
Creative Health and Wellbeing Fund 2025-2026

Review

December 2025



Background



Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community Scheme 2025-2026

How creativity promotes positive health and wellbeing by helping people to connect socially, enhancing their self-esteem and resilience, enabling recovery and empowering them.

- Provided €756,360 in Creative Ireland funding in 2024 for Local Authority partnerships.
- It also included €265,133 of Shared Island funding in 2024 for Local Authority led cross-border arts and health partnerships
- 15 arts and health projects in the community and healthcare settings.
- A 2023 networking event identified a series of challenges and opportunities to embed creative health and wellbeing in different health and community settings.

Projects Funded (not including projects in receipt of Shared Island funding)

Local Authorities	Project
Carlow & Kilkenny County Council	Living Artfully *
Cork City Council	Exploring Loss and Grief: Healing Through Art with the Compassionate Support of a Hospice Foundation *
Cork & Kerry County Council	Make or Break
Dublin City Council	St Agnes' Community Centre for Music and the Arts Harmony Hub *
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	Let's Get Social dlr: making creative connections and inspiring inclusivity across the county *
Galway City and County Council	Mending heARTS: Cardiovascular Art Programme *
Kildare, Offaly & Westmeath County Council	"Did I Ever Tell You" *
Roscommon & Mayo County Council	Mayo Roscommon: Care & Creativity in Context
Tipperary, Clare & Limerick County Councils	Creativity Changing Young Lives in the Mid-West
Waterford City & County Council	Good Grief (working title): An Exploration of the Potential Role of Creative Ritual in the Second Year of Bereavement
Westmeath & Longford County Council	Taipéis

Evaluation Methodology

Objectives of the review:

- Describing and evaluating the process of collaboration across the 11 of the 15 projects – not including Shared Island projects.
- Assessing how the process of collaboration affected the effectiveness of the programmes
- Collating and summarising the impact of the projects with relation to the key objectives
- Identifying elements currently or with potential to be embedded into Local Authorities or Healthy Ireland programmes;

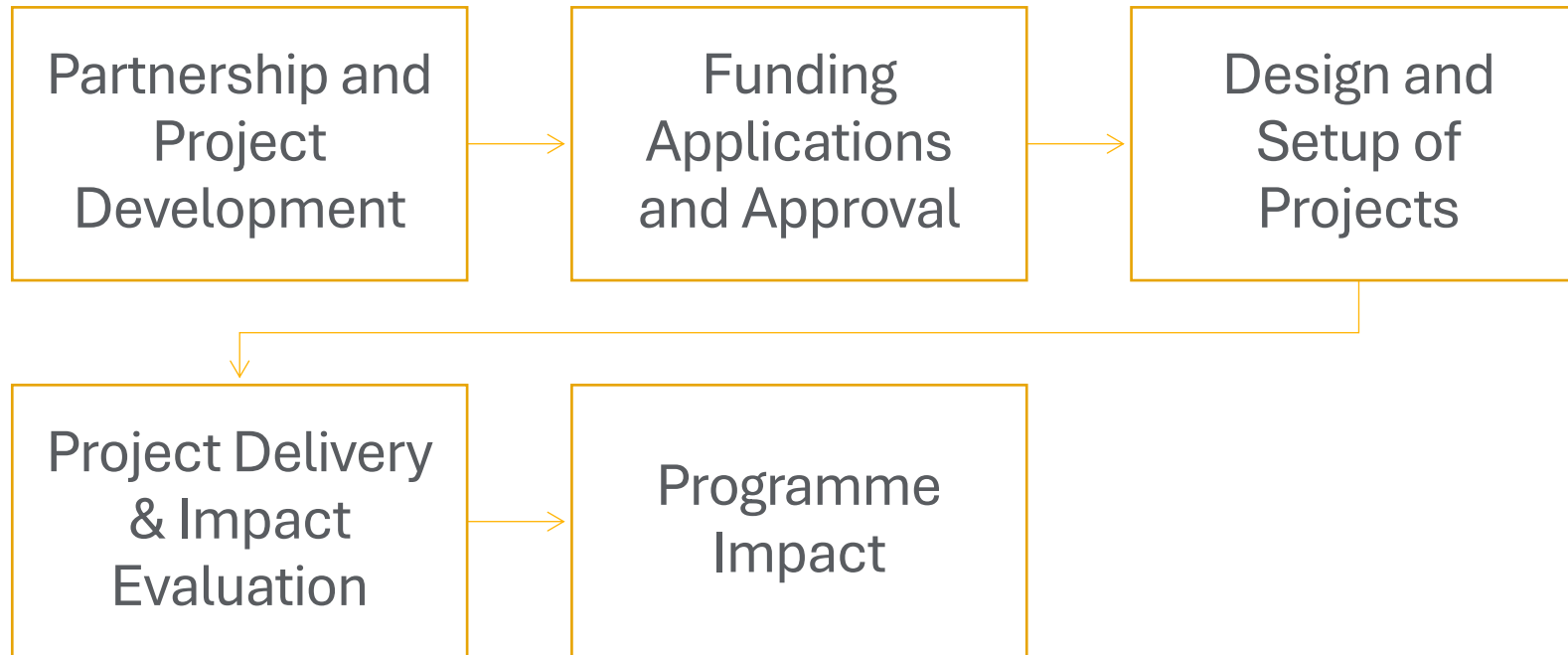
Methodology:

1. Desk Review
2. Process Map
3. Interviews

8 interviews with different team members from across 5 projects, including:

- 2 x Partners
- 1 x Project Manager
- 2 x HSE Staff
- 1 x Healthy Ireland Officer
- 2 x Creative Ireland Team

Process Map and Format of Review



Key Findings



Quotes

“We were really clear what we wanted to come out of this, and it was a long-term impact.”

"There was a really strong leadership team that held the values really closely. And I think if you didn't have that, this would have just been a lot of money spent on nice arts activities.”

“We saw huge benefits for the older group around social connection, well-being, and motivation.”

Partner and Project Development

Key Findings

- New Partnerships and Approaches
- Expanding Pathways
- Early Collaboration Improved Impact
- Aligning with Existing Approaches
- Diverse Project Beneficiaries

Partnerships and Approaches:

The application process supported new partnerships and approaches, as well as extended successful partnerships.

Expanding Pathways: The flexible funding approach created opportunities to expand pathways from acute sector to community.

Early Collaboration Improved Impact: While some LAs created strong balanced partnerships from an early stage, others brought partners later, with varying impact.

Aligning with Existing

Approaches: There were opportunities to align with existing Healthy Ireland, HSE and Creative Ireland goals and this supported better collaboration.

Diverse Project Beneficiaries:

There were a wide range of groups targeted; older people featured in a number of projects.

Funding Applications and Approval

Key Findings

- Timelines
- Flexibility and Openness
- HSE Role
- Partnerships
- Funding Sustainability
- Core vs Project Funding

Timelines

The timeline did not align with HSE funding schedules, and drawdown not aligned with community activities.

Flexibility and Openness

The open scope of the fund allowed for innovative reflection on shared local priorities. However, there was limited “theory of change” emphasis.

HSE Role

HSE role not fully reflected in the application process.

Partnerships

Strong opportunities for developing partnerships. However, this was challenged by staffing changes.

Funding Sustainability

Arts funding is competitive, and these types of projects fall between health and art funding streams. Most projects shared a concern regarding continuity of services once funding ends.

Core vs Project Funding

For some, the funding represented core funding, which created risk in the ongoing continuity of their core work. For others, this was seen as project funding with a clear end point, with the aim of finding internal or external opportunities for successful elements with high impact.

Design and Set-up of Projects

Key Findings

- Partnership Values and Alignment
- Project Team
- Community of Practice
- Clear Project Objectives
- Aligning with Social Prescribing Approaches

Partnership Values and Alignment

Early alignment and shared values improved project design and partnership engagement.

Clear Project Objectives: Some projects benefited from having a clear purpose and shared understanding of improving health and wellbeing.

Project Management

Identifying and appointing project managers helped during key stages.

Community of Practice

Training of team members and creative partners improved impact and helped build a community of practice.

Aligning with Social Prescribing Approaches: While some projects focused on developing Social Prescribing projects, there wasn't full clarity on how they tied into the formal HSE social prescribing infrastructure – referrals etc.

Project Delivery and Impact Evaluation

Key Findings

- Project Impacts
- The Funding Model
- Team Capacity
- Team Values
- Impactful Partnerships
- Project Evaluation

Project Impacts

Even projects with limited scale had transformative impact.

The Funding Model

The funding model was seen as successful in supporting new project approaches and encouraging ambition and innovation.

Team Capacity

Success was repeatedly linked to experience, knowledge and the capacity to integrate professional approaches such as socially engaged art and Arts and Health into projects.

Team Values

This impact was solidified when there was a shared set of values, which in some

cases drove a Community of Practice approach to contracts.

Impactful Partnerships & In-Kind Supports

The partnerships could formalise valuable access to personnel time, as well as leverage untapped sources of impactful support - such as embedding retired nurses into a project.

Project Evaluation

A number of projects shared a need for guidance on reporting and evaluation methods and expectations. This was seen as a great opportunity to evidence the significant impact of this programme, and this approach to creativity within health.

Programme Impact

Key Findings

- Scaling Approaches
- Data Capture and Evidence
- HSE Embedding
- Funding Model
- Sectoral Skills Development

Scaling Approaches

The programme was successful in creating partnerships that support scaling of creative health and wellbeing approaches on a regional basis.

Data Capture and Evidence

There is an opportunity for programme-level data collection and evidence base. The capturing and communication of impact helps embed in local authorities and health infrastructure.

HSE Embedding

This opportunity also applies to embedding within the HSE on a regional basis, although the

evaluation identified some missed opportunities for advocacy and integration.

Funding Model

The scheme was considered to be an effective model in funding delivery of creative health and wellbeing projects across communities.

Sectoral Skills Development

There were notable examples of the programme improving skills and knowledge across health and creative sectors.

Conclusions and Recommendations



Quotes

“There isn't regular funding or it's not embedded within the system – if somebody moves on who was championing it or they retire or move jobs. It's that fragile, this work.”

“It was very well handled by the artists... I learned an awful lot from them about how to deliver quality artistic projects in care home settings.”

““The project was never about the (creative) product. It was the process, and the opportunity to deliver a real and meaningful intervention into the lives of residents. That is just incalculable.”

Overall

Key Recommendations

Creative Health & Wellbeing Fund

- Potential to provide different levels of support for scaling vs innovation
- Knowledge transfer throughout the funding call
- Increase the timelines of projects
- Strong and proactive engagement with potential applicants
- Support funding for projects based on public health area profiles and associated themes.

Developing Partnerships and Projects

- Invest time in establishing strong team structure and shared values.
- Engage senior regional HSE staff earlier and more deeply.
- Support partnership negotiation and advocacy with guidelines and templates
- Clear guidance on project lead role requirements, including handover practices during staff changes.

Applications and Approvals Process

- Combine the sections on Healthy Ireland and Creative Ireland
- Provide a section on the ‘theory of change’ of the project based on local health and wellbeing targets
- Indicate partner representatives at both a senior and an operational level
- Training and support for project leads.
- Support drawdown schedules that respond to project timelines

Community of Practice

- Emphasise capacity building and sharing experiences within projects.
- Opportunities for network development outside of projects, for all involved.

Project Impact and Evaluation

Key Recommendations

Enabling Project Design and Set Up

- Create a database of experienced project management partners in Creative Health and Wellbeing
- Develop accreditation for people working in the creative health and wellbeing.
- Create a database of creative partners to support effective procurement processes.
- Encourage capacity building and sharing experiences across funds.
- Investing time in establishing strong team Structure/Dynamics.
- Embed partnerships by providing templates and supports to formalise agreements, facilitate project advocacy and to leverage internal resources and management support.

Project Impact and Evaluations

- Improve sustainability of funding.
- Increased networking and sharing across projects.
- Provide support on evaluation process and adopt a consistent approach.
- Provide guidance on reporting and templates for recording outcomes.

Increasing overall impact

- Support development of case studies and toolkits for scaling projects.
- Make the case for support to address skills gap.
- Expand and support existing community of practice with learnings from the fund.

Overall

Key Recommendations

Address Skills Gap

- Develop training resources for artists, project manager and local authority project leads.
- Mentorship approaches.

Funding Sustainability

- Improve funding sustainability by linking to other funding sources.

Project Evaluation

- Provide support on evaluation process and adopt a consistent approach.
- Provide guidance on reporting and templates for recording outcomes.

Programme Impact

- Support development of case studies and toolkits for scaling projects.
- Aligning with Existing Approaches – Opportunity to align with Healthy Ireland and Creative Ireland goals

Questions?

