Creative Communities

Economic Action Fund
Synthesis Report 2022

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The Creative Communities Economic Action Fund (CCEAF) was launched in April 2022 in response to the recommendations in the <u>Interim Review of *Creative Communities*</u>. This interim review, led by the Creative Ireland Programme and the County and City Management Association, recognised that, while culture and creativity have been engaged successfully by local authorities as strategies to support wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development, additional targeting of investment in relation to economic development was required.

The first iteration of the **Creative Communities Economic Action Fund in 2022** sought to strategically target the development of the creative economy and investment in related research and insights, to support evidence-based policy and planning, locally and regionally.

The fund aimed to support local authorities in the development of the creative economy at local/regional level through initiatives and models which harness and demonstrate the value of culture and creativity in local economic development through three key areas:

a) *Data and Insights:*
- Developing an evaluation of the project including any economic impacts;
- Strengthening knowledge-sharing and collaboration between local development partners and wider/sectoral expertise (e.g., in higher education or across EU partners) to support the development of the creative economy in a given area;
- Assessing potential economic impacts from additional investment in the creative and cultural sector (or aspects thereof) in support of long-term strategic development;

b) *Ecosystems and Integration:*
- Addressing specific creative ecosystem gaps and acting on the strengths and opportunities unique to each local authority area, which add value to the work of enterprise leads/agencies, creative hubs and other economic development partners in a local authority area or region (or a network of local authority areas);
- Initiatives through which cultural and creative economy partners can strengthen collaboration with other sectors in supporting local or regional economic development strategies or plans;
- Initiatives which enhance strategic support for planning and development of the cultural and creative economy at local level; supporting local authorities (directly or through partnerships) to strengthen the role that culture and creativity can play in the development and long-term resilience of local economies;

c) *Strengthening Investment:*
- Initiatives which can harness the economic potential of existing cultural and heritage assets (physical and institutional) and/or stimulate culture-led regeneration;
- Strengthening multi-agency and or multi-disciplinary partnerships within the local and/or regional creative economy, including opportunities to leverage additional investment in the public and/or private sector.

Application and Award Process:
A call for applications in March 2022 asked Local Authorities to submit proposals for projects which would:
- Build on existing expertise, both creative and economic within local authorities and/or partner organisations leading on regional enterprise; and
- Identify learnings that could strengthen the contribution of culture and creativity to local economic development.

Culture and Creativity, the arts and the creative economy, for the purposes of the fund were considered in broad terms (see Creative Economic Action Fund Guidelines) and applications were reviewed by the Creative Ireland Programme and external assessors under the following criteria:
1. Quality of the proposal in terms of meeting programme objectives.
2. Experience and expertise of the team.
3. Anticipated value for money.

CCEAF Awarded projects:
The following eight projects were chosen from a total of fifteen applications submitted:

- **Cork County Council**
  Project Title: Munster Animation Forum
  Partners: LEOs from Clare, Cork City and County, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, and Waterford and Cork County Council Arts Office

- **Donegal County Council**
  Project Title: Creative Coast 22
  Partners: Donegal Cultural Services Division; Donegal LEO; Donegal Film Office; Regional Cultural Centre; Údarás na Gaeltachta; ATU; Industry partners

- **Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council**
  Project Title: Towards a Creative Dún Laoghaire
  Partners: Arts Office and Economic Development Unit, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; Public Design Lab, IADT; Creative graduates; Local businesses

- **Galway City Council**
  Project Title: Wild Galway Immersive Games Initiative
  Partners: Ardán (Galway Film Centre); Galway City Museum; Galway Tourism; Industry partners

- **Leitrim County Council**
  Project Title: Spark; Art & Business Collaboration
  Partners: Leitrim Arts Office; Leitrim LEO; Hair & Beauty Industry Federation of Ireland (HABIC)

- Meath County Council
  Project Title: Kells; Harnessing Culture, Connecting the Dots

Partners: Meath LEO; Boyne Valley Tourism Ltd; Kells Festival Consortium – Hinterland, Guth Gafa, Type Trail; Sóilsiú Films; Sawmills Studio Company Ltd, National Print Museum, Industry partners, Meath Arts Office, Meath Heritage Office

- **Sligo County Council**
  Project Title: Atlantic TIDE; The Impact of Design in Business and Industry
  Partners: WDC; IDI; Innovate Limerick; Ludgate hub; CREW; FutureCast; An Chroí, Industry partners

- **Waterford City and County Council**
  Project Title: – Creative Ecosystem Development in the South-East
  Partners: Creative Waterford; Waterford Cultural Quarter; LEO Waterford; SETU; Kilkenny County Council; Wexford County Council; Industry partners

The level of funding awarded ranged from €52,000 to the maximum of €75,000 with an average of €68,000 granted to each project.

Engagement with successful projects:
Projects were funded over an eight-month period, during which time Creative Ireland hosted five network meetings to facilitate project updates and knowledge sharing. These meetings served to strengthen linkages and networks between project teams, and to identify the common challenges across the fund.

An evaluation report template was also developed, to gather outcomes, impact and learnings from the projects. These end-of-project evaluation reports form the basis of this summary report, as of March 2023.

Recognising that the majority of the projects placed an emphasis on data collection and mapping the creative industries in Ireland, the Creative Ireland Programme hosted a dedicated webinar on this topic in September 2022. This webinar sought to share insights into different mapping approaches undertaken in the North East by Creative Spark, in the South East by Waterford City & County Council with SETU, and in the West by the CREW project, which brings together ATU, WDC and Galway Film Centre. The discussion stressed the importance of shared approaches to data collection to inform decision making regarding the creative industries at local and national level.

2. IMPACT OF FUNDING

All eight projects cited the Creative Economic Action Fund as having enabled a dedicated focus of time, resources and ambition to both new and existing projects.

For established projects, the fund provided a means of deepening or expanding partnerships and scope. Where new projects were initiated, the fund was the impetus to develop new partnerships and new approaches to understanding and developing the local creative economy.

The impact of the fund was demonstrated through three areas, all of which were evident across the eight funded projects to varying degrees. These were:
- Data and Learning
- Ecosystem and Cluster Development
- Strengthening Collaboration and Investment

2.1 DATA AND RESEARCH

Lack of data about the creative industries was highlighted by all projects as prohibiting informed and effective policy and decision making in their regions.

As such, **research and data collection emerged as a key component** of all eight funded projects; all of which initiated projects with an element of data collection and / or analysis relating to the creativities industries in their respective local authorities.

Waterford, **Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown** and **Meath** undertook mapping exercises which explored the breadth and definition of the creative industries, addressing the impact and make-up of the broader creative industries or 'creative ecosystems' within the regions.

The **Leitrim *Spark Project*** focused on understanding the value and impact of creativity in wider industry. In order to achieve this, the project also undertook international research in accessing several case studies to inform the development path of *Spark* projects.

Waterford's *Creative Ecosystem* project developed the *South East Creative Economy Survey,* gathering both economic and financial data to provide support to policy such as the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Waterford City and County Draft Development Plan. The project also built an interactive inventory, developed through primary research by RIKON at SETU, which categorised over 600 creative enterprises across Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny.

The Atlantic TIDE project carried out an in-depth study of Irish Design Institute members based in the Atlantic region. The first phase of the project collected quantitative and qualitative data from the section through a survey and subsequent workshops. This process revealed new information about the design industry ecosystem in the region and their requirements and challenges as design businesses, namely around capacity building and scalability.

In some cases, the initial research phase of the project resulted in a change of focus, as the research revealed more specific needs within the region. This was the case in **Creative Coast 22** in **Donegal** where, while initially proposed as a Cluster Model, through the initial survey and skills audit, Craft and Design emerged as the largest cohort within the creative industry in Donegal. This presented an opportunity for greater focus within the project.

Needs analysis and skills gap analysis were significant elements of research across all 8 projects, whether it be across the Creative Industries in general within the region, or more specific sub-sectors as was the case for **Munster Animation Forum** or the **Wild Galway Games Initiative.**

Two key issues emerged across research aspects of funded projects:
- Several projects highlighted the issue of working with agreed definitions and understandings of 'the creative industries', 'creative sector, 'creative economy' etc. in conducting this research.
- There is a lack of data pertaining to the creative industries and creative economy across Ireland. There is a distinct need for better data on the number and breadth of creative industries across all regions.

> *"The creative economy is difficult to define and many creative industries straddle the creative sector and the tech sector".*
> *Creative Waterford*

2.2 ECOSYSTEM AND CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

Network building and cluster development was a key objective for five of the eight projects. This objective was strengthened by initial phases of research that indicated the call for stronger networks at a local and national level.

Participants at research stages identified the need to develop such structures in order to build both supportive business and creative environments, develop infrastructure to attract talent and investment to the regions, and to become a unified voice to represent their interests in local and national policy.

Munster Animation Forum, *Creative Coast 22* and *Wild Galway Games Initiative* (WGGI) identified the need to establish these networks formally in order to strengthen the position and impact of creative sectors in the regions through workshops, networking events, conferences and focus groups. The response to these was seen as valuable across the board.

WGGI formalised what had previously been grassroots initiatives to highlight the region as a 'games hotspot'. The fund enabled the development of a scalable framework of engagement which harnessed an existing informal, but highly invested, community in order to build a more robust community of practice, bringing together local game developers, educators and established businesses.

*"As a mostly grassroots community, the regional game developers
have not been a target for support in the past. The Game Jams in
the past have been community driven with little or no budgets.
The community really appreciated support for the community and
the networking opportunities that the special event helped to foster."*

WGGI

While initially intended to develop a model for the clustering of the wider creative industries in **Donegal**, *Creative Coast 22* identified that a focus on a particular sub-sector – the Craft and Design Sector, was of particular value when undertaking the project – allowing stakeholders to address and discuss specific concerns and challenges in this subsector.

*"Previous network meetings arranged by Creative Coast (Donegal)
for the Creative community had mixed results, with feedback
largely stating that the previous approach was **too broad**".
and not specialised enough".*

Creative Coast 22

Narrowing the focus of the pilot Cluster Model proved impactful with the successful rollout of 12 Creative Network Meetings for the Craft and Design industry and the facilitation of the YARNS Fashion and Textile Industry Conference in 2022.

A number of key learnings arise from the CCEAF projects in relation to ecosystem and cluster development:
- There is a disconnect between many facets of the creative industries – education, business, local government etc. which exacerbates the lack of access to opportunities and enterprise enablers.
- Networks often exist informally. While caution needs to be exercised that the formalisation of networks does not negatively impact on the strength of informal networks, structured communication and engagement with networks have an important role to play in strengthening creative sector access to enterprise enablers.
- Creative industries and businesses in rural areas have different needs and challenges to those in urban environments including access to funding and acquisition of talent.
- Networking opportunities are often limited and often-Dublin centric and capacity to build networks is constrained by time, information and geography.

2.3 STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT

A significant impact of the fund proved to be the extent to which the projects **developed and strengthened partnerships and collaborations** over the course of the eight months, strengthening commitment to development of the respective creative economies at local, and sometimes, national level.

A number of the projects focused on strengthening existing relationships and networks in their region, namely Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Leitrim and Meath; where collaborations had

previously been established, but CCEAF investment allowed for these relationships to work towards becoming more strategic and impactful partnerships. All three projects built on existing relationships with education partners with the fund allowing for greater investment of time and resources.

The **Spark Project** furthered the interest in design technologies among artists and resulted in the recognition of design in the wider enterprise context.

Kells – Connecting the Dots, deepened and expanded existing partnership across the region, focussing on operationalising its business plan for newly established creative spaces. As a result, the Kells Prints Works is being developed into a significant creative enterprise with new connections to third level and the national print industry.

Towards a Creative Dún Laoghaire sought to strengthen an existing partnership between Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT). The project allowed stakeholders to articulate their ambitions to retain students and creatives in the area and bring innovation and creativity to the town centre. The outcome of the project is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and IADT to formally and strategically expand collaborations between the two bodies.

Commitments to future strategic plans and future phases emerged from several of the projects including **Waterford**, **Creative Coast** **Donegal** and **Sligo's** **Atlantic TIDE** where formal cross industry engagement at local, regional and national level has led to a commitment from partners to continue working together on a broad strategic agenda.

In particular, **Munster Animation Forum** is notable in its partnership with eight local authorities in Munster as well as a range of national bodies including Enterprise Ireland and Skills Ireland. The outcome of this project is the development of a clear strategic plan and roadmap to build infrastructure to support investment in animation sector in the province. Solidifying these partnerships across the region has widened the network of necessary stakeholders who are committed to the vision and mission outline in the strategic plan.

While economic development and investment was enabled to a certain extent, much of this work remains in early stages, requiring greater resources and time to be fully realised. Projects cited the short timeframe of the fund as a challenge in this regard, but as the reports demonstrate, several of the projects will continue towards their shared goal beyond the end of the fund.

3. CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Understanding and Scope of Creative Sectors:
As highlighted above, definitions and understanding of the creative economy differs across, and within, the whole creative ecosystem. Much time and resources were dedicated in several projects to reaching a shared definition of the sector, which with continued advances in technology and practice, will continue to evolve.

While a consensus on the definition is unlikely to be reached, future policy initiatives should seek to further refine the scope of the fund.

Consistent Approaches to Mapping / Data-gathering:
A wide range of methodologies and approaches were used in the research phases, and this continues to leave a gap when connecting the data that has emerged from these projects to build a national picture of the creative industries and sub-sectors in Ireland.

As a consequence, such inconsistencies in data and data-gathering are likely to impact the usability and effectiveness of such data in decision making, case making, policy making and demonstrating the economic contribution of the creative industries, all of which were outlined as strong motivations for the funded projects.

There may therefore be a value in establishing guidelines or frameworks to guide future stakeholder and industry mapping exercises.

Resource constraints:
Lack of ongoing resources at all levels were highlighted as constraints in continuing projects beyond the timeframe and scope of CCEAF funding 2022. While several projects have committed to future phases of the projects, other projects were tightly confined to the scope of the fund. Similarly, scalability of models was limited with the exception of Galway where this was considered from the outset. Future funds may consider longevity and scalability of proposed projects to ensure that research and learnings are not lost at the completion of the funded stage.

4. CREATIVE COMMUNITIES ECONOMIC ACTION FUND 2023

There is clearly a keen interest in the fund from local authorities around the country, and the impact of the 2022 fund demonstrates the value brought to local authorities and their respective local creative economies.

The design focus of the 2023 fund should, however, enable more targeted approaches that address specific needs of defined sub-sectors.

Delivering a second round of funding will support the delivery of the wider Creative Ireland Creative Communities objective which supports collaboration; between central and local government, between culture and industry, between artists and policy makers, and seeks to harness the potential to deploy creativity as a strategy for wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development.

The structured approach to evaluation could be tightened. Where CCEAF 2022 was broader and more open, CCEAF 2023 has a tighter focus, and the process of evaluation should be refined to reflect this. This tighter focus would greatly benefit from direct engagement with successful applicants to strengthen the evaluative responses.

Annex: Project Summaries

- **Cork County Council – Munster Animation Forum**

  Aim/Ambition: The Munster Animation Forum aims to transform Munster into a recognised powerhouse for animation while supporting the economic growth of the animation community across the province. The project sought to develop a 3-year strategy, harness partners in developing clusters and raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities of animated storytelling.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The project brought together industry partners in contributing to a specific vision and business model which also informed strategy development. The strategy objectives included identifying infrastructure and incentives to attract and support animation companies in the province and region; developing animation training initiatives; providing talent with employment progression routes; developing a supportive business environment and finally the development of a dynamic network of animation business thereby trying to build a unified voice for animation in the region.

- **Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council – Towards a Creative Dún Laoghaire**

  Aim/Ambition: In this multi-disciplinary initiative, the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council sought to partner with the Public Design Lab at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) with a view to embedding the third level institution firmly into fabric and infrastructure of Dún Laoghaire. The project also aimed to explore the 'critical role of the creative economy' in the area; underpinning the potential of creativity to have a 'multiplier effect'.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The project enabled stakeholders to define and assert shared ambitions; to retain students and creatives in the area, and to bring innovation and creativity to the town centre. A key outcome of the project was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DLR County Council and IADT as a basis through which both parties could formally and strategically expand collaboration in pursuit of shared goals.

- **Donegal County Council – Creative Coast**

  Aim/Ambition: The Creative Coast project set out to explore and identify an appropriate cluster model to position the creative sector in all future development in Donegal, specifically concentrating on single-sector clusters.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The project identified the need to establish these networks on a formal basis, in order to strengthen the position and impact of creative sectors in the regions through workshops, networking events, conferences and focus groups.

- **Galway City Council – Wild Galway Immersive Games Initiative**

  Aim/Ambition: The Wild Galway Immersive Games Initiative sought to weave the games and tourism sectors together by creating an immersive games experience for locals and visitors. They aimed to bring the city's stories, myths and legends to life through games technology in a new interactive experience. The partners in the project included Ardán (Galway Film Centre), Galway City Museum and Galway City Council.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The project was successful in informing Ardán on how to engage proactively with the game development community in the Galway region, also enabling the organisation to strengthen the wider games industry ecosystem (incl. HEIs, enterprise agencies, game developers and technical experts). Participating games teams also developed playable game demos and a game pitch document.

- **Leitrim County Council – Spark**

  Aim/Ambition: This arts and business collaboration worked with the Hair and Beauty Industry Confederation of Ireland (HABIC) to explore how design technology and 3D printing can benefit the hairdressing industry, thereby trying to understand the impact of use of creative technologies in conventional industries.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The Leitrim Spark Project, which was built on existing partnerships between the Local Enterprise Office and the Arts Office, furthered the interest in design technologies among artists and resulted in the recognition of design in the wider enterprise context. It also helped in broadening the scope of research and looking at using design technologies in wider context through international case studies.

- **Meath County Council – Kells: Harnessing Culture, Connecting the Dots**

  Aim/Ambition: This project was set up to with an intent to have social and economic impact by ensuring the regeneration of Kells through creative endeavour. A multi-stakeholder project, it aimed to enable the Kells Printing Works and Centre of Typography, the Courthouse Cultural Hub and other stakeholders to establish a learning centre based on letterpress printing for third-level students, the print industry and tourists.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The foundation of this enterprise and its awareness was created through the Kells project among the print industry and third-level students, who expressed interested in engaging and experiencing by establishing vital courses and programs thus enriching the learning process. The project, as intended, was a key pillar in establishing a partnership among the various stakeholders.

- **Sligo County Council – Atlantic TIDE: Transforming Ireland's Design Economy**

  Aim/Ambition: This project represented a multi-agency collaboration with the Institute of Designers in Ireland. The project set out to activate recommendations from the Design Practice in Ireland report 2021 which sets out engagement, network and communication mechanisms to demonstrate the value of design in business and industry contexts. The main focus of the project was to address any challenges faced by the design industry in the region while also trying to provide a regional, long-term model for engagement, communication and networking within and across industry sectors.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The Atlantic TIDE project established working relationships between stakeholders to address design and cross-industry development and growth. This model of engagement is directed at strengthening the contribution of the design industry to local economic development. The partners have acknowledged the need for continuation of collaborative working under the broad agenda of the Regional Enterprise Plans and those identified by the Atlantic TIDE 2022.

- **Waterford City and County Council – Creative ecosystem development in the South-East.**

  Aim/Ambition: The project sought to position and develop the regional creative economy of the South East. A key element of the project was to collate and harness data gathered though a new online platform, GovLab, run by WIT/SETU. This digital resource intends to maintain, analyse and disseminate data emerging from an ongoing inventory of local culture and creative industry activity, thus assessing the impact of the creative industries on the region.

  Outputs/Outcomes: The project produced a survey gathering economic and financial data which informed and supported policy development, specifically the RSES and WCCC Draft Development Plan. It also enabled the partners to build an inventory categorising creative enterprises in Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny regions. The development of the project also helped to identify challenges in defining cultural and creative industry sub-sectors, particularly where the straddle between creative and tech sectors.