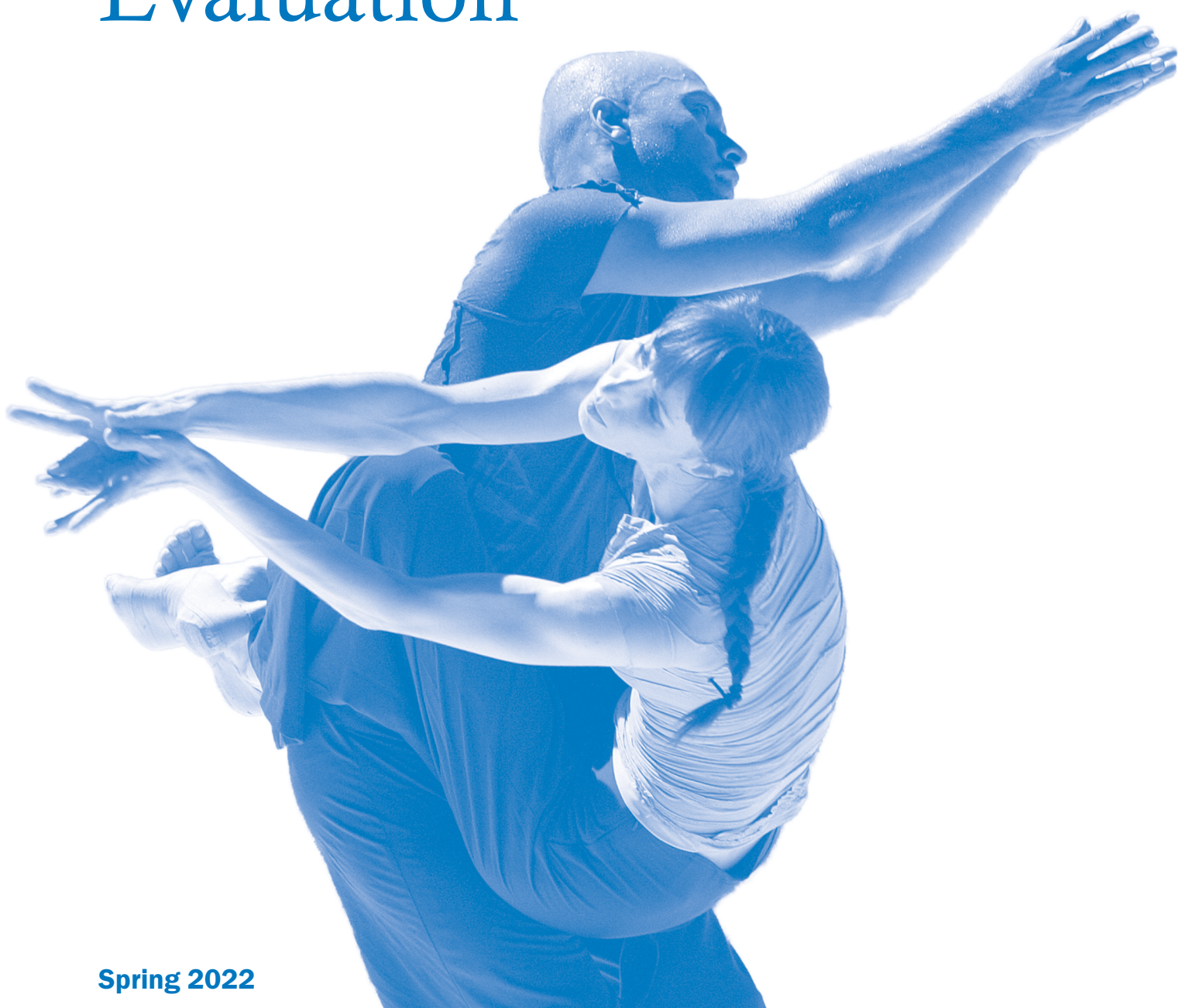




Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION

Weston Culture Fund Evaluation



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Introduction

by Philippa Charles, Director of the Garfield Weston Foundation

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Covid-19 has affected – and will continue to affect for some time – so many areas of our lives. The Foundation is proud to support so many charities across the UK whose work is never more needed, including groups supporting children and young people, isolated older people, homeless people, and those with other vulnerabilities. As longstanding funders of the arts and culture sectors, our Trustees immediately recognised the threat to their viability when lockdown meant the overnight loss of their audiences and significant

damage to their income, not just from ticket sales but also from catering outlets, venue hire, and philanthropic support to name just four significant funding streams that many organisations have worked so hard to develop in order to become sustainable.

This is why we swiftly created and launched the Weston Culture Fund (WCF) in the autumn of 2020, providing £30.2 million to help 106 cultural organisations in the UK survive and thrive. The funding was available to support them in restarting their important work, in adjusting to the new digital era, and in efforts to bring audiences back.

We commissioned an external evaluation of the WCF as part of our ongoing commitment to learning and continuous improvement and we are grateful to Dr. Beth Breeze, OBE for her insights and rigour.

This report summarises the evaluation of WCF. It covers where the funding went, reflections on the process of distributing the funds, some early insights into its impact, and also the broader impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the arts and culture across the UK. All ongoing grantees have provided data for this evaluation, and our Trustees are especially grateful to the 70 organisations that applied and were unsuccessful, but have nonetheless participated in this research. I would also like to thank the Foundation team who worked tirelessly to create and manage the fund, and to our Trustees who gave many additional volunteer hours to assessing and decision making.

As the pandemic has continued, our cultural partners have continued to experience ongoing challenges, causing complex changes to plans and budgets which we have acknowledged with flexible grant periods. We are maintaining relationships with our WCF grantees, listening to their feedback about our processes and learning from their experiences. And, importantly, the Foundation remains committed to supporting the arts and culture as we have done since 1958.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Philippa Charles.

Executive summary

The Garfield Weston Foundation has been a significant funder of the cultural sector since it was founded in 1958. The devastating financial impact of Covid-19 as a result of lockdowns and subsequent loss of income from ticket sales, visitors, and other commercial and fundraising activities, prompted the swift creation of a new initiative – the Weston Culture Fund (WCF) – in autumn 2020 to help the sector recover and re-start activities.

This evaluation finds that the creation and promotion of the WCF, and the application process, were smooth and well-run, with the vast majority of both grantees and unsuccessful applicants reporting satisfaction with the overall experience.

Demand for grants was high, despite many potential applicant organisations being short-staffed due to furloughing and redundancies. The fund received 351 applications, requesting a total of £128 million, representing a spread of applicants from around the UK and across different cultural activities. The Foundation's Trustees made grants totaling £30.2 million to 106 organisations

There is highly positive feedback on the quality of guidance for applicants, and the clarity of the application process, as well as the supportive and empathic response from Foundation staff to applicants. The one notable exception to this finding is agreement across grantees and unsuccessful applicants that the Excel application form (similar to that used by a public funder) was not easy to use, so the Foundation has already decided not to use that format in the future.

The major consequences reported by those applicants that have struggled to secure income were the need to scale back their activities (69%), a reduced ability to reach specific audiences (37%) and to continue working with certain artists (27%). In addition, some noted the impact went beyond financial consequences, with staff morale and organisational confidence taking a hit. Fortunately, in addition to emergency government funding for the arts and culture sectors, almost half (46%) of unsuccessful applicants to this fund secured alternative funding, primarily from other trusts and foundations, and the vast majority (94%) intend to apply again to the Garfield Weston Foundation, underlying the generally positive experience of the WCF process.

The most significant reported impact of the pandemic is loss of income and the subsequent precarious financial situation, including depletion of reserves. Respondents reported four further negative impacts:

- loss of talent due to in-house staff being made redundant or leaving, and inability to undertake normal recruitment during the pandemic
- loss of ability to work with certain artists, including freelance artists, and therefore diversified creative talent
- loss of momentum in terms of building relationships with audiences, and local communities, and concern it will take a long time for confidence to return – not a 'pause' but move backwards
- loss of relationships with individual donors, and lost momentum in mass fundraising activities

Respondents also highlighted their ability to find some degree of 'opportunity in a crisis', reporting three more positive developments as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

- acceleration of the move to digital
- move to more flexible working patterns for staff
- time to stop and think regarding strategy and forward planning

About the Weston Culture Fund

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has had a deep and widespread negative impact on the UK's cultural sector, in particular those organisations that typically generate a significant proportion of their income from commercial activities, which disappeared overnight due to government mandated lockdown. As a long-time funder of this sector, granting an average of £14.7 million per year in each of the previous five years, the Garfield Weston Foundation responded to this unprecedented situation by creating the Weston Culture Fund (WCF), with a planned expenditure of £25 million, to support mid- to large-scale cultural organisations in the UK.¹

Applications were invited from performing, visual and literary arts organisations, arts centres, and accredited museums and galleries that are not run by a local authority. Applicants needed to have a pre-Covid income of at least £500,000.

Applicants could apply for grants ranging from £100,000 to £2 million, based on the size of the applying organisation, to cover costs associated with any, or all, of three areas:

- 1** restarting work and reopening
- 2** making critical adaptations or improvements to physical or digital infrastructure that would help generate income and/or develop audiences
- 3** new activity or adapting existing activity or programming to ensure that existing and new audiences could be reached

The Foundation's goals in relation to the distribution of funding, were as follows:

- to ensure a good geographical coverage across the UK, particularly to organisations outside London that do not have the same access to major donors and sponsors
- to represent a breadth of cultural activity and to reflect the interconnectedness of the cultural sector
- to prioritise geographical areas with low arts engagement and high on the indices of deprivation
- to prioritise organisations that demonstrated a commitment to diversity, inclusion and access in their programming, education/outreach, staff and leadership
- to support those organisations that demonstrated ingenuity and proactivity in helping themselves
- to focus on organisations that demonstrate sensible financial management with realistic financial forecasts and well-considered business assumptions, and that were being proactive in sourcing additional funding

Once the extent and devastating impact of the lockdowns became clear, the Fund opened for applications on 5 October 2020. The Fund received 351 applications requesting a total of £128 million. In response to this level of need the Trustees increased the fund by over 20% to award a total of £30.2 million in 106 grants. One of the grants, worth c.£300,000 was subsequently returned because the organisation in question unfortunately wound down during 2021, so this evaluation covers £29.9 million of grant funding to 105 organisations.

1. Smaller organisations were still able to apply through the Foundation's ongoing Regular Grants programme.

About this evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation

The Foundation commissioned an external and independent evaluation of the Weston Culture Fund to understand the long-term impact of the Trustees’ funding for the grantees and, potentially, for the wider sector. This external evaluation is based on an online survey of all 105 ongoing grantees, as well as a comparison group of 70 unsuccessful applicants in order to explore whether, and to what extent, the Fund met the Foundation’s goals.

Participants in the evaluation

The data presented in this report comes from two separate online surveys.

- A survey of all 105 ongoing grantees, whose participation in the evaluation process was a condition of their grant. The survey is, therefore, a universal (100%) sample of the grantees.
- A survey of 70 unsuccessful applicants who responded to a request sent to all of the 245 organisations that applied to this fund and did not secure funding. This self-selected sample represents a third (29%) of all unsuccessful applicants.

The two groups – grantees and unsuccessful applicants – have broadly similar organisational characteristics. The vast majority had previously applied to the Foundation, with no significant difference in this regard between all applicants and those that succeeded in securing funding, as shown in table 1.

Prior experience of the Garfield Weston Foundation

	All applicants	Grantees
Previously applied to the Foundation	91% (319)	92% (98)
No prior experience of applying to, or being funded by, the Foundation	9% (32)	8% (8)

Table 1 Applicants’ prior experience of the Foundation

Funding went to a good spread of different sized organisations – as measured by number of full-time equivalent staff and by annual income – with grantees slightly more likely to represent the very largest organisations according to both those measures (see appendix tables A.1 and A.2).

Findings

How did applicants hear about the WCF?

Most applicants – whether successful or not – heard about the Fund in one of three main ways: from media/ social media coverage of the Fund, from sector colleagues, and from the Foundation’s website (table A.3). Those who secured grants were substantially more likely to have learnt about this opportunity from colleagues or the Foundation’s website, while unsuccessful applicants were more reliant on reacting to media coverage, suggesting that grantees are more ‘plugged in’ to funding information, directly or indirectly. However, a quarter (24%) of grantees learnt about this opportunity from media coverage.

Geographic distribution of granted funds

A key goal for funding via WCF was to ensure a good geographical cover across the UK, particularly to support organisations outside London that do not have the same access to major donors and sponsors. Figure 1 demonstrates that this goal was met.

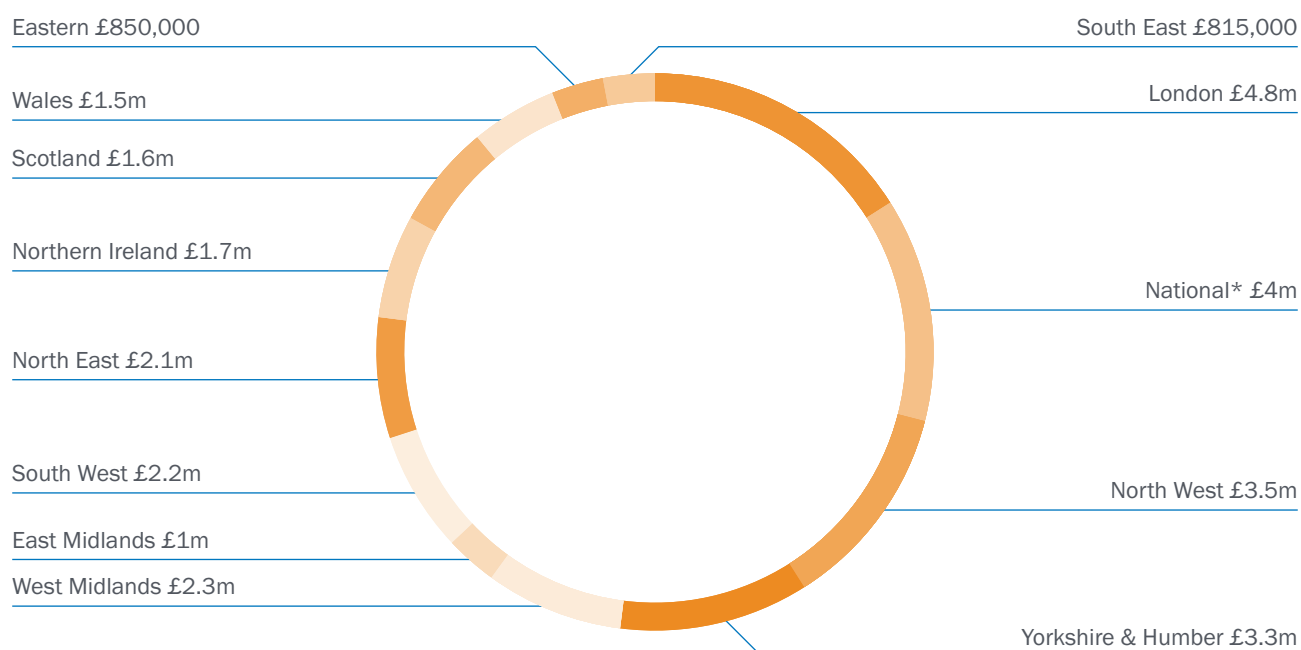


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of funds

* For the purposes of WCF we categorised organisations as National if their work takes place across the UK, as opposed to a venue-based organisation. Touring companies therefore were categorised as National.

Funding by cultural activity

As applicants had to have a minimum annual turnover of £500,000 it is unsurprising that the largest proportion of applications came from theatres (32%), particularly in areas outside the major cities, as these tend to be the largest local cultural organisations.

Most cultural activities received funding roughly in proportion to the quantity of applications. Theatres (which includes touring companies and those based in venues) represent the largest proportion of applicants and granted funds, reflecting the Trustees' aim of supporting organisations with the ability to engage significant audiences, particularly in areas of low arts engagement and high in deprivation.

The Trustees were also keen to reflect the interconnectivity of the cultural sector, for example, recognising that regional theatres, particularly producing houses, need content from touring theatres to attract audiences. Overall, the Foundation succeeded in achieving its goals for WCF, as shown in figure 2.

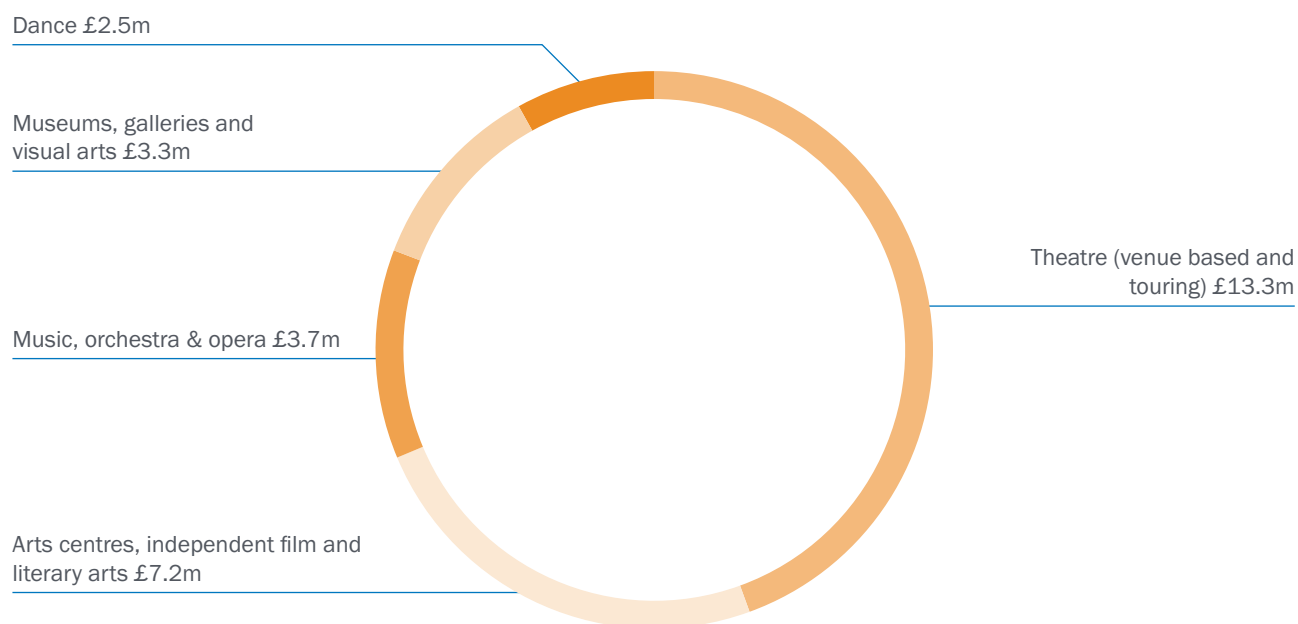


Figure 2: Applicants' cultural activity

Experience of the application process

The Garfield Weston Foundation wishes to maintain its reputation as an accessible and empathic funder. As the main point of contact between grant-seekers and grant-makers is during the application process, a central goal of the first stage of this evaluation is therefore to explore how applicants experienced all aspects of the process of submitting an application.

The survey responses from both grantees and unsuccessful applicants show that the guidance and application process was considered to be clear and straightforward. As might be expected, grantees express more enthusiastic responses but nonetheless a clear majority of all applicants have a positive view of the guidance and process (table A.4).

Examples of positive feedback include an unsuccessful applicant who noted that:

💡💡 *The grant team were quick, clear and helpful in their advice when contacted, which definitely made the process better."*

Two other grantees wrote:

💡💡 *The Foundation's guidelines were very clear and staff's ability to answer questions was excellent."*

💡💡 *All supporting materials were warm and encouraging which helped with our confidence in applying."*

While many organisations noted that applying for grants under lockdown conditions involved additional challenges for pulling their applications together – notably reduced staffing teams due to furlough, and some communication issues due to remote working – there was general agreement that the deadline remained helpful. Reported levels of confidence were similar across all applicants, with most applicants being ambiguous or lacking confidence, likely reflecting the strain these organisations were under at the time of submission. (Table A.4)

Many applicants expressed appreciation of the speed with which the Fund had been launched, the decisions had been made, and the money had reached the frontline, as these quotes illustrate:

💡💡 *We really appreciated the clear timeline and it actually being achieved despite how many applications you received."*

💡💡 *The speed with which decisions and grants were made was exceptional."*

💡💡 *The Foundation stuck to their own schedule and paid very promptly the grant in full which is always so helpful as it avoids any cashflow issues."*

Contact with the Foundation during the application process

Around a third of applicants – higher amongst eventual grantees – reported having some contact with the Foundation during the application process (tables A.5, A.6). The preponderance of in-person, over digital communications, was appreciated by applicants, with one noting:

💡💡 *We got the impression of a personable, helpful, flexible funder that genuinely cares about the work being supported."*

A consistent request from unsuccessful applicants was for feedback to help them understand why they did not make the cut and to gain insights to improve their future applications. Typical comments from unsuccessful applicants include:

💡💡 *The major negative was receiving no feedback."*

💡💡 *Having invested time in a significant application, we would expect meaningful feedback."*

From the Foundation's perspective there is a tricky balance to find vis-à-vis feedback. All WCF applications were good quality and therefore the Trustees had to make hard decisions given they simply could not fund each organisation.

The quantity of applications received means it was unfortunately not possible for the small Foundation team to provide tailored feedback. However, they have identified three key themes as the most common features of successful applications:

- 1 Grantees were more likely to be focused on the impact of their ongoing work on their audiences and local communities, rather than making a case with a predominantly internal focus.
- 2 Grantees tended to be planning a blend of activity as they emerged from the pandemic, with the intention of trying new things whilst retaining elements of their existing work and audiences. They demonstrated ambition, creativity and a determination to succeed.
- 3 While financial uncertainty affected every applicant, the budgets of those that secured WCF grants tended to be more realistically based on their experiences to date, and on clear and sensible assumptions, which resulted in a clearer justification of what funding was needed.

While these three themes will not apply to all applications, it is hoped they will prove more useful to some in reflecting and preparing more successful applications in the future.

What happened for unsuccessful applicants?

Clearly, organisations were seeking and applying to many different sources of funding during this difficult period, so it is not possible to disentangle the precise consequences of success in this scheme from that broader context of efforts to generate income. The major consequence for those applicants that did not receive a WCF grant – reported by two-thirds (69%) – was scaling back of their activities.

Table 2 illustrates the impact of not securing WCF funding. In addition, some noted the impact went beyond financial consequences, with staff morale and organisational confidence taking a hit.

Consequences of not securing funding from WCF	Unsuccessful applicants
Scaling back of activities	69% (48)
Impact on ability to reach specific audiences	37% (26)
Impact on our ability to continue working with some artists	27% (19)
Delay to reopening or restarting	9% (6)
Potential closure	4% (3)

Table 2 Consequences of not securing WCF funding
NB: respondents could select more than one option

Success in securing other funding

Fortunately, almost half (46%) of unsuccessful applicants who participated in this survey managed to secure other funding, and a further fifth (21%) were awaiting the outcome of other fundraising efforts, as shown in table 3. However, it is possible that applicants who 'bounced back' or were still hopeful of good news, were more likely to be willing to participate in this evaluation. Of those who secured alternative funding, the most common sources were individual and major donors (collectively 35%) and other charitable trusts or foundations (33%). Unsurprisingly, given the impact of the pandemic on much of the private sector, corporate donors were the least likely alternative source of funds, as shown in table 4. The vast majority (94%) of unsuccessful applicants intend to apply again to the Garfield Weston Foundation, underlying the generally positive experience of the WCF process.

Did unsuccessful applicants secure alternative funding?	Unsuccessful applicants
Yes	46% (31)
No	33% (22)
Not sure yet	21% (14)

Table 3 Unsuccessful applicants' subsequent success in securing alternative funding

Source of other funding secured	Unsuccessful applicants
Other charitable trusts & foundations	33% (20)
Individual (mass/low-level) donors	23% (14)
Major donors	12% (7)
Corporate donors	7% (4)
Other	25% (15)

Table 4 Source of funding secured by unsuccessful applicants

NB: Respondents could select more than one option

Initial impact of funding on grantees

As with the unsuccessful applicants, almost all of those who became grantees identified 'scaling back of activities' as the key consequence they would have faced had they not secured funding. Similarly, an inability to reach specific audiences and to continue working with certain artists – including freelance artists – were considered the second and third most likely negative impacts, as shown in table 5

Likely impact if WCF funding had not been secured	Successful applicants
Scaling back of activities	98% (103)
Impact on ability to reach specific audiences	92% (97)
Impact on our ability to continue working with certain artists	78% (82)
Delay to reopening or restarting	45% (47)
Potential closure	11% (12)

Table 5 Likely consequences of not securing WCF funding

NB: respondents could select more than one option

Change of plans since applying

When organisations applied to WCF, many had cautious assumptions that they would be able to open over the Christmas 2020 period (particularly important for theatres and vital pantomime income). Due to ongoing lockdowns, these plans had to change at least once, meaning grantees had to adapt and recalculate financial and operational assumptions. It is unsurprising therefore that in the period between submitting applications in November 2020 and completing this survey in the summer of 2021, a fifth (21%) of grantees had changed their plans for using the grant, and a further third (31%) felt some change in use might yet be needed.

Table A.7 shows the breakdown of changes to grantees' plans. Most often these changes relate to the budgeting for proposed adaptations or initiatives, which likely relates to difficulties in securing quotes from suppliers during the lockdown periods, and the difficulty of pricing novel undertakings, for example needing to guestimate the cost of hiring a digital producer. There may also have been adjustments made by suppliers and some lack of robustness in creating the initial budgets.

Impact on other fundraising efforts

Four in ten (39%) of the grantees reported that their success in securing a WCF grant helped them to secure further new funding (table A.8), primarily from other trusts and foundations but also from a range of other types of donors (table A.9). This suggests that receiving support from the Foundation helps to leverage other support. This leveraging mechanism may occur as a result of other funders gaining greater confidence in applicants that have passed Garfield Weston's due diligence procedures. There may also be an indirect impact on the confidence and morale at grantee organisations, leading to more successful applications.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Both grantees and unsuccessful applicants generously shared a huge number of insights into their experience of, and reflections on, the Covid-19 pandemic. This section includes many quotes from those who participated in the evaluation in order to share the perspective of front-line practitioners during this extraordinary time.

Challenges

Financial instability

Loss of income and the subsequent precarious financial situation, including depletion of reserves, is the most significant reported impact. Words and phrases that recur in respondents' comments include "profound", "horrendous", "dramatically reduced", "nonexistent income", "devastating financial impact" and "catastrophic loss of income".

Organisations noted "the total failure of our previously successful business model", that was "utterly exhausting and terrifying", resulting in the "inability to plan", the "erosion" and "stalling of relationships", the "talent drain", and their feeling of being "trapped by increased demand versus reducing resource". Many also reflected on their "lost connection" with audiences, artists and funders, the unknowable consequences of "lingering audience nervousness" and "an impact for years to come".

One applicant described how the loss of income has organisation-wide impact:

💧💧 *We have spent much of our reserves, asked every member of staff to take a salary sacrifice, undertaken a redundancy programme and dealt with 15 months of uncertainty. All of which means we are organisationally tired with little spare capacity."*

Talent retention

The second major reflection on the consequences of Covid-19 is the loss of talent due to in-house staff being made redundant or leaving, and the inability to undertake normal recruitment during the pandemic.

Many respondents described the personal and organisational pain of "losing exceptionally talented colleagues", and many also highlighted the wider consequences on the remaining staff.

💧💧 *The impact of the last 18 months on staff morale and mental health cannot be underestimated."*

The impact on talent management and retention because of decreased confidence and morale was a consistent theme, as these further two quotes illustrate:

💧💧 *The greatest struggle was the confidence of our staff in the industry and its survival. We have seen resignations and career changes."*

💧💧 *The pandemic has skewed the market and pipeline for staff so recruitment is really hard at the moment. Loads of people have left the sector because of uncertainty or because they have found other fulfilling roles."*

Working with freelancers and individual practitioners

A third major theme that emerges is the loss of ability to work with artists, and particularly freelance artists. The crisis highlighted the vital role played by the freelance workforce, how unsupported it was during the crisis and the need to address what can be done to help change that. One respondent summed up:

☝☝ *The colossal precarity of the artists and freelancers we work with, the hardship and anxieties they are going through, and the subsequent talent drain from the sector."*

Music and dance companies noted that it is not possible to 'mothball' the talent of dancers and musicians who must practice in order to remain world-leading, despite their companies not generating sufficient income to pay them.

Audience/outreach relationships and confidence

The fourth reported key impact of the pandemic on arts and culture organisations is the loss of momentum in terms of building relationships with audiences and undertaking outreach with local communities. This was especially expressed in relation to marginalised communities with less history or participation in, and access to, the arts. Many organisations expressed concerns that it will take a long time for confidence to return, and a fear that the crisis did not constitute a 'pause', but rather a large backwards step as a result, for example, of "interruption to our planning and production cycles" and the "erosion of long-term relationships with artists, funders, audiences – and difficulty forging new ones during closure".

Donor relations

The fifth and final theme relates to the loss of relationships with individual donors, and lost momentum in mass fundraising activities. The evident need for the WCF, and concerns expressed by those who did not succeed in this scheme, are apparent in the data reported above. These findings are fleshed out by comments such as:

☝☝ *Losing staff, losing income, losing profile, and losing momentum have all been impactful but the impact on the wider community and audience behaviours is probably the most harmful."*

☝☝ *We are having to reinvent our work, our process, and our relationships with our funders."*

Cumulative impact

There is a cumulative impact of all the five themes explained above, as one organisation explains "it's hard to separate one impact from another because they're all tied together".

This comment sums up the inter-connected nature of all the negative impacts described in this section.

☝☝ *We miss our audiences, and there is now a huge gap in our ongoing relationships formed through people's experiences at our venue. This has a knock-on effect on our finances and fundraising. There will need to be a huge effort of re-engagement."*

This final plaintive comment in relation to negative impacts clearly evokes the unknown, and deeply uncomfortable territory, in which many arts and cultural organisations now find themselves.

☝☝ *The impact temporary closure may have on audiences is unknown. Have their tastes changed, and if they have, how will we face those changes? Have they found new ways to fill their leisure time? How will they feel about returning to a theatre space? Have we forgotten how to please and look after them? Have they forgotten us?"*

Silver linings to the Covid-19 cloud

Whilst it would be crass and premature to describe ‘positives’ resulting from the pandemic, many of our respondents – both grantees and unsuccessful applicants – were able to point to ‘opportunities’ that had arisen as a result of the crisis.

Move to digital

Firstly, many noted that there had been an “acceleration” in their organisation’s move to digital, which included creating and expanding digital output. A typical comment was that “the crisis has propelled us forward on our digital journey”. Another elaborated that “the pandemic has – by force – encouraged the organisation and team to think more creatively about how to harness the potential of digital to reach and inspire new audiences”.

While this change was largely forced rather than by design, respondents recognised it had value, as these two quotes illustrate.

☝☝ *Our progress on the digital front was something that happened out of necessity but has definitely been a positive – allowing us to reach audiences literally all over the world and opening our eyes to its potential.”*

☝☝ *Our digital profile before Covid was seriously lacking and the pandemic has forced us to make time for digital, enhance our skills and develop new confidence. This has opened up everyone’s minds to new ways of working that will help us extend our reach in the future.”*

Such comments did not only come from those who secured a WCF grant to finance this shift. An unsuccessful applicant noted a change in internal attitudes to digital: “We learned how technology could help us continue engaging with audiences. Before Covid we were skeptical about its value to our organisation but we quickly saw its power and potential”.

Two final comments underline the extent and consequences of this impact.

☝☝ *As a result of the crisis our digital offering has gone from strength to strength... we connected to new audiences around the world and collaborated with exciting artists who we may not have worked with otherwise.”*

☝☝ *We have found new ways to connect and be creative with participants and have improved our digital skills. We will retain this going forward and use some of the approaches to engage those who are not able to attend sessions in person.”*

Flexible working

The second major ‘opportunity in a crisis’ has been the move to more flexible working patterns for staff. As with the move to digital, in some cases this accelerated existing plans, with one organisation explaining that the situation resulted in “putting hybrid working into action – giving staff more freedom and flexibility”. Others were prompted to begin exploring flexibility in the workplace.

☝☝ *The crisis has presented a really valuable opportunity to consider new working styles and patterns for all staff to achieve better work-life balance.”*

The positive impact of more flexible working patterns – for both the organisation and the staff, in terms of efficiency and implementing desired values – were also highlighted by respondents.

☝☝ *We work across a number of sites, and now a balance between working from home and in the office is being developed which is more efficient.”*

☝☝ *Created a platform for us to look at how we can work differently as an organisation – more flexibly, digitally, and with new shared values and trust.”*

Reflection time

The third and final theme that emerged in reflections on the 'opportunities in a crisis' relate to the experience of a sudden break in quotidian demands and unrelenting pressures, which created time to stop and think about strategy, forward planning and their organisation's future. Many noted that lockdown has "allowed some time to take stock and rethink priorities", "more time to think, reflect and learn" and "space for strategic reflection".

This unwanted, and yet in some ways valuable, opportunity was described by others as:

☝☝ *Time to rethink the future rather than blindly steaming ahead. Time to consider how to work better for everyone."*

The emphasis on 'everyone' was echoed by another respondent who explained that:

☝☝ *The extended period of closure has allowed us the chance to pause, reflect, and consult with our beneficiaries and artists."*

Many WCF grantees run venues, which necessarily occupy huge amounts of time and attention to keep running successfully. The abrupt cessation of that aspect of work led to reflections such as: "Not having to think about the venue while it has been closed has given us more time to think about our company vision, mission, values and strategy."

One grantee explained how their organisation's leadership had responded to their work grinding to a sudden halt.

☝☝ *Our Senior Management team took the opportunity during the closure period to focus on our purpose and mission as an organisation, and really look at our impact on the communities we serve... This has been an incredibly valuable piece of work."*

More concisely another respondent explained they had: "time to stop and think. Thinking time is undervalued."

Five further developments identified by respondents are:

☝☝ *A much faster move to become a producing house."*

☝☝ *We have realized the potential of our theatre's large garden."*

☝☝ *We have been able to really show up for our community by being their mass vaccine centre and making that experience rich in culture for people coming for jabs".*

☝☝ *As a team we have a strong sense of having worked collaboratively through a very difficult time, and of care for one another."*

☝☝ *We have seen a large increase in volunteer numbers, partly caused by people wanting to get outside and start a new hobby after spending many months in lockdown."*

Despite the many upbeat comments shared above, it is important to also note that this positivity was not universal. When asked if they could identify any positive developments as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, some said: "very few" or "none that I can think of".

Conclusions

The WCF was launched at a time when arts and cultural organisations were experiencing high levels of “stress, exhaustion, and reduced morale due to endless uncertainty” and, despite general appreciation for this additional source of funding, putting together the application was “a huge investment of time” which resulted in “disheartening” news for those that did not secure a grant.

That said, the data presented and discussed in this report indicates that the WCF was organised, launched and administered successfully, with high levels of positive feedback from grantees (perhaps naturally) and also from unsuccessful applicants, whose anonymous responses mean they have no vested interest in giving unduly positive answers and comments.

This report also points to the value of the Weston Culture Fund in particular, and to the Garfield Weston Foundation’s support for arts and cultural organisations in general, as these final three comments explain:

●● *The creation of the Weston Culture Fund in response to the real threat faced by cultural organisations across the UK in light of Covid-19 was an exemplary one and a lifeline to so many across the industry.”*

●● *As a funding intervention the timing, turnaround and focus on programming at a time when other funding was broadly focused on organisational survival was hugely significant and beneficial for the sector. This highly agile and targeted response – identifying and filling a clear ‘gap’ in sector support – was exemplary.”*

●● *During a time of uncertainty, it really lifted our spirits to have such a generous scheme to apply to.”*

Implications

As a result of feedback from applicants three changes have already been implemented by the Foundation.

- There were strong views expressed by many applicants – whether successful or not – that the Excel application form (similar to that used by a public funder) was unwieldy and difficult to use. The decision therefore has been taken not to use this format again.
- Taking into account the ongoing difficult financial situation facing many applicants, the normal position of asking applicants to wait one year before making a new application to the Foundation was reduced to six months. This decision was communicated to unsuccessful applicants in July 2021.
- Given the high level of demand for feedback on unsuccessful applications, this report contains three key themes that Foundation staff have identified as common features in successful applications. Whilst these three themes will not all apply to all applications, it is hoped they will prove useful to some in reflecting and preparing more successful applications in future.

The pandemic continues, as does the Foundation’s support for WCF grantees.

At the time this report is published, the Covid-19 pandemic and its myriad impacts on our lives continues and our cultural partners are beset with further challenges in their efforts to reopen and re-engage their audiences. The Foundation continues to offer flexibility to WCF grant holders as their plans and budgets have been forced to change, and will continue to learn from their experiences to inform the Foundation’s ongoing funding of the cultural sector.

Appendix

Table A.1 Size of applicant organisations: number of permanent, full-time equivalent staff

Number of permanent, full-time equivalent staff	Grantees	Unsuccessful applicants
1	0% (0)	0% (0)
2–5	6% (6)	3% (2)
6–9	12% (13)	16% (10)
10–19	19% (20)	19% (12)
20–29	14% (15)	19% (12)
30–49	14% (15)	16% (10)
50–99	16% (17)	17% (11)
100 or more	18% (19)	11% (7)

Table A.2 Size of applicant organisations: annual income

	Grantees	Unsuccessful applicants
£250,001–£499,999*	1% (1)	5% (3)
£500,000–£999,999	17% (18)	9% (6)
£1m–£2.5m	38% (40)	41% (26)
£2.6m–£4.9m	16% (17)	19% (12)
£5m–£7.5m	10% (10)	13% (8)
£7.6m–£9.9m	5% (5)	3% (2)
£10m or more	13% (14)	9% (6)
Don't know	0% (0)	2% (1)

* While only organisations with an annual income of £500,000 or more were eligible to apply, the first evaluation survey was completed in a different financial year when their funding may have dropped below that minimum.

Table A.3 How did applicants hear about the WCF?

Most important source of information	All applicants	Grantees	Unsuccessful applicants
Media/social media coverage about the grants programme	29.5% (50)	24% (25)	36% (25)
From a colleague in the arts sector	29.5% (50)	32% (34)	23% (16)
The Foundation website	24% (41)	27% (28)	18.5% (13)
Directly from a contact at the Foundation	12% (20)	13% (14)	8.5% (6)
From an umbrella or infrastructure group	5% (9)	4% (4)	7% (5)

Table A.4 Experience and reflections on the application process

To what extent do you agree with this statement	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree	
	G	Ua	G	Ua	G	Ua	G	Ua	G	Ua
The guidance about how to apply was clear	91% (96)	46% (32)	9% (9)	47% (33)	0% (0)	3% (2)	0% (0)	4% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)
The application process was straightforward	69% (72)	24% (17)	27% (28)	46% (32)	2% (2)	14% (10)	3% (3)	14% (10)	0% (0)	1% (1)
The deadline was helpful	85% (89)	56% (39)	13% (14)	33% (23)	2% (2)	7% (5)	0% (0)	4% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)
We nearly did not submit our application	1% (1)	6% (4)	10% (10)	20% (14)	52% (55)	11% (8)	26% (27)	24% (17)	11% (12)	39% (27)
We were confident our application would be successful	1% (1)	0% (0)	10% (10)	19% (13)	52% (55)	41% (29)	26% (27)	27% (19)	11% (12)	13% (9)

G: Grantees

Ua: Unsuccessful applicants

Table A.5 Did you have any direct contact with the Foundation during the application process?

Direct contact with the Foundation	Grantees	Unsuccessful applicants
Yes	42% (44)	31% (21)
No	58% (61)	69% (47)

Table A.6 Of those who did have contact with the Foundation during the application process, what was the nature of that contact?

Type of contact with the Foundation	Grantees	Unsuccessful applicants
Phone call	32% (17)	52% (11)
Video call	9% (5)	0% (0)
We contacted the Foundation to ask questions	42% (22)	38% (8)
Email exchange	17% (9)	10% (2)

Table A.7 How have grantees' plans for using the grant changed since application?

Changes to original application	% of those grantees whose plans have changed (N=22)	% of grantees whose plans might need to change (N=33)
The budget for our proposed adaptations/initiative	50% (11)	67% (22)
The new initiatives we wish to develop	46% (10)	45% (15)
The nature of the adaptations we need to make	23% (5)	39% (13)
The number of staff required	14% (3)	18% (6)
The type of staff required	14% (3)	18% (6)
The artists we wish to work with	14% (3)	12% (4)
The audiences we wish to reach	14% (3)	0% (0)

NB: respondents could select more than one option

Table A.8 Impact of WCF funding success on securing other new funding

Did receiving a WCF grant help with securing other new funding?	% of grantees
Yes	39% (41)
No	21% (22)
Not sure yet	40% (42)

Table A.9 Type of other funding secured by grantees

Source of other new funding secured	% of grantees securing this type of alternative funding
Other charitable trusts & foundations	46% (30)
Individual (mass/low-level) donors	18% (12)
Major donors	17% (11)
Corporate donors	6% (4)
Other	12% (8)

NB: respondents could select more than one option



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