SCAN Sparks

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SCAN Sparks

What is SCAN Sparks?

The SCAN Sparks programme is exploring grassroots and equalities-focused working in the contemporary art sector. We are learning from the experiences of change-makers across Scotland who have created grassroots projects that support the practices of marginalised artists and communities.

This comes at a time when the sector is reeling from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The SCAN Sparks programme aims to address some of the existing structural inequalities that exist across the sector through creating a seed fund that can support new projects from an equalities focused perspective.

Who is it for?

SCAN Sparks is primarily aimed at supporting people from marginalised communities to create sustainable grassroots projects.

How does SCAN Sparks aim to address the marked inequalities in the sector in relation to EDI?

SCAN Sparks aims to empower people who already have great ideas by offering the important resources that are necessary in establishing new projects. While we can only model change on a small scale, we believe that financial support should be supplemented with training and mentorship, creating peer support systems and providing funding to allow time and space for development of new, sustainable projects. Access to support in-kind, venues, expertise and other forms of cultural capital is vital in dismantling inequality.

How does SCAN Sparks fit into SCAN's overall commitment to EDI?

The SCAN Sparks programme aligns with SCAN's current strategic aims to:

  ▶ Connect and unite the sector, sharing knowledge and developing shared sector goals and ambitious activity

  ▶ Cultivate and support a diverse, highly innovative workforce and stronger infrastructure

SCAN Sparks is also part of a wide range of initiatives and programmes that draw from the principles of the Visual Arts Manifesto developed by SCAN and colleagues Scottish Artists Union and ENGAGE (Scotland) in 2017.

The manifesto commits to: *"openness in our discussion, and understanding, of the barriers that affect people "working in the visual arts and those who do not participate"* and pledges to take:

> *"urgent action to create a visual arts sector that celebrates diversity and promotes equality of oppe equality of opportunity for all."*

How does SCAN Sparks address Covid-19 recovery?

At SCAN we understand that post-covid recovery should create new and sustainable models that can improve upon the ways that our funding ecosystem has worked in the past.

SCAN Sparks aims to provide new points of access to funding and facilitate the launching of initiatives that are based on a grassroots model.

Research for the fund consisted of a series of conversations, conducted in podcast format, between our then Artist Policy Officer, Sekai Machache, and members of the creative community in Scotland who have demonstrated a commitment to creating, producing and sustaining grassroots projects that support marginalised communities.

The podcast series comprised five episodes, each 40 minutes to one hour in length. The conversations allowed each participant to discuss in some detail the challenges they faced in creating their projects, their achievements and advice.

This line of enquiry was helpful in establishing some of the shared experiences and unique challenges that people of colour have in the process of establishing grassroots focused projects for and with their communities. The podcasts were a useful way to offer real experiential content that aimed to make visible some of the disparities faced by these community leaders and change makers.

SCAN Sparks Podcast

The SCAN Sparks podcast was an opportunity for SCAN and the wider arts community to engage with the voices of people who have made waves in the sector through building new and innovative projects that aim to amplify the voices of marginalised artists and communities.

Episode 1 of SCAN Sparks Podcast, Sekai spoke to Ica Headlam, the Director of We Are Here Scotland.

Episode 2 with Claricia Parinussa the Director of ID.Y and Vogue Scotland.

Episode 3 with Jess Brough the Director of Fringe of Colour Films.

Episode 4 with Briana Pegado who amongst many other projects developed and was working with Jess at the time as the Co-director of Fringe of Colour Films.

Episode 5 with SCAN team member Myriam Mouflih, a curator, programmer and writer who has worked with Africa in Motion Film Festival and volunteered as a committee member of Transmission Gallery, Glasgow.

Ica Headlam (We Are Here Scotland)   **Episode 1**

We Are Here Scotland (WAHS) is a Community Interest Company with an aim to amplify the voices of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) in particular Artists and Creatives who reside in Scotland, with opportunities to share their work, connect with each other, and have their voices heard within the wider art community.

In this episode Ica discussed:

▶ Methods of support in the community, how to make it work without institutional backing
▶ Imposter syndrome (the biggest challenge)
▶ Gatekeeping in the Scottish art scene, how to break past barriers
▶ The reasoning behind his search for creatives "that look like us"
▶ Entrepreneurial talent and grit within the BIPOC community, that due to marginalisation within institutions is often ignored and has had to thrive without funding, mentorship, guidance, or opportunities.
▶ The Black individual pursuit of success within the community. BIPOC creatives operate under a 'duty of care' for their community, especially the generations to follow. It's never/rarely an individual pursuit of success, none of us make it until we have established real systemic change to a system that imperially is white, middle-class, male dominated.

"Representation matters, seeing someone in an elevated role spurs you on"

What we learned

Ica told us that he'd like to see a lot of BIPOC make it and doesn't feel like individual success is enough. His journey started through open conversations with People of Colour in Scotland, not always just with those working in the creative industries. He is motivated by a drive to support and uplift others, it's not an individual pursuit. It's a community pursuit.

Ica was not only aware of the prejudice and violence that were mainly being protested during the BLM protests in 2020, but also how Black creatives navigate such white spaces, often isolated and face discrimination in whatever field they are in. He wanted to support and call attention to the treatment of BIPOC artist in Scotland in particular, with an aim to *"Amplify our voice"*.

The Creators Fund:

In 2021, We are Here Scotland raised money through their Creator's fund to offer BIPOC artists an opportunity for receive some financial support with their practice. In June, the Creators' Fund reached its £6000 target, and WAHS were able to provide successful applicants with financial support, career advice, support, and guidance.

TAKEAWAY

The Creator's fund is a great example of what an organisation can do when it has access to resources that can contribute to the development of projects. With little to no financial and institutional support, Ica and WAHS have been able to create a funding opportunity for BIPOC artists. The Creator's fund could be a great case study for the provision of micro-grants with provision for guidance and continued support.

TAKEAWAY

Claricia Parinussa (ID.Y and Vogue Scotland)   **Episode 2**

Producer and Performer Claricia discussed:

- ▶ Independent producing aimed at supporting BIPOC creatives and performers.
- ▶ The value of fundraising
- ▶ The performative nature of institutional marketing, in which artists' identities are a substitute for real action for organisational or structural change
- ▶ The way BIPOC are put into boxes, and the challenges of stereotypes of race/ gender/sex before they've even walked onto the stage
- ▶ Ballroom culture and representations in the media
- ▶ Cultural experiences and being misunderstood
- ▶ The importance/ necessity of collaboration
- ▶ What it means to make an institutional space safe for a queer artist of colour?
- ▶ The realities of the pandemic and the lockdown, having to enforce boundaries

"Be really clear with yourself about why you think you want to do what you're doing, and believe it, because people will make you doubt yourself."

What we learned

The importance of collaboration
There's a difference in collaboration and collective spaces. Being community-centred, you do have to collaborate. This appears to come very naturally to Claricia, they instinctively work that way and sees it as an opportunity for learning and growth. Doing things on our terms is a central thing. – If one of us wants to do something differently they can be gaslighted, but if many of us do it we can begin to shift those power dynamics. The more that those spaces can be created can all add up in an energy that keeps it going. She's helping people so they don't have to start from scratch.

Institutional support
Making smart decisions with funding to support underground communities. Claricia says: *"I'll take your money because I know what I can do with it"* Not necessarily doing exactly what the institutions want them to do with it, so they'll work within those terms but think logically about how they can elevate people that need it.

What can institutions do better?
Avoid excessive marketing within that just acts as a box-ticking exercise. **Institutions** must ask themselves: if you were to take up this role for us, that do you need to do to make it possible for us to have supportive conditions to do this work.

The Ballroom Scene
Some of the challenges in supporting their community are based in the specific cultural experiences within the ballroom scene. The needs of the community are often misunderstood or ignored by institutions that just want to enjoy the performance aspect of what they do. Professional dancers will just learn voguing from wherever and get a gig, but it's the people who it came from that should be getting asked but are often overlooked. Ballroom is first and foremost a family space built on mutual support and with a real vulnerability. Claricia explains that this culture has existed for decades and is always evolving.

TAKEAWAY

Employing an artist of colour isn't doing anti-racist work. Normalise asking: What do you need? Is there anything that I've missed? Is there anything you want to discuss? Anything that can be done better or differently? Do you want to just take this money/slot/space and do what you want with it?

Jess Brough (Fringe of Colour)   **Episode 3**

In Episode 3 Jess discusses:

► The necessity of a 'Fringe of Colour' outwith the usual Edinburgh Fringe festival
► How projects like these connect artists of colour and we need each other – it's also about networking within our community, not just the festival itself
► Funding, difficulties, and organisations focused on racial justice that can provide workshops, funding and support in BIPOC artistic pursuits
► Doing away with competitive attitudes in the art world, and a focus more on existing in the same field – and celebrating that.
► How meaningful work that you are passionate about – such as anti-racist efforts – can be extremely draining
► The power of exposure over money
► The challenges of sustaining a project
► Online art festivals post-covid

"You can't do everything on your own, and nor should you...bring in as many people as you can, it'll take pressure off of you and make the project better."

What we learned

Jess noticed a lack of opportunities for non-white actors and performers at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. There was also very little visibility for those who did choose to participate in the festivals. They recognised a massive gap in representation and realised that Black people and other people of colour were not being served by the Fringe. Of course, this was exacerbated by the lockdown when performing arts was limited and resources were even more stretched. Having already established Fringe of Colour as an organisation, Jess created an online platform to showcase the work of artists of colour, and those working in film.

Jess explained that the majority of the support they received was from other artists: This guidance was usually on important aspects of organising, such as fair pay for participants. They also received a lot of much needed encouragement from their peers who donated money, shared the project on social media and bought tickets. They received some institutional support from the Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, who offered space in kind and resources for the community. Another organisation that supported them was Eclipse, a Black led organisation specialising in theatre.

Jess felt that it was difficult to connect with wider institutions and they were not sure that they wanted their help from these institutions that had previously left them out. They endeavoured to be part of the festival but not dependent on it. Some artists and performers were integral to the success of the project, such as Nish Kumar who used their platform to share content and helped spread the word. The most important aspect of making the festival possible was listening to the artists and performers.

The major challenges they experienced were dealing with the difficulties of working during lockdown and dealing with the emotional toll brought on by the Black Lives Matter protests.

"We were talking about white supremacy, anti-blackness, violence, and murder. It was a tumultuous time. In a way, organising the festival was a distraction from that"

TAKEAWAY

Online art festivals have many benefits and became a necessity during lockdown. They also have the bonus of being more accessible for audiences living with disabilities. Access should always be a major consideration for anyone when making public-facing events. Fringe of Colour has a focus on development, workshops, mentorship, teaching skills and advice. The festival is a great resource and has proved to be an important reminder of how much can be done to improve representation when enough real effort is made.

Briana Pegado (Edinburgh Student Art Festival Founder)   **Episode 4**

In Episode 4 Briana discusses:

- ▶ Exploitation of yourself, perfectionism, "wee hours" emailing
- ▶ Fair pay and fair work
- ▶ Seed funding – People first, trust
- ▶ Edinburgh Student Arts Festival (ESAF)
- ▶ Fringe of Colour – The difference in having a POC Queer led space
- ▶ The complexities in issues within the Arts and Cultural Sector
- ▶ Burnout/working freelance
- ▶ Work/life balance

In 2014 Briana Pegado became president of Edinburgh University Student Association, the first Black woman in its history of more than a century. She discusses how she found it difficult to find a creative outlet during her time at university and so decided to create a space for artists and creatives to showcase their work. This became the Edinburgh Student Arts Festival (ESAF) which she created and ran for over three years. Briana worked tirelessly to network and reach people who might benefit from the festival.

> *"There's something very special about running a festival in Scotland, there's a lot of solidarity and support there."*

Briana explained that if you're Black and working in the arts sector somewhere like Scotland, which is mostly white and hasn't quite figured out how to work meaningfully with Black artists across the board, it's always draining. You ask yourself: "Why do I have to fight for this, it should already be there, and it shouldn't all be on the shoulders of me or someone who looks like me."

Some of the major successes of ESAF were that the artists that didn't know each other before all coming together. Films from the festival have gone elsewhere and has helped those artists continue to make work due to the exposure from the festival.

She recognised that within Edinburgh institutions there was a lack of training, guidance and support there for (BPOC) creatives who didn't necessarily study art but were interested and active in running events like poetry nights and that this disparity in knowledge was everywhere and hugely impactful to what they could achieve.

ESAF had many challenges, the last festival was in 2017. The project had to end because of burnout and funding instability.

> *"Festivals are not financially sustainable for the most part" but the overall story of ESAF was one of incredibly success. Our impact was huge."*

Successes: The artists ESAF helped, got opportunities and were able to network due to this. Many are still in contact, still collaborate, although the festival ran for just 3 years, the legacy was considerable. Briana talks about the stress this all put on her and the team – she was sending emails in the middle of the night, just running on empty for year and also took a personal financial hit.

What we learned

The arts and cultural sector:

- ► Have an issue with fair pay and fair work
- ► Often consist of people working freelance and self-employed with little protection
- ► Have a lack of transparency about rates for freelance work
- ► Ask people to speak or undertake work without pay

Apart from money, it is necessary to have free and appropriate training and free resources:

- ► Sessions on governance, legal structures for setting up organisations
- ► Management accounts and financing
- ► Bookkeeping
- ► Sessions on how to structure a team

TAKEAWAY

The solution here is not just funding, but putting people first. Trusting them to deliver projects and giving support that they need would only reap better results, and reduce burnout. Peer support is crucial.

Myriam Mouflih (Independent film curator)   **Episode 5**

In Episode 5 Myriam discusses:

- ▸ Film **programming at Africa in Motion**
- ▸ Funding applications and support
- ▸ The necessity for informal support – peers, mentors, friends

Myriam had a desire to be a filmmaker, but also felt more comfortable positioning herself to amplify other people's voices and work. In 2017 she started working for the film festival Africa in Motion. As an independent curator Myriam feels that she has benefited greatly from informal peer support, informal learning spaces and her experience of being a member of the Transmission committee during its time as a POC-led committee. Myriam's experience working with SCAN has been very important in her development as her role working closely with membership has given her insight into the challenges faced by artists and artworkers in Scotland.

> *"Resources can be so many things, it can be funding, mentorship, advice or just being in community with one another. Support doesn't have to be based on outcomes"*

Having been a member of the Transmission Gallery committee for two years during a time when it was exclusively run by people of colour, Myriam has some experience of supporting artists and creatives of colour in Glasgow. She discussed the successes of offering peer support through resources and how invaluable it is to the community to have spaces that they can feel comfortable and safe in. Transmission was a great example of an arts space that was welcoming and open to artists and creatives of colour in the city.

TAKEAWAY

Collaboration is incredibly important and peer support is key to making successful projects. Finding people who you can learn from is important as well as offering that support to others in return.

SCAN Sparks Focus Group

Overview

In 2021 SCAN hosted a focus group with BPOC (Black People and People of Colour) artists, creatives and grassroots organisers, curators, producers, and artists to discuss the SCAN Sparks programme. Those invited were selected due to their previous involvement in grassroots projects, socially engaged art practice and collective organising.

The focus of this discussion was the SCAN Sparks seed fund, which is in its developmental phase. The SCAN Sparks seed fund is a small pilot seed fund for grassroots and equalities-focused working in the contemporary art sector. The results of the discussion are summarised below, as well as in the visual notes provided.

Background

Who participated?

We invited a group of artists, creatives, curators, and producers of colour to participate in the focus group. Most of the participants were based in Glasgow but others lived in other parts of the country. They were experienced in their field with many having made applications for funding for their own grass roots creative projects and some were potential applicants for the seed fund.

What was the aim?

We aimed to consider the process of application for a seed fund project, what kind of support should be given to successful applicants, what the evaluation process might look at and what the practicalities of developing the fund would be.

What was the outcome?

Most of the conversation revolved around the fact that funding application processes can be very difficult to work with and often people are working hard to make applications for very small pots of money that cannot truly sustain a project. It was important for us to consider how SCAN might be able to support applicants through the process and whether depending on the size of the fund, there should be an evaluation process at all. It was suggested that if the funding bracket was on the lower end there should not be an evaluation form needed.

Other observations that were useful was considering that one of the most important resources most creatives need is access to space to work. It was suggested that we might speak with the SCAN membership and discuss how they can potentially offer space and support to successful applicants.

TAKEAWAY

The focus group conversation concluded that formal reporting and evaluation was a barrier to support at lower levels of funding. Access to resources, such as space to work and expertise was very important.

SCAN Sparks Survey

In our SCAN Sparks session, we spoke to a group of twelve creative practitioners of colour working in Scotland. After the group discussion a follow up survey completed by some of these practitioners, we were able to better understand more about what support could help BPOC creative practitioners to thrive.

What has supported you?

We asked the group what supported them throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Community support, from friends and family but also the arts ecology was mentioned by several participants. This could be in the form of mentoring and peer advice or more formal approaches like Creative Scotland's Hardship Fund and Universal Credit.

One participant explained: *"Having mentorship has been really great for me. They introduced me to community and that dialogue was really important."*

Another said: *"Being able to connect with community virtually, keeping employment despite everything, being able to adapt very quickly to digital formats, support from family and friends, being able to access free workshops online that cater and support BPoC creatives in their work, being able to engage in free activities online, connecting with people who have similar experience"*

Another valued approach was flexibility: organisations being flexible with how they work with artists and flexibility on timescales and delivery.

TAKEAWAY

It is clear that a combination of help from both informal and formal support during the pandemic has been most beneficial. Community, mentorship and connection through digital was central.

What barriers have you encountered?

We were interested in finding out from participants what barriers they had encountered in their working lives, but also in applying for funding. Restrictions on funding and conditional funding were highlighted by many as a barrier in even applying to funds. The length of applications, and time required to do them, was another barrier that participants cited. The issue of access was raised by many and it was noted by one participant that the process of applying for funding was particularly demanding or 'spoon intense'.[1] This is more profoundly felt by people who are neurodivergent or disabled. It was notable that in some cases, the barriers facing potential applicants intersected.

> *"Not being taken seriously, most likely due to being dismissed because I'm a black woman. Money has presented many barriers (working several jobs, plus freelancing, plus studio time = burnout) Chronic physical and mental health issues have also prevented barriers."*

After the focus group SCAN spoke to funder Creative Scotland who have recently overhauled individual funding for artists to make the process simpler. Creative Scotland does provide access support for applicants. Some Creative Scotland funds also provide "surgeries" for potential applicants. Our research suggests that these changes are clear and not yet well understood by artists. SCAN recommends that funders signpost clear information about access, giving examples about what could be available, and that funders should build confident and open relationships with BPOC artists and potential applicants.

TAKEWAY

It was suggested that when designing a fund that a variety of access measures should be implemented. These could include video or audio applications. Application processes should be designed take account of the time demands and health challenges faced by practitioners

What is missing?

We asked the group what is missing in the relationship between artists and organisations. Most participants expressed the view that long term support was a key missing aspect. Support could be expressed financially in the form of jobs or funding, but it was also noted by one participant that being kept in conversations for opportunities could be just as valuable. It was noted that there was a lack of trust between those who distribute funds and those who receive them and that transparency on behalf of organisations could be a way to build trust. One participant said:

> "How much do you have to prove? The work is always happening, and it happens with or without money. To trust these networks and support this through action through community support in a real way. Not having the pressure of producing something immediately. Outcomes come naturally through communicating and working together."

Whilst reporting makes up a key element of the funding process cycle, it is clear that flexibility around this needs to be encouraged. Artists can feel pressure to produce outcomes and would prefer an approach that lets ideas grow organically.

Another participant suggested that the ethics of an organisation should be considered when funding is being distributed. It was noted that organisational structures often reflected hegemonic power structures and mimic surveillance culture. It was noted that institutional desires for diversity across programming were not always reflected in staff structures. A participant in the focus group suggested: *"Funds should go to POC artists and group who do not celebrate or mimic empire in resulting content and structure of organising."*

This is a field of research that needs more dedicated study in order to understand how this could function, but some arts organisations have borrowed structures from social justice organising in order to change how they operate. An example of this could be found in the arts organisation Arika, who dedicate around a quarter of their funds to local groups and co-operate with them to create events chosen by the groups.

TAKEWAY

Relationships of trust are key: artists want to have long term and trusting relationships with support structures and access to information and opportunities. They want to work within and with ethical structures and organisations that reflect diversity. They want to be trusted and experience less pressure around outcomes.

Wellbeing of artists

Ensuring access for all was a priority for those in the focus group. Participants noted that any funding opportunity should be accessible and open to people with different needs and neurodivergence. This approach should be embedded in organisations too and it was suggested that grants could be provided to organisations to make their physical and online presence more accessible. The issue of access is deeply linked with resource, both for organisations and individual practitioners. Both have a deep impact on artists' wellbeing.

One participant suggests: *"I know this is a bit left field, but is it possible to put some funds towards artist welfare? My mental health has taken a massive hit, and it has been a nightmare trying to access therapy - therapy which would certainly make it easier to focus on my art!"*

We know that the majority of artists and creative practitioners work freelance, with limited organisational support. SCAN currently offers PAM Assist as part of our membership offer, which allows our members and staff access to free online and phone support for wellbeing, mental health, legal and financial advice. However, this is a short-term solution and supports individuals in times of crisis.

TAKEWAY

Access support is a significant priority for artists and should be embedded in organisations and opportunities.

Research and development

One participant noted that "art should not be built around productivity" and a significant proportion of the group stressed the value of giving artists money for development, research, administration but also funding to grow and play.

> *"Supporting spaces for artists to come together to question, challenge, dream, experiment and develop what art is/can be, and what art spaces actually are post-covid. Rather than funding just towards outcomes for the institution/ exhibition."*

Suggestions of how this could be enacted included stipends for administration and research, communal spaces for practitioners to think and no strings attached support. The idea of a universal basic income was also raised by a number of people and this too would enable space for cultural development of local artists and communities.

One participant in the focus group suggested that better ways of sharing information with artists should be created, such as drop-in sessions and open office hours. *"This would help build slower and more engaged funding relationships + mentorship and support beyond money."* This would provide a dialogue for those who were unsuccessful with funding bids and allow them to pursue other avenues of support for their projects. Support could also be as simple as paying freelancers for meetings and studio visits, an initiative that has been implemented by a number of organisations in Scotland.

TAKEAWAY

Research and development for BPOC artists should be supported and should be embedded in organisations and opportunities. Dialogue between funders and artists should be open and supported.

[1] 'Spoon theory' is a concept coined by Christine Miserandino, conceptualising a unit of energy used by people living with disabilities as spoons. The metaphor has become common parlance in the field of disability studies to explain how people living with chronic illness can expend more energy doing day to day tasks. https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoontheory/

SCAN Sparks Reflecting on our Research

SCAN Sparks Podcast

What did the podcast series achieve?

- The opportunity to hear from BPOC organisers, curators and directors.
- Affirmation and unity. Everyone interviewed felt that institutional support was lacking despite their achievements. It's clear that this is a problem that needs addressing.
- The podcasts shared the BPOC community's methods of supporting each other and working together. This is something that people of colour do day in and day out. It's important that that is acknowledged.

What did it get right?

- Open forum for discussion.
- Caluable insights drawn from natural conversation with the interviewees giving the podcast series a genuine feel.
- Everyone involved in the podcasts was a person of colour, allowing for a rare conversation that was direct, honest and safe.
- Promotion of cultural community support

Where could it have been more thorough in its approach?

- Perhaps it could have considered artists and creatives with less success and achievements to show how they had been failed or how the barriers in place had defeated them in their pursuits.

How can the SCAN Sparks podcast be useful to institutions ?

- The podcasts **highlight the ways that BPOC creatives are let down.** Institutions can recognise that they need to do more, invest more and trust in the BIPOC community more, and recognise how hard we work despite the conditions we must battle every day.

- The podcasts **describe the way that BPOC artists must go above and beyond.** When it comes to opportunities and hiring, marginalised people have had to work so much harder. It makes them highly-skilled and experienced members of your team/organisation. Programmes supporting BIPOC artists shouldn't assume that intervention should always be around training and mentoring, but should acknowledge the expertise and skillbase that people already possess.

How do we learn from what has been achieved in the past?

- Listen**, take experiences seriously and change.** If it's broken, fix it.

Many of the interviewees talk about working themselves to the bone, funding their own projects, poor sleep and mental health. They address this and often encourage caution on this behaviour. However it is also clear that they had to work themselves to these extreme lengths to achieve.

How can these podcast episodes be used as a vehicle towards creating the SCAN Sparks Seed Fund?

- ▶ In hearing how hard working these creatives are (against the odds), it could encourage institutions to give opportunities and better support to BIPOC creatives.

- ▶ Encouraging new initiatives and applications

SCAN Sparks Focus Group Review

What did the focus group achieve?

We were able to think through important questions and consider a range of potential concerns, limitations and structural issues that arise when institutions invite applicants to write funding bids. We learned from the focus group that the most important thing they need from institutions is their trust and to know that they as creatives are trusted with resources.

What did it get right?

We invited the right range of people. Each participant had their own set of skills and experience to bring to the table and all had a lot of great and important insights about the project.

We asked the right questions. Making sure to keep things quite open and accessible, we discussed the most important aspects of developing the fund. These were mainly the application process, accessibility, support, and the evaluation process.

Where could it have been more thorough in its approach?

With more time and space and potentially another focus group meeting to discuss outcomes, we could really involve the participants more in the process of creating the fund.

What was learned? What is our takeaway?

We learned that often funding processes can be clunky and difficult and inaccessible so making the process as simple as possible is imperative. Evaluations can be very difficult and often unnecessary when the funding is small.

Here's a short summary of what our SCAN Sparks collaborators told us:

The Pandemic

A combination of help from both informal and formal support during the pandemic has been most beneficial. Community, mentorship and connection through digital was central.

Online art festivals have many benefits and became a necessity during lockdown. They also have the bonus of being more accessible for audiences living with disabilities. Access should always be a major consideration for anyone when making public-facing events. Much can be done to improve representation when enough real effort is made.

Peer support and collaboration

Collaboration is incredibly important and peer support is key to making successful projects. Finding people who you can learn from is important as well as offering that support to others in return.

Funding and Access

The solution is not just funding, but putting people first. Trusting them to deliver projects and giving support that they need would only reap better results and reduce burnout. Peer support is crucial.

Formal reporting and evaluation was a barrier to support at lower levels of funding. Access to resources, such as space to work and expertise was very important.

Access support is a significant priority for artists and should be embedded in organisations and opportunities.

When designing a fund, a variety of access measures should be implemented. These could include video or audio applications. Application processes should be designed take account of the time demands and health challenges faced by practitioners.

Research and development for BPOC artists should be supported and should be embedded in organisations and opportunities. Dialogue between funders and artists should be open and supported.

Working with artists

Relationships of trust are key: artists want to have long term and trusting relationships with support structures and access to information and opportunities. They want to work within and with ethical structures and organisations that reflect diversity. They want to be trusted and experience less pressure around outcomes.

Employing an artist of colour isn't doing anti-racist work. Normalise asking: What do you need? Is there anything that I've missed? Is there anything you want to discuss? Anything that can be done better or differently? Do you want to just take this money/slot/space and do what you want with it?