

## **acta Foundation Seminar, All Work & No Pay?**

**7 November 14**

**Notes from third seminar in the series.**

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Helen Tomlin, acta Executive Director - welcome – acta is often asked how our projects come about? There are lots of different ways, and this will be at the core of the discussion today; how do we decide which projects to pursue? There are lots of different aspects to this, hence the large panel for this seminar:-

- Beccy Thomas, Knowle West Media Centre, Programme Manager (Young People)
- Flora Toulson Clarke, experienced acta freelancer and former core team member
- Kat Quartermass, Voluntary Arts
- Neil Beddow, acta Artistic Director (strategic planning & fundraising)

acta Foundation is about sharing learning. Organisation is learning as much through foundation as individuals on the programme are learning themselves; we never stop learning. Helen asked all participants to introduce themselves by telling the group something that they have learnt this week.

Never met anyone working in community theatre for the money, but we believe important to be a good employer, and need to pay people properly to get the best people working in the sector; not everyone can afford to volunteer. Importance of fundraising for projects – introduce Neil's presentation.

### **Fundraising Top Tips**

acta will be 30 next year. I was there at the beginning, and first week's wages were £17.50. Raising funds always difficult. I scare myself by telling myself need to raise £1 million every 3 years. That is too scary, so need to look at it in small bite size chunks.

We have 3 main areas of funding, about a third from each – Arts Council & Bristol City – various lottery sources – charitable trusts.

Arts Council – grants for the arts – forms are very clear, with specific questions and guidelines – people who are prepared to talk to you about your project.

Bristol City – not lots of money, but there are project funds that pop up e.g. green capital fund at the moment – contact Louise Baker and ask to be put onto their mailing list.

Lottery – acta has always had lots of funding from lottery, as they understand that participatory community arts can achieve lots of the things they are interested in funding e.g. individual & community development, improving health & well-being, heritage. Two main funds at the moment –

awards for all for projects up to £10k, and Reaching Communities, which is a much bigger fund for projects above £10k; looking for 3 year projects with big vision & with big outcomes. Thing big – if you don't dream, you'll never get where you want to be; important to have a goal. Also Heritage Lottery – we love HLF – Young Roots for work with young people, and Our Heritage working with the general public. Give them a call, they are friendly and open; office in Exeter; if you have a heritage idea; heritage can be really wide.

Charitable trusts – so many, and all different sizes – must check their criteria as all so different. Spend a day on a funder finder website e.g. use Voscur in Bristol; or grantsnet - Diocese of Bristol through Bristol Cathedral website, has a good filter system. Also look at Quartet in Bristol. And funding through social networks e.g. Kick Start and others.

I am responsible for fundraising at acta, with support from Rosalie and Helen, and also Artistic Director (AD). Thinking two years ahead most of the time, as that is normally how long it takes to create a project and secure the funding. Unusual to have AD also responsible for fundraising, but always worked for us. If you are delivering the work, thinking about the work, it makes it easier to write about it and try to explain it to someone else. Other organisations do it differently. I think up the projects and then look for the money, or sometimes I look for the money and then think of the project, that can happen too.

acta has a simple basic ethos that making theatre is good for people and everyone should have the chance to do it. Once you have accepted that, there are a whole range of people you can work with. How theatre can improve people's health, bring people together, improve people's confidence, a whole range... Having that in your head helps to write the bids.

Also important to understand what the funders want. First thing is that they want to give their money away; not trying to keep it to themselves; you are not going with a begging bowl. Secondly, really try to understand the funder, what do they want to do; read their criteria and think about what they want to achieve. Then look back at what you want to do and achieve, and somewhere in the middle will be your project. Different funders have different criteria, but it is possible to fund a project with different funders who are looking for different things, by talking up different aspects of the project. A good example of this would be acta's Gas Girls project last year, funded by both Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund, each funding it for very different reasons; two bids for the same project; this project is doing several things.

First thing to do is to identify the need for it. You as a theatre maker will have a personal need that you really want to do this project but very few funders are going to get overjoyed by that. The Arts Council might, because they're interested in artists' vision & ideas, but most other funders want to know what effect you're going to have, and who are the people who need you? For instance, it might be there are lots of isolated older people locally who are frightened of younger people. The next thing you need to do is think of what is going to change by you doing your project; what is the outcome going to be, what is the difference? So you want older people not to be frightened of younger people. Now, the project, is the bit in the middle, that links the need to the outcome. Common sense, but people do forget that. You have to think how you are going to make that change, and make sure that it makes sense. Funders will recognise if your proposal is not going to bring about the change.

A good thing to do is to find yourself a partner, someone who shares the vision with you, perhaps who understands the need that you have identified. That can really help, as they can supply you with people to work with, evidence that what you're stating is true and credibility. Sometimes you can make a joint bid. There may be funding sources that they can access which are not available to you, and also it is a nice thing to work in partnership!

This is not a fundraising training day, and we do not have enough time to do that, we are just trying to give you a few pointers about acta's approach and where we go for funding, but there are lots of good courses available, so also consider booking onto one of those.

### **Questions...**

Heritage Fund – Do they fund work in schools?

They're fine with that. Big Lottery are a bit funny with that, but HLF are ok.

How about Arts Council?

Kat – This is complex. For most things that enhance the curriculum, they would expect you to go through Rio, the bridge organisation in this region.

Neil – But if you have a piece of touring theatre aimed at schools, they're fine with that.

What about taking risks, delivering a project that has not been tried & tested, how can you then define the need; convincing a funder if it is a new delivery model? Would you disclose level of risk?

Kat – All the funders discussed are not hard outcome funders, and will be sympathetic to taking risk.

Helen & Neil – Except for Big Lottery which is very outcomes focused.

Neil – Need to convince a funder that you are confident your project will work, despite the risk. Most funders will ask for a risk assessment. Show how you'll mitigate the risks.

Beccy – Be clear about your experience of delivering projects like these; demonstrate you are capable of taking these risks.

Audience member – There was a dance project in Brighton once that was awarded £75 million, and nobody turned up! Extraordinary.

Do you have any examples of the change in your project participants as a result of engaging in an acta project?

Neil – Thousands. Recently, working with an isolated older woman, who we originally contacted through a lunch club that she went to. Very shy and lacked confidence. She came to get involved in a visual arts group, expressed an interest in performing and joined a performance group we were also offering; a couple of weeks ago I took her on her first ever flight to Rotterdam, to take part in a festival; and she is performing in our Christmas show; and has expressed a massive change in her life, her confidence, she was too shy before and now she is learning lines and performing. Fantastic, but just one example.

Story-telling is so important for fundraising; funders need the stories to stand out and for them to remember you; include them as case studies; collect evidence to include in your bids.

When you are applying to multiple funders to contribute to one project, should you include the cost of the whole project in each bid?

Neil – Often this feels a bit strange, but mostly funders like to see that other funders are also contributing.

If one of the sources you apply to is not successful, but others are, how does that work?

Dialogue. Perhaps you can reduce the project size, or come up with new strategy. Never heard of a funder withdrawing funding as a result of another funding bid being unsuccessful. This happened with our Gas Girls project last year. Our bid to Wellcome Trust failed, but we spoke to Arts Council, and explained that we were going to make a bid to HLF to replace it.

Beccy – With corporate sponsors, guidelines may be stricter, but make sure you are clear when you sign up to a funding agreement. Talk about it as early as possible. Worst thing is not to communicate.

Helen – Have the confidence to call funders and chat through your ideas with them, they're not monsters!

Beccy – Everyone told me it was important to build relationships with funders, but I did not know what this meant – much easier to do on the phone than in writing.

How about talking to the Arts Council? In Bristol, they won't speak to anyone at the moment.

Kat – You can get answers from the Manchester grants office; they seem to be moving towards a structure similar to Big Lottery; this is the team who are also assessing the grants, makes it fairer for all. Use the intermediaries e.g. Theatre Bristol and other funded organisations.

Neil – Importance of building a relationship, particularly with charitable trusts. They all know each other! Get people to put in a good word for you! Who you know.

How do you fund costs that are not project related? Your day-to-day running costs?

Neil – It is a nightmare to be honest. We have just heard that we will be an NPO from next year, after three years without Arts Council core funding. We did secure good levels of Arts Council project funding over the last 3 years, but it is not easy. Some trusts will give core funding e.g. Esme Fairbairn, Tudor Trust, but that is quite hard. But best thing is to build core costs into your project budgets – real costs recovery is what the lottery calls it, others will fund overheads or a project coordination fee – everyone calls it a different thing. Need a flexible approach depending on the funder. It is generally hard to secure core funding, so make sure you include it in your project budgets.

Beccy – At KWMC, we have more earned income that can help fund core costs. When you get an opportunity to charge more for your time, do it; if you're delivering workshops for those who can

pay, this can help to support your charitable work. Be flexible e.g. charge for evaluation costs, in the knowledge that this will be delivered by core team.

Neil – When you're putting a project budget together, be realistic about how much time a project will take, and include all your planning & prep time, the thinking time etc. Be creative!

## **Volunteering**

In community theatre we are working all the time with volunteers, the participants who are engaging in our projects. Additionally, there are lots of opportunities for volunteers to work alongside professionals. So we've asked Kat to talk about Voluntary Arts.

Voluntary Arts was set up to support those taking part in the arts purely for the love of it. However, DCMS research discovered that at least 30% of the groups were actually paying people to work with them, so there are lots of paid opportunities within the sector. The paid and unpaid sectors are merging together, and no more so than here in Bristol.

An analogy – you wouldn't ask a plumber to do it for free would you? This is being used to make a case for paying artists, and it is nonsense! If you knew plumbers, you'd know that they do actually work for free sometimes. This is a myth. Artists are no different to other professions. It is not helpful if we continue this myth. Do the work for free or a lower rate when you want to do it; what's important is that you take charge of this.

Secondly, there are so many choices as to what role you are playing, freelance or volunteer, artist or other support roles. One thing will lead to another. At Voluntary Arts we support projects to continue for longer by becoming an organisation and accessing funding to pay artists, as well as by making best use of volunteers when appropriate. You need to ask yourself whether you want to be the freelancer waiting for someone else to set up the organisation to employ you, or do you want to set up your own organisation to secure funding yourself?

And finally, working for smaller voluntary sector groups and amateur groups who do not work towards community goals, but just interested in making the art... there is more work in this sector than you might think. Interesting article on RSC website about this. Community arts facilitators and skills workshop leaders are two different career paths, and we need to fully understand this, but also remember that there is paid work available in both.

Question – What is the first step to becoming an organisation?

Kat – Constitution - First step before you can apply to most funders. Look at how much time people have got to invest, and then determine which is the right constitution for you?

Question – What are the ethics of volunteering?

Kat – We have a toolkit:

<http://www.voluntaryarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Volunteering-in-the-Arts-toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

## **Working as a Freelancer, Top Tips**

Flora – I liken working as a freelancer to surfing. When all is going well, feels like being on the crest of a wave, mastering your skill. At other times, despite all your efforts, it feels a bit like swimming against the tide, exhausting and demoralising. Sometimes you have to wait a very long time for a wave to come along, and this requires a lot of patience. Other days you feel like you are effortlessly gliding, and you arrive at the beach and gaze around and congratulate yourself on your spectacular achievement. Or other times you might miss time catching a wave, and realise that your bikini has become your scarf! Then you feel particularly vulnerable, lost and lonely.

Being a freelancer requires lots of self-development and time to reflect, be robust, adaptable.

I became a freelancer by accident, which is quite common. Paid to cover a session, doing something I love doing. Successful in securing funding for some first projects, which were fairly disastrous. I didn't feel like a real freelancer; was really not sure what I was doing. For some years I combined occasional work as a freelancer with more regular part-time employment. Then I moved to Bristol and worked with acta. I developed my confidence and increased my skill set. Then I felt more able to promote myself as a freelancer. All the time I was thinking how do I become a proper freelancer?

To cut a long story short... went off travelling, came back had a child, got a mortgage... work / life balance became more important to me as a mum ... at that point I was working part-time for acta as well as developing work as a freelancer, and everything was going incredibly well.

Then my part-time job came to an end, and suddenly there was no more work. You have to watch your own back as a freelancer, and even if you're doing a fantastic job, if the work stops they have no commitment to employ you. So I found myself one November being heavily depressed, no money, no work, lost self-esteem and confidence... Out of panic and fear, I used a scatter gun approach to promote myself with as many people as possible, but so chaotic that it did not actually lead to any work. My learning was that I needed to toughen up and focus solely on working as a freelancer... it is scary, especially as now I'm a single parent.. but on the back of all of that, I have put together a list of dos and don'ts...

First of all I googled it!

There is an extensive list available online (I don't do all these things by the way!):-

**Know your clients and build relationships with them** – Be clear about expectations e.g. payment terms (you need to know when the money is coming in, to avoid panic!)

**Accounts & administration** – Do not leave tax return until last minute; price up all the hours you are going to work (not just face to face session time) i.e. know your value / what are you worth?

**Resilience** – Do not take everything personally; have a wider outlook. Be prepared to put the work in.

**Don't panic** – Use the time strategically when you have no work – paint your bathroom!

**Stay healthy** – Avoid burnout, and don't work all hours, even if there is a danger you'll miss something.

**Maintain relationships** – create a database of your clients, and go back to them.

**Promote yourself** – social media and website etc.

**Plan ahead** – Put some money away in your “for fear fund”.

**Don't say yes to everything.**

**Be adaptable and develop your skills** – it takes time to develop what you're good at.

Questions & further comments:-

Wouldn't you be really dull if you did all those things? You're way more interesting than that!

I'm good at relating to people, but I naturally keep in touch. And I'm passionate about what I do.

Resilience and motivation are really important for me.

**Be a good listener** – listen to what your employer needs. It is easy to have your own agenda, but be aware that it may not be your employer's agenda.

Also, be prepared to recommend others if you're not the best person for the job.

**Be caring** – it is not just a job.

### **Partnerships & collaborations**

Beccy – I manage the young people's programme at Knowle West Media Centre – an arts organisation that uses digital technology and media, but similar principles to acta.

Interesting fact - no young people in Filwood ward achieved 5 A\* - C grade GCSEs last year.

We work with 18-25 yr olds on work-based training & paid internships.

None of our programme would work without partnerships, with schools and community organisations to engage local people. But also, we need partnerships with companies offering work.

Film – meet my friend Dave – works for heating solutions company, “Secure Controls.” The Director of KWMC met Dave, and was excited about developing a partnership with him. He understands what both organisations get out of the partnership.

(Beccy explained projects by their digital producers, and why Dave's company were really interested in these creative young people in Knowle West, and why KWMC were really interested in what Dave's company could provide.)

Learning & opportunities from our partnerships.

Publicity that links to multinational company can offer.

A good critical friend e.g. why are you doing it like that?!

Shared aims – we trust each other, and it is an equal partnership, with both partners in control.

Dave talks about KWMC young people as “consultants”. This is what creative industries can offer – making money out of your arts skills.

Think of unusual partnerships!

## **Questions**

Who approached who?

Suggested by Local Enterprise Partnership. Recommend finding out who the West of England LEP are talking to, if seeking businesses for partnerships.

Can we have too many partners or partnerships?

Need partners to bring different skills & experience, but share an overall vision.

Intellectual property rights?

Need a partnership agreement at the start, and should include this. (Depends if a project has commercial potential.)

Is it reasonable for the artist to manage the partnership themselves?

Be realistic about your time.

KWMC involved the freelance artists in planning the workshop, and those that were keen to develop the work further, came back to discuss future potential developments too.

Kat – Younger organisations can expect freelance artists to take on more of the partnership development, as they’re not always set up to manage this themselves. Cornwall are doing this differently now, giving more control direct to the artists.

Partnerships – be clear from the start why all partners are interested.

Any advice on agreements and contracts?

All sorts of templates available. Think about what sort of agreement you need, and ask other similar organisations for advice. Or a friendly lawyer who might volunteer their time?

Websites - Independent Theatre Council and Volunteer England.

As a freelancer, have you ever written your own contract?

No, only had to sign one!

More common in the media industry, where intellectual property is more of an issue.

Can start with a verbal agreement, whilst developing a relationship of trust, but need to write something once money is involved. Written agreement is to cover yourselves.

If it is an arts organisation who hasn’t paid you on time, talk to them! Communication is key.

New words for learning today: “Knowledge exchange process,” from Dave.



