I'm a poet and novelist (and, to a lesser extent, a spoken word artist) who's been resident in Scotland since 2001. I'm American by birth, British by naturalisation, and unlikely ever to feel “Scottish” enough to use that as a label (if for no other reason than that I am reminded every week of my life that I Don't Sound Scottish), but I have always felt welcomed and included by the literary community here, which means a lot to me.

I should point out my direct experience with Creative Scotland (all of it in the Literature category):

1) in 2010, I applied for a grant from the Scottish Arts Council (£5000 for tuition for a Faber Academy course). I received a perfectly sensible and encouraging rejection letter with the opportunity for a personal follow up. In hindsight, I agree that this was way too much money for that type of course.

2) later in 2010, I won a New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust (£2000 in cash plus a lot of opportunities and training).

3) in 2012, Creative Scotland awarded me a Talent Development grant for £6000 to support me during the writing of a full-length poetry collection.

4) in 2014, Creative Scotland awarded me a Professional Development grant for £1000 to partly fund my attendance at the Spoken Word Workshop at the Banff Centre, Canada.

5) I currently have an application pending for partial funding to attend the San Francisco Writers Conference.

Of course, this doesn't take into account the many events and workshops I've attended, and journals I've published in, which were partially or completely funded by Creative Scotland, either directly or with funds through other organisations.

I'm afraid I don't have anything say about high-level strategic and operational changes in Creative Scotland, or performance measures, but I have a few thoughts on item 2, about ensuring that Creative Scotland achieves value for money.

The problem with the phrase “value for money” is that most of the time, this effectively means “are we going to get tangible results, which generally is measured in 'more money.'” There are many types of value, and I'm not saying this in a wishy-washy Oh But How Can You Judge Art In Terms Of Money sort of way. The value that I'm personally most interested in isn't primarily financial (though heaven knows that's appreciated), but rather how grants can provide stepping stones for artists at various levels of their careers. No one wants to hand tens of thousands of pounds to an unknown, untested applicant, but is there a more structured way to use grants as a way to encourage artists to reach that point? What happens when you give a new writer £200 to perform at their first festival, and then two years later give them a few thousand to complete a manuscript? How much impact will that initial award have on their commitment to art, their personal identity as an artist, their ability to attract funding or publication/productions from other organisations? (And, of course, completing grant applications is a skill in itself – one which writers have a natural advantage at, since we use words all the time – so smaller applications are much less threatening.)
The beauty of the small-scale awards is that they could serve as a longitudinal study of how such awards can make a difference to the lives of artists and the creation/production of art. I'd love to see Creative Scotland offering small (up to £500) grants for a huge range of things, given to people practically at the start of their careers as well as for more experienced artists to move in different directions. (My spoken word-related grant is an excellent example of this.) Have as simple an application form as possible (Eleanor Livingstone, the director of StAnza Poetry Festival, had many positive things to say about other countries' grant-awarding processes for small awards, and one of them was the simplicity). Basically, say to artists, “Here's a small amount of money. Go use it wisely. Then come back and tell us how that small amount provided you and your career with value. (Here are a few performance metrics we'd like you to keep in mind.) And if we agree, we'll probably give you some more substantial funding.”

Creative Scotland funds the arts, but it also funds artists. I think positioning “value” within the long-term trajectory of an artist's career would be an excellent direction to move in.

Tracey S. Rosenberg
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