

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

# Creative Individuals Recovery Programme (CIRP) Evaluation

Key findings

September 2022



## About the Creative Individuals Recovery Programme

---

This programme was designed to support individual artists with the cost of reactivating, maintaining, enhancing their creative trade, vocation or professions. This sought to prevent artists from leaving the creative economy and help re-establish their contribution to the benefits the sector delivers.

The end of project reports show that 1,210 artists received £2.3 million in funding, as of 8th June 2022. They had requested £2.8 million.

On average, these artists received £1,892 pounds from the programme. 77% of them received between £2,000 and £2,500. 21% received between £1,000 and less than £2,000. 2% received less than £1,000.

As of 5th September 2022, 46 grant recipients had returned £21,015 of this funding. The main reasons for this underspent had to do with illness, artists starting a new job, events being cancelled, and ineligible costs outside the funding remit.

## Evaluation: What did we want to find out?

---

**Aim:** To engage with grant recipients of the Creative Individuals Recovery Programme (CIRP) provided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) to evaluate the impact of the grant in supporting recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## What did we do?

---

**Methodology:** Online survey: From the 1534 individuals (who had received a CIRP grant) contacted, a total of 622 surveys were completed, giving a response rate of 41%

From the survey respondents, 8 people were invited to participate in a focus group.

## Main findings

---

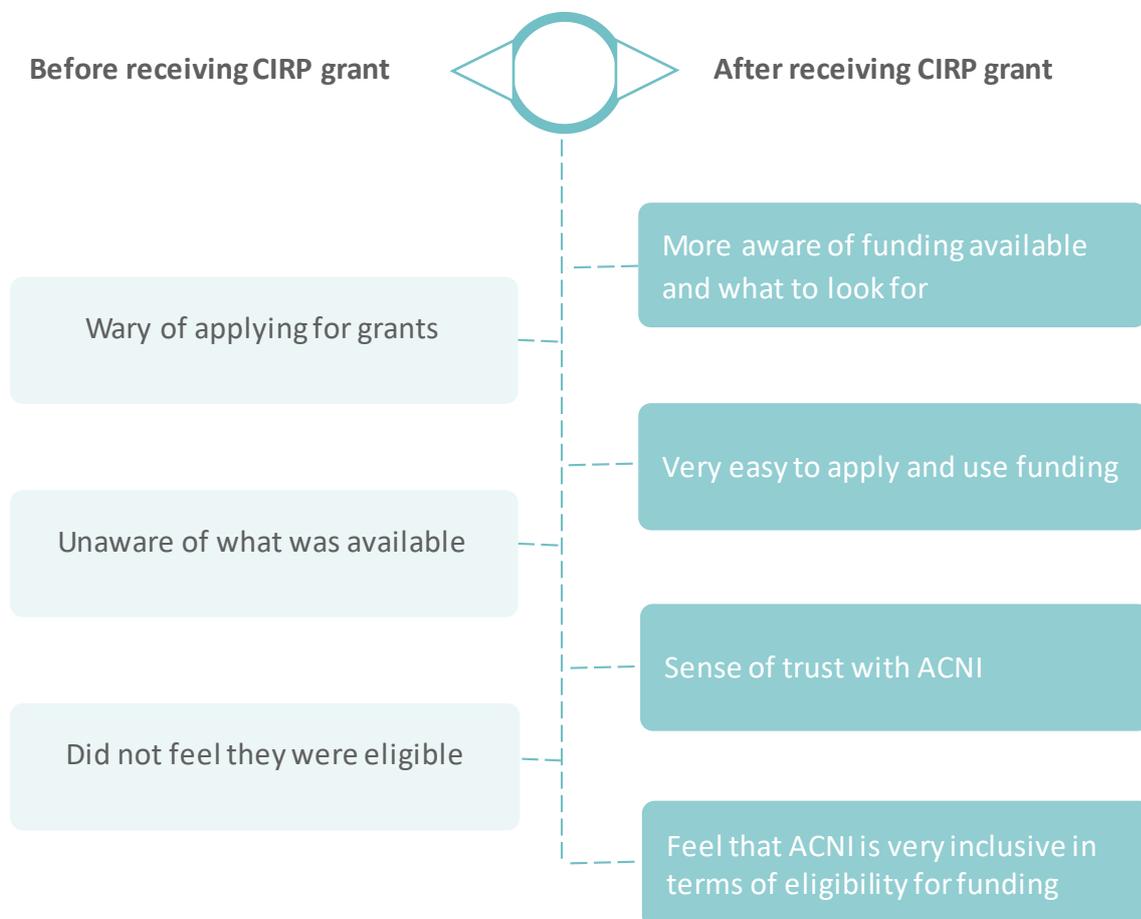
High additionality: the grant allowed participants to undertake activities they would not have been able to do otherwise.

Low displacement: Most respondents did not receive recovery funding from other public bodies or private sources.

High personal impact: 98% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the grant meant they could maintain their creative skills in the absence of work.

## Attitudes towards CIRP

---



## Recommendations from participants in focus group

---

### Support and advice on how to utilize funding:

- Some participants felt that as an emerging artist, they did not have the enough experience to know how to effectively use the funding. One participant suggested having the funding in two stages where the second part of funding would be saved for when the artists were more aware of how to use it.
- Similar to the feedback provided in the end of project reports, participants suggested that ACNI could help create contacts within the arts sector that the recipients could use to get their foot in the door.

### Increased percentage for materials:

- A few participants felt that the percentage allowed for materials could be more discretionary, especially since the price of materials has been increasing.

“

*“I didn't know there were things that were essential for me until I'd gone and worked with the other artists.”*

*“The government in ROI pay the festivals in Europe money to take over Irish acts to play in the continent. We don't get any support like that.”*

”

## Key insights from the survey

---

### Profile of respondents:

- Many respondents work in more than one sector.
  - 77% of respondents worked in the Music sector.
  - 25% in Film, TV, Radio and photography
  - 6% in Publishing
- 29% of them are between 35 and 44 years old. 24% are between 25 and 34. 37%, between 45 and 64.
- 53% identified themselves as male, 44% as female. 2% preferred not to say and 1% identified themselves in another way.

## Use of CIRP funding:

- 48% of their CIRP projects focused on artistic content creation.
- 25% on training, upskilling, mentoring
- 12% on research and development
- 15% on other activities such as reaching new audiences.

## Other sources of recovery funding:

What % of respondents received recovery funding from other sources (other than CIRP):

- 70% received no funding from other public funders. **25% received funding from other public funders.** (5% responded “prefer not to say”).
- 79% received no funding from private funders (donations, sponsorship, foundations). **16% received funding from private funders.** (5% responded “prefer not to say”)

## Reach and impact:

Groups reached by CIRP projects and themes:

- 50% of the projects did not reach a specific group of people, reflecting the nature of the grant. 40% reported reaching young and older people.
- 34% reported addressing mental and wellbeing themes; 28% isolation and loneliness. 47% did not address a specific theme.

## Impact on participants:

Creativity and income (% strongly agreed or agreed):

- 98% of respondents reported that the grant meant they could maintain their creative skills in the absence of work.
- For 74% of respondents, the grant meant that they did not have to seek employment outside the sector
- 78% of respondents used the grant to buy food, pay for heating, make rent or mortgage payments.

Additionality (% strongly agreed or agreed):

- 98% of respondents stated that they would not have been able to undertake the activity or project supported by CIRP without it.

- 88% reported that the grant helped them protect their career in the creative industries.
- 78% said that the funding helped them build networks.

## Insights from the focus group

---

### **Experiences and challenges during the pandemic:**

#### **Financial support:**

##### **Alternative employment**

- A few participants took employment in fields outside the arts in order to earn a living. This resulted in decreased time available to spend in their field of arts.
- These jobs included a variety of roles including working as a social carer, a substitute teacher and for a solicitor.

##### **Savings**

- Some stated that they had to delve into their savings in order to manage their income.

##### **Benefits**

- Two participants mentioned that they claimed Universal Credit to supplement their income and support their children. While it was beneficial, it involved a lot of paperwork and was time consuming.

##### **Other grants and funding**

- Self Employed Income Support Scheme. However, those who had not started working and were just out of university were not eligible for this.
- Resilience programme and Artists Emergency programme by ACNI
- Funding provided by trade unions.

##### **Lack of awareness of financial support and available**

- Some participants mentioned that they were not aware that they were eligible to avail of funds and grants for their artistic use and were not sure where to look.

“

*“Pandemic starts, like income... just I have none”*

*“Universal Credit, it was almost like a godsend and it was a poison chalice at the same time because it was so difficult to meet their demands”*

*“I was very concerned and I did go into the savings as well”*

”

### **Emotions and wellbeing:**

- Some participants expressed that they experienced a certain level of fear and concern over their artistic pursuits and livelihood.
- Even though they were passionate about their artistic endeavours, the pandemic made them question whether the time and effort was worth it.

### **Other challenges:**

- One participant mentioned restrictions to access funding associated with the visa they were on. Therefore, they were not eligible for most of the funding that was available initially. As a result, the ACNI grants was particularly beneficial.
- For one participant, investments made prior to the pandemic, especially with regard to advertising and marketing, were unutilised sunk costs that they could not recover.

“

*“The pandemic for me absolutely kicked the heart out of me because I put a lot of work into it.”*

*“I put a lot of hours into this, and I'd always play and create, hopefully, but it was a question of, God, is it worth doing?”*

”

## **Barriers to restarting post-pandemic**

---

### **Sourcing venues and spaces:**

- Participants experienced difficulty in finding suitable venues and studios where they could practice and commission the arts they were involved in since there was high demand for spaces.

- Moreover, some participants found it difficult to source funds they could use for hiring or renting spaces.

### **Uncertainty due to Covid:**

- Workshops and seminars that some participants had used the grant to attend were oftentimes cancelled due to Covid, which hindered progress. However, they reported that the ACNI was very accommodating in allowing them to rearrange where required.
- Participants who organised workshops for others faced similar challenges as attendees cancelled at the last minute due to Covid, resulting in difficulty in preparing in advance.
- One participant was unable to restart his work with walking tours since he felt that the tourism sphere was still very uncertain.

### **Other barriers:**

- One participant mentioned that many theatre companies are not holding auditions which makes it difficult for many actors to get jobs.

“

*“There were times when you were right up to the wire, waiting to see how many of your attendants would have to cancel because of Covid. I was relying on some of that income to make a living while I made other art, and it's still a little bit tricky”*

*“To try and get a venue alone for your show to get it in was desperate.”*

*“It was opening up, then it was closing down, then it was opening up again. And I'm just not at a level where you could do things like leaflets and invest your time. And I just thought, well, nobody really knew what was happening.”*

”

## Impact of the Creative Individuals Recovery Programme

---

### Developing skills:

- The grant provided the funds for artists to take the time to develop their skills which not only developed them as an artist but also increased their confidence and allowed them to engage with larger artistic communities in the process.

### More time to devote to artistic work:

- One participant felt that the grant was beneficial since it bought him time to focus on his work without the stress of external financial pressures.

### Making work sustainable:

- The grant allowed some recipients to pursue new avenues of their artistic work, providing the time and funds required to increase its sustainability as a secure craft.
- It provided them with an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and develop their work further.

“

*“I got to be part of a programme for free where I learned new skills, and if I hadn't had the funding, I wouldn't have that experience”*

*“I found it really helpful, and I feel valued because the Arts Council were trying to help artists. You felt like you were still an artist.”*

*“If I hadn't got the funding, I wouldn't be in a position to think about my work becoming sustainable.”*

”

### Confirming artistic identity and recognition:

- Some participants stated that it provided them with a sense of identity, allowing them to gain confidence in their work and as an artist.
- One participant also mentioned that it raised his profile in the community. This recognition granted more job opportunities and places in panels and radio shows, providing a platform to broadcast his work further.

## Providing direction:

- It gave some recipients the opportunity to seek advice, new perspectives and direction on how to develop their craft further, thereby providing clarity for their future.

“I wouldn't feel like I could call myself an artist if I hadn't received the funding. I think the funding was super pivotal to me viewing my craft, as valuable, as legitimate.”

*“It's shaped what my work looks like and the kind of work I produce and the direction of my career as a photographer.”*

*“I didn't have technical skills of analog image production. And I always felt really like I didn't count because I didn't have those skills.”*

”

## Introduced to new platforms and networks:

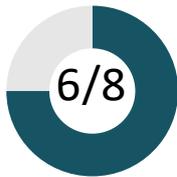
- The grant introduced some participants to new avenues and platforms which allowed them to develop relationships with those very skilled in their field, allowing for more opportunities to learn and grow
- One participant stated that she was not aware of certain networks and platforms before getting this grant, which then enabled her to interact with other artist in the field and share ideas and skills.

## Awareness of funding:

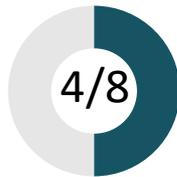
- The initiative by the ACNI resulted in increased awareness of funding within the arts community. It provided people with direction for where to look for support when they needed it.
- Participants reported that they used to assume that the funding did not apply to them. However, being introduced to this grant opened them up to searching for more funding and support for their work.

## Direct impacts:

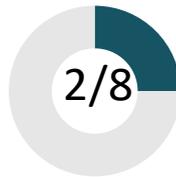
Learned new skills



Updated skills



Impact on travel



“

*“I found this huge community who barter and share skills. The network that I built up in that time, I never thought it existed before.”*

*“I think a lot of those people, including myself, are now more aware of how funding works. And they keep an eye on the Arts Council in Northern Ireland website to see when there is funding for individuals available and they have a think. Could I apply for that?”*

”

## Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Linen Hill House  
23 Linenhall Street  
Lisburn  
BT28 1FJ

[artscouncil-ni.org](http://artscouncil-ni.org)

T: +44 (28) 9262 3555

E: [strategy@artscouncil-ni.org](mailto:strategy@artscouncil-ni.org)

Alternative formats of this publication may be available on request.  
For further information, email: [info@artscouncil-ni.org](mailto:info@artscouncil-ni.org)

