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Tuesday, 24 February 2009

Big Thinking Consultation
Big Lottery Fund
1 Plough Place
London
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To whom it may concern,

NCA response to Big Lottery Fund's *Big Thinking* consultation

I am writing to formally respond, on behalf of the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA), to Big Lottery Fund's *Big Thinking* consultation.

The NCA is the UK's only independent lobbying organisation representing all the arts. It provides a voice for the arts world in all its diversity. It seeks to safeguard, promote and develop the arts and win public and political recognition for the importance of the arts as a key element in our national culture.

This response has been informed by our members, a number of whom are community and voluntary arts organisations.

The NCA recognises that BIG is an 'outcomes' funder and we would stress the valuable role arts and arts organisations can play in transforming people's lives and communities.

We are happy to support BIG's employment of 'transitions' and 'isolation' as themes around which to base funding decisions. The arts can play a fundamental role in helping communities through troubled times and also help individuals through crucial points in their lives. The arts also have the ability to support individuals and often voluntary arts organisations also act as vital personal and social support networks.

The NCA is also happy to support BIG's desire to focus funding on 'areas most in need'. We would, however, argue for the definition of need to be drawn in the widest possible terms; allowing scope to fund a diverse range of activity. We believe that 'need' is much broader than mere financial poverty. Poverty of opportunity, ambition and experience are also detrimental to personal and community wellbeing. The arts and arts organisations can be key partners in addressing these issues and solving long term deprivation.

The NCA believes that BIG should also build partnerships with local authorities across the UK. Local Authorities are major funders of community and voluntary organisations and they are useful barometers of community priorities. The arts sector works closely with local government and local authorities understand that the arts can be a useful agent of social change. As well as rooting BIG deeper in the communities its funding

effects, building partnerships with local authorities could usefully expose BIG to the instrumental value of the arts and arts organisations.

We would also like to see BIG retain and extend its commitment of funds to the voluntary sector. We believe that guaranteed, high levels of funding for such organisations will assist BIG in achieving desired funding outcomes. This sort of guarantee will also provide hope to many organisations facing an uncertain future in these troubled economic times. The NCA would also recommend that BIG prioritise the sustaining of funding to organisations over a long period above the desire to fund, short-term, a large and unsustainable number of organisations. Long term funding allows organisations to plan and grow whereas funding lots of initiatives will see numerous projects start-up only to find that they cannot sustain themselves long term.

The NCA is also keen to see BIG play an active support role with the organisations it funds; we believe that this is a crucial duty of responsible funders. In order to ensure that grants are good value for money BIG should assess how much support a funded organisation will need when deciding on grants and a programme of support should be agreed as part of an overall funding package.

The NCA is also wholeheartedly supportive of Big Lottery Fund's desire to invest in risk-taking. This would mirror the desire of Arts Council England to support innovation in the arts through risk taking.

In principle, the NCA is very supportive of the strategy being developed by Big Lottery Fund. We would, however, like to take this opportunity to remind BIG of the value of arts and arts activities to communities and whatever steps can be taken to ensure BIG's continued support for these organisations would be most welcome.

Should you have any questions regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours,

Louise de Winter
Director