

## Top Tips for Grants for the arts: Theatre

from the South East relationship managers

*These pointers are designed to complement the Grants for the arts criteria and prompts that are available from the Arts Council England website. These are not formal rules or 'hidden criteria' but intended as a guide to creating a stronger project and a more competitive application.*

- Ensure you're applying for a project with a beginning, middle and end, not on-going activity.
- Grants for the arts is a 'development fund' so consider how your project develops you, your artistic practice, audiences, your project partners, the art form etc.
- Include the word 'theatre' in the 100 word description at the start of the application to ensure it gets looked at by the most appropriate person. Outline the project in the most basic terms (e.g. 3 weeks R&D [research and development] with 2 work-in-progress performances) so that you give a clear sense of what you're applying for before starting the main proposal.
- Spell out the obvious - The person reading your application doesn't know your work and needs evidence to make a favourable assessment; if you don't say it, they can't count it.
- Artistic Quality - this is where you can get the reader excited about your project, the artistic idea, the creative team, mentors, your influences, the partners etc. The rest of the application is about giving the reader the confidence that, if you follow the steps you outline, it will be delivered successfully.
- Don't do things like workshops and scratch performances because you think it's something we like to see in applications; do them if it makes sense to the project that you're proposing. If workshops are something you're interested in including in a project, consider developing them in the same way that you might develop the show they accompany (e.g. trialling them with test participants).
- Increasing sustainability - This isn't necessarily about moving away from a reliance on funding. Sustainability can also be about your ability to manage your work so that if your application is unsuccessful, you/your organisation will still be there to make another one. And it can be about building your capacity to develop more strategic partnerships and ambitious projects. It's also about paying yourself properly so that you can carry on doing what you do.
- Activity Partners - The organisations that you work with give us an indication of quality and demand for your project. It can also make your application more strategic by broadening your project's impact, e.g. by helping a partner venue reach a specific audience or develop its artist support offer. To judge the strength of a partnership we look at the level of cash contribution or in-kind support (which can range from rehearsal space and technical support to mentoring and advice). Letters of support are also useful to include as an attachment if you're applying for £15,000 or over.
- Public engagement - Be specific about who and how. It's the difference between, 'We're making a show about coal miners that will appeal to ex-miners' and 'We're making a show about coal miners and will be running workshops in ex-mining communities to gather first-hand accounts, staging rehearsed readings in working men's clubs in colliery towns and

working with community ambassadors to bring mini-bus parties to the theatre when the show opens.'

- Marketing - We would much rather fund a project with a well-resourced, detailed marketing strategy than a cheaper project without a clear idea about how it will attract an audience.

- Potential future audiences - If you're applying for R&D towards a new project then we recognise that public engagement will be limited. However, we will want to know what you're doing to secure a future life for your project. This could include showings with detail about which promoters and producers you will invite and why, engaging a tour booker, or creating resources to send to promoters and producers such as photos and video.

- Preliminary Tour Schedule - Try to avoid 'not spoken to yet'. The more 'pencilled' and, ideally, 'confirmed' dates, the better. Tend towards optimism – if you've had a positive conversation and you think there's a good chance of a booking, go for 'pencilled'; if you're talking about dates and pinning down a deal, go for 'confirmed'. If your application is successful, a confirmed tour schedule will be a condition of our grant – so do bear that in mind! Where possible, we would prefer that venues offer you a fee or at least a box office split. We are less enthusiastic about supporting a tour where the company is hiring the venues as this raises concerns about the level of demand and the likelihood of the venue offering marketing support etc., increasing the risk to you and, therefore, to our investment. It's useful to describe the relationships you have with each venue, and why they make a suitable venue for your project, in the narrative of your application.

- Expenditure - It's good to explain how you have arrived at the figures in your budget and to outline what financial checks you have in place (e.g. an account with two signatories). If you have support from a venue, you might also consider asking for their help with budget management such as having their finance officer go through your figures.

- Rates of pay - We expect applicants to base their rates of pay on industry minimums such as those recommended by ITC, Equity, The Writers Guild etc. Break down costs in the budget or in the proposal so that we can see 5 actors x 24 days @ £xxx = £xxx

- We're interested in the percentage of Arts Council funding that you're asking for. If we've invested in 80% of an R&D project and you then come back to us for more money but a lower percentage of the production and tour of that work, we would regard that as a good return on investment. It's also worth bearing in mind that the average % match (including in-kind support) for successful applications is 65%. We'd expect this to be lower for R&D projects but it's still worth bearing in mind that strong applications often have more than the minimum 10% required – and that actual cash support does help to make an application stronger.

- Evaluation - Try to tailor this to your project's aims so that you are able to assess the success of your activity in a way that is most useful to you and what you do next.

- We are not afraid of artistic risk so if your project did not succeed as you hoped, that doesn't mean that we won't fund you again, explain the lessons learned and how you will overcome them in the future. Similarly if you're applying to produce a show following a funded R&D period, be candid about what didn't work and what you want to address in the rehearsal process.

*Good luck!*