Poorboy Ltd

Supported by The Creative Entrepreneurs Club

Impact Report
Creative Scotland Multi-Year Funding Application Process

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Thanks also to Adam York Gregory for his editorial support

Abbreviations

CS	Creative Scotland
CEC	Creative Entrepreneurs Club
MYF	Multi Year Fund
RFO	Regular Funded Organisations
OPF	Open Fund
EPF	Extended Programme Fund
TOIL	Time Off In Lieu

Contents

1 **Introduction**

1.1 Background 1
1.2 Objectives 1

2 Methodology and Respondents

2.1 Methodology 2
2.2 Response 2
2.3 Creative disciplines and leadership 2
2.4 Funding application experience and current status 3

3 MYF Application Process Workload

3.1 MYF Application – range, average and cumulative workload ... 5
3.2 A Demanding Application Process 8
3.3 Paid and Unpaid Working 9

4 Roles, Expertise and Costs

4.1 In-house expertise 10
4.2 Specialist advice and consultants 11
4.3 Other costs 13
4.4 Cumulative costs 14

5 Benefits of the MYF Application Process 15

6 Impact of MYF Application Process on Organisations

6.1 Work delayed, paused or cancelled – overview 16
6.2 Programme and public delivery disruption 17
6.3 Financial impact 19
6.4 Pressure on leadership 21
6.5 Excessive working hours 23
6.6 Staff disruption 23

7 Impact of the Application Process on People

7.1 Which people? 24
7.2 Financial impact on individuals 24
7.3 Work disruption for individuals and teams 26

7.4 Work backlogs and time off 27
7.5 Wellbeing impacts
7.5.1 Overall Wellbeing impacts 30
7.5.2 The effects of sustained overwork 31
7.5.3 Impact on relationships and support systems.....32
7.5.4 Financial impacts on individuals 34
7.5.5 Impact on psychological and physical wellbeing.....34
7.5.6 Factors impacting wellbeing.....37

8 MYF Application Design
8.1 Overview 41
8.2 Workload and Fair Working 41
8.3 The three stage process..... 43
8.4 A business template 50
8.5 Language and Clarity 58
8.6 Word limits 61
8.7 Financial Pro-forma 65
8.8 Suitability for assessment..... 65

9 The MYF Application Process Across Organisations 67

10 MYF Guidance..... 74

11 MYF Application Process Fit with Art Sector Realities..... 81

12 Access
12.1 Access needs for MYF applications and CS support 86
12.2 Range of barriers to access..... 89

13 Impact on Freelancers
13.1 Initial Impact..... 93
13.2 Results of impact on freelancers 97

14 Summary of Report
14.1 Survey findings in brief 101
14.2 Recommendations..... 102
14.3 Suggested further research 104

15 Conclusion..... 105

References 106

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the weeks before the Creative Scotland MYF Stage 2 submission date I was approached by multiple arts organisations for help with creating or shaping business plans for their applications. The organisations ranged considerably in size, scope, experience and age, but all were finding the process challenging. During the submission window the facebook group Admin Monkeys acted as a peer support and advice group and it became clear there also, that many other MYF applicants were challenged by the process to a level that seemed exceptional.

As an advisor to creative businesses at the Creative Entrepreneurs Club and Artistic Director of Poorboy I saw this process through both the business and arts lens. I posted an independent survey requesting details of organisations' experiences and the impact of the application process on organisations, individuals and the sector at large. As the survey was drawing to a close the Creative Entrepreneurs Club stepped in to provide support for the creation of the Impact Report.

1.2 Objectives

The objective of the survey was to gather information on experiences of the Creative Scotland MYF application process across the sector and any resultant impacts, with the declared intention to make findings publicly available and to present those findings to Creative Scotland and the sector through sector organisations and individuals to encourage public, sector and creative discipline specific discussions on the MYF process.

2. Methodology and Response

2.1 Methodology

A survey of 37 questions seeking quantitative and qualitative responses was created by Sandy Thomson and shared online. The 37 questions explored respondent demographics, MYF application costs, required working capacity for the MYF process, specifics of any challenges met by applicants during the application process, applicant access requirements and the resulting impact of all of these things. Other questions gave freelancers in the sector and organisations who had considered an MYF application but chosen not to apply, a space to relate their experiences and any impact they experienced as a result of the MYF funding applications being made by organisations in their network.

The survey went online on May 2nd and two days later, as a result of requests from the sector, three additional questions were added to specifically address wellbeing impacts.

The survey was open from May 2nd to May 19th 2024.

2.2 Response

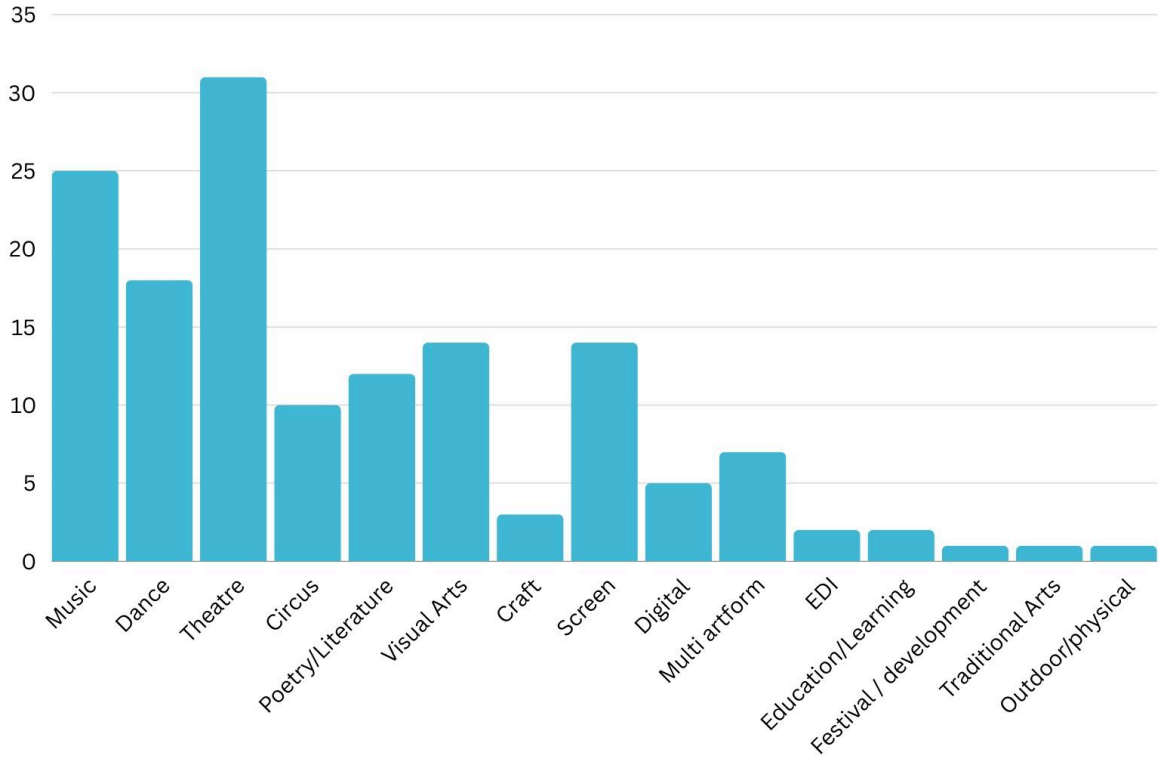
The survey was hosted online and a shareable link was sent out across social media including creative discipline specific groups, networks and sector organisations. It was emailed directly to all 122 RFO organisations listed by CS on their download of the 2018 to 2021 network. It was impossible to establish a cohesive list of the organisations applying to MYF that did not have RFO status and so it's likely the survey did not reach all of those 159 organisations.

CS state there were 281 applications to MYF[1]. The survey had 95 responses, 81 of which were from organisations applying for MYF. This is 28.7% of MYF applicants.

2.3 Creative disciplines and leadership

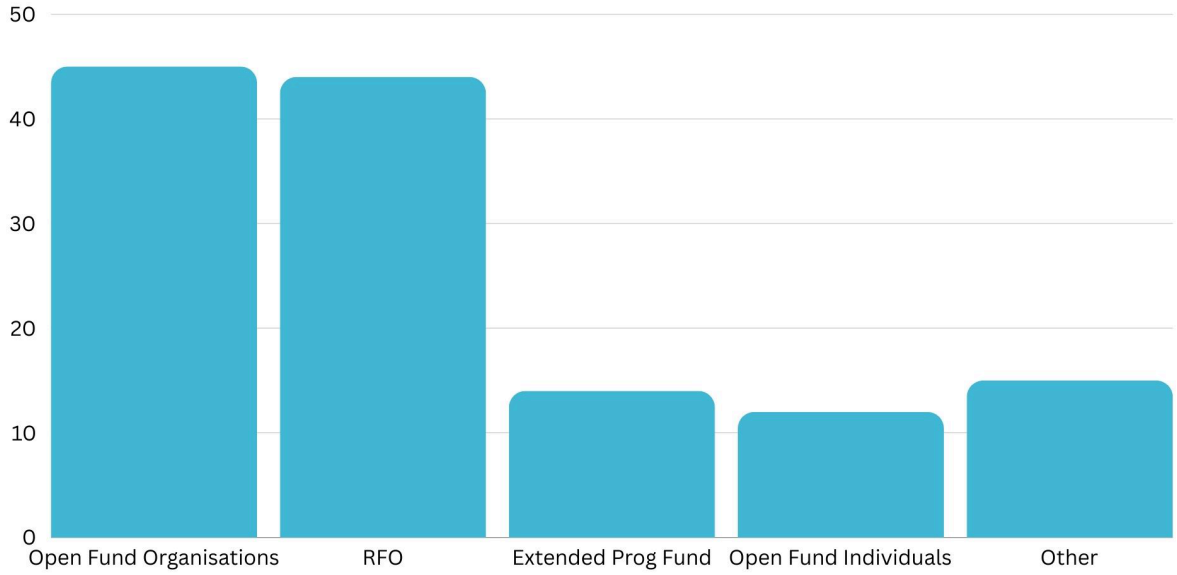
Respondents were able to select multiple descriptions for their organisation's creative discipline, its creative infrastructure sector if a support organisation or their own creative discipline if they were a freelancer. A number of discrete descriptions have been amalgamated to ensure respondent anonymity.

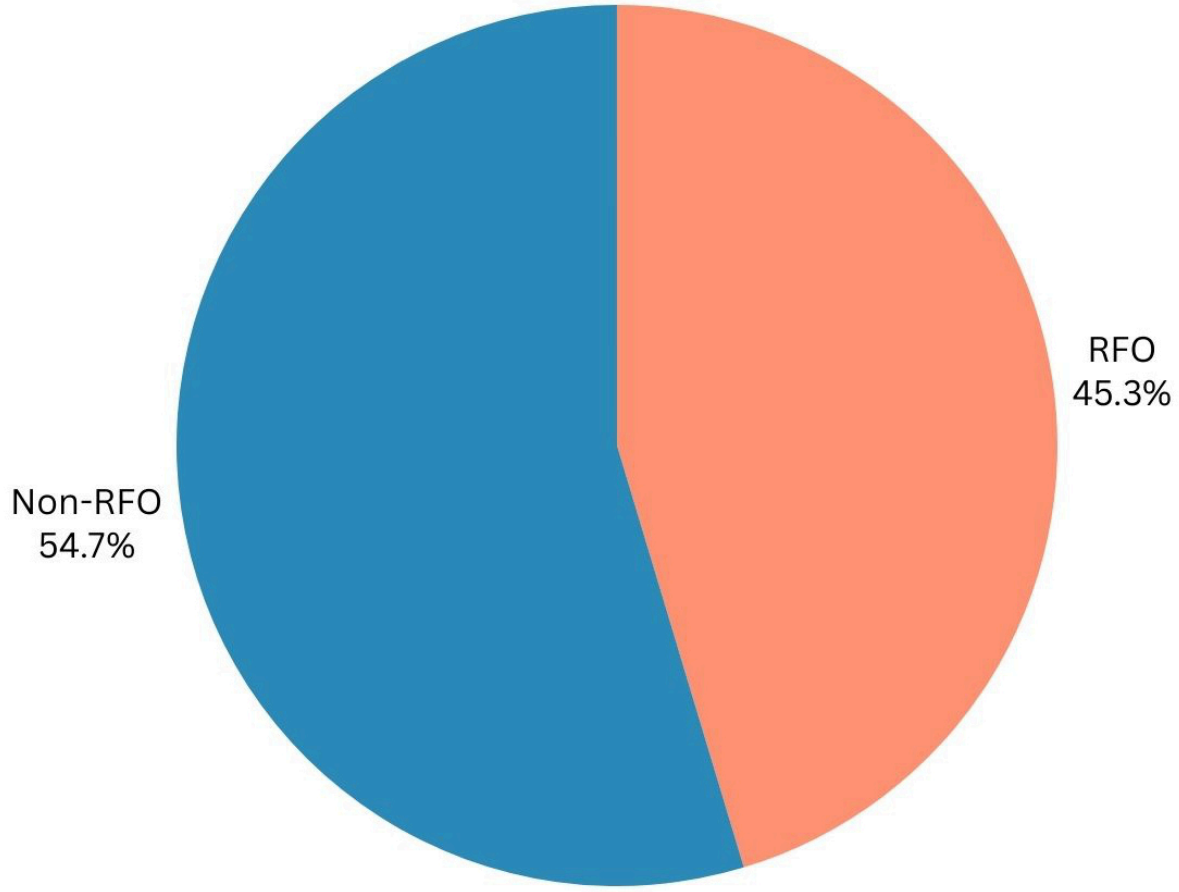
53.9% of respondent organisations identified as an Artist Led Organisation or Initiative. 46.1% of respondent organisations did not.



2.4 Funding application experience and current status

The survey asked organisations about their previous funding application experience, prior to applying to MYF. All applicants had previous funding application experience. Often this experience was extensive and a third of of individual respondents had direct experience of the RFO funding process.





Respondents were nearly equally divided between organisations that are currently RFOs and organisations that are not RFOs.

3. MYF Application Process Workload

3.1 MYF Application – range, average and cumulative workload

The workload require to complete the MYF application process was huge. Prior to this survey being opened, sector discussions raised repeatedly the fact that the level of work required to complete the MYF application process was unexpected, excessive and out of proportion with the sums being applied for. As a result the survey led with detailed questions on the work hours undertaken by organisations to complete the MYF application process.

Across the valid response to questions on the hours worked in total on the different stages of the MYF application process, the average and range of working hours was as follows :

HOURS WORKED ON STAGE ONE

Across 78 viable responses:

Average hours spent to complete MYF Stage One:
140 Hours worked, equivalent to 19 working days

Hours worked by different organisations on MYF Stage One range from:
8 hours and 450 hours, equivalent to just over 1 day to 60 days

Cumulative sector hours worked on MYF Stage One:
Cumulative hours = 10,914
Cumulative Days = 1,456
Cumulative Weeks = 291
Cumulative Years = 5.6 Years

HOURS WORKED ON STAGE TWO

Across 77 viable responses:

Average hours spent to complete MYF Stage Two and Submission:
246 Hours worked, equivalent to 33 working days

Hours worked by different organisations on MYF Stage Two and Submission ranged from:
27 hours and 576 hours, equivalent to 3.6 days to 77 days.

Cumulative sector hours worked by respondents on MYF Stage Two and Submission were:
Cumulative hours = 18,970
Cumulative Days = 2,530
Cumulative Weeks = 506
Cumulative Years = 9.7 Years

OVERALL AVERAGE HOURS WORKED

Overall average organisational hours worked over both stages of the MYF application process:

Stage one average 140 hrs
Stage two average 247 hrs

Total average hours per organisation 386 hrs

Costed at **minimum wage of £11.44/hr**

386 hr x £11.44 = £4416

In these, and all other calculations, it was assumed that a standard working week was 5 days at 7.5 hours per day.

Organisations reporting the highest numbers of hours worked on the MYF application process range considerably and high numbers are found across organisational size. The volume of hours does not relate directly to the size of the organisation or the amount of money requested. Some of this is likely to be due to RFOs having some version of the required policies and planning documents already in place whilst some smaller organisations were obliged to developing these in response to the application process. Equally some existing RFOs found it necessary to undertake very comprehensive, labour intensive work during the application process due to the scale of their organisation, its administrative and organisational standards and its future plans, whilst some smaller organisations were focused on fewer aspects of development and working on a more modest scale.

This extensive and labour intensive workload was designed into the MYF application process through both the information and documentation required from applicants and an extremely long multi-stage application process. Indeed, the MYF application process managed to be both long enough, from registration stage to the issuing of funds, to disrupt the strategic and operational planning of many organisations, and yet also short enough to present many organisations with an almost impossible schedule as they struggled to prepare, agree, shape and submit extensive Business Plans and Appendices tailored to MYF priorities in the 8 week turnaround between MYF Application Stage One and Stage Two.

It should be noted that the 8 week turnaround between the MYF applicants being notified they were through to Stage Two and the Stage Two[2] submission date offers 300 working hours in total to any one working individual. If this amount of hours was dedicated to the MYF Stage Two application that individual had no other working hours available for any other task or responsibility. This means that small organisations, with only one staff member working on the MYF Stage Two application in that window, are

working under a constraint that is not a factor for those larger organisations able to allocate the working hours of multiple members of staff to the application over the same time period.

Just over a quarter of respondents worked over 300 hrs to complete their Stage Two MYF application.

The words 'the sheer scale' occur over and over in survey answers in relation to workload.

> **"Just the sheer scale"**
>
> **"The sheer scale of the ask was huge"**
>
> **"The sheer amount of supporting information to keep up with"**
>
> **"an incredible amount of work required for both stages"**
>
> **"The amount of work involved was ridiculous"**
>
> **"This was an exhausting process"**
>
> **"an unprecedented amount of work for a fundraising application"**
>
> **"The volume of Stage 1 – which involved around 9,000 words of text"**
>
> **"Our application was around 84,000 – basically a PhD – this is too much"**
>
> **"the level of information required is disproportionate"**
>
> **"(Our) funding lead has worked on many £1m+ tenders and funding applications and stated that this was the most arduous of all they had written in over 30 years of experience"**
>
> **"I completely understand that some form of process should exist, that accountability is vital, that public benefit is the priority, but these things are not served by asking small scale charities to provide nearly 80,000 words of written material"**

This excessive workload for a newly designed funding application process – especially when many of the working hours were unforeseen, and the requirements and relationship between the submission stages were unclear – had a wide range of significant and detrimental effects on organisations and their people regardless of the scale of application. (See Section 6, *Impact of MYF application process on organisations* (p.16) and Section 7, *Impact of MYF application process on individuals* (p.24))

> **"the priorities placed on orgs through the MYF process are different from RFO, which was different from Flexible or Foundation funding. These regular changes to priorities mean re-working and re-thinking of how we communicate what we do"**

3.2 A Demanding Application Process

Over 90% of respondents rated the MYF application process 'More demanding' or 'Far more demanding' than previous funding applications made by their organisation. On a five point grade scale less than 9% rated the MYF application process as 'Equally demanding as previous funding applications" and none rated it 'Less demanding' or 'Far less demanding'.

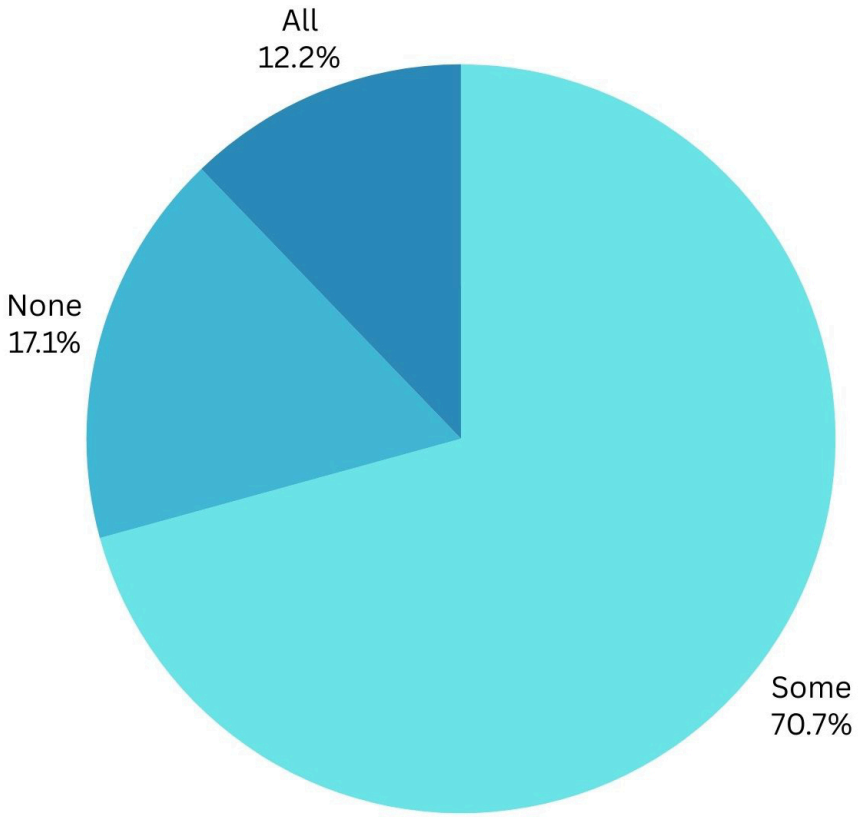
In response to a dedicated question 86% of respondents who had applied for MYF gave specific, and often multiple, reasons why the MYF was more demanding than previous funding applications made by the organisation. (See Section 3.1, *MYF application – range, average and cumulative workload* (p.5), Section 8 *MYF application design* (p.41), Section 9 *The MYF application process across organisations* (p.67))

Given that almost half of respondents (43.5%) confirmed they represent organisations in receipt of RFO funding, the range of funding experience of the respondents is not the issue. The key challenge was that the MYF application process was significantly more demanding than the requirements of previous CS funding application processes, or the application processes of other organisations delivering funding at this level. The Evaluation of the 2018-2021 Regular Funding process by Wavehill Social and Economic Research [hereafter referred to as the Wavehill Evaluation] advises[3],

> ***"As part of their National Portfolio Programme 2018–22, Arts Council England didn't require organisations to submit their full business plans and supporting information at the applications stage"***

3.3 Paid and Unpaid Work

Respondents were asked whether some, none or all of the working hours on their organisations MYF Application were unpaid.



All survey respondents who made MYF funding applications responded to this question – and only 17% of those organisations were able to pay all the working hours required by the MYF application process. 83% said some or all of the hours worked on the MYF application process were unpaid.

63 respondents reported working 'some' or 'all' unpaid hours:
Total unpaid hours = 9399 hours
9399 hrs is equal to 1253 days

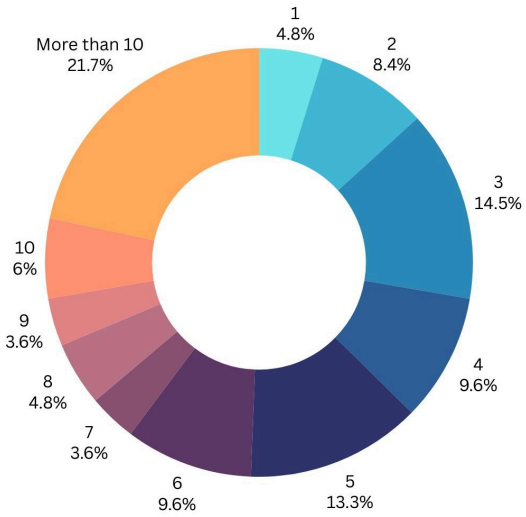
Average unpaid hours worked on the MYF Application process per respondent:
150 hours or 20 days

These figures show that, for many organisations, the MYF application required exceptional levels of working hours from applicant organisations which could not be accommodated within existing organisational staffing and pay structures. They also suggest that CS was ill informed and inaccurate in its estimates, or simply did not consider, the number of hours it would take application organisations to complete the MYF application requirements.

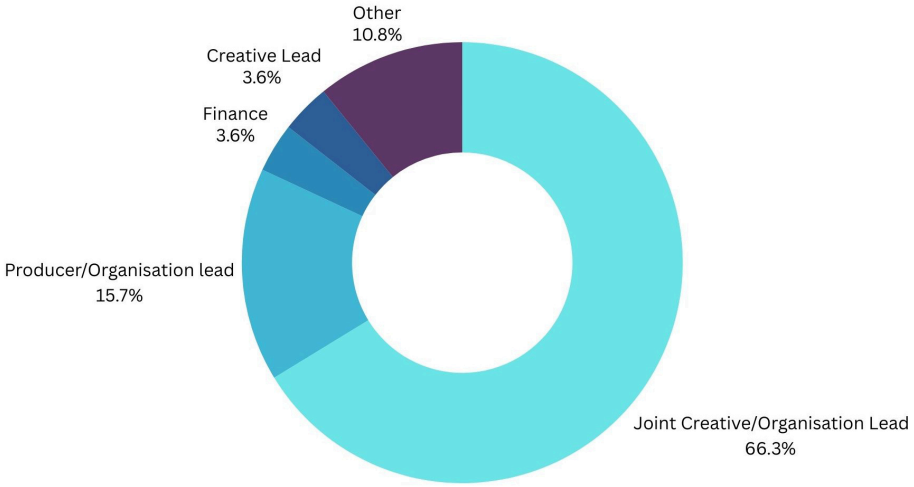
4. Roles, Expertise and Costs

4.1 In-house expertise

There is a sizeable range in the scale of in-house expertise and work hours available to organisations undertaking the MYF application process. 13.2% of MYF applications were created by two people or one person working alone, whilst 21.7% were the result of work by more than 10 people.



The difference in the size of teams involved in generating what was required for an MYF application underpins another issue raised by a sizeable amount respondents – the inappropriateness of the MYF's 'one size fits all' approach, with no scaling of requirements in the application process in line with organisation size or the amount of funding applied for – and no guidance as to how an organisation might manage that scaling in their application themselves (See Section 9 *The MYF application process across organisations* (p.67))



Related to this is the impact of the application process on particular roles within an organisation. Every respondent who applied for MYF answered the survey question on roles impacted by the MYF funding application.

The impact of the process is by far most common on those in lead roles, with Creative organisational leads or Producer organisational leads making up 86% of the roles most impacted. This means the impact of the MYF application process affected leaders regardless of the size or current funding status of their organisation. There are multiple consequences as a result of having 86% of the leadership of respondent organisations impacted by this process. These consequences affect the organisations themselves, the freelancers who work with and for organisations and the sector as whole (See Sections 6 *Impact of MYF application process on organisation* (p.16), 7 *Impact of MYF application process on people* (p.24) & 13 *Impact on Freelancers* (p.93)).

4.2 Specialist advice and consultants

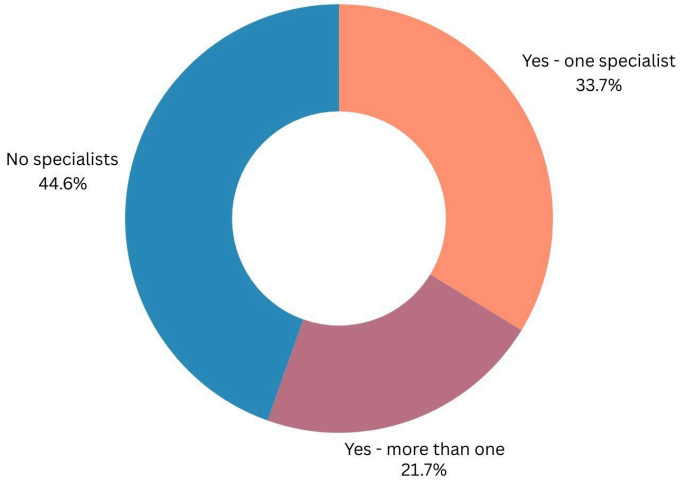
Many organisations required specialist advice or workers to complete the MYF Application and most paid for that assistance. Some organisations wished to secure that assistance but couldn't afford to pay for it. Other organisations sourced assistance that was voluntary – for example through their Board – or free at the point of delivery. In total 55.5% of organisations brought in specialist advice or workers.

Average amount paid by MYF applicant organisations for specialist help:
£1229.42

Range of amounts paid by MYF applicant organisations for specialist help:
£70 to £5,500

Broadly specialist advice and support sought addressed:

Business plan advice and creation across all areas including producing, sustainability, strategic planning, structure of plan
Fundraising advice
Policy advice and generation
EDI specific advice
Environmental specific advice
Fair Work specific advice
Editing and review across applications, business plan and policies
Finance and budget advice and support across planning or specific to MYF financial pro forma
Application writing including other funding bids which core team did not have capacity for due to the demands of the MYF application process
Copywriting and proofreading
Design and graphics
Access support (See Section 12 *Access* (p.86))



It's worth noting that strategic and business planning specialist advice and support was felt to be most efficient and pertinent if the specialist was familiar with the organisation. Obviously the challenging schedule, workload and unclear early guidance from CS on the MYF process meant that many organisations faced challenges in securing enough time with the strategic and business planning specialists best placed to execute the work.

Additionally, access to specialist help is by no means equal for all organisations. This creates real problems when more than half of respondents who are MYF applicant organisations found that access to specialist help was necessary to meet the demands of the application process and others may have required the same help but found it to be financially out of reach.

There are ethical questions around the accessibility of, and the assumptions underpinning, a funding application process with a design so demanding and specific that it requires extensive and varied use of specialist advice and support to complete an application.

Related to this, a small proportion of respondents (7.7%) advised that their specialist advice was not paid for by the organisation itself but was paid for either by an individual connected to the application or through a combination of organisational money and that of an individual. Taken alongside the high level of unpaid work being undertaken across organisations during the MYF application process, the financial implications for this section of applicants is shocking.

4.3 Other costs

28% of respondent organisations who applied for MYF incurred other costs as part of their MYF application process.

Average costs per organisation additional to or discrete from specialist support:
£928

Range of costs per organisation additional to or discrete from specialist support:
£50 to £4000

Cumulative costs to organisations additional to or discrete from specialist support:
£21,335

These costs covered a range of MYF incurred requirements, most commonly:

- Meeting spaces
- Office spaces
- Travel
- Printing
- Research
- Home working
- Computer packages
- Staff overtime

A key factor raised by a number of respondents for the first time at this point in the survey were the costs incurred as a direct result of the pressure on organisational and individual capacity created by a dense, labour intensive and long MYF Application process. This pressure resulted in organisations, and individuals working for them, incurring costs through lost income due to being unable to complete or undertake income generating work. An organisational leader who is also a freelance worker estimated a loss of £12,000 earned freelance income due to capacity pressure created by the MYF application process.

Other lost income costs were incurred when organisations found MYF application capacity pressure meant they lacked time for event promotion and subsequent ticket sales fell below projected levels. Finally, potential funding was lost when organisations found they had no time to apply for other funding opportunities – including funding applications that were part of company planning commitments for next year.

4.4 Cumulative costs

> **"The price for small organisations was too high to reasonably pay"**

Taking the information from respondents on hours worked and specialist costs give us the following calculation if minimum wage is applied to the hours worked across the two MYF stages :

Stage 1 (10,914 hours @£11.44) = £124,856
Stage 2 (18,970 hours @£11.44) = £217, 016
Specialist total = £69,797

Grand total
(lowest estimate, not including time off in lieu or anything above minimum wage)
£411,669

This conservative figure works out as an average cost of **£5083** to each respondent organisation who applied to the MYF.

5. Benefits of the MYF Application Process

16% of respondents mentioned some benefits to the MYF application process despite also having reservations or issues with specific parts of the process.

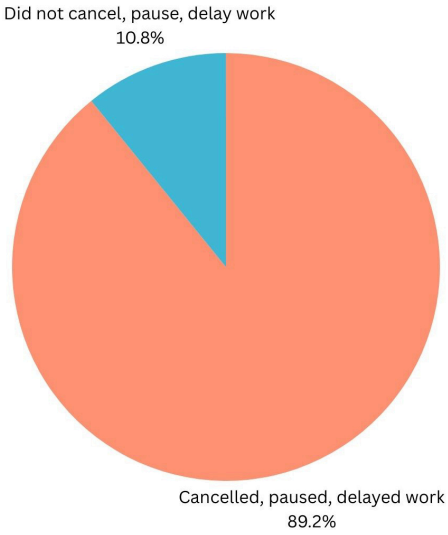
Benefits were around the value of evaluating, revisiting or creating of strategic and operational plans spanning a number of years and having clarity around organisational development. Small organisations mentioned that such planning would have been hard to prioritise had it not been driven by the imperatives of the MYF application process. Other organisations expressed the view that the decision making and documentation created through the MYF Application process would continue to be relevant and useful in making other funding bids.

Finally, it was noted that the level of peer support shared by applicant organisations was very high during the MYF Application process and that the resultant sense of community across the sector was very welcome in the face of multiple challenges.

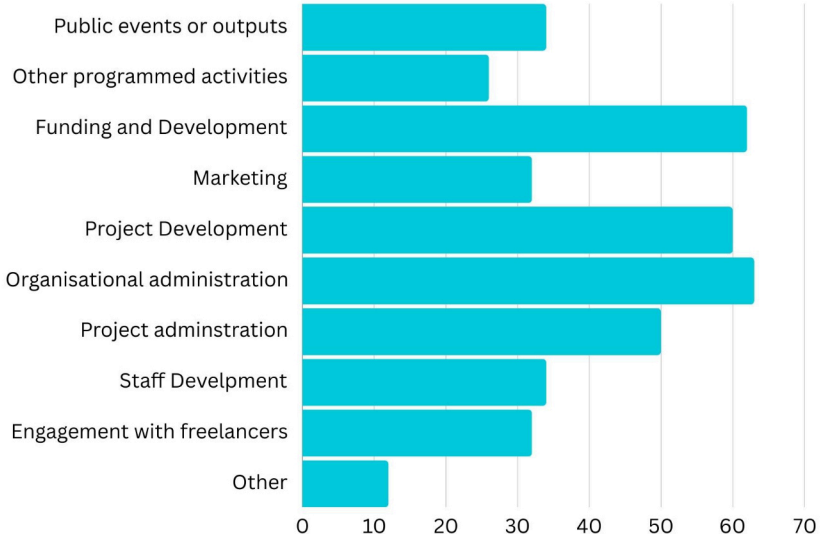
6. Impact of the MYF Application Process on Organisations

6.1 Work delayed, paused or cancelled – overview

Across all respondents who applied for MYF 89% delayed, paused or cancelled work.



All respondents who delayed, paused or cancelled work as a direct result of the capacity pressure presented by the MYF application process took the time to detail what kind of work was affected. It should be noted that the question requesting details of the affected work had 76 respondents and 438 pieces of information. This means that, on average, any given MYF applicant organisation had to delay, pause or cancel activities across 5 or 6 business areas.



Hardest hit were Funding and development activities, Project development and Organisational Administration.

6.2 Programme and public delivery disruption

One of the most immediate impacts of the MYF process was that, as a direct result of undertaking an application, organisations had no choice but to cancel planned arts activity. To put it another way – arts organisations were forced to deprioritise the very reason they exist to meet the demands of the MYF application process. As a result a whole range of individuals and communities – audiences, participants, artists, organisations – did without planned performances, workshops, retreats, support, engagement and other events and activities.

> **"Our creative work and output has been worryingly impacted"**
>
> **"regular projects were not able to be delivered"**
>
> **"Schools programme paused"**
>
> **"required…the cancellation of a major training and public performance project"**
>
> **"had to stop basically everything and put the organisation on pause for 2 months"**
>
> **"We were unable to progress with so much work…projects were delayed getting started and developed"**
>
> **"the MYF application had a severe impact on our organisation's ability to carry out its usual activities"**

Where programme activities went ahead some were scaled back or adapted in other ways to allow for lack of staff capacity, or were delivered with staff working beyond full stretch.

> **"while delivery went ahead in this period it was impacted by overstretched staff and would say the work in this period suffered for it"**
>
> **"For the programming we continued to deliver, we had to do it with the bare minimal resources and attention because we were having to prioritise MYF"**

Organisations advise of the damage to relationships with communities and partners as a result of being unable to meet their delivery commitments.

> **"This process hasn't just damaged the organisations who applied, it also damaged the communities we work in"**
>
> **"It was an utter distraction from the purpose of our organisation: to foster creativity and support our communities"**
>
> **"We had to pull out of some paid external events because we needed to prioritise MYF, which meant losing income and disappointing partners"**
>
> **"We felt the stress of letting down our partners and the communities that we serve"**

There were also issues with planning backlogs or delays, meaning some programmes will continue to be affected by the demands of the MYF application process in the coming years and months.

> **"had to hold off planning and programming our future activities, which had a detrimental effect and meant that as soon as the application was submitted we had a mountain of work on our plates but we were all exhausted"**

It remains to be seen what the lasting effects of this damage will be on organisations who rely on their public outputs, and – often encouraged by CS – have developed business models which trade on, their reputation and connection with audiences and stakeholders, professional partnerships and networks.

6.3 Financial Impact

The MYF application process created a variety of financial challenges, hardships, disruptions and insecurities for applicant organisations and their budgets with resultant financial insecurity now and in the future.

First there has been loss of earned income – often at the same time as organisations experience increased staffing costs as a result of the MYF application process :

> **"We trade to support our engagement activities and lost several large contracts due to not being able to get back to clients quickly because of MYF"**
>
> **"We will probably need to cut our team's hours for at least a few months until we hear the results of the application and can fill that hole in our budget"**
>
> **"Loss of income due to organisations being unable to respond to income generating contracts"**

Organisations lost out on funding opportunities when bids and applications to other funds, some of which were part of projected income in company plans, were obliged to be neglected or abandoned to concentrate of the MYF Application.

> **"We also missed some smaller funding application deadlines for projects"**
>
> **"The application took up so much time and therefore staff resources that I suspect it will have had a very negative impact on our future funding through missed deadlines and opportunities to apply to other funders"**

Other organisations faced funding delays and impact on company financial reserves:

> **"evaluation and reporting to multiple funders and partners was delayed, which in turn delays payment of final instalments of grants etc."**
>
> **"People are mostly getting paid…but it is eating into reserves"**

> **"We paid ourselves to do it through our company's reserves, which are now depleted, leaving us no safety net"**

The financial impact that the MYF application process has had on applicant organisations and their activities, now and in the future, is expected to be exacerbated by award decisions by CS. Applicant organisations base this expectation on the repeated statements of CS staff that the fund will be insufficient to meet the demands of applications and the practice of reducing funding awards from the amounts applied for.

> **"The main frustration with this two stage process is that we have been asked to do a spectacular amount of work and in all likelihood we will be awarded a smaller amount than we asked for – ultimately this means a lot of the work will have to be done again to reshape the programme, activity plan and budgets to fit the amount of funding offered"**
>
> **"I sincerely hope that if we are successful with our MYF application that we are awarded the amount we requested, if not it will have been a complete waste of our time"**
>
> **"knowing that this is likely to be the toughest CS funding round to date and that CS have clearly stated that many organisations may no longer be funded."**

The impossible position of arts organisations navigating today's funding landscape and specifically, trying to meet CS business imperatives whilst being hampered by the demands of an excessively labour intensive funding process driven by CS priorities, was outlined by one respondent in this way:

> **"we are continually encouraged to diversify funding streams by CS but there is no thought to the impact when you are unable to decide not to apply to funders who are clearly going through a period of consolidating their own interests and funded portfolios, and you need to try and make sure your company is included to survive"**

6.4 Pressure on leadership

82% of the leadership of respondent organisations report being impacted by the MYF funding application process. Leaders being unavailable due to the application process was reported to have halted, paused or otherwise impacted a whole range of important organisational activities (See 4.1 *In-house expertise* (p.10)). Leaders' responsibility for strategic and operational decision making, organisational governance and responsibilities for the people within the organisation were all deprioritise.

Organisations suffered from strategic, project and day to day disruption due to lack of access to their key decisions makers and leaders were put in an impossible position – torn between completing content for the MYF application that could only be addressed by someone with their level of knowledge and expertise, and meeting the other, pressing leadership responsibilities their organisations required of them.

> **"My day to day remit was put on hold, except for the most urgent of matters"**
>
> **"The process impacted my whole staff team to an extent: I was far less available to them for four weeks on Stage Two and could not respond to them all as quickly as usual, except for matters that took absolute priority"**
>
> **"complete pause on my work as Creative Director"**
>
> **"Postponed all meetings and 75% of all work on 2024 project**
>
> **"Forward planning was badly affected"**
>
> **"it was impossible to stay on top of everything. Governance suffered, and a board meeting was cancelled"**
>
> **"had to hold off planning and programming our future activities"**
>
> **"This meant that some decisions on office management and project management were delayed: frustrating for all, despite their willingness to understand the situation. My team were all brilliant, offering to take more on to help, but there are certain decisions only the CEO can take"**

Respondents – many with long experience of decision making and team leadership in high stakes environments or situations – talked about unprecedented pressure and feelings of deep personal responsibility for managing the duty of care for their staff and freelancers through what they felt was an excessively risky and unnecessarily challenging situation.

> **"the lingering doubt in the back of my mind as to whether I have done enough to save the jobs… of the best and most hard working people I know"**
>
> **"I am the director of the organisation and I am extremely robust, in the latter part of my career and have had stressful jobs with huge responsibility including capital development. This application however was really the worst process I have ever had to go through"**
>
> **"The idea that we might need to close our company after 30 years because of a technical error in how we approached the application felt very real"**

Organisations dealt with the practical impacts on staff of an extended lack of access to their leadership, whilst leaders endeavoured to ameliorate the effect on team morale of the upcoming funding decisions to be made by CS. This was especially challenging as it was perceived that CS decisions would be made based on what many felt was an exhausting and poorly designed application process that did not allow organisations to showcase their excellence (See Section 8 *MYF Application Design* (p.41)).

> **"this long wait and the high risk we all feel is having a huge impact on morale of staff and the forward momentum of the organisation"**
>
> **"It floored us, we are still exhausted"**
>
> **"It has had a detrimental effect on the mental, physical, and financial health and stability of our team"**

6.5 Excessive working hours

Relevant to both the previous and following sections of the report was the MYF application processes requirement for some leaders, staff and freelancers in key organisational positions to work excessive additional hours to complete the process (See Section 3.1 *MYF application – range, average and cumulative workload* (p.5) & 8.2 *Workload and Fair Working* (p.41)).

This was particularly challenging given the amount of work undertake without payment (See Section 3.3 *Paid and Unpaid working* (p.9)).

> **"we were working until 2am most days in the final weeks prior to the deadline"**
>
> **"Had to work over October Week and Easter Holiday"**
>
> **"Every member of our team, but especially the Director who does the grant writing, was required to work far past usual hours and working practices, for weeks"**

6.6 Staff disruptions

Organisations were required to deal with the impact the demands of the MYF funding application process had on their staff or freelance workers in key positions. Planned or day to day organisational activities like staff training and management were disrupted as leaders and team members prioritised their capacity to complete the MYF application.

Staff or freelancers involved with their organisation's bid were often, alongside their organisational leadership, subject to an excessive workload. The emotional toll of long working hours and a laborious and opaque application process had a detrimental effect on work / life balances. Many staff and freelancers – whether working on their organisation's MYF application or not – faced daily reminders of the prospect of financial and employment precarity in the future as a direct result of the pressures and stakes of the MYF application process. (See Section 7 *Impact of the MYF application process on people* (p.24)).

7. Impact of the Application Process on People

7.1 Which people?

Arts organisations rely on the work of a range of people connected, affiliated or engaged with the company in a variety of different ways e.g. employees, freelancers, project partners or collaborators being paid by a different organisation, etc. Unlike other fields or institutions like education or government where required organisational staff are simply employed at an industry standard rate on a permanent or fixed term contract and self employed individuals are contracted largely for project work, it is relatively common in arts organisations to find individuals fulfilling key organisational roles who are:

Employed on fixed term or permanent contract

Self employed and contracted part or full time

Donating some or all time – this is not just the scenario with Board members in organisations with a non-profit legal structure but is also encountered when arts organisations are funded on a project by project basis and essential organisational, governance and development work is required to keep the organisation running efficiently and to secure funding. In this situation it is common for individuals in key roles to take on income generating, self employed contracts or other employment outside of the organisation to subsidise their donated time in their organisational role. Individuals working in this way may also be paid by the organisation on fixed term contracts for projects which have secured funding.

Self employed, employed or volunteering in an organisational role in a group leadership or collective working structure – where a number of individuals share organisational roles and responsibilities for full, nominal or no payment.

The following are some of the impacts of the MYF application process on individuals working within key organisational roles on an employed, self employed or donated time basis. The impact on those working solely in freelance/project based roles with organisations is looked at in more detail elsewhere in the report. (See Section 13 *Impact on freelancers* (p.93)).

7.2 Financial impact on individuals

83% of all respondent organisations undertook unpaid working on the MYF funding application process. (See 3.3 *Paid and Unpaid working* (p.9)). For those employed by a conventional employment contract and a salary, extended unpaid overtime is an issue with multiple work and life impacts. The unpaid working and work overload (See

Section 3 *Range, average and cumulative workload* (p.5)) created an even more unmanageable issue for applicant organisations who rely on individuals maintaining leadership or other key roles in the organisation on donated time whilst subsidising their work there with their freelance contracts.

These individuals were particularly hard hit when the demands of the MYF application process not only impacted their work/life balance and cut across their other organisational priorities. The MYF application process demands also required a reduction in the time these individuals had committed to vital income generation freelance activities outside of their organisations. Unexpected, extensive unpaid overtime becoming necessary for the MYF application process for individuals in this situation is not simply exhausting, demanding and inconvenient, it is a financial disaster. The MYF application process required individuals take on personal financial risk by sacrificing their own financial wellbeing, planning and security and suspend their income to meet the heavy, extended workload presented to their organisation by CS. It's hard to imagine a less constructive or disheartening situation than a large funding organisation introducing a funding process which creates an unavoidable set of circumstances resulting in freelancing individuals taking on financial losses to complete an organisational funding bid that offer those individuals longer term financial security in their organisational roles if successful, but that is speculative at best.

Some applicant organisations – whether they are an existing RFO or not – have small core teams and/or key staff that are only employed part time by the organisation and who have other employment or freelance working commitments. The lack of acknowledgement or consideration for this in the MYF application process speaks to a significant failure on the part of Creative Scotland to understand, acknowledge, accept and work constructively across the realities of the sector. This suggests a significant working culture divide between Creative Scotland – with its 142 employees, many on full time and permanent employment contracts with pension plans (Creative Scotland 2022 Annual Report[4]) – and the realities of employment, or engagement for workers in the arts sector it funds.

> **"we anticipate reduced income and financial stress for all team members in the next 18 months, this coupled with not knowing what the outcome is until October provides little financial support for the individuals involved"**
>
> **"I run the organisation basically alone, and unpaid. I had to stop basically everything"**
>
> **"It has had a detrimental effect on the mental, physical, and financial health and stability of our team"**

7.3 Work disruption for individuals and teams

In their organisational capacities many people were obliged to deal with an absence of leadership during the MYF application process due to the process largely impacting leadership roles (See 4.1 *In-house Experience* (p.10)). Employed staff or freelance roles in staff positions found their capacity overwhelmed both by working around the practicalities of this absence and, on occasion, by their own involvement in generating what was a required for the organisation's MYF application. This caused a raft of wellbeing and work/life impacts.

Organisations' need for their programmed activities to be delivered despite the challenges to capacity meant some individuals delivered events without sufficient preparation, sufficient marketing or sufficient staffing levels to deliver the event to the level expected by the company's track record and reputation.

> **"This process severely impacted the wellbeing of our entire team"**
>
> **"running events with a skeleton crew, which lessened our ability to deliver events to our usual standards of professionalism"**

Because organisations dare not rely on receiving MYF and have spent extensive time creating Business Plans which will have to be radically reviewed and revised in the event of not receiving funds, staff and leaders now face the exhausting prospect of scenario planning for the future.

> **"We are now having to scenario plan – this will take hours of time and much energy [the survey hasn't] asked the question; how many hours will it take between now and October to plan for the outcome of the decision?"**

Many leaders and staff will find themselves part of this necessary scenario planning – with its need for imagination, enthusiasm, creative drive, clarity and resilience to be undertaken effectively. However, in survey questions about well-being impacts these are the kind of qualities cited as being depleted by individuals' experiences of the MYF application process. (See Section 7.5 *Wellbeing Impacts* (p.30))

7.4 Work backlogs and time off

In addition to the pressure and overwork experienced during the MYF application process, after the MYF submission dates individuals in many organisations found themselves dealing with the considerable backlog of work necessarily delayed and deprioritised to allow teams to meet the demands of the MYF application process

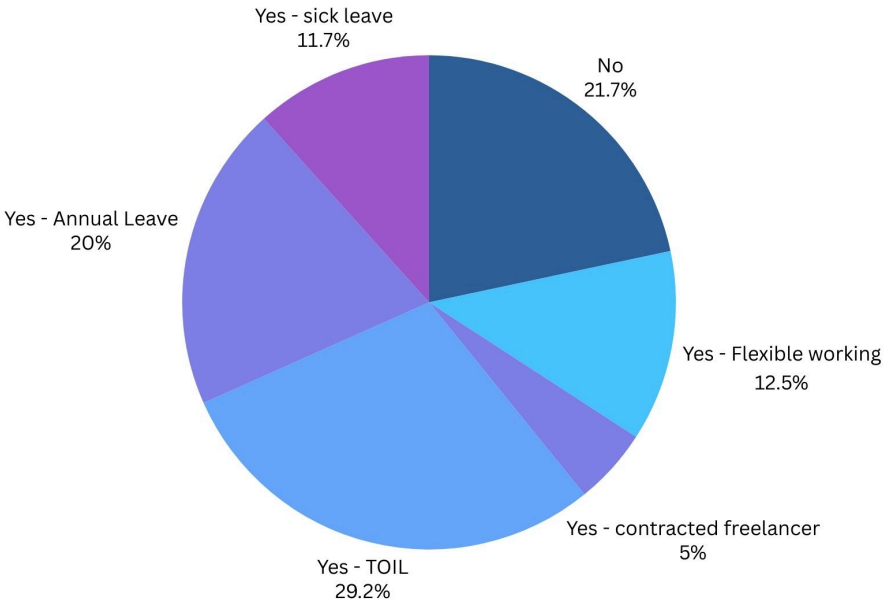
> **"work piling up for after the deadline"**
>
> **"weeks of constant work overload as end of year operational deadlines came and went unfinished"**
>
> **"having submitted Stage Two, there was barely a day of relief because I bear the responsibility for the continuation of a long established, well respected organisation and its broad remit"**

Alongside these backlogs there was a need for exhausted and overstretched individuals who had endured weeks of long working, with all the attendant impacts of work/life balance, to take time off or back. When asked if anyone in the organisation took time as a result of the MYF application process all MYF application respondents answered. As of the survey closure date of 19th May 2024, 78% of respondents said that individuals had taken time off and 22% said no one had taken time off. The total number of responses show that some organisations were dealing with more than one person on their staff or team taking time off in the immediate wake of the MYF submission date.

Another consideration is that multiple respondents mentioned that it was impossible for key staff to take time off after the MYF submission date despite exhaustion and the need for rest – so although 22% of organisations did not log any time off that does not mean that time off for the individuals involved in the MYF application process, or maintaining company delivery and management in the absence of leadership and other key roles, was not necessary and desirable.

> **"of course after the application was submitted there was a huge backlog of matters to deal with, hence I've only been able to take a fraction of the TOIL I accumulated"**
>
> **"I am so run down but cannot afford to take time off, because I have to get the organisation back on track after neglecting it so long for MYF"**

> **"The majority of the director's work on the application happened in non-work hours and were not able to be compensated by TOIL because of the necessity to keep the organisation running"**
>
> **"Backlog of activity to deal with post submission, felt unable to take leave during this time"**
>
> **"didn't take time off after the application process because I needed to catch up on all the work I had missed"**



Respondents provided us with a complex picture of time off. Across 58 respondents:

Average time taken off by individuals in organisation (by end May for an April process):
31hrs or 4.4 days

Range of time taken off by different individuals in organisations (by end May for an April process):
Zero to 210 hrs or 30 days

This potentially highlights not only the difference in working capacity and flexibility in a sizeable RFO funded organisation compared to smaller, project funded organisations but also that what is practical without further impacting the activities and momentum of an organisation varies considerably across organisation size and structure.

The significant proportion of respondents took no hours off as time off/sick leave or TOIL at all cited the following reasons:

> Lack of organisational capacity due to work backlog caused by MYF funding application process
>
> Financial precariousness as a result of income generating work being deferred, paused or cancelled work which required that work or new work be undertaken immediately after submission date
>
> Lack of organisational capacity due to public commitments which fell immediately after deadlines
>
> Lack of organisational capacity which would normally be dedicated to underwriting staff sick leave unrelated to the MYF funding process.

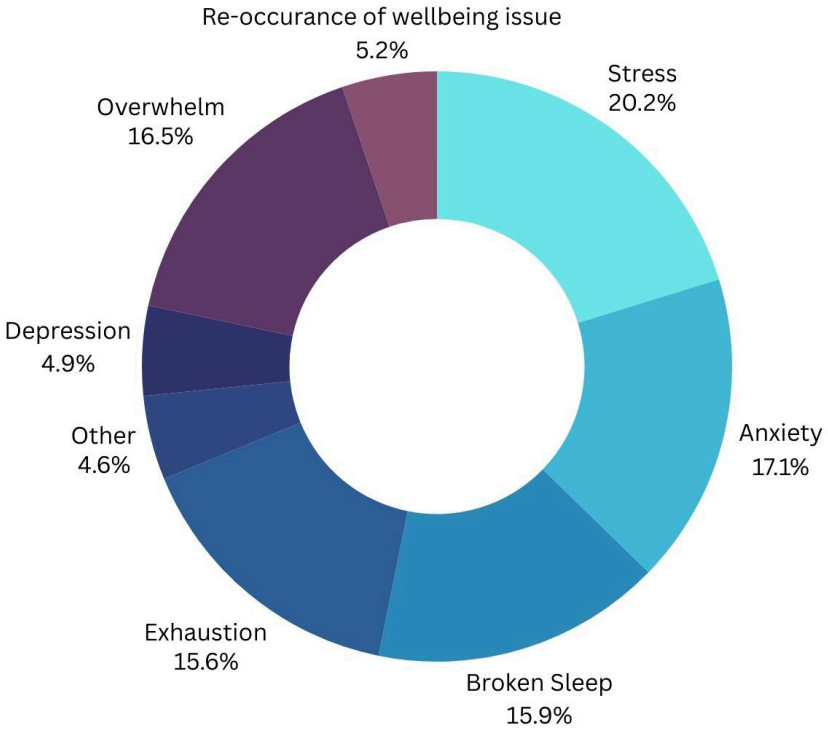
Even more concerning are responses saying that sick leave is required but has not been taken due to commitments and capacity (See Section 7.5 *Wellbeing Impacts* (p.30))

> **"because our work has piled up through the MYF process, and because we are not salaried, we are unable to take much medical leave"**

7.5 Wellbeing impacts

7.5.1 Overall Wellbeing impacts

The impact of the MYF application process on the wellbeing of individuals making applications was huge. In responses across the survey on the impact of the application process the harm done to individuals' wellbeing is mentioned repeatedly. In dedicated questions about impact on wellbeing 91% of respondents who were involved in MYF funding applications reported harm to their wellbeing as a direct result of the process.



A dedicated survey question allowed respondents to log multiple wellbeing impacts. There were 346 documented wellbeing impacts across 76 respondents. This means that individuals were dealing with multiple well-being impacts as a result of the MYF application process and/or that multiple members of organisational teams were suffering different wellbeing impacts at the same time.

7.5.2 The effects of sustained overwork

Much of the wellbeing impact on individuals is directly related to sustained overwork and a of lack of opportunity to step away and rest. This comes, in part, from the schedule of the MYF Application Process – with organisations lacking capacity to commit to the extensive work required by Stage Two until a decision was announced by CS that they were successfully progressing to that Stage, and then having only 8 weeks to generate what was required. Equally significant in driving the relentless and unreasonable workload was a lack of clear advance notice from CS on the nature and volume of what was required of organisations for both MYF Application Stages alongside a lack of sufficient and appropriate guidance and parameters for Stage Two in particular (See Section 3 *MYF application process workload* (p.5), Section 8 *MYF Application Design* (p.41)).

> **"I have never worked 7 days a week nor 12+ hours a day and trust I will never need to again"**
>
> **"spent 6 weekends writing this application. This is 6 weeks without a single day off"**
>
> **"spent time in evenings and weekends towards the end of the process"**
>
> **"The application process was a full-time job, for me, as organisation-lead, for a total of 14 full working weeks"**
>
> **"realistically, we could only begin working on S2 when we found out – which was 27 Feb, eight weeks prior to the deadline. This was not even close to the amount of time we realistically needed to develop that application while also delivering all of our other activities"**
>
> **"absolute overwhelm. This has manifested through physical symptoms for all [involved]"**

7.5.3 Impact on relationships and support systems

A significant wellbeing impact for individuals was that families, friends and other social supports had to be neglected or abandoned for applicants to meet the MYF demands and schedule. Much of the hardship was caused by the unexpected and unprecedented workload of the MYF application process and its resultant requirement for working hours "off the clock" i.e. taking place over evenings, weekends or during days of the week when part time staff would normally be off work.

> **"a lot of things in our personal lives had to be put on hold"**
>
> **"creates a huge amount of domestic strain, guilt and tension"**
>
> **"Relationship strain due to time away and indeterminate workload"**
>
> **"Destruction of my social life and communal resilience"**

29% of respondents to a question dedicated to access issues cited carer duties which were differentiated from childcare. (See also Section 12 *Access* (p.86))

Across multiple questions there were repeated responses citing the challenges, emotional hardship and financial costs the MYF application process forced upon those with children (See also Section 12 *Access* (p.86))

> **"a small team, some with young families we were working until 2am most days in the final weeks prior to the deadline. This caused relationship difficulties and families were impacted"**
>
> **"Family life and relationships suffered"**
>
> **"My family have been hugely impacted. I lost 70 hours of family time with my small children taken beyond usual working hours. I'll never get these back"**
>
> **"unplanned time away from young family which had an impact on personal and wider family well being"**

> **"I'm so upset that I allowed my wellbeing to suffer so much and my family to pay the price, but there was no choice"**

Some parents had to make significant changes to their living arrangements and the ways they met their childcare responsibilities and were forced to meet unforeseen costs linked to these.

> **"had to live with a parent (I am a lone parent) who only stopped to cook dinner rather than spend time with them"**
>
> **"Due to significant time requirement, additional childcare was sought"**
>
> **"Having to cancel hours of time with your children, to arrange last minute childcare (with no financial budget)"**
>
> **"a huge unnecessary stress for anyone with childcare responsibilities"**

Another key issue was the scheduling of the MYF application Stage One and Stage Two submission deadlines which were both set for immediately after school holidays. Across a number of questions respondents with children cited this as a particular challenge – with the MYF application process and schedule required them to work right through family holiday time. Whilst the survey did not disaggregate responses across gender, parenting responsibilities still disproportionately affect women and the lack of consideration given by CS to the impact of scheduling the Stage one and Stage two submission dates in this way clearly evidences a lack of concern for access and equality in the MYF application process design. (See Section 11 *MYF application process fit with art sector realities* (p.81)).

> **"it can't be overstated how much the process has affected family who were robbed of October and Easter holidays due to the demands of the funding application process"**
>
> **"ridiculous to place the deadline just after easter holidays"**
>
> **"The most difficult aspect was the demands it place on time of employees who had their own work to do and holidays to take (over Easter)"**

7.5.4 Financial impacts on individuals

Whilst the survey did not specifically request details on personal costs incurred by the MYF funding process, the issue of lost income and increased personal costs as a result of things like unexpected childcare costs were raised repeatedly.

Individuals connected to organisations making applications to MYF suffered disruption to their financial expectations and planning as a result of the effects of the MYF application process on those organisations. Organisations detailed a variety of impacts linked to the MYF application that had a direct effect on organisational cashflow delays or reductions in organisational income generation activities. (See Section 6.3 *Financial impact* (p.19))

In addition to the financial delays and shortfalls experienced by organisations and passed on to individuals, there was a, frequently concurrent, loss of income experienced by individuals who maintaining leadership or other key roles in the organisation whilst subsidising their work there with their freelance contracts. (See Section 7.2 *Financial impact on individuals* (p.24)).

Some individuals then, who met the demands of the MYF application process on behalf of organisations, suffered financial loss or upheaval as a direct result.

The unavoidable financial challenges of the MYF application process affected many who were already dealing with reduced income and/or opportunities due to the arts sector's extensive post-Brexit and post pandemic shrinkage – which has seen many arts professions required to manage an uncommon level of financial risk, precarity and vulnerability if they wish to stay in the sector. (For additional info see Section 13 *MYF application process impact on Freelancers* (p.97))

7.5.5 Impact on psychological and physical wellbeing

The impact of the MYF application process on the psychological wellbeing of individuals was extensive and varied (See Section 7.5.1 *Overall Wellbeing impacts* (p.30)) and harmful impacts included individuals enduring overwhelm and anxiety.

> **"The intensity of Stage 1 contributed to the feeling of overwhelm in Stage 2"**
>
> **"The process was overwhelming"**
>
> **"It has felt like we have been set up from the beginning to feel overwhelm and immense pressure"**
>
> **"absolute overwhelm"**

> **"The stress of the application took a large toll on mental health, ability to and quality of sleep, and overall physical health. Both myself and my colleague have never felt so anxious and overwhelmed in writing an application"**
>
> **"[Stage Two] bred further anxiety – did we do it correctly? Did we miss anything? Was that enough information? Should we have expanded in any way?"**
>
> **"There was considerable anxiety for the two organisation leads, which came in waves particularly when guidance changed, or when we moved onto different parts of the process (eg looking at questions after writing business plan"**
>
> **"flare-ups of anxiety (including many panic attacks)"**

In addition to overwhelm and anxiety respondents cite multiple experiences of burnout and illness.

> **"I had never experienced burnout in over 30 years of work. Following this process I now know the meaning of the word"**
>
> **"burnout"**
>
> **"All core team members entered into the process already considerably burnt out"**
>
> **"burnout"**
>
> **"The MYF process seemed like the only way we would resource ourselves and become sustainable as an organisation but also the process itself added considerably to the burn out."**
>
> **"Despite having previously managed huge funding bids and major projects, run organisations and large departments, I have never experienced burnout like this"**
>
> **"burnout"**

> **"has manifested through physical symptoms [for multiple individuals in the organisation]"**
>
> **"could not get out of bed or function…and am still recovering"**
>
> **"We all experienced broken sleep"**
>
> **"diagnosed with chronic mental fatigue by a neurologist"**
>
> **"multiple Directors have required medical leave"**
>
> **"The stress caused physical illness to the point that I sought medical attention. I was very unwell for the last week of the application process and for the week after submission"**
>
> **"Blood pressure hypertension for the first time in my life."**
>
> **"The stress caused me to have physical symptoms"**
>
> **"my spine is basically collapsing from the 15 hour days I've been doing for 4 weeks straight, I am having to go back to physio urgently"**
>
> **"illness, and physical symptoms caused by prolonged overload and severe stress"**
>
> **"our lead team are artists and movers, and the physical toll it took on our bodies to be at a desk for so many continued hours and days was huge"**

It should be noted that many respondents are experienced professionals and largely accustomed to the pressures of submitting demanding applications whilst running their creative practice or organisations. However, the MYF application process and its demands created a type of overwhelm and anxiety so significant it had serious impacts on confidence and optimism.

> **"I am generally a confident, optimistic person with 45 successful years in the…industry, now trying to keep a brave face on it all for my team and our stakeholders across Scotland and beyond"**

> **"feelings of sadness and hopelessness"**
>
> **"This is a hard thing to admit and talk about but I would say that it has affected my professional confidence deeply"**
>
> **"It's also challenging to positively write a creative application when the organisation you are applying to has made it clear that success rate will be low due to lack of funding and that negativity will loom until October 2024"**

7.5.6 Factors impacting wellbeing

> **"It was utterly demoralising"**

Respondents mentioned a specific stressor being the extended duration of the application process,

> **"The sheer pressure of the long wait for decisions between Stages One and Two was difficult"**
>
> **"have to wait an agonising six months for a final decision"**
>
> **"The effects / impact mentioned…were part of the process since August last year and are continuing because we don't know what's going to happen"**
>
> **"From preparing from June 2023 for the August 2023 Intention to Apply to the outcome at end of Oct 2024 is 17 months – this is way too long for our staff, and the thousands impacted across the sector, to be a generalised state of stress and sense of precarity for what the future may bring"**
>
> **"now we have months to wait before the decision is made. We cannot plan properly for 2025/26 as we should be committing funds and inviting artists to work now"**

The challenges of the extended MYF application process timeframe became more unmanageable when compounded by CS language and application requirements which many applicants found lacking clarity.

> **“The entire process was a guessing game – what does CS want to see? Are we doing it right? How do we communicate CS's priorities – not to mention our actual priorities – through this 25 page document? While we understand that CS’s objective was to make the application process open & broad enough for the wide range of organisations going through it, this vagueness created massive uncertainty, frustration, and likely overwork.”**
>
> **“the stress that the right information was not there”**
>
> **”the competitive process that we all felt through the marking of the questions. We all know that if we don't get the funds we ask for, in the words of my board 'will be used against us'. We know that we will be told by CS that we have not been able to respond to this or that criteria properly – this will cause a huge rift within organisations ultimately. All this makes this application, its form and potential impact extremely demanding.”**
>
> **“The lack of clarity about what was required in stage 2 created a panic where we just generated more and more documents to make our case”**
>
> **“panicked about what to include because they didn't really conclusively tell us”**
>
> **“The questions were so opaque. As far as I could tell, many were asking the same thing with slightly different wording”**
>
> **“It was very difficult to understand what was expected of us and hard to tell if we had been successful”**

But also deeply significant to applicant experiences and wellbeing impacts were the stakes and uncertainties around the MYF funding process.

> **"this high stakes round"**
>
> **"so much is riding on the outcome"**
>
> **"we felt immense pressure to do it excellently, as the future of our organisation – and our jobs – were on the line"**
>
> **"This process was incredibly pressured because of the knowledge of a) who else was applying and b) how limited the funds are"**
>
> **"Even the prospect of [some organisations not being funded] (and having to live with it for another six months) casts a terrible black shadow"**

And whilst the reality of the MYF fund being oversubscribed is not disputed, the repeated framing of the MYF funding process by CS as one where their decision making would leave many organisations unfunded was unhelpful and is cited repeatedly as a source of stress as applicants undertook the MYF application process. This unnecessarily stress-inducing framing sat alongside a startling lack of clarity, constructive guidance or any other information from CS around how or when unsuccessful MYF applicants would be able to apply to alternative funds or take other steps to secure their future and respondents are clear this exacerbated the stress, anxiety and overwhelm they experienced and, for some, felt positively antagonistic.

> **"Working in an negative environment when senior CS staff regularly informed us that many would not succeed with this application process during information sessions. There will be a sizeable reduction in groups being supported by this new process"**

"The lack of support from Creative Scotland and the, 'drawbridges up and portcullis down' atmosphere from them. They felt like the gatekeepers judging the sector and wanting us to fail, rather than the body supporting and championing the sector and wanting us to thrive"

"Trying to avoid repetition, endless justification and just feeling worthless in a time of spending cuts and having constant CS repetitive messages ringing in our ears about so many going to fail within the process"

"The forced emphasis on competition was the antithesis of what our sector and the creative industries in Scotland have previously been about. It was very hard to maintain a positive outlook and I am still afraid this may have negatively impacted the application we submitted"

"Then to cap it all we are very firmly told in the CS press release that only a few will be funded – what a slap in the face"

"the huge fear that one wrong step could mean not getting the support needed"

"a very high pressure, make or break fund, which we know there is not nearly enough money to support"

"it is the implications of the outcome of this MYF grant that make the process so demanding – the decision, however it is made, will have such a huge impact on our organisation"

"The competitive nature of this process was the main reason this was so demanding. Because we knew that there was a deficit in the CS budget we had to work additionally hard to secure the future of the organisation"

"I take the whole process to be a disciplining of the sector in order to instil certain ways of working"

8. MYF Application Design

8.1 Overview

> **"Creative Scotland MUST simplify their funding systems"**

Almost every respondent who undertook the MYF application process has something to say about the challenges presented by the process design.

> **"If CS had aimed to create a process that would generate the most amount of labour for the sector then this was it"**
>
> **"appeared poorly thought through"**
>
> **"The 2 stage process has prolonged everything and made way more work"**
>
> **"The format of this whole process has been dreadful"**
>
> **"The whole process and assessment has become more of a complex rubric, not transparent, less robust than the past, designed for failure and to chase you away if you complain"**
>
> **"it's hideous, stressful and extraordinarily badly designed"**
>
> **"a shockingly poorly designed funding process"**

8.2 Workload and Fair Working

Many respondents found the workload of the MYF application process excessively demanding, long and laborious – having significant impacts on company activities, programme delivery, company finances and the health, wellbeing, quality of life and finances of the individuals involved (See Section 3 MYF Application Workload (p.5), Section 6 *Impact of MYF application process on Organisations* (p.16), Section 7 *Impact of MYF application process on Individuals* (p.24)).

The impact of the workload – much of it being met by unpaid labour – is impossible to square with the declared CS priority of Fair Work and the requirement that all business plans included a Fair Work policy.

"The deep anger at the irony of working late into the night answering questions on access, engagement, fair work and equalities policies – when there was no evidence of respect for any of these in the design or of the application process itself"

"How this can possibly be squared with any notion of 'Fair Work' is laughable. The process has clearly been designed by committee without a thought to the actual people actually doing the applications"

"Writing in detail about fair work when you yourself has not slept due to the stress of writing about fair work probably best sums it up"

"did not really fit in with the Fair Work First principles – given that staff had to work overtime to complete the application"

"Writing 1500 words in stage one on fair work and then more in stage 2, knowing that 250 organisations were writing applications for free is somewhat ironic"

"This extensive unpaid labour is not consistent with the Fair Work values CS expects organisations in receipt of public funds to uphold."

"The amount of time required to build something specific to the exacting requirements" "The funding lead has worked on many £1m+ tenders and funding applications and stated that this was the most arduous of all they had written in over 30 years of experience"

"It's also maddening to see how this process upholds Fair Work policies for CS staff – they get six months to process all of these applications, whereas we only get eight weeks to write them"

8.3 The three stage process

Whilst the MYF was framed as a two stage process it was, in fact, a three stage process with the third stage being a significant online submission form.

First of all respondents were impacted in multiple ways by the two initial stages of the MYF application process, citing challenges with both the duration of the process and the design of the different stages.

There were impacts on workload and labour due to the process having two stages:

> **"I think the aim of the two stage process was to reduce hours and labour within the sector. This really felt like it doubled the workload, if not more so. Instead of 1 concentrated period of work there was 2. It felt all consuming"**
>
> **"leading to immense stress x 2"**
>
> **"the two stage process meant there was more work involved and more hours contributed to the application process"**
>
> **"This 2-stage idea was meant to minimise workload but just doubled it. We wrote 46,000 words between the two stages"**
>
> **"There was an incredible amount of work required for both stages"**
>
> **"Our application was around 84000 – basically a PhD – this is too much"**
>
> **"The two lead artists spent 5 full weeks of unpaid time on the 2 stages"**
>
> **"The 2 stage process was not well thought through as it was the equivalent of 2 applications"**

> **"I completely understand that some form of process should exist, that accountability is vital, that public benefit is the priority, but these things are not served by asking small scale charities to provide nearly 80,000 words of written material"**

The exceptionally long duration of the entire MYF Application process – with its prolonged periods of stress, overwork, upheaval for organisations and impact on financial planning for the future – was cited as one of the reasons respondent found it to be 'More' or 'Much More' demanding than other applications.

> **"Drawn-out nature of the 2-stage process"**
>
> **"The 2 stage process has prolonged everything and made way more work"**
>
> **"The sheer duration of the process itself is demanding, the best part of 15 months from starting Stage One to the results of Stage Two"**
>
> **"The whole process has been really drawn out and will last 14 months"**
>
> **"the process is way too long for the length of funding being offered"**
>
> **"The 2-stage process could have been an improvement, but both were over long, especially for small organisations"**

Stage One required organisations to do much of the planning, projection and decision making that would underpin Stage Two, at a point where those organisations had no idea if they would make it to Stage Two. Many applicants mentioned CS assurances that Stage One would be 'light touch' and the fact that this turned out to be entirely untrue, with Stage One being a long and demanding application in its own right.

> **"Any other 2-stage funding process I've ever been part of has a much, MUCH lighter touch stage 1 process"**

> **"There was briefing that stage 1 would be 'light touch', but it felt anything but"**
>
> **"huge volume of information required for Stage 1, when it was supposed to be more 'light touch' at that stage"**
>
> **"The supposed light touch Stage one"**
>
> **"Stage 1 was unnecessarily long and appeared to ask far more than any staged process experienced to day (whether government tenders, funding applications etc) and was surely unnecessary"**
>
> **"The volume of Stage 1 – which involved around 9,000 words of text"**
>
> **"At stage 1 a huge amount of detailed work was required to complete what was supposed to be a summary application; of course it is not possible to give indicate budget figures or outline programmes without doing the detailed work"**
>
> **"Even with a top level budget in stage 1, the work still had to be done on the budget to get accurate figures"**
>
> **"I had high hopes that stage one would be a light touch process and that the more detailed work would come if you were invited through to stage 2. After writing more than 14,000 words for stage 1, I certainly wouldn't call it light touch!"**

It was then extremely disheartening for organisations that had undertaken to create a sizeable application for Stage One to find that it did not, in fact, make much of a difference as to whether they would be selected for Stage Two with the vast majority of Stage One applicants being selected to move on to Stage Two. Many organisations felt they had been asked to provide really significant amounts of information for no real reason.

> **"in the end, stage 1 did not mean that many people being removed from the process. so what was the point? it was an extra level of application and additional work"**

"The worst thing I feel is that there were too many organisations getting through to stage 2, meaning more unpaid work with CS having the prior knowledge that at least half, but probably more like two thirds will not be funded. This makes a nonsense of a two stage application. Not only for those applying but also for creative Scotland staff"

"The stage one was framed as competitive but it was a glorified eligibility check. I was expecting far more orgs to be cut from stage one"

"The main thing I would say that a two stage process only works if the first stage is used to filter out all but the most likely to be funded. If 80% of stage 1 applicants go through to stage 2, then stage 1 has not done its job"

"The bar for progression to Stage Two was set too low, thereby leading to very low odds of success for those organisations which have invested a huge amount of time and resource but are ultimately unsuccessful"

"the 2 stage process was meant to prevent organisations undertaking huge amounts of work if they were unlikely to gain support but what's happened is a dissatisfactory half way house"

"the idea of asking for so much information at Stage 1 and then putting 80% of applicants through to Stage 2 made no sense. If the basis of Stage 1 decisions was purely to see if applicants met the criteria, then this could have been accomplished with much less information"

> **"it would have been fairer to make the difficult decisions at that stage…This would have: 1 given unsuccessful organizations more time to adjust. 2. Been fairer on the time demand on unsuccessful organizations. 3. Taken the pressure of the Business planning process, perhaps even allowing for a two way conversation with CS on the strengths and weaknesses of the plan"**

> **"In an ideal world, funding would have been awarded after Stage 1 and then the following months could have been spent writing the business plan to support the amount of funding offered"**

Respondents had issues with the lack of time between Stage One and Stage Two in light of the enormous amount of work each stage involved. Some organisations felt obliged to devote working time to their application for Stage Two without knowing if they had made it to that Stage, and other organisations prioritised their organisational commitments until the Stage One decision before beginning work on the Stage Two application.

> **"The balance of delivering all of this whilst still meeting all of our active projects…I had even less time to draft the Stage 2 application, and almost no time to consult with trustees and get their input"**

> **"length of time between Stage 1 result and Stage 2 deadline was too short and meant that people had to start extensive work on Business Plans before finding our if successful in Stage 1"**

> **"The idea CS put forward that we had plenty of time to work on the S2 application – that we could/should have started when the guidance was issued in January – was unrealistic and frankly insulting. They said in their FAQs 'For Stage 2 specifically, we published the supplementary guidance for Stage 2 as scheduled on 17 January 2024, 7 weeks before the Stage 2 fund opened, and 14 weeks before the fund deadline.' As a non-RFO organisation (and even if you are RFO) we do not have the resources to work speculatively. It would have been an irresponsible use of our time to begin developing a S2 application before we knew we'd gotten through to S2"**

Applicants found that the submission requirements of the MYF Application process Stage One and Stage Two were broadly and frequently repetitive but not in a way that was exact enough to allow work that had already been done to be effectively and easily used across both Stages.

> **"It was all very circular and complex to keep a track of where and how everything had been addressed"**
>
> **"The duplication of tasks / info shared between the two rounds was actually more time consuming as it wasn't like for like"**
>
> **"a truly unnerving process in which it became impossible to know whether beyond a criteria check you were appealing to decision makers"**
>
> **"The level of repetition across the two stages did not reduce the amount of work required"**
>
> **"It was like 3 independently-conceived documents that hadn't bothered to get together and agree what they wanted"**

> **"Questions in part 1. Business Plan in part 2, several months later with guidance that discusses how orgs will be penalised if they are inconsistent"**
>
> **"The significant lack of connection between CS stating that one's stage two business plan could be in any format and/or style etc, while simultaneously expecting it to address closely further responses to the specific questions which formed the stage one application."**
>
> **"If I had known the content of Stage-2 guidance from the outset I would have conducted answering Stage-1 differently, ensuring answers aligned and there was no repetition. As it was, answering Stage-1 'blind' led to a logistical quagmire of cross referencing, requiring needless, stressful, extra work"**
>
> **"Also, the 2 guidance documents – for the stage-2 form and business plan – did not align. Eg. one was informed in the application guidance that appendices might not be referred to, yet told in the business plan guidance to put all detail on programme content in appendices ie. that CS might assess the application without taking any interest in programme content whatsoever"**

This was also found to be the case when exhausted applicants facing a tough deadline reached the online submission stage.

> **"the confusion on how to present the answers between the BP and the CS form"**
>
> **"The questions asking to point out where in your business plan you had answered the questions was a gruelling hoop-jumping exercise"**

> **"Finally to add complete insult to injury question 2 on the actual application form was different from the one published in the guidance and the trick question at the end was simply unnecessary"**

> **"The other main reason for the difference in the amount of work required for this process was due to the fact that the Business Plan process did not correlate well with the application questions"**

> **"The sneaky switcheroo of questions in the guidance vs portal, and the extra question. That's just mean"**

8.4 A business template

Many respondents found the requirement to format submissions as a Business Plan built to MYF application priorities in Stage Two of the MYF funding process imposed a business lens and corporate measures on organisations that function in legal models, creative and community priorities and delivery, operational and financial realities that are not fully or well reflected by that format and its attendant priorities and underpinning assumptions.

> **"the overall creation of the process felt like a corporate template imposed on a large number of SMEs which are fundamentally unsuitable to that scale"**

> **"It felt perversely corporate in some of its asks"**

> **"I have no confidence that Stage Two will support a good understanding of an organisation's work given the methodology applied"**

> **"The lenses through which we were asked to view our plans were clearly geared towards increasing our responses in those directions, not simply stating what it is we did in this direction, and in many ways, due to the competitive environment and deep funding uncertainty from the government, forced us into corners which were clearly contrived to appease the assessors"**

> **"I take the whole process to be a disciplining of the sector in order to instil certain ways of working"**

It was a specific challenge that the guidance and submission requirements provided by CS on Business Plans did not line up with a standard Business Plan. This meant that applicants were faced with 'open ended writing' when creating a Business Plan to MYF application priorities – rather than working to a standard structure laid out in the guidance. Equally laborious was the need for organisations to entirely rework their existing, functional, fit for purpose Business Plans so that they were tailored to the specific CS priorities for the MYF.

> **"effectively an open ended application [which] created a huge amount of pressure"**
>
> **"this process – particularly at S2, was far more demanding because of the lack of structure and guidance"**
>
> **"The Business Plan was really hard as, rather than just a normal business plan it had to be adapted to answer the questions in Stage 2. This took a lot of time"**
>
> **"Both stages were hugely onerous and required the organisation to write completely new copy in order to respond This was something we had not expected, nor was it based on previous funding through CS"**
>
> **"required us to reformat all of our usual project/ organisational planning into this 25 page structure, which we found very difficult"**
>
> **"Writing a business plan with the detail and focus that was required by CS"**
>
> **"the guidelines said it was not necessary to write a specific business plan, but then dictated a whole series of things that had to be in the BP meaning that a specific one did have to be written"**
>
> **"The business plan was purely written for the funding application"**

> **"Requiring a complete business plan at a time which was not in line with our business planning process took a lot of time"**
>
> **"We already had a full active business plan, which had to be completely rewritten to show all the things they wanted"**
>
> **"Stage 2 was the most challenging, whilst CS stated that the Business Plan was not "a funding application but a working document for the organisation" it was clearly a funding application with a 56 page document explaining how you should write a 25 page plan" "The structure of Stage 2 where the Business Plan' had to be tied to the same 18 questions, was an extraordinarily convoluted process that flew in the face of what was said about the BP not being a funding application and may be a document that an organisation has in place for other purpose"**
>
> **"The guidance given felt flippant in suggesting that we could simply tweak an existing business plan, while having to ensure that we were adequately answering the questions in the application at the same time"**
>
> **"the requirement to provide a business plan but link back to questions that don't always match the totality of our business plan"**
>
> **"A Business Plan is a summary of lots of other plans that sit underneath it so if you need to develop or review those other plans, that's a big task before you can even start the Business Plan if you want to make sure everything connects properly"**

Applicants stated that a factor in their rating the MYF application process as 'More' or 'Much More' demanding than other applications, was the requirement to tailor a 'Business Plan' to specific CS requirements. Applicant organisations also felt they were required to provide an unacceptable number of appendices, some of which were, in effect, mandatory.

> **"given the competitive nature of the process, plus diminished funds, we took very seriously the need to re-write or completely invent policies and ways of working in order to meet the demands of MYF. its too big risk not to"**
>
> **"This forced us to add a ridiculous amount of appendices"**
>
> **"revising or creating new Appendices and/or Polices that could then be referred to in the BP"**
>
> **"the policies required are incredible. The weighting of our business plan must have been 70% policies to 20% programme design to 10% actual business plan creation" And the lack of guidance on the supporting documents was incredibly frustrating"**
>
> **"We understood that other organisations were including dozens, so we felt pressure to include as many as possible"**

Applicants agreed with the priorities behind the CS policies emphasised as being key in the MYF application process. However many found the requirement to produce these at application stage to be unreasonable.

> **"We believe wholeheartedly in the social and environmental priorities that drive the assessment process, but at some stage there has to be an acceptance that those principles are not deliverable without more resource"**
>
> **"welcome some attempt to encourage the sector to deal with racist, extractivist, colonial social issues, these are couched in such liberal ways as to simply reinforce many of the problems they seek to address"**
>
> **"we continue to meet the discipline of increasingly vast conditionality that, ironically, both Creative Scotland and the Scot Gov don't seem to meet, but yet, we are expected, in our tiny organisations, to create, perform and meet"**

> **"no understanding of the relative age and size of organisations and the fact they will be at different levels of organisational development as a result. [We had feedback on] not having carbon audit plans. We are TINY"**
>
> **"We are not an RFO and we felt we were aiming at 'invisible hoops' re EDI, environment and Fair Work"**
>
> **"completely agree that we should all be doing our bit for the environment, fair work and be much more accessible, however what is expected of us in this area is not fair and we don't have the specialist knowledge or capacity to even be effective. What should happen is that once funded you get advice and guidance in how to adapt"**

It was also an issue that the advice in the CS *Business Planning Guidance for Creative and Cultural Organisations*[5] lined up with neither standard Business Plan advice and structure nor the activities and indicators that the applicant organisations felt were to key showcasing their achievements and goals. Matters were further complicated by the need at submission stage to align the Stage Two Business Plan effectively with the questions on the submission form.

> **"It was very difficult to fulfil the requirements of the questions and also follow the guidance given for writing a successful Business Plan."**
>
> **"the guidance document on writing a business plan was laughably inadequate and inappropriate, despite its billing as being specially commissioned for creative organisations. A business plan guide for creative organisations that doesn't suggest including an outline programme (ie what the organisation will do) is way off the mark – anyone who followed these guidelines to the letter would have had a business plan that would not address all the questions being asked"**

> **“Many of the questions would not normally sit in a business plan. So it is difficult to double guess whether it is more important to write a coherent business plan or just force the answers into a ‘pretend’ business plan”**

> **“The Business plan was an extremely difficult circle to square. On the one hand to write a business plan using the guidance given by Creative Scotland on 'how to write a good business plan', on the other hand to ensure to effectively answered the portal questions with out simply repeating stage 1”**

Respondents felt there was a lack of focus on the excellence and impact of their organisations arts activity.

> **“We wrote little to nothing about our art form, where it is and where we think it needs to go. There was simply no space when you were given 500/250 words and had to make sure you were ticking the boxes”**

> **“in the second stage particularly, not very interested at all in the actual work that we hope to make”**

> **“the ratio of policies over programme and impact is insane”**

> **“Of the initial 21 questions in stage-1 (22 including the final 'diversity-led' question) only 3 concerned programme content; the rest were entirely concerned with EDI, fair work and governance etc. There was a clear message that the politics and bureaucracy of HOW work is to be delivered is more important to CS than what the work actually is.”**

"Ultimately this process was not about saying what you do and why you do it from a creative/ artistic and strategic point of view, in your own way as a creative organisation, and then letting your vision be assessed and judged along with others to create a picture of Scotland as a cultural place"

"making this a business plan and application writing competition and not a way to ensure and maintain quality of creative programming across Scotland"

"There was very little in the MYF funding process that allowed us to refer to reputation, experience and artistic output. As a company with a long and successful history with audiences it seemed most of the emphasis was on policy, business planning and understanding and using corporate language"

"having to go through this process insidiously informs and bastardises the ways we work, so that practices take on the language and methodology imposed on us by CS, which is liberal and limited in it's utility, and in fact impeded more radical or just ways of working" "the priorities are not aesthetic or artistic: artistic production is maybe covered in one question in the Quality and Ambition section, so a third of a sixth of the priorities. the rest are gov policy agendas"

"My own organisation has a very wide ranging remit and it is not easy to illustrate all that we do within the confines of the written word: surely it is also important for assessors to understand impact through observing the work of an organisation in person and engaging with the stakeholders?"

"leaving little space to address artistic production"

> **"A business plan is concerned with risks, swot analysis and strategies for a business and whilst these are necessary within public funding, to remove any opportunity to talk about creative ideas, vision and ambition within those 25 pages (because you had to deliver all the business detail) meant that it was devoid of who we are"**
>
> **"overly indulgent bureaucratic interrogation designed to satisfy Creative Scotland reporting not deliver any benefit to artists or arts organisations"**
>
> **"The way they ask about the art itself felt secondary."**

And also that the process deprioritised the skills and abilities brought to organisational planning, management and programmes by those with an arts background and focus.

> **"It failed to take into account that many non-RFO's are artist led with a different skill set" "there are not enough services who truly understand Arts organisations, the values and the innovative practice to deliver a plan that is reflective of this."**
>
> **"Small organisations who are expert at what they do and extremely efficient, impactful and creative can lose out because they aren't so used to resourcing for bureaucracy"**
>
> **"We were acutely aware through the process of writing this application that our small team of four artists who are self-taught in business and finance would be going up against major organisations with funding – organisations who have far more skills, resources, and time to devote to this application. We felt an immense pressure to do equivalent work to those organisations, and pushed ourselves far past what is reasonable and supported by Fair Work principles"**

8.5 Language and clarity

A recurring issue was the lack of clarity in the MYF application process guidance documents, and the application forms themselves. This was, at least in part, related to CS use of opaque language and phrasing while framing their application requirements as both vague yet also demanding (See section 7.5.6 *Factors affecting wellbeing* (p.37)).

> **"While we understand that CS's objective was to make the application process open & broad enough for the wide range of organisations going through it, this vagueness created massive uncertainty, frustration, and likely overwork"**
>
> **"simultaneously very specific and very vague"**
>
> **"we were given vague guidelines"**
>
> **"The lack of clarity about what was required in stage 2 created a panic where we just generated more and more documents to make our case"**
>
> **"Why not just ask direct questions? Why ask questions that apparently need a whole webinar to explain what they mean?"**
>
> **"it would have been far far better for creative Scotland just to write a clear list of the information they required"**
>
> **"The obscurity of the question wording, relying on jargon and the resulting need to spend a significant amount of time interpreting what was even meant"**
>
> **"there was no clarity around this"**
>
> **"convoluted rules"**
>
> **"I went to one of the online Teams Q&A sessions that Creative Scotland offered and when they talked through the questions some of the things they said they might be looking for in response to a particular question bore no resemblance to the actual question. It felt like interpreting the questions was a test in itself at times"**

> **"I spent a lot of time in conversation with highly educated and skilled people at major organisations, trying to interpret the guidance and realising we all had a different understanding of what was wanted"**

> **"I was terrified that I might be marked down for not including something, without having been asked for it or knowing it might be needed"**

Respondents also found the structure and wording of the questions across Stages to be confusingly repetitive.

> **"providing similar information across both stages with a steer not to repeat material"**

> **"Answering several questions on the same topic"**

> **"The confusion over the questions which seemed to be asking the same thing three times"**

> **"And then they say no repetition, but ask the same questions over and over"**

> **"Writing the same information twice, in different ways"**

> **"consistent need to avoid repetition"**

> **"multiple rounds of pointless repetition"**

> **"The form of the application which was very repetitive"**

> **"lots of repetition between stage 1 and 2"**

> **"Repetition between questions in both stages"**

> **"asking the same questions almost but not quite is the most bat shit crazy thing I have seen in two decades of working in the sector"**

It should be noted that the density and lack of clarity in guidance materials also created significant work and costs for organisations who did not, ultimately, apply for to the MYF.

> **"when MYF and EPF were announced it took a significant amount of time, including paying experienced arts producers, to look at the 2 funds in detail and try to work out which one to apply to. There was a LOT of crossover. The info about each one was quite complicated. Even at this stage, it was too inaccessible and needlessly complex"**

This is an ongoing issue and has been raised multiple times. The Wavehill Evaluation states[6],

> ***One criticism levelled by organisations that provided submissions to the Committee's inquiry was that the application forms and guidance provided by Creative Scotland were not clearly written and were full of jargon and bureaucratic language. For some, this presented an unnecessary barrier when applying for funding. Similar criticism was raised by a number of organisations that responded to the survey of applicants to 2015-18 RFO funding and is also consistent with feedback from Creative Scotland staff involved in the assessment of applications for the 2018-21 RFO process***

8.6 Word limits

Balancing the amount of information required to answer questions within word limits or Business Plan page limits was considered particularly tough. In Stage two in particular these page limits resulted in what respondents felt was an excessive amount of document appendices.

> **"How can you really answer all the questions in stage 2 in any more detail than stage 1 when you only have a 25 page business plan to do it in?"**
>
> **"My main issue was the tight restrictions of the business plan (questions that had to be answered within a very tight page limit) in relation to the open-ended option"**
>
> **"While we managed everything (just) within 25 pages, I know many friends and colleagues, particularly RFO CEOs etc, really struggled with the pages limit"**
>
> **"The limited number of pages [in the Business Plan] created a reliance on a fairly extensive set of appendices"**
>
> **"At stage 2 the level of detail required, particularly in the appendices, to provide the evidence required for the application assessment was significant"**
>
> **"The 25 page limit for the plan wasn't really enough to give adequate information as requested in the application"**
>
> **"My [25 page] BP was nearly 300 pages once appendices were in"**
>
> **"The BP limit, though helping to stay focused, meant that the bulk of the application was about the Appendices, around 20 of them"**

Having managed this balancing act by putting information important to their application in the appendices of their business plan it was then extremely discouraging to MYF applicants to be informed by the MYF guidance that all appendices would not necessarily be read and assessed.

> **"one was informed in the application guidance that appendices might not be referred to, yet told in the business plan guidance to put all detail on programme content in appendices ie. that CS might assess the application without taking any interest in programme content whatsoever"**
>
> **"it was maddening doing that work and knowing that those documents might not even be opened"**

MYF applicants found their concern that their Stage Two Business Plan and Appendices would not be read and comprehended in full and on a considered, attentive level to be compounded when they faced the Submission Portal questions:

> **"The portal application for Stage 2 was a truly dispiriting process"**
>
> **"to provide supporting documents that may/may not be considered"**
>
> **"The final straw was the ask of organisations to point to pages of the business plan. We had spent so much time writing and crafting this document, in support of the application that we should have expected to submit and for it to have been read in full"**
>
> **"But worst of all having to literally list paragraph and sentence number in each question was astounding, seriously? READ THE PLAN AND APPENDICES THAT WE WERE FORCED TO WRITE OR CHANGE YOUR PROCESS"**

> **"It was also very frustrating to be asked to write a business plan and appendices, but then also have to do the application questions, which were effectively an exercise in signposting. It made us feel that CS wasn't going to bother to read our application and needed to be told where everything was. After all the work we put in, that section felt like a slap in the face and an admittance of laziness on CS's behalf: please do all this work, in detail, then make a handy Cliff's Notes version for us so we don't have to read it"**

> **"the Stage 2 Questions were essentially pointing assessors to places in the plan about where to find information that had already been given so very repetitive"**

> **"but also it was I doing that work and knowing that those documents might not even be opened"**

Applicants were concerned that, not only were they required to orientate MYF assessors through the applicant's Business Plan, but that the questions asked by the online submission platform did not match the questions asked in either of the two Stages or the pre-guidance issued by CS on what the submission platform would ask.

> **"the actual stage 2 application was, in all honestly a farce. It basically asked us to do CS's job for them – matching up the already answered questions with the strategic plan was such a convoluted task that seemed unnecessary"**

> **"The questions asking to point out where in your business plan you had answered the questions was a gruelling hoop-jumping exercise"**

> **"the confusion on how to present the answers between the BP and the CS form"**

> **"this [overtime] was necessary to just get the structure right [and] unpick what I call the riddle between the application and the business plan"**

> **"Finally to add complete insult to injury question 2 on the actual application form was different from the one published in the guidance and the trick question at the end was simply unnecessary"**

> **"The CS software for uploading the business plan and appendices not being consistent, those endless 23 or whatever questions asking where you info is and then hidden questions at the very end of the process was just so draining and again repetitive"**

> **"The questions in the second round changed between what was originally issued and what was on the final form, to the point where it drastically altered the meaning of what we were being asked"**

Finally the online submission portal caused practical problems in the way it operated at a point where overworked organisations were facing the deadline of a long, laborious application process.

> **"the online process (caused stress), as there was no clear way to see that documents had uploaded properly"**

> **"It was unclear without going through the form (only possibly by uploading early drafts) what the questions would be, so prep was made very tricky"**

8.7 Financial Pro-forma

Many respondents found the design of the MYF application Stage Two Business Plan Financial Pro-forma confusing or so laborious as to be nearly unfit for purpose.

> **"Proforma budget table was confusing"**
>
> **"We found the financial ProForma more complex than in previous RFO applications: the need to include two prior years figures against trying to forecast what impact inflation might have in 2025-28 resulted in a dilemma about how to pitch our as"**
>
> **"That Proforma. What the actual ****. Even my fundraising advisor was stumped by it" "budgets about budgets. it was a farcical experience"**
>
> **"The finance section in particular – as the way we had to present the budget, forecasts, cashflow etc. was so prescriptive – we essentially had to rewrite and calculate our existing budgets in order to fit in with CS's way of doing things"**
>
> **"our financial years do not align with pro-forma"**
>
> **"changed finance pro forma info (section headings changed) especially when focusing on previous 2 years figures"**

8.8 Suitability for assessment

A number of respondents expressed concern that the documents and responses created as a result of the MYF application process would prove difficult for CS to assess effectively and transparently.

> **"It feels like a hugely unfair ask of the assessment team to try and engage with the volume of material they're going to receive and we have real concerns about how opaque the assessment process appears at its final stage of 'programme balancing'"**

> **"I have always been impressed by the ability of CS assessors to read thoroughly thru our previous applications. So I was surprised to see this was how CS wanted to approach the analysis of Business Plans"**
>
> **"It has not felt like this has been a good use of anyone's time, including the Creative Scotland staff who had their automatic replies set on their emails for 3+ months saying they were unable to reply because they were writing up lengthy assessments for stage 1"**

It is worth noting that the the Wavehill Evaluation also raised questions about the effectiveness and transparency of assessment at RFO level[7]

> ***"One of the key criticisms fed back by applicants for the 2015-18 RFO process was that the 'Balancing the Portfolio' phase of the decision making process was opaque and that feedback in this respect was insufficient. Whilst efforts have been directed at improving the 2018-21 RFO process similar criticisms around a lack of clarity on Stage 4 of the assessment process characterise the feedback from applicants and have also been raised internally by staff and board members"***

9. The Application Process Across Organisations

Respondents to the survey were fairly evenly split between those working in existing RFOs and organisations that are not currently RFOs. Across both these groups a significant amount of respondents expressed concern about the inherent inequality of a 'one size fits all' MYF application process that offered no adaptation or scaling of its requirements in relation to the amount of funding applied for, nor the size or organisational models of the different applicants.

> **"I think the key thing is how unlevel the playing field is for small organisations without full time staff. It is unbelievable there is no difference in the process or level of detail required either by org size or amount requested"**
>
> **"I feel the playing field was not level"**
>
> **"We find it very frustrating that there wasn't a tiered application system – that every organisation was expected to carry out the same labour, regardless of whether you have 100 paid staffers or 1 unpaid staffer, and regardless of the amount you're applying for"**
>
> **"Why were small organisations, and artist-led organisations asking for less than £100,000 per year providing in the same level as detail as far larger national ones"**
>
> **"There is no understanding of the relative age and size of organisations and the fact they will be at different levels of organisational development as a result"**
>
> **"I just find it incomprehensible that there was no sense of scale in what was demanded of each organisation, regardless of the amount requested"**
>
> **"[why not] different levels for different asks i.e. an up to £400k band and then above"**

> **"completely disproportionate to both the support requested and the scale of our operation. Our businesses are on the same scale as corner shops, in terms of turnover. Can you imagine asking a corner shop for information on the scale CS requested?"**
>
> **"We were led to understand that CS wanted new, lived-experience led orgs to enter the portfolio, but everything about the actual process was weighted so heavily in favour of existing RFOs that it suggests they absolutely do not"**
>
> **"The process was deeply unfair and biased towards current RFO's"**

Whilst CS advised that smaller scale applications were not expected to produce the same depth of application as larger ones there was no guidance as to how this was to be addressed and, as a result, applicants felt obliged to provide all they could.

> **"– more information about [how differences in scale of resources] is considered during assessment would have been helpful"**

Respondents found it unfair that applicant organisations had such varied access to resources.

> **"There is a huge inequity in the resources needed to be spent writing an application like this for already funded organisations compared to those without funding"**
>
> **"This did not seem like a fair process as it does not seem to have taken into account the scale of resources across different organisations"**
>
> **"The process unfairly advantages larger organisations who already have the resources to put together large documents like this"**

Organisational capacity and the availability of staff to address the enormous workload of the MYF application process was also a significant issue.

> **"Those who get a yearly open fund were actively encouraged to apply but the process showed CS had not looked at the capacity of these groups"**
>
> **"Absolutely unfair playing field. We are a tiny organisation with only freelance staff"**
>
> **"The vast range of scale of organisations also seems inequitable with some so small, they have little capacity for anything else during the process of applying (and probably no funds to buy in extra help) and others with teams of people to draw on... or to keep things running while senior staff are engaged in the application"**
>
> **"The ask for a small team was huge, and disproportionate when considering we're applying in competition with organisations who have much bigger teams"**
>
> **"Our organisation works on 1.3 FTE employees and during this time we could think of nothing else"**
>
> **"The entire process felt unfair and unbalanced in the favour of organisations who were already in receipt of RFO. They had multiple advantages through this process: they have salaried staff and thus were able to pay workers to write this application (even if not completely)"**
>
> **"For smaller organisations like ourselves, we were expected to continue with delivery of activities whilst also writing MYF application"**
>
> **"How can a small/tiny company compete with all those larger companies who have people able to spend more quality time on an application?"**

Existing RFOs were felt to also have a distinct advantage in both their familiarity with the kinds of policies and documents the MYF application process required and the likelihood that the organisations would already have some form of the required policies and plans in operation.

> **"I need stable funding to do a lot of the organisational development that they already want us to have"**
>
> **"It felt almost hopeless in the face of the budget available for the fund and the fact we were being asked to directly compete with established venues and organisations who have had these policies and procedures in place already"**
>
> **"[RFOs] have experience of going through a similar process with CS they already have many of the policies / documents CS is looking for"**
>
> **"the amount of questions and expectation for project funded companies competing against RFO's who already know the system"**
>
> **"Too many questions around EDI and environmental impact for a small organisation"**
>
> **"There has been a lot of research to do on EDI, Environment and Fair work due to the importance of these now, and as a project based company we do not have the capacity to be continually current on this or have all the EDI action plan etc already written and in place"**
>
> **"We have never written a business plan before. The S2 process required us to self-train in understanding what business plans are, how they're structured, and what they contain"**

The differing level of familiarity with the requisite documents and policies – and with the funding process itself – suggests there were clear differences in organisational staff skillsets and experience and these were felt to favour larger organisations.

> **"We were acutely aware through the process of writing this application that our small team of four artists who are self-taught in business and finance would be going up against major organisations with funding – organisations who have far more skills, resources, and time to devote to this application"**
>
> **"I resent being forced to have this level of knowledge about this process or to have to talk about our work in this detail in these ways, given the scale of our organisation"**

The inequality between large and small organisations when it comes to matters of staff skills, capacity and experience were also flagged up by applicants who were RFOs.

> **"As an RFO organisation, we have been through multi-year funding application processes before, and we felt that this MYF process was excluding of other applicants who did not have that advantage, or are newer organisations without all the resources and policies we have developed over the years."**
>
> **"I say this coming from a relatively well-resourced organisation with a fundraising team… I cannot comprehend how an equally deserving but much smaller organisation could have possibly had the capacity to pull this off. I know of some orgs that had to hire in external consultants to lead on the business planning as there was not enough staff resource"**
>
> **"As an RFO I am aware of the privilege we have in being paid to write the application"**

And this inequality continued to play out in the focus and vocabulary of the CS designed Financial Pro-forma.

> **"The Pro Forma in particular was telling in its focus on Capital Spending and building management. It feels extremely detached from the actuality of working artists lives."**
>
> **"Should there not be different applications for organisations that create art and venues?"**

And finally, the MYF application process required applicants provided documentation, plans and policies in line with specific ways of organisational working.

> **"we exceed all of the MYF processes limited notions of EDI or policy, much of the process is translating what we do down to a lower level of competence or nuance required for MYF. its infuriating. MYF will not have made anything we do better"**

The issues raised by the 'one size fits all' approach has been raised multiple times over a significant period of time. The Wavehill Evaluation found in 2018 that,

> ***Feedback from a number of applicant organisations (both successful and unsuccessful) has questioned this approach with suggestions that this favours larger organisations that may have greater resources and capacity to pull together their RFO application and/or favours organisations that have are already funded through Regular Funding and as such have a greater level of familiarity with the application process***

The report recommends

> ***Creative Scotland should explore the feasibility of using investment bands within the design of future funding models***

The report notes that the

> ***The use of a tiered application model, which involves a lighter-touch approach for organisations applying for relatively smaller levels of funding support, has the potential to encourage smaller organisations to apply. This in turn can contribute to Creative Scotland's stated objectives to ensure that the cultural provision funded through the Regular Funding programme offers a mix of different types of high quality work that reflects and encourages a better understanding of the significant diversity of Scotland's population***

It also states that this option was raised as early as 2015 as a solution to the inequalities of the 'one size fits all' design.

> ***Whilst this approach has previously been subject to discussion within Creative Scotland following the review of the 2015-18 RFO process, in light of the feedback provided by applicants and staff the feasibility of using investment bands for the next investment round should be revisited***

10. MYF Guidance and Information

The MYF is both a new fund with a new funding timeline and process and also a fund which attracted a number of applicants new to this level of funding. As such the need for clear, appropriate guidance from CS across all aspects of the application process was important. It became vital as it became clear many were finding the two stage process and its attendant requirements demanding, confusing and repetitive.

However, at every Stage, respondents raised a number of significant issues with the MYF application process guidance, CS feedback and the public statements from CS .

Early management of expectations was found to be misleading, with a raft of respondents specifically citing CS assurances that Stage One of the process would be 'light touch'. (See Section 8.3 *The three stage process* (p.43)).

The phrase 'light touch' was used by CS in press and comms around the MYF and presumably came initially from the Wavehill Evaluation which suggests:

> **"having a lighter-touch two stage application and assessment process that is used to determine which organisations are recommended for funding and producing a ranked list of organisations based on their basic assessment scores"**

Respondents flagged a lack of information from CS about the likely demands of the MYF application process as a whole, as an issue.

> **"we gave it our best shot despite not really knowing how much work would be involved when we started the process"**
>
> **"Improvements on transparency in how what was going to be expected at stage 2 would have been helpful"**

This phrase 'light touch' created misconceptions for applicants around where the weight of workload would fall in the process and the impact of this on applicants planning was the start of the capacity issues for applicant organisations which dogged the entire MYF application process as organisations realised, and tried to meet, the significant organisational capacity required for the Stage One application form.

> **"The intensity of Stage 1 contributed to the feeling of overwhelm in Stage 2 – we thought we'd done all the really hard work in Stage 1, but it turned out that…we hadn't"**

Applicants felt there were other inaccuracies in early stage information from CS – specifically after the recognition of the unsuitability of a 'one size fits all' application process and assurances there would be measures to address the inequalities it presented.

> **"There was no consideration for project based companies as had been talked about in the last funding round"**
>
> **"The original funding review said big would not be pitted against small and emergent but that is exactly what has happened"**
>
> **"All talk of bigger organisations and smaller being 'guided' through different processes which would allow new and smaller organisations to enter with 1/2/3 year or more of funding – with greater scope for fluidity and movement – went by the board. So everyone, from large to small went through the same process"**

Another early stage issue were CS staff recommendations to apply made to organisations, only for those organisations to find – as the weight and focus of the MYF application process because slowly apparent – that they and their plans were not a good fit for the demands and priorities of the fund.

> **"We were explicitly encouraged to apply by CS and secured extended funding so felt we had no choice"**
>
> **"We felt like we had no other option but to go through this process. Our usual funding liaison officer had recommended that we do so. But also, CS made it clear that organisations operating like ours (applying for OPF cyclically to fund regular programming) should do the process – and that we won't be able to continue operating like this in future"**

> **"For context, we are a very young organisation and were encouraged to apply by…Creative Scotland. Which is really nice in that they have faith in us that we're worth funding, but I don't think they understood how complex the application process would be and much of a step up it would be for us"**
>
> **"I wish CS had been more clear in communicating who this fund was for, because it felt like it wasn't for us, but I only really grasped that at Stage 2, when it all felt too late to back out"**

After Stage One applicants received feedback of varied quality on their applications from their CS contacts. This range of feedback showed inconsistent levels of judgement, knowledge and relevance.

> **"Feedback from Stage 1 was opaque and unconstructive"**
>
> **"We were frustrated by the lack of clarity – for example, it seemed in our feedback from Stage 1 that we had to give incredibly basic information (as though the assessor was junior in experience and we had to state the obvious)"**
>
> **"At several points in the assessors feedback marked down without giving any indication of what could be improved"**
>
> **"poorly written, feeble excuses and felt like an external adviser who knew nothing about us"**
>
> **"Some comments seemed ill-informed, assumptions. I used the feedback to develop our proposal so that in stage 2 these incorrect assumptions could not be drawn, ie to leave no room for doubt"**

> **"I know a few…whose scoring was more than generous for the same questions/answers which we answered thoroughly"**
>
> **"Finally the stage 1 feedback to organisations was inconsistent reducing confidence in the process overall and adding unnecessary stress"**

Both the MYF funding application questions and the guidance documents issued by CS for applicants were considered to lack clarity. Online briefing and information sessions provided by CS were short and superficial. Particularly when it came to Stage 2, the lack of live or recorded sessions that explored in detail the practical interpretation of the enormous amount of information requested by CS in an open ended format was surprising, especially given this was a new process and the guidance documents were unclear, limited or contradictory.

> **"massive lack of advice on how to complete the proforma budget"**
>
> **"The guidance was poor"**
>
> **"Some of the information and guidance wasn't clear"**
>
> **"we were given vague guidelines and a document about business plans that isn't consistent with how business plans are usually written"**
>
> **"The amount of assumed background knowledge"**
>
> **"the guidance given felt flippant in suggesting that we could simply tweak an existing business plan, while having to ensure that we were adequately answering the questions in the application at the same time"**
>
> **"the help guide video for stage 1 was far easier to follow and not given at stage 2"**

> **"some of it contradictory. E.g. the Fund guidance and the Business Plan guidance often seemed at odds in terms of what they want. So the fund guidance said your programme needs to be in the BP, but the BP guidance doesn't have a place for it in their prescribed structure"**
>
> **"There was no guidance from CS on how to do [the Business Plan] aside from that pdf – no trainings, no Q&A sessions, no further resources"**
>
> **"There were no models of what a good BP looked like, or what a application answer looked like. Like, I read the questions as literally just asking you to provide page numbers. But my advisor said no, you're supposed to make an argument there too, while also dropping page numbers. What? Why not just ask that?"**

This left many applicants unsure they had provided the information needed.

> **"I am still worried I may have missed important point"**
>
> **"I might have completely misunderstood the proforma but it's too late to think about that now"**
>
> **"I had a recurring nightmare that I had not clicked the submit button properly and so had gone through the whole process but not submitted on time. In my undreaming state after sending the applications I thought of so many additions I should have made"**
>
> **"As it was I delivered everything I possibly could with the resources available to me, but I'm left feeling there was so much more I should have included in terms of appendices, if only I'd had the time.**

> **"the Stage 2 process in particular did not allow us to articulate…in a way that felt true to our vision and while we felt confident in our strategy and plans, we did not feel confident that the way we presented was what was being asked of us"**

CS staff responses to questions from applicant organisations during their preparation of their MYF applications were sometimes found to be limited and unclear. (See Section 8.5 *Language and Clarity* (p.58))

> **"The FAQs were like a constantly moving goalpost of information to catch up on. I genuinely just could not hold all of that information in my head all at once while I was trying to write things"**
>
> **"more support thru the process, with a support or development officer on hand would have been great"**
>
> **"There was no one with whom we could share concerns for fear of affecting the outcome"**

Guidance was also not always timely.

> **"If I had known the content of Stage-2 guidance from the outset I would have conducted answering Stage-1 differently, ensuring answers aligned and there was no repetition. As it was, answering Stage-1 'blind' led to a logistical quagmire of cross referencing, requiring needless, stressful, extra work"**
>
> **"I found it very frustrating that the guidance for stage 2 wasn't published up front at the beginning of this process and that Creative Scotland were then quite prescriptive about the format of your company's business plan, e.g. that it should be 25 pages, etc. This is far more demanding than other funders. A lot of time was spent editing"**

The combination of these factors created additional work for MYF applicants.

> **"Work had to be duplicated as we had to revisit or change things often as the sector pieced together information released gradually by CS through the enquiries line, FAQ's or from other CS contacts"**

Peer networks and online groups took on a key role in helping applicants interpret guidance and complete their applications – creating a whole other raft of work for applicants who were overstretched and often unpaid.

> **"If it wasn't for Admin Monkeys Facebook page, we would not have been able to work out how to complete the form and especially the proforma budget"**

Finally, whilst working through a process that was constantly framed by CS as one which would result in failure for many applicants, and addressing an application process that had required an enormous amount of work overwork and had lacked effective guidance, applicant organisations questioned the lack of advice provided by CS on what routes to funding would be available to the considerable expected numbers of unsuccessful applicants.

> **"a scary lack of information about what happens to organisations who are unsuccessful for MYF – what is 'transition funding'? Will we be able to access funding again? This lack of information created a severe pressure and deep sense of uncertainty for all organisations: do this MYF application, and do it well, or you may never again receive funding"**

11. MYF Application Process Fit with Art Sector Realities

There were a number of disconnects between the realities of the work, life and priorities of MYF applicants and the practicalities and positioning of the MYF application process and its requirements and the assumptions that seemed to underpin them.

> **"This process was…hugely stressful, time-consuming and felt depressingly and completely disconnected from the lived reality of running an arts organisation in Scotland today"**
>
> **"There is vast blind spot amongst the staff within Creative Scotland for how organisations actually run. These are government employees in safe jobs […and…] benefits"**

Obviously a major consideration was the enormous capacity demands made by the MYF application process when applicant arts organisations, as part of their declared mission and operational responsibilities, already had organisational commitments that had to be met during that time period. (See Section 3 *MYF Application process workload* (p.5) 6.1 *Work delayed, paused or cancelled – overview* (p.16), 6.2 *Public Delivery Disruption* (p.17))

> **"there were some small benefits to this work, in terms of clarifying how we talk about what we do. but as a whole, most of this work (a huge amount of time and labour, maybe 6 months of the organisations output) is next to useless in terms of how we work or what we do"**
>
> **"the process showed CS had not looked at the capacity of these groups"**
>
> **"The balance of delivering all of this whilst still meeting all of our active projects"**
>
> **"the difficulty is balancing out these priorities with the overall programme of events/sector support that an organisation exists to deliver"**

> **"deadlines on same day as board meetings"**
>
> **"I had to put the organisation on hiatus to be able to do that"**
>
> **"Our creative work and output has been worryingly impacted"**
>
> **"[no] time off to concentrate without impacting our activities"**

Applicants' organisational obligations have been set by the realities of the current arts landscape and by the funding imperatives laid down by CS itself. The timing and unpredictability of MYF application process cut across these obligations and their schedule.

> **"major issue in that it wasn't only CS that introduced multi year deadlines in the immediate post-pandemic period, In the period from August 2022 to October 2023 our small organisation completed 4 large multi year applications for CS, councils, h&sc partnerships etc. and 1 OPF as well as MYF stage 1. The others were not as big as MYF but still around 10,000 words. These wouldn't usually fall all in 1 year and the impact on our small company was huge"**
>
> **"we are continually encouraged to diversify funding streams by CS but there is no thought to the impact when you are unable to decide not to apply to funders who are clearly going through a period of consolidating their own interests and funded portfolios, and you need to try and make sure your company is included to survive"**
>
> **"we have been asked to do a spectacular amount of work [for the MYF application] and in all likelihood we will be awarded a smaller amount than we asked for – ultimately this means a lot of the work will have to be done again to reshape the programme, activity plan and budgets to fit the amount of funding offered"**

> **"Our sector is facing another cliff edge in October (the review from last time said they would stagger things next time around) meaning future planning and advertising work opportunities for core staff and freelancers can't be done with any confidence"**

The MYF application process prioritised business skills, policies and procedures (See Section 8.4 *A business template* (p.50)). It did not reflect many of the respondent organisations' priorities, skills and working models – where lean, nimble, opportunistic arts organisations with small staff numbers focus on the creation and facilitation of art alongside their personal and organisational connections and service to their communities – all whilst navigating and responding to a volatile and challenging political and funding environment.

> **"The process was not at all in line with funders' best practice, showed no trust in organisations to have the expertise to deliver their work successfully,"**
>
> **"It failed to take into account that many non-RFO's are artist led with a different skill set"**
>
> **"The lack of attention paid to the artistic input versus fair work, environment etc showed a fundamental disrespect for artists"**
>
> **"We are artists and it feels like the art has been lost in importance"**
>
> **"We wrote little to nothing about our artform, where it is and where we think it needs to go. There was simply no space when you were given 500/250 words and had to make sure you were ticking the boxes"**
>
> **"As an artist-led organisation, none of us made any art during this process"**

The MYF application process fit was particularly poor for EDI organisations or those with a user led operational model.

> **"I think the application form was not set up for EDI orgs like ours. I felt like replying 'You said you would read my business plan' to many of the questions, because how do you direct…to a page reference that shows you think about EDI when your entire organisation is EDI? It's literally on every page. It's how we do things as well as what we do"**
>
> **"The whole point of a user-led organisation is that we are led by users. We *have* to leave space for flexibility and responsiveness to what our members want and need [in our planning]…I found the pressure for every minute and penny to be accounted for, and every project planned to the Nth degree, to be really oppressive"**

Respondents felt that the MYF process was particularly oblivious to the realities of running an arts organisation in the wake of Brexit and Covid and standstill funding.

> **"the language of the business plan guidance did not marry with lived reality. It spoke of constant growth and expansion when most of us are, at best, barely able to tread water. The model is hopelessly broken"**
>
> **"I feel the dissonance between what we all say we are doing and aiming to achieve versus what is actually happening on the ground is becoming a chasm which is debilitating and destabilising – as we all fight for support in a landscape of scarcity the cracks and chasms across the sector get bigger"**
>
> **"building a picture of magnificent delivery when the reality is that we are a very small number of overstretched individuals performing multiple roles with not enough resource already"**

> **"The last thing the sector needed was a competitive rat race for funding after coming out of Covid and the financial tough times that many are still experiencing"**
>
> **"it damaged our relationships between each other. The only way to get meaningful impact is through partnership"**
>
> **"We've been on standstill RFO funding since 2015--- constantly challenged to deliver more with less-- and wanted to frame our ask in terms of being able to pay our essential operational costs going forward (staffing, rent, office facilities) as well as our ambition to create new work projects"**
>
> **"The application required planning for approximately 5 yrs of finance including the current year coming up. We were simultaneously applying for that funding"**
>
> **"stage two makes naive assumptions about where organisations are at in terms of business planning, policies, action plans etc."**
>
> **"In current circumstances, the process should have been radically streamlined, not expanded into levels of complication that its creators were clearly not fit to manage" "needless repetition, obfuscating language, conflicting guidance, and an utter tone-deafness to the capacities of – and pressures upon – the arts workforce"**

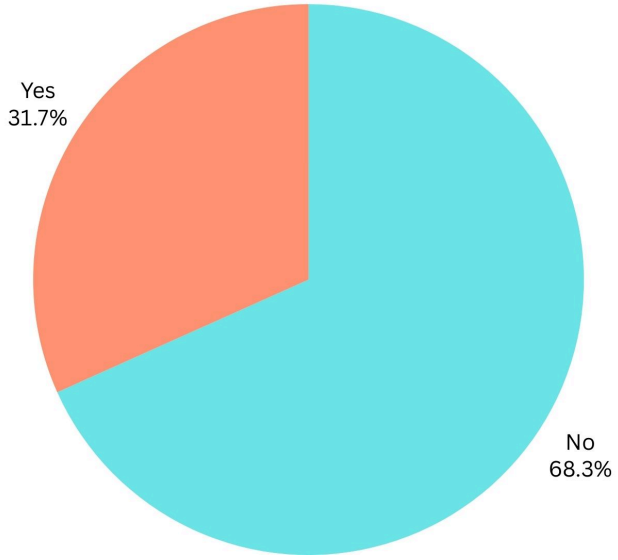
Arts organisations are acutely aware that their current environment is challenging in ways that are unprecedented but, instead of the design, priorities and process of the MYF offering the start of a constructive, communal way forward with the sector's key funder instead –

> **"an opportunity to radically look at where we are and where we need to go has been lost"**

12. Access

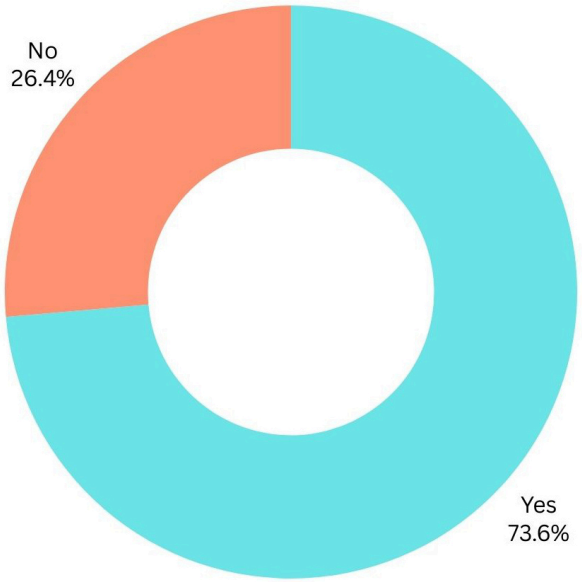
12.1 Access needs for MYF applications and CS support

Over 30% of respondents who applied for MYF said their organisation's capacity to apply was affected by barriers to access .



Question: In terms of accessibility in the MYF application process, was your organisation's capacity to apply affected by access needs?

When asked if they were aware that Access Support Funds were available from CS, over a quarter of respondents said No.



This suggests that a significant proportion of the arts sector who may need support to address barriers to access when applying for funding from CS are unaware that the organisation has both funds and a process which exist for the express reason of meeting the support needs of applicants to CS.

Another issue is that CS funds to support the addressing of barriers to access are, themselves, somewhat inaccessible.

> **"I could not work out how this could be used or of help when the process was actively designed to be inaccessible"**

Given that significant numbers of respondents reported barriers to access but low numbers of respondents applied to CS for access support it seemed appropriate to assess how easy it was to source information on applying for access support.

Two different cold approaches to the CS website looking for information on how to apply for access support, using search criteria 'apply access funds' and close variables led searchers to multiple links that did not give details on how to apply for CS funding support with access needs. These pages resulted in a number of fruitless, circular searches through pages that did not carry the information or referred to it in an obscure way. Finally, it was necessary to come out of the CS website altogether and use Google to search for the pages. This produced the appropriate pages on the CS website.

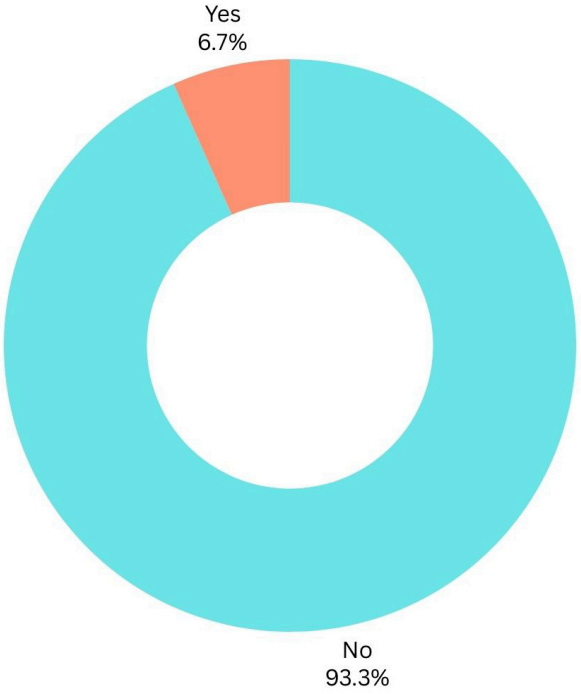
It should be noted that, in an age where alternative formats are a standard adaptation for organisations to offer those in their community with barriers to access, there is only one format of contact accepted by CS from those making an initial request for access support from the organisation.

Did you consider applying, or did you apply, for Access Support funds from CS for your MYF application?

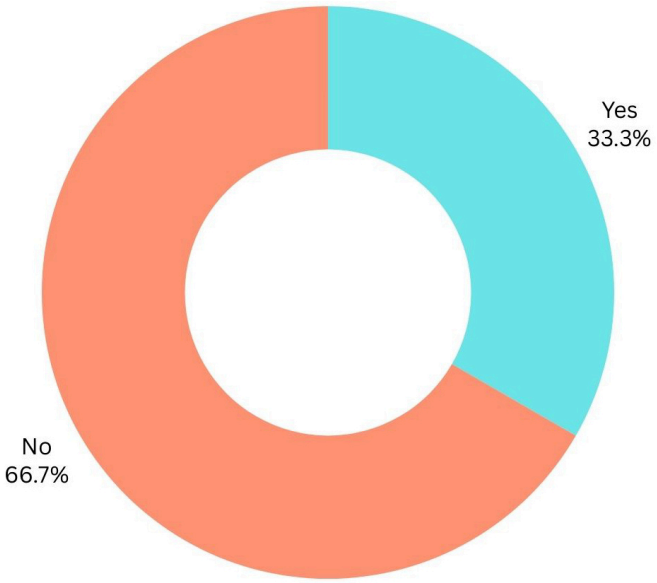
The convoluted, indeed inaccessible, process necessary to find relevant information on funds to support applicant access on the CS website and the limited ways available in which to begin the application process for those funds may go some way to explaining why the number of respondents citing barriers to access is so much higher than the number who applied for CS funding to support their MYF application process.

> **"We didn't consider applying for Access Support Funds because we don't fully understand their purpose or whether they would be appropriate for us"**

It also appears CS does not offer enough funding to cover the level of support required to genuinely and usefully offset the barriers to access created by the CS designed MYF application process.



Was the Access Support Fund amount sufficient for your organisation's 's adaptation needs during the MYF application process?



There appears to simply not have been enough funding allocated by CS for one to one support to make the MYF application process equal and fair. The website's 'Maximum contribution by type of support' caps one to one support at 2 days[8]. Some applicants secured 5 days – presumably because there were three stages to the MYF funding application process.

> **"Creative Scotland provided 5 days of scribing support, which was a small fraction of the time needed"**

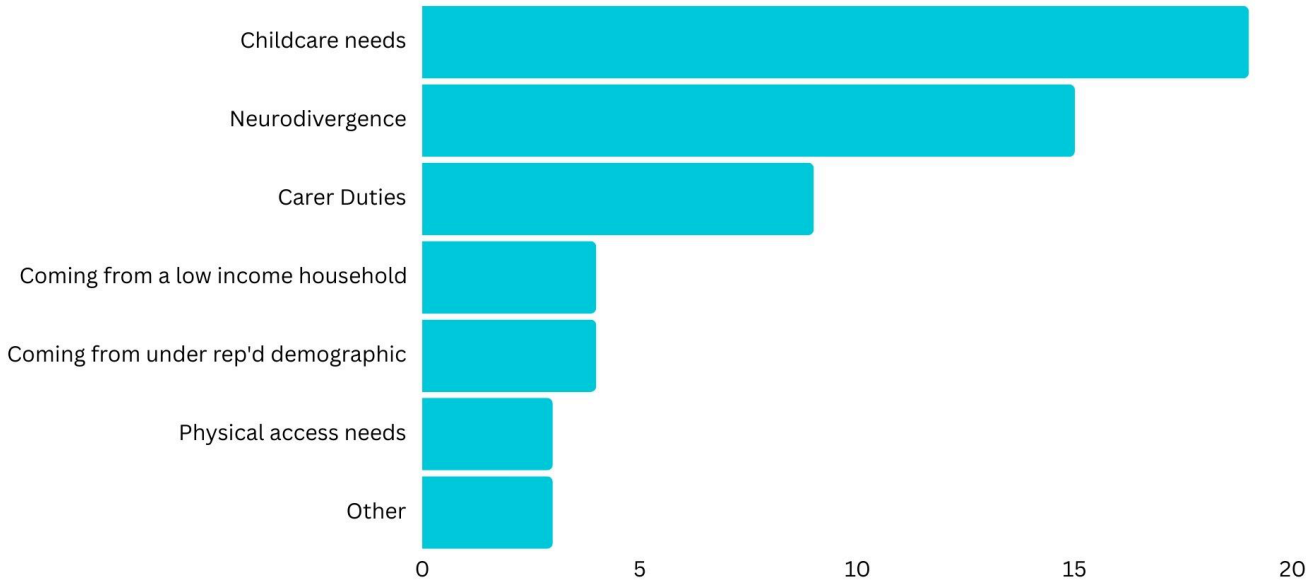
It is relevant at this point to refer back to findings (See Section 3.1 *MYF Application– range, average and cumulative workload* (p.5)) which found the average working days spent by respondents on the MYF funding application for Stage One to be 19 days and for Stage Two, 29 days.

12.2 Range of barriers to access

> **"Didn't feel there was as much care in the MYF process than there is to open fund with regards to access needs"**

When asked to categorise the form of access barrier they or their organisation faced, respondents described 57 instances of access need. This means some respondents experienced multiple barriers to access during the MYF application process.

There were significant barriers to access that were specific to the MYF application process – with its inordinate workload, dense and complex guidance and business focused application requirements.



Some of the barriers to access indicated by respondents sit within what CS access support information calls “physical/learning disability …living with chronic illness, mental illness or neurodivergence”. Those managing barriers to access of that kind found access issues with both the MYF application design and its process.

> **“the process is cripplingly neurotypical in profound and damaging ways”**
>
> **“Application was geared towards neurotypical functions…”**
>
> **“Geared towards neurotypical brains in timescale and articulation of questions”**
>
> **“the formats, cross-referencing and convoluted ways in which you ate supposed to cram all of stage 1 (40 printed pages) into a business plan of 25 pages, while also asking you to 'evidence' things you have not already done, while loosely asking for appendices to back up things you have no space for, and for all of this to be cross-referenced, means that a major part of the process is simple open-ended writing that then needs to be citational clarified, in ways that are not accessible to many people with a whole range of neurotypes or learning modes or capacities”**

And, related to these barriers, the complete lack of alternative submission formats to the enormous volume of written documents required in both Stage one and Stage two of the MYF application process, was an issue.

> **“our team all have various access needs… These include neurodivergence, including dyslexia and ADHD, physical disabilities making writing difficult, and mental health conditions… the most frustrating barrier for us in applying for funding is the advanced grant-writing skills it requires and that applications cannot be made through video or alternate processes”**

A deeply concerning aspect of these and other access barriers applicants faced during the MYF application process, is that they are only barriers as a result of CS's choices when deciding the MYF application's design. These choices around what is required of applicants make significant assumptions about the lives and identities of those undertaking the MYF application process.

> **"represents a lack of access to CS applications for people/ organisations whose skills/remits are not formal writing. There are also serious barriers for those without formal academic training, business acumen, or financial savvy"**
>
> **"Class issue- so much focus in the application to provide evidence of diversity/inclusion/equal opportunities we'd provide, but application process itself was very middle class language"**
>
> **"impossible for someone dyslexic or person with English as second language"**

This sits alongside assumptions CS made about the kinds of working hours applicants to the MYF would be able to make available for the process, and the choice to put both Stage One and Stage Two deadlines immediately after school holidays, suggesting that CS did not consider that applicants may be parents or carers with unavoidable care responsibilities and no access to free and flexible alternative childcare or carer provision. (See Section 7.5.3 *Impact on relationships and support systems* (p.32)).

> **"All the key staff members involved were affected by caring responsibilities in practical and worry [sic] terms during the application process and our family members had less help from us"**
>
> **"compromised her ability to do her normal regular elder carer work….and has had a significant knock on effect"**
>
> **"since both previous deadlines also fell during or straight after school holidays. This was profoundly thoughtless, creating unnecessary obstacles and stress for those of us with childcare commitments"**

> **"during holidays (October week/ Easter) which brought stress and burn out for the full team"**
>
> **"impacted my family life"**

Finally, organisations that considered applying to the MYF but chose not to answered a dedicated question about their decision and, whilst some choices by applicants were pragmatic and based on a variety of funding options, others made the choice based on the scale of the barriers to access the MYF application process presented.

> **"The work asked for was a level beyond anything we'd have to produce before"**
>
> **"The amount of work asked for felt insurmountable"**
>
> **"Too much work for no pay"**
>
> **"Lack of staff time and financial resources"**
>
> **"the process looked overly time consuming and issues many had with the portal put us off"**
>
> **"the inflexibility on timings did not align well"**
>
> **"when MYF and EPF were announced it took a significant amount of time, including paying experienced arts producers, to look at the 2 funds in detail and try to work out which one to apply to. There was a LOT of crossover. The info about each one was quite complicated. Even at this stage, it was too inaccessible and needlessly complex"**

13. Impact on Freelancers

13.1 Initial impact

> **"I genuinely feel as though my career has been forcibly put on pause"**

The MYF application process had a significant impact on the organisations applying to the fund but that impact was also passed on directly to the freelance artists and art sector workers who work in tandem with these organisations within a shared business ecology.

Freelancers reported projects, regular work and a whole range of activities scaled back, paused or cancelled by organisations undertaking the MYF application process. This correlates with the reported impact of the MYF application on organisational activities reported by the organisations themselves (See Section 6 *Impact of MYF Application process on organisations* (p.16)).

As organisations focused on their MYF application, other activity was paused or cancelled. This created a reduction in both paid roles in organisational work and a reduction or slow down in the benefits and support organisations bring to their collaborative partnerships on projects driven by freelancers.

> **"Other projects were paused/neglected to work on the MFY application"**
>
> **"the extreme contraction in the theatre sector at this time due to the amount of resource being used up on the MYF application and the amount of indecision and uncertainty there is about programming work"**
>
> **"Time lines for current projects pushed back"**
>
> **"Even before knowing whether or not organisations had got through to phase two, many were putting activities on hold to begin prep work and to allow themselves not to be overloaded if the time came to prepare a stage 2 application"**

> **"contracts from RFOs arriving late/being postponed"**
>
> **"What little roles have been advertised have seen fierce competition"**
>
> **"I regularly work for as a performer (and in other capacities) [for a specific company that] will generally have at least one performance either in development or touring…because of this funding application cycle, their work has seemingly been paused or pushed back to allow time for application/results"**
>
> **"I have also experienced organisations reducing the scale and ambition of projects this year due to demised capacity due to MYF admin"**
>
> **"experienced a drop off in organisations committing to creating work where I might have had the opportunity to be paid as freelancer with many 'putting projects on hold until after MYF' or postponing projects until 2025"**
>
> **"RFOs not replying to emails when I was trying to line up in-kind space to have residences to go to CS open fund"**

Freelancers working on development of new works found there was almost no organisational time available in MYF applicant organisations to have speculative conversations.

> **"because of the application process taking up so much of their time and staff resource [Organisations are unable to]… Answer emails, consider my ideas, have meetings, make decisions about what might be possible in the future"**
>
> **"[MYF applicant organisations] struggle to plan ahead or are unable to commit funds and/or administrative resources towards collaborative projects"**
>
> **"Meetings about new/upcoming projects pushed back"**

> **"For the projects that are going ahead I have experienced a much greater difficulty in securing in kind support from organisations"**
>
> **"projects were turned down"**
>
> **"as they struggle to plan ahead or are unable to commit funds and/or administrative resources towards collaborative projects"**
>
> **"a real feeling of difficulty all around, hard to get work and hard to get it moving"**

Where freelancers might reasonably have expected engagement and employment with organisations across a raft of different kinds of work the reality was that the demands of MYF application process and its effect on organisations cut across these.

> **"I have experienced a drop in the number of residency opportunities, small scale commissions, paid performance opportunities and professional development opportunities available"**
>
> **"I have a commission with a specific performance date. The piece needs finished but I have less time to do it due to myf"**

Freelancers – often the last to be put in place during the development of creative work – found, or predict, that managing the already challenging schedules of their sector work is going to result in missing out on work as the impact of the various stages of MYF application process continue to roll out across the sector.

> **"All of the performance work in my diary, bar one project and one single day event, is pending funding. That's currently 5 separate large projects, by different companies, that may or may not start in the autumn"**

> **“While this gap has been difficult and may continue if none of these projects are funded, there is also the possibility that if they do get funded, they will all start at similar times and clash massively, meaning I may miss out on valuable work and on taking part in projects I am invested in, some of which I have already put time into”**
>
> **“The length of the application process (taking over a year! Unbelievable!) means the uncertainty organisations face impacts on their ability to support freelancers”**
>
> **“It feels like a potential lose-lose situation because of the timing. That said, not all of these projects are MYF, some are open fund applications, but the timing has aligned very badly with MYF”**

Some reported a significant impact on peer support in the sector and the flow of information, help and exchange that keeps art sector networks and partnerships active and viable for both freelancers and organisations.

> **“At an even more basic level, I have struggled with peer support on what used to be relatively easy to get answered questions because those working on MFY simply do not have time to even answer emails or have a conversation about topics which are not MYF”**
>
> **"Organising emotional and intellectual capacity to [delivery artistically whilst suppressing worry] in a way that didn't rub off on my colleagues or compromise the outcome for the audience”**

13.2 Result of impacts on freelancers

Due to the demands made on applicant organisations by the MYF application, freelancers in the sector, who were already managing the challenges of industry shrinkage post Brexit and post pandemic, faced and continue to face, disruption to their working patterns and a dearth of available work resulting in financial hardships and wellbeing impacts.

> **"Freelancers have been MASSIVELY impacted by this"**
>
> **"even during the pandemic my work prospects were not as poor as they have been in the last 6 months"**
>
> **"After covid this delay to my work in the arts has felt like going backwards"**
>
> **"It is no exaggeration to say I had more paid work and opportunities during covid than I have had during this MYF process and I expect this to continue until [MYF] decisions are made"**
>
> **"coming on the coattails of the pandemic, and the cost of living crisis, it is the nail in the coffin of many freelance careers"**
>
> **"The main company I work for have tried to help by offering cover teaching opportunities where possible but this hasn't been enough to bridge the difference"**
>
> **"I have had zero paid performance/R&D work so far this year in Scotland and have none in the diary until the end of June"**
>
> **"I am a freelance producer specialising in festivals and live events. I have had to take on employment outside my area of normal work and at a lower skill level due to a lack of freelance opportunities since about October 2023"**

It's important to bear in mind that some of these freelancers also hold organisational posts which are subsidised by the income from their freelance work. Many in this situation had to suspend their freelance work to complete the MYF application process on behalf of the organisations where they hold key roles. But whilst those experiencing that specific combination of circumstance perhaps experienced the impacts of the MYF application process most acutely, the MYF application process and its attendant impact on organisations, their capacity and their ability to plan and deliver activities, has resulted in unprecedented financial challenges for freelancers across the board.

> **"I have lost work and am unsure that I will be able to financially recover this year"**
>
> **"I have had very few performing or assisting in artistic opportunities in Scotland since October 2023 and those I have had have been volunteering"**
>
> **"I am currently without any paid work in the arts, and there is nothing coming down the line"**
>
> **"can see that myf will have another an impact on my earning in a few months because I've not been able to keep up my usual pitching for work"**
>
> **"This impacts on income"**
>
> **"the situation has caused me financial difficulty not only due to lack of work but also due to the fact that the work I have had to take on was only available on a PAYE basis. This means I'm having to pay two tax years concurrently, a situation I had not planned for and was not prepared for. This situation is a bit hard to weather given six months of underemployment and will no doubt be a barrier to getting back into freelancing"**
>
> **"Amidst all of this I still consider myself lucky – being older and with some savings behind me, I'm fortunate to be a bit more secure and this position isn't catastrophic for me but it absolutely would have been not much more than a few years ago. I believe many are in a similar situation to myself or worse off"**

As a result, the toll on freelancers' mental health has been significant.

> **"This has impacted my mental health and of course my income over the last 6 months"**
>
> **"I am a freelancer running an org. I could not take up other work during myf I have work that has had to be compressed making it more stressful to do"**
>
> **"Delivering artistically whilst trying to suppress the massive worry"**
>
> **"It's caused massive mental health problems"**
>
> **"Team members did not have capacity to carry out freelance work at the same time as this process, resulting in burnout"**

The combination of these factors along with perceptions that freelancers in recent years have not been valued – in the sector, by CS or by Scottish Government – and a concern that the forces acting so detrimentally on their careers are too big for individuals, or even freelancers as a coordinated body, to influence, means freelancers are being forced to consider leaving their careers in the arts.

> **"I have over 10 years of experience in this sector, 5 of which as a freelancer and with great references I have struggled. I cannot imagine the impact this has had on those who are earlier in their career"**
>
> **"I fundamentally feel like I've lost trust in a sector I've worked in for 20 years, and I'm not sure why I bothered to become an award winning expert in my field if my skills are so disposable"**
>
> **"As a freelancer you become used to uncertainty and you learn to be flexible, but this situation is a systemic problem that freelancers neither made, not have control over"**

> **"has made me feel like this career is not sustainable or valued by the Scottish government"**
>
> **"But [the impact on freelancers] has been largely ignored by Creative Scotland and the Government seems completely unaware"**
>
> **"As for me, I'm seriously considering whether I want to come back to freelancing full-time, or whether I might retrain in a different area of work"**
>
> **"I have been applying for jobs in other industry despite working in the Scottish arts sector for 11 years"**
>
> **"Almost everyone I know is in the same position, and many people are leaving the industry"**
>
> **"Looking to the future, the knowledge that this process will come around again in another 3-4 years time offers me little hope that this could be a long term, sustainable career. I still have love and passion for the incredible work we do and the people I have been lucky to work with, but I am seriously questioning what the point is in investing the time and energy that I always have into my work when I might just find myself in the same situation 3 years down the line, older and much more burnt out"**

Ultimately, not only is it likely that the impact of the MYF Application process on organisations is hastening the end of careers in the arts sector for some freelancers, but it's also possible that the resulting lack of skilled freelancers will have a direct effect on the ability of the organisations eventually funded by the MYF to deliver on the plans that required so much energy, time, capacity and real world costs and upheaval to create.

> **"there will be a huge skills shortage early next year when roles supported by MYF funding will be entering the market but many skilled workers will have left and cannot afford to come back, or simply can't see any incentive to do so"**

14. Summary of Report

14.1 Survey findings in brief

> **"there was clear messaging of how crucial issues of EDI, fair work and governance are for CS in assessing 'success'. However, the format of their own application process – which was badly structured, clearly untested, and riddled with contradictions – took no account whatsoever of issues of 'fair work', 'dignity at work', 'inclusion', or straightforward capacity of the workforce; with no compensation being made whatsoever for an equitable engagement of non-RFO organisations. In their own terms, their own process was 'unfundable'"**

The survey finds that respondents' experience of the MYF application process was one defined by a long timeline, complex and extensive requirements and insufficient guidance. It was found by respondents to be extremely challenging across all levels of experience – from those at early stages of their careers to those who have worked in leadership roles for decades.

The characteristics of the application process resulted in a heavy workload which, for many respondents, required working considerable unpaid overtime. This work fell largely to those in key roles within organisations. Leadership reported feeling under pressure and within organisations staff and governance matters were deprioritised until after the submission date.

Less art was made in Scotland as a result of the MYF application process. The pressure on MYF applicant organisation's working capacity required that the majority of respondents pause, delay or cancel other work, including public events. Given the scale and importance of the MYF fund and the large amount of organisations applying, this had the effect of disrupting almost the entire arts sector in a variety of ways – from audiences and communities who saw their arts events and participation dwindle to freelance workers in the sector who faced financial hardship as a direct result of the delay, pausing or cancellation of work.

Whilst a small percentage of respondents reported they found the requirements of the MYF process generated useful organisational plans, and a few mentioned the positive effect of the extensive peer support the procedure made necessary as organisations struggled to decipher and complete its demands, other organisations reported the MYF

process has not only damaged their perception of, and relationship with, CS but with partner organisations and those in their peer network.

Applying to the MYF had a very significant financial cost for most respondent organisations and budget disruption within the respondents' organisations was also common.

The work backlog created by the MYF application process demands meant many in key roles, who were required to overextend their capacity during the application, were often required to continue at work without a break or rest period due to the resulting backlog of urgent decisions and work that had become pressing during the extended periods where they were unavailable.

Respondents raised multiple issues with the design of the MYF application process and its schedule, assumptions, requirements, focus, guidance and submission platform. The process presented a range of access issues for applicants, some of which ran directly counter to the EDI and Fair Work policies CS required of organisations applying for MYF.

All of these factors resulted in a raft of financial and wellbeing impacts for individuals working in the arts sector in Scotland. A large number of respondents reported multiple impacts on their wellbeing and multiple respondents suggest the MYF application process influenced their considerations of retirement or leaving the sector.

14.2 Recommendations

The scope of the survey was to map impact on the sector. Some of the main findings suggest the following would be helpful in the future:

That CS application processes be streamlined with an eye to those processes' impact on the organisational capacity and commitments of applicant organisations, and the wellbeing of the sector.

That CS explore measures to minimise the impact on sector capacity of major application processes likely to attract a high level of applications.

That CS provide appropriate, accessible and timely guidance in multiple forms for all application processes and continue to generate guidance at any point where enquiries from applicants show that existing guidance is being found to be insufficient or unclear.

That CS consider the diversity of organisational models functioning in the arts sector in their application designs.

That CS work to a clear rationale in its funding application design where the scale of an organisation, or the scale of funding it applies for, is reflected in the depth and volume of information required by CS.

That CS take advice from those with lived experience, and then considers in depth, the lived realities and multiple responsibilities of individuals – whether freelance or in organisational roles – when designing any application process.

That CS address and adjust their focus on business skills and models in their assessment process and engage with organisations to establish key assessment criteria that reflect the excellence of the work of organisations beyond that of business compliance.

This might involve:

CS recognising, and exploring publicly, the ways in which third sector organisations do not function in exact replica of commercial business.

CS designing for and working constructively with, the sector reality that – whilst many individuals in roles within larger organisations are comfortable, experienced, skilled and employed because of their engagement with business tools, vocabulary and metrics – a sizeable proportion of arts organisations are staffed largely by people who do not engage with the business paradigm on a regular basis whilst running their successful, effective and efficient organisations.

CS exploring and designing processes that have applicants who are artists build on the communication, leadership, planning, decision making and management skills that have developed as a result of their professional creative practice rather than requiring they build extensive knowledge of top down, CS prescribed business language, skills and models.

CS providing facilitation, accessible contact and guidance in the cases where there is a disconnect between a CS application process business metric and the business experience of an organisation or individual making an application.

Recent events suggest the need for the following recommendation:

That CS evidence joined up thinking across funding provision. In the time period since the MYF application process closed and this report was published, the Open Fund for Individuals was closed on very short notice. There has been an announcement from CS that the fund will reopen but the impact on the sector has already been significant and the hundreds of applications made in the short notice period between closure announcement will have to be assessed. In recent media coverage CS also advised they are considering a significantly lower cap[9] in the funding amount that could be applied for through this fund. This means that the MYF applications made to Creative Scotland, were written by organisations planning their activities, financial choices and other metrics for organisational wellbeing and success in detail, based on a funding landscape that they were unaware was about to experience radical shift as a result of CS decisions.

14.3 Suggestions for further research

Best practice suggests a funder should request from applicants some reporting on the working hours taken to complete an application process. This provides the funder with key information when designing subsequent application processes. Aggregate and organisational figures provide sector organisations with insight into the relative funding processes and creates opportunities for efficiency of scheduling and planning.

Given the costs and capacity demands of a process like the MYF application process to applicant organisations, it would be useful to explore whether successful applications to the MYF are linked to the time and money allocated to that application.

Given that the costs of applying to the MYF are significant, will organisations budget in advance for this application process arising in three years time and, if so, what is the effect of that budgeting on those organisations? What effect do these sums have on the organisational budgets across the sector dedicated to arts production or promotion over repeated funding cycles? What are the implications for organisations who cannot afford the costs of application?

What effect do application processes like MYF, with a strong focus on business skills, have on future board recruitment and the accessibility of board positions? If funds require organisations access extensive, free advice and guidance from those with business skills rather than art skills in what way does this change who is selected for an arts organisations board? Does the implied requirement that board members may have to volunteer extensive free time to utilising their skills on behalf of arts organisations making extremely demanding applications exclude those who do not have that leisure time and are they, as a result, likely to be underrepresented on art organisation boards in the future?

15. Conclusion

In conclusion, the application process for MYF falters against a number of key metrics, including those set by Creative Scotland.

Notably, there is demonstrable evidence of significant harm to wellbeing and an unfairness inherent in the 'One Size Fits All' approach, leading to a high degree of overwork and unpaid labour. This unpaid labour cannot be classified as 'voluntary' as it appears that organisations have viewed this as being an essential part of the application process.

Furthermore, this all comes at the expense of taking key workers away from their roles within the industry during the application period, causing further stresses and creating a lack of provision for artists and audiences and essentially replacing the normal function of the organisation.

These inadequacies also seem to respond to an inherent bias in the process, creating a pressure against diversity on organisational boards and also the timing of the process that selects against parents and carers of school age children.

Ultimately, this process falls far short of the guidelines that Creative Scotland has laid out for best practice in the industry.

The reasons for this approach seem unclear and unjustified. If it is to deter smaller organisations from applying, a form of hostile architecture, this should have been identified during the first stages of the application and those organisations should have been informed.

The cost to physical and mental well-being of the participants in this process is not acceptable nor is it in service of a strong, responsive and resilient sector at large.

It is perhaps salient to reflect that the applicants engaged in this process do so through hope, and that for many this will ultimately also prove fruitless. All of this time, energy and money has been spent, for some, on nothing at all.

> **“Imagine if all of these hours, all this work, all this effort, had gone into making actual community focused art”**

References:

1: https://www.creativescotland.com/news-stories/latest-news/archive/2024/04/multi-year-funding-programme-stage-two-now-closed-for-applications

2: https://www.creativescotland.com/news-stories/latest-news/archive/2024/02/multi-year-funding-programme-outcome-from-stage-one-of-the-application-process

3: ACE does not require business plans (quoting p.25 of the Wavehill Evaluation report)

4: https://www.creativescotland.com/binaries/content/assets/creative-scotland/resources-and-publications/publications/annual-reports-and-accounts/2021-22/cs-group-accounts-2022.pdf

5: https://www.creativescotland.com/binaries/content/assets/creative-scotland/resources-and-publications/guides-and-toolkits/business-planning-guidance-for-creative-and-cultural-organisations/business-planning-guidance-for-creative-and-cultural-organisations-scotland-final-nov2022.pdf

6: CS docs full of jargon (quoting p.19 of the Wavehill Evaluation report)

7: CS decision making opaque (quoting p.36 of the Wavehill Evaluation report)

8: https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/help-with-your-application/access-support/types-of-support-and-maximum-contribution-levels

9: https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24560585.creative-scotland-considers-halving-maximum-fund-award/?fbclid=IwY2xjawFLj1ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHWD6WifNMTapAlUhwDlx-Mx6b82qy_qgkyVCj0t7x_BVFi-7lT1vkYflHQ_aem_7CPkeN87_lSaGepYHrp3Ng

A download link for “The Evaluation of the 2018–2021 Regular Funding Process by Wavehill social and economic research” can be found on the landing page for the Impact Report on the Creative Entrepreneurs Club website:

https://creativeentrepreneursclub.co.uk/the-impact-of-creative-scotlands-multi-year-fund-application-process/