



Cumbria Community Foundation – Cumbria Cultural Fund

Summary of one-to-one consultations and online survey

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October 2024

Introduction

Cumbria Community Foundation (CCF) embarked on a review of its Cultural Fund, and other funding for arts and creativity, in May 2024. As part of which I was asked to meet arts leaders in Cumbria, and other stakeholders, in preparation for which CCF's Chief Executive, Andy Beeforth sent an introductory note.

In addition to these one-to-one meetings (about one hour each, mainly online) we prepared and distributed a SurveyMonkey to a broader audience including Cumbria Arts and Culture Network, Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (no longer in existence)'s cultural network and others.

This is a summary document of the thoughts and matters arising from the individual consultations and SurveyMonkey which form the basis of a report prepared by CCF in developing its cultural funding.

Summary of the one-to-one consultations

- *These points and notes are not always in order but put, as much as possible, in groupings*
- *I have attempted to avoid duplication, but some points make this difficult to avoid. Some duplication may be unintentional for which apologies*
- *There are a considerable number of summary points intended to reflect as best I can the many points made during the consultation meetings. My bullet point notes of these meetings amount to over 30 pages, this summary is about 12. Inevitably I will have missed some points in this process and may have inadequately covered others. I hope, however, to have caught a sense of the depth, range and feelings of those I met*
- *Those involved in the consultations were given the opportunity to review a draft of this summary, to comment on any substantive omissions or misunderstandings on my part*

- *I have added a few thoughts of my own, I hope to complement comments made*
 - *I have wrestled with how best to write this summary. I thought about doing it in sections with headings, or along those lines. But I have chosen to present it in the way I heard what was said, with some grouping and gathering but not attempting to find headings. The “raw material” so to speak. I hope this works*
 - *And my thanks to the open and willing way in which people spoke of and responded to creativity in Cumbria*
1. It was said that the creative and cultural sector makes a significant contribution to
 - a. place shaping
 - b. the economy
 - c. health and wellbeing (mental and physical)

 2. Concern was expressed about
 - a. the sector and its future – challenges to sustainability
 - b. matters affecting people’s day to day lives, some of which are significant and serious
 - c. the survival of cultural organisations, some of which were said to be in “dire straits”
 - d. the amount of pressure the sector is under
 - e. time constraints – heads down to meet pressing day to day needs, insufficient time to discuss and explore as examples
 - f. the state of some of the towns people live and work in. Barrow was given as an example

 3. Almost everybody spoke of the challenges and complexities of funding, some about its competitive nature
 - a. the time it takes to make applications, sometimes for modest return
 - b. the disproportionate amount of monitoring required for modest return
 - c. the competition involved in the funding process and, therefore, the secrecy with which some approach it – impacting on collegiality
 - d. ACE’s funding stream, *Developing your Creative Practice* was said to be a good thing, simpler in approach with no match funding required. Competitive as a result
 - e. the geographical distribution of funding was raised with some parts (eg Barrow and more recently Copeland) benefiting more than others. It was said that some places could be more easily identified to be in need, through postcode analysis for example, than others where such analysis gave a more hybrid result and suggested therefore a lesser need for funding than others
 - f. the level of grants hasn’t kept up with costs

- g. creatives are struggling to make ends meet which can result in taking on more non-related work, reducing the time and energy for creativity
- 4. Years of reductions in local government funding has resulted in an inability for councils to support the creative sector as much as necessary. Limited local government funds being prioritised for statutory services
- 5. People said that creative practitioners and small organisations need help to develop and grow, including by
 - a. financial support which is necessary to help keep people in the arts
 - b. awareness of the existence of funding streams and the mechanics of making an application
 - c. building confidence to feel entitled and able to make an application
 - d. becoming aware of networks and potential support
 - e. finding people/organisations with whom to connect and collaborate
 - f. becoming aware of the many things that need to be known about in moving forward – including administrative and management matters, budgeting/financial/marketing support
 - g. a kit of essential/useful parts was suggested
 - h. assisting in the development of fundraising strategies and to carry out fundraising
 - i. getting out and about to meet others with whom to develop – creatives need to meet people that are going to give them a break
 - j. R&D
 - k. provision of workshop, rehearsal, recording and other production-based facilities
 - l. supporting people in Cumbria’s “cold spots”
- 6. People said that there must be more skills development in the sector but that a shortage of jobs made this difficult
- 7. Young people should be at the vanguard of this, ready to take over when opportunities arise and to support existing teams in the meantime
- 8. It was said that those running organisations need to be younger, more identifiable to the people it is essential to encourage and develop into the sector
- 9. The need for apprenticeships and other forms of training in the creative sector was emphasised – including creative, technical, administrative, production and more. Maybe involving more than one employer to include, for example, a greater range of skills, experience and contacts. Travel and accommodation costs could exclude many

10. Creating and developing opportunities to get involved in arts and culture was emphasised particularly with those who might struggle or otherwise be unaware. As part of which it was said that those involved in the sector should scout around and about to find people and organisations with potential and in need of support
11. Issues of diversity in Cumbria included class and rurality. Working class being in need of better representation and inclusion. Social justice. Equitable treatment
12. People spoke of the hardship many people are under – including poverty, health, survival. Saying that creativity can play a part in understanding and supporting people, some of whom are in difficulty. By
 - a. providing empathy
 - b. assisting in finding paths to help people come to terms with themselves, understanding themselves better, to feeling less lonely and isolated
 - c. supporting social care – one person spoke of getting into the arts to alleviate worries, to build confidence
 - d. building social and collaborative skills
 - e. building social cohesion, community engagement
 - f. supporting mental, physical health and well-being
 - g. demonstrating the relevance of creativity to everyday life, and the significance of the creative sector
 - h. meeting the civic purpose that sits alongside public funding
 - i. supporting the needs of communities around you
 - j. providing a means of escape from day-to-day travails. Adapting the words of Nicola Benedetti (not part of this review) “to imagine your way out of where you are”
 - k. working to combat emerging racial tensions
 - l. working in warm places during colder months
 - m. and more...
13. Some, however, did not think it was the role of creative organisations and practitioners to meet and support these living needs and concerns. They should be funded to create not to meet what they considered to be extraneous (albeit significant other) agendas. Such support might arise through creative output but that it should not be a starting point, or an agenda set by funders in advance
14. Somebody from outside the sector and formal consultations but who knew Mary Burkett well said - *My perception is that Mary's interests, focus and support were wide and unconstrained by conventional thinking and structures. She embraced creativity and individuality recognising that variety and differences benefit all*

enriching our lives in 'soft' ways beyond capture by modern metrics, KPI's etc. I have a sense that were she still alive and active she would be increasingly channelling this by informal grants and support through education (in the widest meaning) recognising the unique and life changing potential for specific targeted benefits to individuals. Targeting funding to recipients that typically would be outside the grant structures is of course hard work and arguably in conflict with the grants structures. BUT importantly, in my view, this would reflect her vision, the unique socioeconomics of Cumberland and provide a unique funding offer

15. People spoke of the restrictions put on the creative sector through funding programmes. A no pegs/no pre-prescribed funding approach would be welcomed
- a. freeing up creativity
 - b. providing opportunity for creative residencies with no strings attached
 - c. allowing for sometimes disruptive outputs - the past was more disruptive and creative than we sometimes think or remember
 - d. previous creatives were far more disruptive than we may know about now
 - e. allowing for radical experiments
 - f. part of the job is to mess with assumptions
 - g. looking to produce hidden narratives and voices
 - h. taking risks - taking a risk on something ahead of its time
 - i. many who took risks in the past (and disrupted) are now household, acclaimed names
 - j. creativity for its own sake can be squeezed out
 - k. allowing for self-expression – idiosyncrasy
 - l. allowing for key contemporary concerns and messages, eg environmental
 - m. installations, not always in recognised and established venues, but in relevant alternative spaces – more “underground” so to speak
 - n. arts for arts sake, nothing wrong with that
 - o. no “product” required
 - p. we tend to keep in what we consider to be safe, traditional spaces
 - q. Mary [Burkett] was a disrupter, we sometimes lose sight of this – disruption and provocations in artists
 - r. artistic excellence must never be lost
 - s. these people need places to create work, whatever its outcome
 - t. it is important to look beyond what is happening now – keeping progressive
 - u. a funding approach within the Paul Hamlyn Foundation was referenced – its team members go out and about to find projects they believe might be supported by the foundation, assisting potential applicants in making an application and advocating throughout the decision-making process. This

approach resonated with the thinking of others - one part of CCF's cultural funding could be supported by "cultural scouts" along similar lines. This might be developed to include supporting CCF's fundraising to align with developing and emerging objectives

16. Creative organisations and leaders (and some practitioners) have become institutionalised through the requirements of funders
 - a. shaped by the strategies of funders
 - b. restricting creativity through required outcomes/outputs
 - c. prescribed not liberated
17. A wider view is essential, embracing, developing, working alongside national and international developments and practice. Sometimes we are a bit too parochial. Heads down meeting day to day necessities. Community focus can restrict outward looking – internationalism
18. Working in communities is essential – this work can sometimes be looked down on, or considered not to be as good or valid
19. People spoke of the need for physical in addition to digital connection. Too much was happening on screens. Things should be in real life, with real people, not all on screens
20. Some said NPOs and others in the creative sector have all sorts of expertise and experience which could be used to support others. Possibly mixing and matching with one another for the greater good. But it was emphasised this takes time and resource on already hard-pressed organisations which would need to be funded and supported in some way
21. The point was made that NPOs are a significant force within the cultural sector in Cumbria but that there are many other organisations and individuals. Many would be part of the CACN membership, but maybe not all
22. Everybody wanted to make things work, to make a difference, to support people through creativity in whatever shape or form it takes
23. Most people wanted the development and achievement of quality and excellence in creative practice to be encouraged and nurtured, sitting alongside accessibility and inclusivity

24. People spoke of the geography, size and scale of the county, leading to difficulty in knowing what is going on, and in getting around and about. Partnering was thought to be a good thing, but geographical difficulties exist. You can't just meet up in the local coffee shop
25. Location challenges are not just about rurality. Even Carlisle can feel left out by "priority place" designations. And by population density in places such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester and Liverpool
26. The "Everyone Here" project is West Cumbrian based – the new local government structure for Cumberland includes Carlisle – Cumberland wants a "whole Cumberland" approach
27. People spoke of the difficulty in attracting audiences
 - a. people are living in hard times
 - b. there is a need for entertainment, joy, happiness and fun
 - c. for people to connect with others, making creativity relevant in the here and now
 - d. getting around and about the county to visit exhibitions and attend performances, as examples. Particularly from those with low or no income or where the geography of the county is an obstacle, in terms of distance and transport
 - e. enabling people to feel that such exhibitions and performances, as examples, are relevant to them/their lives – accessible and relevant – informative – sometimes challenging – sometimes entertaining and fun – engaging – resonating
 - f. producing performing arts to support communities and societal need (high on the agenda) is challenging - it can struggle to attract sufficient numbers and income to support it
 - g. some thought that a menu of options was important from which people could discover and decide what interests/appeals to them or not. The danger of not providing this menu (on as accessible a basis as possible) is that people gravitate only to the familiar, discounting as irrelevant or "not for the likes of us" anything else. The negative impact of which on the creative sector and society should not be underestimated
 - h. it was said that more concentrated thought needed to be given to attracting and retaining diverse audiences
28. People spoke of the advantages of building hubs of creative practice, some physical, some digital, but caution was expressed about hubs developing into silos with negative effect

- a. hubs should be supported and developed, both physically and digitally, to engage, generate, support and share creative activity
- b. they should have clear/linked purpose (which may evolve) and support those in their catchment areas whether this be geographic or purpose driven
- c. they should not set agendas, or pre-judge what people want to do, but respond to individual need through their individual and collective expertise and resources
- d. they should cross over from one to another to provide separate but linked expertise, experience and skills, benefiting from each other and for the whole
- e. hubs could include those from outside the sector but with interests in it. See comments on the corporate sector below for example
- f. they should not become self-interested or use this position to their own end (unless this arose in consequence)
- g. Penrith was thought to be a wasted opportunity, good rail and road access. No arts centre. Thought to be a well-placed town to provide hub type support. Carlisle was suggested as an alternative or an addition

29. Some said that larger organisations have the infrastructure and expertise to look after themselves. But it was also said that small pockets of funding (eg £5k +) could help make projects happen in larger organisations that might not otherwise – projects that directly impact disadvantaged communities. And it was said that larger organisations have greater costs and break-even points

30. Thoughts on creativity/creative practice insofar as applications to the fund should be considered included

- a. for amateurs and professionals alike
- b. for existing professionals only, and for support leading to a professional life in the creative sector
- c. to introduce people of all ages, particularly children and young people, to participation in arts and culture – not least to those who might otherwise miss out due to lack of opportunity and/or funding, as examples
- d. to provide equitable opportunities – democratising opportunity and engagement – social justice
- e. applications shouldn't be restricted, let people make their case for funding – no definition – no pre-prescribed agendas - who says what great art is – who makes that judgement
- f. for those that support people and communities with living issues
- g. traditional, contemporary, experimental, sometimes a mash-up

- h. in musical terms this included access to the RNCM, for example, to underground punk/grime/death metal in pubs and clubs. This could probably be replicated in other forms of expressive arts
- i. IDLES/Banksy's inflatable migrant boat was referenced – disruptive, relevant to many, as performed at Glastonbury in 2024. More underground/angry/on the street forms of expression should be better recognised and supported, it can be marginalised, including street art. Stormzy was referenced both as a creative and through his social care and concerns
- j. “Who am I to say what music is” said a grant-giving authority – but care needs to be taken with safeguarding and hidden/underground messages, known only to the informed. A tricky balance to be struck by funders to allow freedom of expression but not to fund irresponsibly
- k. a priority should be funding for younger people for work with younger people. Too much work is created by older people. The young should be doing stuff we don't like or understand. They need a safe place to do this and to meet each other
- l. it must be defined, to some extent, to protect the panel from an avalanche of applications, many of which would be unsuccessful because of volume, causing difficulty/disappointment all round, not least to applicants
- m. maybe there should be categories within an overall fund – covering different, maybe linked bases
- n. some thought community organisations should be supported, both on a stand-alone basis and as a means of engagement in creativity which could lead to a professional life. Communities have all sorts of creative people and expertise available, to help people access and develop in the arts, but this needs to be supported through funding
- o. funding community organisations who have much to offer individuals and smaller groups which in cities might be offered by professional organisations. It is difficult for people in rural communities to get to cities, and expensive. Time and money are issues, among other things
- p. creative practice unlocks creativity in others but this needs to be supported
- q. people can miss out because of this lack of opportunity/knowing what is out there/the range of creative opportunity/potential engagement
- r. quality and excellence, do we know what it is - the word “mediocrity” was used, to be avoided. “Mid-point isn't quite good enough” - “Lack of time and ambition to do better” - “Mediocrity happens so quickly” - “Do it right or don't do it at all” – “Poverty of aspiration”

- s. the challenge between cultivating from grass roots was set alongside those who are talented, have worked hard, are committed and have moved themselves on, to the point that financial support would get them even further - but it was said that they can make less “noise” and are noticed less as a result
- t. bursaries would help people get on to a ladder, then to climb it
- u. sustainable long/er-term funding is often necessary and certainly desirable
- v. people need to travel to grow, examples include – to develop as practitioners, mounting shows, visiting others, to experience creative activity (eg schools, more below) for which funding can be necessary
- w. ensuring access/engagement to people with disabilities (in its many forms, some seen, some not) is thought through and included in the many and different ways this is necessary
- x. accessibility and inclusivity were emphasised (equitable opportunity), but not to the detriment of quality/excellence/elite which must be supported so as not to be squeezed out of Cumbria. Note - elite not elitism, the two being different in perception and meaning. We don't have difficulty with elite athletes – Olympians. In comparison, as these notes are written, the Proms are in full flight (other well-known brands are available!)
- y. “unprivileged” people need help
- z. funding during Covid was exciting – unrestricted – practitioner focused – less about day-to-day survival of organisations and administrative type stuff
- aa. “an absolute joy” to find experimental funding supporting creative people

31. People spoke of the need to make creativity more relevant in people's day to day lives. Giving them access to it from an early age, to make it less of a feature, more the norm, handed down from one generation to another

32. The Scott Foundation/ Cumbria Youth Alliance's *Break the Mould* funding was referenced, alongside *Jury for Joy*, a citizens' jury for creative expression in West Cumbria – please see

- a. <https://www.cya.org.uk/good-news/break-the-mould-francis-c-scott-charitable-trust-launches-young-people-s-grant-programme-celebrating-60-years-of-empowerment> and
- b. <https://www.citizensinpower.com/all-projects/west-cumbria-jury-for-joy>

33. Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership's *Catalyst: Creative residencies in Cumbria* was referenced – please see <https://www.art-gene.co.uk/catalyst/>

34. Funding decisions to be taken by young people for young people (maybe not always for young people but of relevance to them)
35. The need for and benefits of collaboration were highlighted throughout. People were positive about Cumbria Arts and Culture Network (CACN) and its increasing impact on the creative sector, speaking positively about the Chair's decision to find more time in support
36. It was suggested that CCF could partner with CACN given its breadth of knowledge and relationships across Cumbria, and maybe others, including the two Councils and Copeland Community Fund
37. It was said that the more people collaborate, speak to, and understand one another, the better
38. If key funders and other similarly interested parties (eg interested business/ corporates, see below) could be identified and put into this mix, the better
39. A more joined up approach was said to be necessary, to bring key players – influencers - stakeholders closer together
 - a. to collaborate through combinations of support
 - b. each providing what they can do for the greater good
 - c. avoiding, as much as possible, duplication of activity and effort
 - d. to stop worrying about being competitive with one another, be more altruistic – for the greater good
 - e. such a way of working could assist in putting Cumbria on the map, encouraging people to stay/return/come into the county to live, work, create, participate in creative activity
40. Education was emphasised throughout, getting at young people early and in a sustained, not one-off, way. Building interest, engagement and relevance to young people's lives
 - a. funding is necessary to take cultural activity into schools (secondary are a challenge but no less important) and to get CYP out to see or participate in cultural activity elsewhere – transport costs are an issue
 - b. STEAM not STEM
 - c. financial assistance for CYP to get involved, including the purchase/loan of musical instruments, for example, and other creative supports
 - d. to support young people facing significant barriers to progress

- e. the interest and engagement of CYP needs to be ignited. To get to them early so that this isn't considered to be something remote, inaccessible, irrelevant, elite – but the norm
- f. creativity should be passed from generation to generation as with so many other things. A real danger that it becomes “not for the likes of us” instead
- g. areas with socio-economic and challenging life issues need particular support with which to generate greater awareness of and involvement in creative activity – to emphasise its relevance notwithstanding day-to-day challenges, assisting in finding a way through them

41. It was said that Cumbria is rich in arts, culture, heritage and more, in so many rich and diverse ways. And that this should be celebrated in a bi/annual event, making it visible both within and outside the county.

A “Mary Burkett” type event. An arts biennale. A South Bank Centre inspired *Meltdown* which could be curated by somebody like Jess Gillam, alongside a couple of other exemplars of different expressive arts. A big shout out, to

- a. promote and support creative practitioners and practice in Cumbria, amateur and professional – across many types and forms (not everybody was clear that amateur should be included others felt strongly that it should – “an eco-system”)
- b. encourage people of all ages to get involved, not least CYP, developing from there
- c. demonstrate that creativity can generate a living
- d. encourage creatives to stay in the county or return to it. Although it was also said by some that the important thing is to get people involved, to develop if they wish/are able to, no matter where they then go
- e. encourage creatives from elsewhere to live and work in Cumbria, benefitting not least from the relatively lower cost of living in some parts of the county, alongside good connectivity (physical and digital). Margate, among others, was given as an example of a place that had been transformed through culture (maybe becoming financially inaccessible to creatives as an unfortunate consequence)
- f. encourage investment and philanthropic support
- g. encourage new philanthropists at various, sometimes lower levels of giving. Building the endowment or annual income for in year use
- h. demonstrate the impact cultural activity can have on people, their health and well-being
- i. demonstrate the impact of culture within the mix of Cumbrian economies – including its economic impact

- j. encourage business to get involved and support, for mutual benefit
- k. UNESCO World Heritage sites
- l. Note - concern was expressed that in demonstrating accessibility and inclusivity this could lead to “mediocrity”. It was said that the really good people in the county/or from it, are under the radar/just get on with it/leave to work elsewhere. It is said some don’t think of considering applying for funding which they may need to develop even more. Their work may not be seen/shouted about but drowned out by greater “noise” which might come from the more “mediocre”. A challenging point

42. Partners in producing a celebration/shout out might include

- a. successful applicants to the Culture Fund
- b. Cumbria Arts and Culture Network (CACN)
- c. Soundwave (building, maybe, on the Kendal Calling initiative this and in previous years) – noisy/sometimes angry
- d. NPOs
- e. CACN, Art Gene and UoC were contracted by Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (CLEP) to manage the decision making of CLEP’s Catalyst: Creative residencies in Cumbria programme. 20 people were shortlisted from a much larger group that might be relevant to consider
- f. business/corporate sector

43. Working more closely with business/corporates for mutual benefit was discussed

- a. attracting investment, sponsorship/funding
- b. demonstrating relevance to business/corporate objectives
- c. demonstrating the economic impact of the creative sector
- d. assisting business creativity both in terms of their products and within the culture and behaviour of their organisations
- e. promoting creative practitioners to use their skills in some training and development within business and corporate settings
- f. supporting happier employees, more effective work and productivity
- g. supporting better internal communications
- h. providing relevant business support and facilities to the creative sector

44. Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership has closed following which a new Economic Growth Board is being created. Further opportunities for CCF’s cultural advocacy and funding may arise as a result

45. Is the Culture Fund at CCF a suitable name and is CCF the right brand/home

- a. would a different name be suitable

- b. does CCF have the relevant expertise to run and develop a cultural fund on its own, could partners be found to support