



CREATIVE COMMUNITIES ECONOMIC ACTION FUND 2023: REPORT

May 2024

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Overview

The second Creative Communities Economic Action Fund (CCEAF II) was delivered by the Creative Ireland Programme in 2023.

The 2023 fund built on the first Creative Communities Economic Action Fund, which was delivered in 2022. There were a number of differences within CCEAF II, arising from evaluation of the first fund. Key amongst these differences, was a greater targeting of CCEAF II towards digital creative industries, such as design, digital games, and immersive technologies.

Under CCEAF II, a total of €418,550 was awarded to five projects, namely: Wild Galway Games Initiative-II; North East Creative Conversations; Immerse; Atlantic TIDE-II; and Purple XR.

Projects could apply based on addressing the following three potential priority areas:

- Strengthening Creative Regions
- Innovation
- Low Carbon and Circular Economy

It is worth noting that no applications sought funding to support the transition to a low carbon and circular economy. This may be because of the significant investment made by the Creative Ireland Programme in projects under the Creative Climate Action Fund. It may also be an issue of capacity or readiness from within the digital creative industries sectors to focus on the transition to low carbon or circular economy projects.

All five projects, funded through the Creative Communities Economic Action Fund II, reported that it enabled projects to dedicate funds and resources towards the development of digital creative industries at a local level. The development was achieved through building partnerships, targeting new types of industries, exploring market opportunities and supporting businesses and business professionals in the targeted creative digital sectors.

The fund has been successful in supporting these local authority-led projects to establish partnerships between enterprise enablers, wider industry, academic institutions, and creative businesses. These partnerships provided opportunities for knowledge sharing, network building and access to resources in order to build sectoral capacity for digital creative industries.

In addition, CCEAF II enabled greater collaboration within local authorities, and helped to strengthen the involvement of LEOs within Creative Ireland's Culture & Creativity Teams in the local authorities leading on the projects. This collaboration brought benefits to creative businesses and to local authority/LEO partners. Where multiple local authorities were involved in a project, however, the feedback to the Culture & Creativity Teams in non-lead local authorities does not appear to have been as strong as it might have been.

The Creative Ireland team was supported by M-CO in the development of the scheme, and in the evaluation and engagement process with the selected projects.

Introduction

Background

This review relates to the second iteration of the Creative Communities Economic Action Fund (CCEAF II) delivered by the Creative Ireland Programme during 2023.

The Creative Communities Economic Action Fund (CCEAF) was first established in 2022 as a pilot initiative in response to the recommendations in the Interim Review of Creative Communities. 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 CCEAF therefore sought “*to provide local authorities with resources to develop innovative projects which seek to leverage the potential of the creative industries in supporting local and regional economic development.*”

The evaluation of the first CCEAF noted that the investment arising from this pilot initiative supported data and research, ecosystem, and cluster development, and strengthened partnerships for collaboration and investment. The benefits of this first phase of investment can be seen in the iteration and development of some projects that came forward for investment in CCEAF II. The evaluation of the first CCEAF also recognised that the openness of the fund in relation to the breadth of creative industries led, in many cases, to very broad approaches being taken to targeting sectors. In many of the projects funded under the first CCEAF, this breadth in approach resulted in significant time and resources dedicated to identifying and defining the sector to be targeted.

The second iteration of this competitive fund (CCEAF II) was announced in January 2023 and adopted more targeted approaches to:

- a) Eligibility of applicants, and guidance regarding partnerships; and
- b) Alignment with sectors to be targeted under the draft Roadmap for Digital Creative Industries.

This targeted approach recognised the potential for learnings from this second phase of pilot funding to inform implementation of Government policy in rapidly evolving digital sectors such as design, games, and content creation. This approach also recognised that the development of these sectors requires a range of partners, whose involvement would be key to inform learnings arising.

Application and Award Process

The CCEAF II application process ran from 19th January with the launch of the fund to the 28th of February 2023. CCEAF II set out clear guidance in relation to applicants, noting that:

1. A local authority had to be the lead partner in all applications, working with their local enterprise offices (LEOs).
2. Local authorities could choose to collaborate with other local authorities and/or external partners (e.g., in further or higher education, research or innovation) as appropriate to their application. Such collaboration needed to be clearly structured and outlined within applications.

3. Collaborations with regional agencies such as the Western Development Commission and Údarás na Gaeltachta were welcome.
4. Applicants (and their partners) were strongly encouraged to collaborate with the industry body/bodies relevant to the sectoral focus of their project, to ensure that applications are informed by the needs and potential of the creative industries across Ireland. These included - but were not limited to - IAPI, IMIRT, Eirmersive, IDI, ICAD, and the Service Design Network. Such collaboration had to be clearly structured and outlined within applications.
5. All applications had to set out how their project and process would seek to identify learnings that could strengthen the impact of local stakeholders, in stimulating the development of the creative industries and related economic development.
6. Investment in design-driven innovation for non-design sectors would only be considered where integral to projects that were primarily focused on building the capacity of design firms.

Projects were required to focus on activities seeking to support resilient domestic employment and economic growth. **Targeted sectors** were identified as:

- Design sectors including industrial design, product design, visual communications, graphic design, Ui/Ux (User-interface/User-experience) and interaction design, service design and strategic design;
- Digital creative sectors including software design and games sectors; and
- Content creation sectors including advertising and brand agencies, visual and audiovisual content for commercial social media, multimedia content for mobile applications ('apps'), and content for newer and emerging platforms such as AR/VR/XR (Augmented Reality / Virtual Reality / Mixed Reality).

Within these targeted sectors, applications could address three potential priority areas:

- a) Strengthening Creative Regions
- b) Innovation
- c) Low Carbon and Circular Economy

Application Assessment process

The applications were reviewed by Creative Ireland and external assessors on the following criterion:

- Quality of eligible proposals on delivering the above-mentioned objectives and priorities of CCEAF II
- Experience and expertise of the team/partners and the quality of collaboration
- Anticipated outputs and impact/outcomes

Funded Projects

On evaluation of the applications received, Creative Ireland awarded funding of €418,550 across five successful projects, namely:

Wild Galway Games Initiative-II (WGGI-II)

Lead Partner: Galway City Council

Funding Awarded: €90,000

WGGI-II focused on supporting emerging games developers to connect and collaborate with support from professional games developers and enterprise agencies. This initiative was a partnership between Árdán, Imirt, the Galway LEO and Galway Game Jam.

Atlantic TIDE-II - Transforming the Irish Design Environment

Lead Partner: Sligo County Council

Funding Awarded: €90,000

This project's aim was to consolidate the design industry across the Atlantic Innovation Region. The project was a partnership between the Sligo County Council, the Institute of Designers in Ireland, CREW Digital, and the Western Development Commission (WDC).

IMMERSE

Lead Partner: Donegal County Council

Funding Awarded: €68,000

The project focused on offering opportunities for immersive technology and creative technology industry sectors in Donegal to discover more about the capability of augmented reality. It was a partnership between the Donegal County Council Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Eirmersive, Connected Hubs, Regional Enterprise Offices, CREW Digital, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission (WDC).

PURPLE XR

Lead Partner: Cork City Council

Funding Awarded: €84,040

Recognizing the potential of immersive technologies, PURPLE-XR sought to combine a comprehensive XR training program with a platform for collaboration. This approach facilitated knowledge exchange and resource sharing, including development of XR projects. In delivering this project, Cork City Council Arts Office and LEO worked in partnership with Immersive Ireland, Imirt, Munster Technological University and University College Cork (UCC).

North East Creative Conversations

Lead Partner: Monaghan County Council

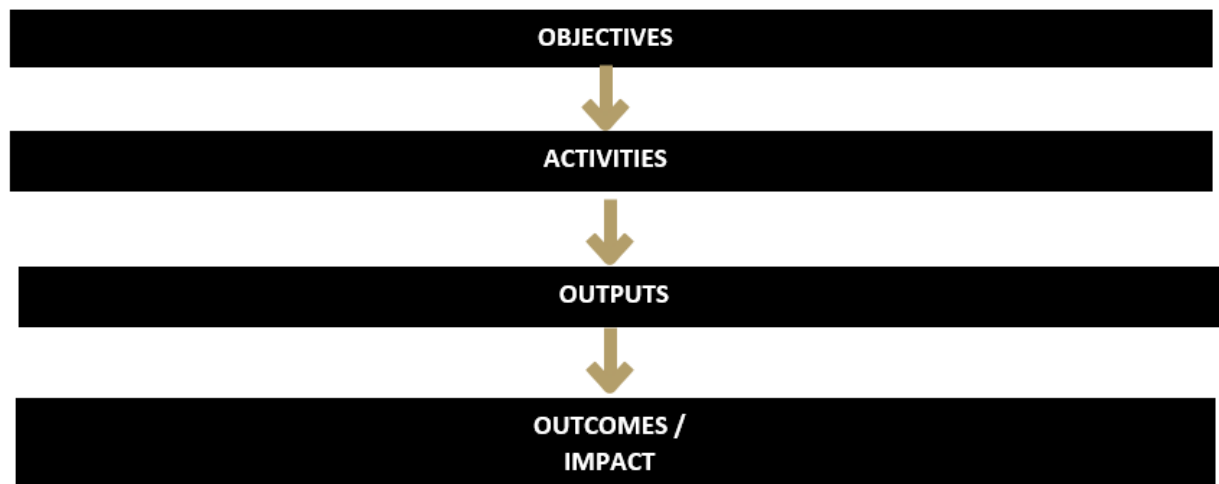
Funding Awarded: €86,510

The aim of North East Creative Conversations was to strengthen and develop the Northeast Region's capacity as a creative centre of excellence in commercial design and enhance the potential for economic development and sustainability in the creative sector. This project was led by Monaghan County Council LEO in partnership with Louth County Council and Cavan County Council, Creative Spark, and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

Each of the projects was funded for a period of eight months, beginning in April 2023. In seeking to support collaboration, knowledge-sharing and shared learnings, Creative Ireland held three online networking sessions across this eight-month timeframe (April, June, and September). A high-level summary of emerging learnings was also presented to Creative Ireland coordinators from the 31 Local Authorities in December 2023.

Evaluation: Framework and Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of CCEAF II investments and its alignment with stated priorities, an evaluation framework was developed based on the Objectives-to-Impact model. This framework utilises four stages: Objectives, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes/Impact as set out below:



This framework provides a clear and structured approach to gauge how the investment translated into desired outcomes. The evaluation approach also sought to draw out two key elements with a view to informing future initiatives for the development of the digital creative industries:

1. What works well and what does not in terms of projects seeking to support the development of digital creative industries at local level; and
2. Key factors in the relationships and networks underpinning such projects.

The evaluation of the projects was undertaken in three stages which are as follows:

1. **Part A** of the Evaluation Toolkit sought to outline each project's overview by capturing key context for the project by local authorities, outlining partners and collaborators and their roles, along with key activities. This stage also captured the project's progress and challenges, as well as key learnings and stakeholder impact. Finally, this stage sought to identify the potential for sustaining each of the projects, where appropriate, beyond the current delivery timelines.
2. A **focus group** discussion was facilitated with representatives from each of the project teams. This sought to further analyse learnings emerging from Part A; supporting the synthesis of the data and the identification of key themes.
3. **Part B** of the Evaluation Toolkit focused on key outputs and outcomes as well as the project's impact through the activities undertaken. The project team was also asked to note any additional learnings at this stage of the project, research findings and public engagement. This stage was completed by the project teams upon completion of the project.

The findings emerging from analysis of the evaluative outputs are set out below.

Analysis and Findings

The evaluation identified impacts and learnings across five key themes, set out below. These learnings encompass a diversity of experiences and, where possible, the analysis traces these impacts and learning to specific projects. Where broader feedback appropriate to a theme arose through the focus group discussion, this is also included.

The key themes have been distilled under six headings:

- I. Enhanced collaboration between LEO and creative industries
- II. Partnership approaches supporting beneficiaries
- III. Knowledge sharing and network building
- IV. Provision of technical guidance and resources
- V. Integration of CCEAF with Culture & Creativity Teams
- VI. Additional learnings

I] ENHANCED COLLABORATION BETWEEN LEO AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Four out of five projects identified that CCEAF II enabled enhanced collaboration between the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and creative businesses. One project did not experience the same level of LEO engagement.

The following impacts and learnings were also noted:

- The collaboration between LEOs and local creative businesses fostered deeper LEO involvement with these evolving creative sectors. This, in turn, led to a better understanding of the targeted creative sectors' specific requirements.
- Feedback from the industry partners (representative bodies) engaged in the projects indicates that the targeted businesses engaged in the projects developed a stronger understanding of potential funding and soft supports available. This highlighted a need for guidance for creative businesses – by LEOs and/or industry bodies – in relation to how these businesses identify and frame applications for assistance.
- The fund also allowed for enhanced understanding for the sector in relation to enterprise support structures and policy making; alongside recognition of the value of 'professionalisation' of the creative industries, through the representative bodies.
- Through the projects undertaken, commitments emerged within ***Galway, Wild Galway Games Initiative-II, Sligo, Atlantic TIDE-II, and Donegal, Immerse***, to ongoing engagement with Local Enterprise Offices. These projects identified the potential for further business development programmes for the creative businesses targeted by their initiatives.
- Sligo's Atlantic TIDE-II initiative also noted a valuable additional area that could enable greater engagement between LEOs and creative businesses. Through their project, Sligo LEO identified that, although they have a wealth of information on available supports on their website, this information was not being accessed due to the online user experience of creative businesses.

II] PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES SUPPORTING BENEFICIARIES

All five projects recognised that the partnerships with creative, enterprise, academic and other key stakeholders have been vital for the delivery of the project. These partnerships helped with access to/engagement with beneficiaries which would not otherwise have been possible. Three projects noted the appetite for further engagement of key partners to sustain the support extended to the beneficiaries.

The following impacts and learnings were also noted:

- The funded projects recognised that relationship-building between partners requires investment of time and shared focus, and the CCEAF II projects facilitated that, although one partner noted that this does not imply a long-term relationship has been built.
- Some projects noted a need to manage expectations of partners at the outset, particularly in relation to the commitment required to deliver such a project at the pace and level required. Not having a clear communication framework at the start was a constraint for some projects in achieving the desired engagement between partners and consequentially, between partners and beneficiaries.
- It was also pointed out that where one partner does not deliver, other partners need to compensate with increased investment of time and resources.

III] KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND NETWORK BUILDING

For three out of five projects, the partnerships have resulted in knowledge sharing, interaction, network building and/or stronger regional presence for industry bodies. These projects have helped to bridge the gap through information sharing between the targeted creative sector(s) and enterprise partners.

The following impacts and learnings were also noted:

- One project noted a real sense of discovery, where shared attendance at an international industry event was central to creating a sense of community and network among the beneficiaries.
- One project also recognised a sense of imposter syndrome among their target beneficiaries in nascent sectors or small businesses, which may be a hindrance for professional networking and engagement within these sectors.
- Two projects, *Immerse*, *Donegal* and *Purple XR, Cork* queried whether knowledge sharing, or network building could be sustained beyond the delivery of the project, without additional resources. These projects have specific requirements around access to new technologies.

IV] PROVISION OF TECHNICAL GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES

Three projects successfully empowered key partners to identify critical gaps and opportunities for supporting beneficiaries. Recognising the need for ongoing support beyond the project's timeframe, these projects are exploring the development of business development programs, learning initiatives, or expanded resource networks to further empower the targeted sectors in their regions.

The following impacts and learnings were also noted:

- For the other two projects, there is no current commitment to, or expectation of, further targeted engagement with the identified sectors.
- For **Purple XR, Cork** project, the barrier to ongoing engagement is linked to the cost of technical equipment (rather than any unwillingness around support) which the LEO cannot directly finance. Another project noted that the funding had encouraged upskilling and learning, however there was a limitation for professional development due to industry capacity constraints.
- **Immerse, Donegal** also noted that CCEAF has encouraged ideation and new collaborations. In addition to enterprise support available, however, there is a challenge in relation to funding for prototyping and sandboxing.

V] INTEGRATION OF CCEAF WITH CULTURE AND CREATIVITY TEAMS

It appears that **the integration of CCEAF II projects with the work of Culture and Creativity Teams across the local authorities has been inconsistent and, at times, poor in terms of ongoing reporting, and in terms of future planning.**

- This is particularly the case for local authorities who were not the lead local authority partner on a project. For two of the multi-local authority projects, it is clear that there was little or no awareness of the project by the Culture and Creativity Team or the Creative Ireland Coordinator in the partner local authorities.
- At the time of writing – it is not evident that Culture and Creativity teams are factoring CCEAF II projects into implementation plans for 2024. This includes cases where projects have demonstrated positive outcomes, the potential for sustained impact, and an interest in extending their project.
- This lack of integration may be due to CCEAF II operating as a standalone project, with a funding scheme separate to annual Creative Communities investment.
- For CCEAF II delivery, WDC has been a vital and highly effective intermediary, facilitator and agent in mobilising project and partners within its region which includes **Monaghan, North East Creative Conversations; Donegal, Immerse; and Sligo, Atlantic TIDE-II.**

- On the other hand, the role of the WDC may have enabled less involvement from LEOs and Culture and Creativity teams, particularly in partner local authorities (as opposed to lead local authorities). This raises a concern that these partners within local authorities may not be aware of, or ready to, back further development of successful projects.
- The focus group discussion noted a need for continued collaboration between the Culture and Creativity teams and LEOs in the local authorities to support ongoing delivery for the creative industries.

VI] ADDITIONAL LEARNINGS

All five projects noted that the prioritisation of key areas and objectives within the fund design helped with the identification and engagement of target beneficiaries. This resulted in the building of stronger networks and communities of beneficiaries at local/regional levels.

The following impacts and learnings were also noted:

- The tighter focus of the 2023 fund, based on the recommendations from the report of CCEAF I, significantly helped projects to address the needs of the targeted sectors of the creative economy.
- It was noted by two projects that funding enabled businesses from the targeted sectors to engage directly with other businesses in the same sector in ways that had not happened heretofore.
- The limited timespan for delivery of the project was cited as a common restraint for all five projects, specifically in quantitative purposes for engagement.
- Two out of five projects experienced additional barriers in working in a rural region – specifically, in incurring additional costs and time with regards to engaging with businesses.
- In terms of building legacy and delivering beyond the current lifespan of the fund, all projects noted it was essential to build data and evidence-base in order that LEOs and other enterprise plans and partners are better enabled to seek and provide funding to ensure that supports for the targeted digital creative industries are sustained.

Summary Conclusions

The evaluation of the Creative Cultural and Economic Activity Fund 2023 (CCEAF II) has provided valuable insights into the impacts and learnings across key themes. The diverse feedback captured through this evaluation underscores the richness of the collaborations and partnerships strengthened by the fund.

The themes identified in this report — ***Enhanced Collaboration between LEO and Creative Industries, Partnership Approaches Supporting Beneficiaries, Knowledge Sharing and Network Building, Provision of Technical Guidance and Resources, and Integration of CCEAF with Culture & Creativity Teams*** — demonstrate both the range of impacts accruing from the initiative, as well as the learnings arising for any future investment or engagement with the creative industries at regional/local levels.

The CCEAF supported new partnerships between local authorities, industry partners and higher education partners. These partnerships have proven to be vital in targeting and supporting beneficiaries, and have been instrumental to the achievement of project outcomes. The feedback from the focus group discussion also emphasised the tangible benefits experienced by the projects from the collaborative approaches.

From the perspective of beneficiaries, a cornerstone of success for CCEAF II has been the enhanced collaboration between the Local Enterprise Offices and creative industries. This collaborative approach has seen the development and strengthening of local creative ecosystems, establishing relationships and building understanding on both sides that can support the development of future economic growth.

Projects funded under CCEAF II helped to provide incentive structures in training and capacity building, and to build networks and collaboration in the targeted digital creative industries. Similarly, the fund enabled project partners to more fully understand the challenges faced by the target sectors. The LEOs who contributed to the evaluation process were very clear in their appreciation of the initiative, and the learnings they can apply in their own local context.

There has been a great emphasis placed on knowledge sharing and network building which has helped create foundations for sustained development. The findings also underscore the need for continued efforts to foster and sustain these benefits within the creative ecosystem.

The learnings from CCEAF II may present opportunities to inform future support initiatives in the local creative economy; whether through LEOs, through Culture & Creativity Teams, or through other mechanisms. CCEAF II has demonstrated the importance of aligning initiatives in the creative economy with broader cultural and economic strategies.

Integration of projects with local authority teams helped create cohesion in approach and any future investment that may align with the ambitions of the Creative Ireland Programme would benefit from deeper engagement with Culture and Creativity teams in all partnering local authorities – to support local nuance and learnings, and aid sustainability of longevity of successful initiatives.

Overall, the evaluation findings highlight the positive impacts of CCEAF II for the creative economy. The lessons learned point to the benefits accruing for creative economy ecosystems at local level, and to the benefits arising from targeted partnership-based schemes. The learnings may also be beneficial to the wider Creative Ireland Programme in the design of any future investment/partnership initiatives at local authority level.

Recommendations for Similar Initiatives

Partnerships and Targeting Beneficiaries

Targeting and reaching beneficiaries was a key focus for CCEAF II projects. Achieving the hoped-for visibility and engagement was, however, a challenge or constraint in some cases. A number of projects also noted that the partnerships established at local/regional level through CCEAF II, added significant value in targeting and reaching beneficiaries.

Recommendation 1: For future support programmes let by enterprise enablers and partners, applicants should be asked to identify how they will target and reach intended beneficiaries of their proposed project.

This will support applicants and partners to be clear in their targeted beneficiaries, consider what communication frameworks are appropriate and identify potential collaboration opportunities to increase visibility and engagement for their project.

Recommendation 2: Consideration should also be given to promoting partnership approaches in the development of the creative industries, where targeting and engagement of hard-to-reach beneficiaries are critical success factors in projects.

In this regard, the model established by the Creative Ireland Programme under CCEAF II can serve as an exemplar for other initiatives, where the guidance and eligibility factors: required involvement of the LEOs; ‘strongly encouraged’ collaboration with relevant industry bodies; and proposed collaboration with partners in further or higher education, research or innovation, and with other local authorities.

Enhancing Accountability in Partnership Approaches

Some projects noted that different partners and collaborators contributed to varying degrees – less than may have been expected in their development of the applications. As highlighted within the findings, it is beneficial to ensure a common understanding of each partner’s role at the project outset for the benefit of the partnership and of beneficiaries.

Recommendation 3: Consideration could be given to inclusion of outline indicators of partnership responsibilities in any similar application processes. This could guide partners to consider key responsibilities and actions for which they are responsible, but also the percentage responsibility they carry for delivery within the overall project.

Risk management embedded within Project Application

While it might prove difficult to consider all viable risks when embarking on a project, it could aid the project teams and partnerships to engage in forecasting risks and ways to manage and mitigate them. This process could help the development of project proposals and planning, and also strengthen partnerships.

Recommendation 4: Consideration should be given to inclusion of a simple risk register and mitigation framework in any similar initiatives. This should be devised in such a manner that project partners recognise where they have a role to play in mitigating risks. The inclusion or extent of such a framework should, however, be proportionate to the level of investment or commitment involved.

Integration with Culture & Creativity Teams in Partner Local Authorities

Discussions with partners in all five projects highlight their recognition of the value arising from the projects. While some projects have progressed discussions regarding ongoing collaboration in relation to the creative industries, such discussions have not always extended to the Culture and Creativity Teams or the Creative Ireland Coordinator in the partner local authorities. Ensuring appropriate integration is likely to inform forward planning for the local authorities involved, while also enabling consideration of the potential for projects funded through special/once-off schemes to be mainstreamed or extended.

Recommendation 5: Consideration should be given to a communications framework or mechanism, through which any future, multi-partner Creative Ireland projects anchored through local authorities are required to connect periodically with relevant Creative Ireland Coordinators in each local authority. This may require a feedback or monitoring mechanism to ensure that the Culture and Creativity Teams are apprised in relation to project progress.

Access to Technology and Technical Resources

Two projects noted the need for greater sustained access to technology. These projects were both centred around Immersive / XR technologies. Where participants in formal education contexts may have access to new technologies, this is less likely to be the case for micro-enterprises in creative sectors. In such sectors where technologies continue to evolve, and with the potential for AI to play an increasing role in new product and service development, access to technology and technical resources are likely to remain key requirements to encourage existing companies to explore and exploit opportunities arising.

Recommendation 6: In any similar initiatives targeting increases in innovation, or the uptake or promotion of new technologies, consideration should be given to how relevant applicants can be encouraged and /or supported to identify opportunities to achieve such access to technologies, and potentially sustain it through and beyond the life of the project.

Appendix: Project Summaries

- **Cork County Council – Purple-XR**

Aim/Ambition: Purple-XR was designed to combine a process-driven training initiative in immersive technologies (XR) with a forum for collaborative ideation and project development for creative practitioners. Through a collaborative approach, partners sought to foster innovation through network building, learning programmes and development of a toolkit.

Outputs/Outcomes: The project began by knowledge building for the target beneficiaries through a series of webinars. Subsequently, beneficiaries were encouraged to participate in immersive lab processes, through which a number of test projects were finally developed. The project placed an emphasis on engendering a learning and development environment which allowed businesses to learn about the possibilities and economic opportunities in the immersive technology sector. The project's collaborative approach also encouraged further research in XR technologies and relationship building with different stakeholders such as the local authority, local enterprise office and academic partners.

Key Learnings: Purple-XR enabled the development of new knowledge and skills in a relatively new sector while highlighting the understanding of financial and infrastructural support required for creators in the immersive technology sector. Participants also learned of the scope for immersive technology to be applied in other sectors. It was noted that the approach of the CCEAF II fund was important in this regard, to allow for potential intersections between the targeted creative industries and other creative industries to be explored.

- **Sligo County Council – Atlantic TIDE-II**

Aim/Ambition: Atlantic TIDE-II originated from the recommendations arising from delivery of a pilot project in 2022. The 2023 iteration of the project saw key partners building on the opportunities identified in the 2022 project, and on the achievements and outputs of Atlantic TIDE-I. The aim of this project was to improve engagement within the design community across the local authorities of the Atlantic Innovation Region, while positioning the design industry as an enabler of competitive advantage in the region. The key objectives include network building, framing the industry narrative, creating an accessible pool of ecosystem development resources and supporting engagement with enterprise enablers.

Outputs/Outcomes: Through CCEAF II, the Atlantic Tide-II consortium has been able to position the design industry in a more advantageous position in the Western region. The project was able to establish a forum allowing for access to networks and for resources for the sector. Partners were also encouraged to build discipline-specific forums for business development. The Atlantic TIDE II project also strengthened trust amongst consortium members. This led to the decision for partners to continue to collaborate over the next five years to consolidate research, development, innovation, and the enterprise ecosystem for digital creative businesses.

Key Learnings: As noted above, the project has enabled establishment of a formal mechanism to facilitate region-specific industry innovation, enterprise engagement and investment. The Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) have identified new pathways to disseminate information on supports available for the project's target beneficiaries. For one of the key partners, Institute of Designers Ireland (IDI), there has been a realisation of the need to demonstrate visibility in the region, and to continue to collect data on business demographics.

- **Monaghan: North East Creative Conversations**

Aim/Ambition: The aim of North East Creative Conversations was to strengthen and develop the Northeast Region's capacity as a creative centre of excellence in design; specifically, within the counties of Cavan, Louth, Monaghan. Through the project, the partners were trying to create a regional ecosystem of creative businesses, thereby aiding to economic development, and fostering regional connectivity to the rest of Ireland.

Outputs/Outcomes: North East Creative Conversations allowed for targeted mapping of design businesses, developing a new database of practitioners/businesses and helping to establish a design forum. The project allowed for better relationship building among target beneficiaries (design businesses), and with the Institute of Designers Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO). In return, the project also strengthened the networks and links for the LEOs in all three participating counties.

Key Learnings: North East Creative Conversations strengthened the appetite for engagement and information sharing between enterprise enablers and the beneficiaries (design community). The initiative provided a valuable platform for relationship-building, both for the delivery partners, and for the wider network of beneficiaries. From an organisational/structural perspective, a further learning arising from the project, was around the importance of clarifying and managing expectations of all partners at the outset, to support communications and accountability in delivery.

- **Galway: Wild Galway Games Initiative – II**

Aim/Ambition: The Wild Galway Games Initiative – II is continuation of a 2022 pilot project funded under CCEAF I. The aim of this iteration of the project was to continue discovering, uniting, and supporting games developers to in the establishment of a professional game developer network. Through increased visibility and participation in the network, the partners wanted to strengthen capacity building, peer mentoring and collaboration for game developers, leading to economic development opportunities for the gaming sector in Galway.

Outputs/Outcomes: The project has helped provide access for local businesses to connect from a grassroots level. It has also enabled access to international networks and opportunities for the Galway gaming sector, along with access to potential finance and business supports from the Local Enterprise Office. Building on the project, the LEO is also developing a training programme for local gaming community in the county.

Key Learnings: The project has led to the realisation that while there is a thriving gaming community in Galway, and Ireland, professional networks and supports for local game developers are limited. Partners also noted a sense of imposter syndrome amongst; a reluctance for beneficiaries to identify themselves as game developers ready to engage in new business and new product development. The partners in the consortium therefore identified the importance of strong networks and support ecosystems in building confidence to explore business opportunities and retain talent in the sector. This is particularly important in the context of pitching sessions, but also in navigating the landscape of business supports with confidence. For the consortium involved in the project, there have also been valuable learnings in relation to the challenges of structuring and scheduling high-value networking opportunities while also ensuring high levels of participation and engagement.

Donegal: Immerse

Aim/Ambition: The Immerse project was undertaken to activate recommendations that emerged from a research report on the Immersive technology sector. The ambitions of this project were to initiate an engagement and communications project to address the challenges to socialising existing and future opportunities (for all industries) in harnessing XR capabilities; enhance community cohesion and establish an ecosystem for the sector in the West. The programme aimed to ‘synch’ the XR industry from Donegal to Kerry in addition to linking with skills development programmes and the development of new AV and XR facilities in the region.

Outputs/Outcomes: The project partners have identified a burgeoning XR industry in the Western region and businesses with which to engage. The project has shown that enterprise enablers are keen to facilitate XR enterprise growth. The project identifies that their ‘three-strand model’ played an important role in the successes of the project. This model is based around enhancing engagement within the targeted industries; enhancing engagement and understanding with wider industries, and enhancing engagement with enterprise enablers.

Key learnings: A key learning for the project partners is the requirement for a strategic framework for immersive technology development, along with the understanding of the need for a consortium or partnership for growth. The project provided valuable insights into the target community’s needs and expectations, including the need for ongoing hands-on access to the technology. The project timeline proved to be a limiting factor for partners due to the complexity and novelty of immersive technology.