attracting participants, one grantee increased the number of attendees by providing people free access to their masterclass series. Another grantee, despite a healthy marketing and consultation process, found that their workshops were undersubscribed and had to seek the support of another organisation to redesign the workshops to better meet participants' needs.

Numbers may also be affected by the time of year. One grantee found that their lecture series were substantially more successful in the winter months than in the summer months.

Consider that participants may have diverging needs or abilities. One grantee learnt to create 'graded' professional development sessions that were more targeted to participants' experience and skill levels, instead of creating highly inclusive opportunities free and open to all 400+ members.

Be realistic about how much can be achieved in a workshop. One grantee revised their workshops to focus more on exploration of ideas rather than a final performance product.

Consider uploading lectures as podcasts to gain a wider audience.