

Case Study

First Art Awards:

supporting grassroots activities to engage communities



Image of The First at Diamond Centre, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nov. 2016 courtesy of © Gary Huddless

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First Art ran an award scheme to support artists and non-arts organisations to make an artistic offer.

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First Art Awards

supporting grassroots activity

About First Art

First Art is a partnership that links cultural and community organisations working within the former coalfields of North East Derbyshire and North East Nottinghamshire. It is one of 21 Creative People and Places* projects across the country, funded by Arts Council England.

First Art Awards

First Art ran an award scheme that welcomed artists and community organisations to bid for money to deliver projects right at the heart of their communities.

We saw this as a way of opening up opportunities for grassroots projects. In an area identified as having fewer opportunities for arts engagement, we felt it was important to give the community a voice. We wanted to nurture existing activity and support groups who needed help to shape ideas and get them off the ground.

We extended our reach by empowering local people to put on their own arts activities with the arms length support of First Art.

Objectives

Through our award scheme we wanted to:

- Support non-arts organisations to make an artistic offer
- Help establish new organisations to deliver an artistic offer
- Work with artists to create arts commissions in the area
- Innovate, learn from and share our work
- Secure the resources to sustain our work

*Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places is about more people choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live.

Funded by Arts Council England, there are now 21 independent Creative People and Places projects in areas where people have fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts.

Promoting the scheme

There was a lot of leg work involved in promoting the awards. We spoke to existing contacts that we knew worked with various groups and asked them to spread the word.

We promoted the award scheme through our website and social media and encouraged people to share the information.

Assessing applications

Our award scheme was available online to applicants on a rolling basis.

Applications were assessed based on set criteria including artistic quality, value for money and the reach of the project. We were particularly keen to support new activities.

Decisions were made by First Art's artistic directors to achieve a balance of investment across the area.

The target audience

We asked applicants to our awards programme to identify their potential audiences as part of the application process.

The successful projects were able to tell us in detail who they thought the audiences were. They told us how they would attract them and how they would share audience numbers and research data with us.

The awards

We had two types of award. The first was aimed at beginners at arts funding and gave awards of up to £250. The second gave awards to more experienced groups of up to £2,000.

Overall we invested around £5,000. We asked for match funding for awards and we estimate a total match of £20,000.

Funded projects

Three projects have completed and reported back to us:

- The Women's Institute in Bolsover benefited from working with an artist
- Emerging theatre producer Kay Vardy and her theatre company 'A Prop Me Up Theatre', based in Sutton-in-Ashfield, worked with local amateur actors and a choir to stage a backward pantomime 'Gretel and Hansel'
- A group of learning disabled adults in Mansfield were supported to go to a creative nightclub

We have recorded a combined audience and participation figure of around 2,000 people.

Another three projects are yet to complete and we hope to double this figure.

Successes

The award programme allowed us to reach new communities and support grassroots ideas and groups. With our support, those groups have also developed new skills in writing funding applications that will help them sustain their arts activities.

Find out more about the projects

[Sound file for Kay Vardy from 'A Prop me up theatre' speaking to Helen Jones \(BBC\)](#)

Recommendations

If you want to extend your reach, show your community that you value what is important to them:

Supporting grassroots activity enabled us to give our community a voice. They told us what they wanted to do and we helped them achieve it.

If you want to get to know artists and groups in your area, make an open invitation:

The awards programme proved to be a great way to get to know artists and groups in our area. We made an open invitation for applications and people contacted us to talk about their ideas and ask for support.

If you're thinking of running an awards programme, make sure you have the time and resources:

You need to have enough time and staff resource to manage expectations, provide advice and help with applications.

Further resources

[First Art Website](#)

[First Art Facebook Page](#)