

FLEXIBLE FUNDING ASSESSMENT

Applicant name:	The Audience Business	
Application Reference number:	G201001062	
Amount Requested (Year 1/Year 2)	£140,000	£150,000
Officer's recommendation		
<p>Summarise the key points of your assessment and draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the application taken together with any comments you have received from source evidence (portfolio of evidence/ internal / external consultation). Highlight any specific risks <i>Note: The amount of information you provide here should be sufficient for the decision maker to reach a decision. As with all previous commentary boxes please do not exceed 250 words</i></p>		
<p>Comments: Strengths: TAB delivers services that are key to SAC's Corporate Plan (2007-09) and to the Audience Development Department's most recently published strategy. The organisation is focused on long term impact.</p> <p>The application meets the criteria for the flexible fund: 'for the development and presentation of programmes that aim to maximise audience attendance'.</p> <p>The business plan demonstrates best practice in a number of areas.</p> <p>TAB's staffing structure and track record in financial and administrative management, points to their ability to successfully deliver this programme. Although there is an unrestricted deficit shown in the budget TAB have been proactive in addressing ways in which to improve financial management and deploy (additional) resources effectively, as well as planning to expand income from the consultancy business.</p> <p>TAB plays an important role in promoting and developing Equal Opportunities.</p> <p>TAB aim to operate at a strategic level, and effectively evidence demand for their services.</p> <p>TAB has a strong relationship with its member organisations and encourages collaborative working and sharing of resources</p> <p>The organisation has a strong relationship with the local authority in terms of support and funding. The original setting up of TAB was supported by City of Edinburgh Council who have provided ongoing funding.</p> <p>The programme does not represent a radical departure from TAB's core work (this could be considered a weakness) but does develop the organisation's services overall.</p> <p>Weaknesses: It is difficult to assess whether the application as it stands represents good value for money due to the lack of clarity with respect to the budget: greater evidence could have been shown as to how TAB can demonstrate the impact of the outcomes of the funding requested and their impact overall.</p>		
Officer's overall priority recommendation		MEDIUM
Lead Officer signature:		Date: 31 January 2008
Print name:	Janice Kelly	Revised: 20 March 2008

Stage 2: Heads of Departments prioritise applications with advice from Specialist Advisors

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the application identified by the Specialist Advisors? Please summarise their comments below. What were their ratings of the importance of the application in being supported?

Comments: The panel consisted of Kirsteen Macdonald, Susan Nickalls, Sita Ramamurthy, Louise Butler, Steve Slater, Alan Riach, Wendy Niblock and Sally Wilson.

The panel comments: This was a dynamic, interesting and competent application. The Audience Business is an important service organisation able to support and work with a range of arts organisations. They do well on a local and national level and contribute to national audience development strategies. They have also gone through a reformation in business planning. Members of staff are specialists in their field and have a good relationship with the sector, prioritising gaps such as non-ticketed organisations. They are responsive and proactive. The application could have been clearer in articulating The Audience Business's benefit to the arts sector, and the outcomes it facilitates.

Rating: medium

2. Summarise the role of the organisation within the infrastructure of the sector. Assess to what extent the organisation's vision will contribute to the department's and to Scottish Arts Council's aims: (to fulfil artists' potential, to increase participation, to place creativity at the heart of learning)

Comments:

1. Fit with FXO criteria:

1.1 Excellent artistic vision and leadership; role within sector/support to artists

The Audience Business (TAB) was Scotland's first formal audience development agency. Its sister agency is Glasgow Grows Audiences (GGA). These agencies were set up by arts organisations for arts organisations, as a result of consortia bids to local authority partners in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and the Scottish Arts Council.

It is acknowledged that the appointment of the current Chief Executive heralded a new beginning for TAB. Prior to her arrival, it was providing a solid service to its subscribers, but had perhaps begun to lose the clarity of vision evident in this application and noted by the assessing officer and the Specialist Advisors. Recent appointments of senior staff have been a positive investment for the organisation and begun to strengthen its leadership role within Edinburgh.

TAB encourages collaboration between organisations as a way of improving efficiency and effectiveness in developing audiences for individual organisations, Edinburgh City and surrounds, and Scotland as a whole. TAB has 40 subscribers from across the art forms in the geographical area it serves, but engages with many more through networking opportunities provided, projects or consultancy.

UK-wide, TAB is also part of Network (the consortium of audience development agencies). There are around fourteen agencies in the UK, many of them long-standing, regularly funded clients of Arts Council England. Audiences Wales is supported by the Arts Council of Wales and Audiences Northern Ireland by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Network membership ensures benchmarking against UK standards.

1.2 Improving your engagement with the public

TAB's role is to work with other organisations to improve their engagement with the public and is at the forefront of good practice in this area. Their purpose is not to engage directly with the public. As a business-to-business organisation, their engagement with their client base is high and has improved greatly in recent years, securing new subscribers and alliances, particularly in the Visual Arts which had been a priority area for TAB. Unfortunately, the applicant has not chosen to address this section within the application, although the business plan does expand on its role in enabling other organisations to increase public engagement.

1.3 Good practice in the governance and management

TAB undergoes regular board away-days and scrutinises its practice in this area. Board rotation may be an aspect they need to consider for the future, although new board members have recently been recruited. The current chair has been in the role for some time, although appears to be effective.

A recent restructure allowed the organisation to evolve at a pace with its needs and those of its subscribers and this appears to be working well. TAB is always careful in planning any changes and will review its structure in 2008/9.

1.4 Practical implementation of your equal opportunities policy; widening access

The Officer comments that TAB could have made more of its role in widening access to the arts and how it actively promotes equalities in its work, as she observes that they are playing an effective role.

1.5 Raising other income at least 25%

As the Officer notes, the organisation is planning to raise 61% of its own revenue in 2009/10 (risk low). The balance of Scottish Arts Council and local authority funding is something that will need to be monitored in future.

2. Fit with Departmental priorities

In brief, the audience development agencies are strategic partners; policy delivery bodies and service providers for the Scottish Arts Council.

TAB falls under the aim of the Scottish Arts Council's audience development strategy, to support a Scotland-wide network of regional audience development workers and initiatives, in partnership with local authorities and others. Consultation is currently ongoing to develop solutions for the North East and East of Scotland. TAB is already pivotal in the development of this network. As outlined in the application, it is anticipated that it would support any emergent solutions by expanding its remit to ensure broad, sustainable audience development support is available throughout Scotland. TAB has submitted some plans as part of this application, although the financial element is unclear.

3. Fit within Scottish Arts Council aims

Ultimately, TAB contributes to the Scottish Arts Council's overall aim of increasing participation in the arts. They do this by supporting arts organisations to achieve their audience development objectives. They specifically focus on audience research, the provision of geographically-specific market intelligence, and on all aspects of organisational and marketing planning, and its implementation. They also support artists and arts organisations in Scotland to fulfil their creative and business potential.

3. Based on the lead officer's assessment and the subsequent meeting with Specialist advisors, please rate the application (High, medium, low) summarise your reasons for assessing the application as you have (drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and highlighting any specific risks)

Comments

1.1 Application rating

a. comparison with Officer and Specialist advisor comments and recommendations

The officer's assessment is positive and rates the application MEDIUM, as an arts organisation which has a strategic role in the development of a key policy area (audience development), but where there is a development area in relation to demonstrating its impact.

The specialist advisors also raised issues around how effectively TAB was proving its value to the arts sector. The lack of sufficient evidence about this was seen as a development area and, therefore, Specialist Advisors rated the application as MEDIUM.

I would support the officer's recommendation that TAB receives Flexible Funding as a MEDIUM rating, in recognition of the development areas identified.

1.2 Reasons for assessing at this rating

The officer notes strong evidence of the applicant meeting the individual assessment criteria, particularly in relation to supporting arts organisations to improve their engagement with the public, primarily through marketing, and in supporting arts organisations to fulfil their creative and business potential. It exercises good practice in this area internally, working as it does as a business-to-business organisation.

A clear case for the *outcomes* of the funding requested in the application is not as evident as it could be. The application is light on detail in this area, although the business plan makes a convincing case for the organisation's needs in relation to funding. A more persuasive rationale could have provided in relation to what would be positively achieved as a result of regular funding, particularly in relation to public engagement.

There is a development area for TAB in evidencing its overall impact.

1.3 Strengths of application

Although TAB makes the case that regular funding would allow them to serve their current subscribers more effectively, there are a number of additional roles and services that this funding would facilitate. This includes the market intelligence resource (linking with GGA and many of the agencies UK-wide) and the project to maximise attendance through innovative use of ICT. Both of these developments are timely in relation to world wide trends in digital participation, and particularly in demand from the sector in Edinburgh where there is a real risk of over-saturation of the core market.

I observe clear improvements in evidence-based planning, evaluation and marketing practice in arts organisations as a direct result of TAB's interventions. Projects submitted to the Audience Development fund are improved by input from TAB in terms of visioning and shaping proposals, as well as delivery.

1.4 Weaknesses of application

The only weakness in the application is that a more persuasive case could have been made for funding in terms of positive outcomes. (There was some lack of clarity around the budget heading Beyond the Central Belt, which was an ambition by the organisation to widen its geographical reach in response to the Scottish Arts Council's regional audience development consultancy. An amount for this was not included in the main budget, but as a separate appendix. This work is premature at this particular time, until an organisational review is undertaken and the consultation in the East and North East of Scotland is at a more advanced stage. The funding required for Beyond the Central Belt of £53,400 in 2009 and £42,272 is not considered part of this bid.)

1.5 Specific risks associated with the application

No significant, specific risks.

1.6 Development areas identified

Providing evidence of overall impact and value; balancing local authority investment with Scottish Arts Council investment.

1.7 Recommended level of support

£80,130 per year

4. Please comment on the geographic reach of the programme

Comments:

1.1 Where will the activity/programme take place?

1.2 Where will the audience come from?

TAB was specifically set up to serve arts organisations in Edinburgh City and surrounds, as it is established best practice that audience development agencies are specific and local to the 'contexts, organisational needs and priorities within each geographical catchment area' (Network Audience Development Agency Stocktake, August 2006). TAB is, however, committed to exploring a widening its services, based on audience behaviour rather than legislative boundaries, and this is positive. Organisations outwith the Edinburgh area are able to and do access services on a consultancy basis.

Head of Department's overall priority recommendation

MEDIUM

Head of Department's signature:

Print name:

FIONA STURGEON

Date: 15 February 2008

Revised: 26 March 2008

Stage 3: Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) make recommendations to Directors (Acting Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and Co-Directors of Arts)		
1. Summarise the reasons why the final rating has been made.		
Comments: Good overall fit with FXO criteria. The amount reflects development areas identified, the competitive funding context and assessment recommendation. Suggested level of support: £80,130 annually.		
Collective Heads of Department (Arts Development Managers) priority recommendation		Strong medium
Chair of Meeting signature:		Date: 2 April 2008
Print name:	Iain Munro	

Stage 4: Directors make recommendations to Joint Board (strategic fit)		
Record the Directors' recommendation and confirm the suggested level of support. If the recommendation differs from Stage 3, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: Agree with Stage 3 recommendation. Suggested level of support: £80,130 annually.		
Directors recommendations to Joint Board		Strong medium
Acting Chief Executive signature:		Date:10 April 2008
Print name:	Jim Tough	

Stage 5: Joint Board's decisions		
Record the Joint Board's recommendation. If the recommendation differs from Stage 4, please summarise the reasons why.		
Comments: The Joint Board accepts the Stage 4 recommendation.		
Joint Board Final Decision		APPROVE
Date: 24 April 2008	If approved for support, enter sum awarded	£80,130 annually

End of Assessment