

RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Recommendations

Funding

Funding is a major issue for voluntary arts groups in Northern Ireland. Groups need more information on how to access funds. Most are aware of the funding that is available to them but find it difficult to address the criteria of the funding groups when writing their applications. They need to develop understanding of how they can meet funders' objectives. They also need to build into the group a method of increasing sustainability. Thus reducing dependency is a major challenge due to the voluntary nature of these groups.

There are many sources of funding and generating income: Trusts, Foundations, Government Grants, European funding, company giving, employer-supported volunteering, ticket sales, membership fees, selling arts items and fundraising activities such as raffles.

Good Management

Good management is essential to the long term sustainability of any voluntary arts group. Good advice to any arts group at the early stages in its development would be to ensure that there is a management structure which can co-ordinate activities and make decisions in the best interests of the group. It may be important to appoint a treasurer or to seek the help of an outside accountant, to ensure that the financial affairs of the group are managed as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is also important for groups to ensure that they have adhered carefully to health and safety, and other legal requirements for any organisation. This is why an efficient and reliable management structure is essential.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation and monitoring is very important for any project. Monitoring should be done through continuous assessment of a projects progress. Evaluation should provide a systematic and objective analysis of a projects performance. This is necessary to ensure resources are targeted and used both effectively and economically, to achieve

accountability for expenditure of public money, and to identify lessons which can be applied in the future.

Umbrella Bodies

Umbrella bodies such as Voluntary Arts Ireland need to continue their good work by providing information that will assist voluntary arts groups on a day- to-day-basis, e.g. VAN Briefing Sheets. There is a need to raise the profile of cultural volunteering as an option and organisations such as VAI and the Volunteer Development Agency should be supported for their contribution.

Conclusions

These case studies provide an insight into the voluntary arts groups in rural communities in Northern Ireland. Issue 40 of the VAN Newsletter states 'amongst the assets that every community holds are the skills and talents of individuals that partake in the voluntary arts'. The skills and talents of each of these groups stand as evidence of the assets that exist within Northern Ireland's rural communities. 'Community Creators' highlights just a few of the region's many voluntary arts groups, and shows a insight into just some of the cultural volunteering that is undertaken in Northern Ireland. We need to celebrate our cultural volunteers - there has never been a better time than during 2005, the Year of the Volunteer.