

City of London's Central Grants Programme – Inspiring London Through Culture Analysis of Grants Awarded 2020/21 to 2024/25

Key Findings

This paper provides the first comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the Inspiring London Through Culture funding programme (ILTC) over the last five years illustrating the ILTC's contribution to delivering both Destination City and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. The ILTC fund supports the delivery of high quality innovative arts projects in the City of London and promotes local cultural organisations to showcase their work and engage with City communities. Notable findings of the grant analysis include:

- Over the last five years the ILTC has distributed £398,479 in 48 grants to 39 unique organisations. 7 organisations received two or more grants each.
- The average value of grant awarded over the last five years was £8,302.
- Over the last 3 years (2022/23 to 2024/25) applications to the ILTC have increased by 67% and this trend is set to continue with 28 application received for the 2025/26 funding round 28 applications – a further 12% year on year increase.
- Over the last three years, at the same time as a steady year on year increase in the demand for ILTC funding, the average value of ILTC grants awarded has increased but the value of funds available has remained more or less constant. Consequently the annual approval rate has dropped from 53% in 2022/23 to 40% in 2024/25 with only 2 out of every 5 applications being awarded funding.
- Over the last 3 years the percentage of organisations in each funding round that were new to the portfolio has increased year on year from 62% in 2022/23 to 70% in 2024/25 reflecting the Panel's aim to support a broad range of applicants and those new to grant funding.
- Over the last five years 56% of grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500K. Just under a third (31%) of all ILTC grants awarded over the last five years were to 'very small' organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100K.
- Over the last 5 years grants were awarded across a wide spectrum of artforms. 27% of grants were awarded to music projects representing 25% of the total value of funds awarded (£98,274 investment), 13% of grants were awarded to theatre projects representing 13% of the total value of funds awarded (£51,924 investment) and 13% of grants were awarded to film projects representing 12% of the total value of funds awarded (£48,002 investment). However, over the last 5 years there has been a lack of investment in the visual arts with only 4% of ILTC grants awarded to visual arts projects representing 5% of the value of grants awarded (£18,500).
- Similarly, given the abundance of key heritage sites and collections across the City of London there has also been low investment through the ILTC fund in relation to heritage projects – only £17,710 investment over the last five years across 3 projects.
- 69% of ILTC funded activities over the last 5 years were for general beneficiaries, 29% of all funded projects benefitted children under 11, 25% benefitted young people aged 11-25 years and 25% benefitted people from minoritised ethnic groups.
- Over the last 5 years 98% of grants awarded 'Promoted access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer'. The ILTC fund also contributed to the delivery of the City of London's key Destination City policy (63% of all ILTC funded projects).
- The ILTC delivers against five of the six CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. For example, the strategic outcome 'Vibrant Thriving Destination' with 69% of all grants awarded contributing to 'providing a world-leading culture and leisure offer' and 44% of grants awarded contributing to 'increased visitor spend'. The ILTC also strongly delivers the Corporate Plan strategic outcome to create 'Diverse engaged communities' with 60% of grants awarded contributing to 'increasing community cohesion' and 40% of grants awarded contributing to 'reducing social isolation'.

City of London Corporation: Central Grants Programme

Analysis of Inspiring London Through Culture grants awarded 2020/22 to 2024/25

Background

1. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the 'Central Grants Programme: Inspiring London Through Culture Fund' over the last five years of awards 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive to illustrate the impact of the fund in delivering both Destination City and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.
2. The paper analyses the impact and learning from 48 Inspiring London Through Culture Fund (ILTC) grants awarded over 60 months (April 2020 to March 2025 inclusive) by addressing the key learning questions identified for the programme (see **Appendix A**).
3. The ILTC is one of a portfolio of four open grant funding programmes that form the City of London Corporation's Central Grants Programme. Funding for ILTC comes from the City's Estate with a budget agreed each year.
4. ILTC has one funding round each year with a 12-week decision turnaround. Over the last three years, 2022/23 to 2024/25, the ILTC has distributed c.£73,333 each year. The minimum grant available is £500 and the maximum grant is £10,000.
5. Grants issued through ILTC are awarded to projects that deliver most (or all) of their benefits within the Square Mile or amongst communities from the Square (at any location).
6. ILTC applications must meet one or more of the fund's four core criteria – 'Promote access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer'; 'Enhance London's creative future through championing excellence in the development of innovative practice and/or skills'; 'Deliver positive social impact through culture and/or heritage in the City of London'; 'Support the development of the City of London's Destination City'.
7. In line with embedding EEDI within funding best practice, ILTC offers pre-application advice to all applicants helping to support organisations establish connections with key stakeholders, identify potential project partners and make contact with relevant CoL Officers prior to application. The programme's management is reviewed against IVAR's Open and Trusting Grant-Making for Public Agencies with light touch grant reporting in line with Open and Trusting grant-making principles.

Value and distribution of grants over time

8. Over the last five years, 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive, the ILTC has distributed £398,479 in 48 grants. Grants awarded have ranged from £1,200 to £10,000. (See **Table 1**).

Table 1			
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded	Value of grants awarded in year	Average value of grant awarded
2020/21	12	£92,888	£7,740
2021/22	9	£82,169	£9,130
2022/23	8	£76,970	£9,621
2023/24	9	£70,348	£7,816
2024/25	10	£76,104	£7,610
Total	48	£398,479	Av.£8,302

9. The average value of grant awarded over the last five years was £8,302. Over the last three years given that the total value of the fund has remained more or less static, the value of the average grant has fluctuated in relation to the number of grants awarded. This reflects a process introduced at Panel from 2023/24 where reduced grant offers are awarded to strong applications in order to ensure a range of art forms and size of organisation are supported. This results in an slight increase in the number of awards but a reduction in the average value of the funds awarded. For example, in 2023/24 £5,221 reduction was agreed by Panel from the grants recommended, increasing in 2024/25 to a £9,325 reduction agreed by Panel from the grants recommended.

Demand for Inspiring London Through Culture grants

10. Over the last 5 years there have been a total of 107 applications to the ILTC of which on average 44% were rejected, 9% were withdrawn, 2% were lapsed and 45% were approved. (See **Table 2**).
11. Over the last 3 years (2022/23 to 2024/25) applications to the ILTC have increased by 67% and this trend is set to continue. For the 2025/26 ILTC round 28 applications have been received – a further 12% year on year increase. This year on year increase in the number of applications to cultural funders is being experienced across the sector as arts organisations whose reserves were used during the pandemic struggle with increased costs at a time when several major charitable funders are realigning their funding priorities or closing.
12. Over the last three years, at the same time as a steady year on year increase in the demand for ILTC funding, the average value of ILTC grant awarded has increased but the value of funds available has remained more or less constant. Consequently the annual approval rate has dropped from 53% in 2022/23 to 40% in 2024/25 with only 2 out of every 5 applications being awarded funding. This low average approval rate is not unusual for the arts and cultural sector and broadly in line with Arts Council England's (ACE) National Lottery Project Grants approval rate of 1 in 3 (June 2025). That said ACE's low project grant approval rate was also cited as one of the key reasons for ACE to review their fund alongside administrative capacity requirements to manage a fund with very wide criteria.

Table 2						
Financial Year	Number of appics submitted	Number of Grants awarded/ funded	Number of appics rejected	Number of appics withdrawn	Number of appics lapsed	Approval rate
2020/21	29	12	14	3	0	41%
2021/22	20	9	10	1	0	45%
2022/23	15	8	5	0	2	53%
2023/24	18	9	8	1	0	50%
2024/25	25	10	10	5	0	40%
Total	107	48	47	10	2	Av.45%

13. In line with high quality funding practice CFCMT offers 1:1 tailored pre-application advice calls to all potential applicants. This practice ensures that potential applicants are provided with information, advice and introductions to potential stakeholders to help develop their projects prior to submission. It allows the CFCMT to ensure that those who are furthest from accessing funding are given the support they individually need by

removing structural barriers within the funding process. Pre-application calls also enable the team to establish relational grant-making practice from the initial contact with a potential applicant and identify and mitigate common issues experienced by applicants. Most importantly, pre-application advice provides early identification of ineligible applicants and projects, thereby preventing organisations wasting precious time on working up full applications and allowing CFCMT Officers to spend more time on assessing potentially successful applications.

14. Monitoring of pre-application advice began in late 2023. In 2023/24 only 8 organisations requested ILTC pre-application advice. Of these only 2 out of the 8 went on to submit an application – with one application then withdrawn during assessment and one application rejected at Panel. 75% of organisations receiving ILTC pre-application advice decided that their projects were ineligible for funding or did not align sufficiently with the fund's criteria. This illustrates the role of pre-application advice in supporting organisations to avoid wasting capacity on working up applications unlikely to secure funding and the role of pre-application advice in using limited Officer time more strategically and avoiding the lengthy assessment of weak applications.
15. For the 2025/26 funding round 16 organisations requested ILTC pre-application advice reflecting the increased promotion of this service. It is important to note that the CFCMT's pre-application advice provides information on the specifics of the fund and is additional to the expert development support provided by the Culture Team to help organisations develop strong bids, secure appropriate permissions and make connections across City Services.

Continuation/Repeat Funding

16. Over the five year period (2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive) 39 unique organisations were supported through the award of ILTC grant funding of which 82% of successful applicants were awarded one grant each. (See **Table 3**).
17. Over the last 3 years the percentage of organisations in each funding round that were new to the portfolio has increased year on year from 62% in 2022/23 to 70% in 2024/25 reflecting the Panel's aim to support a broad range of applicants and those new to grant funding.

Table 3	
Number of grants awarded over 5 years	Number of organisations
1	32
2	5
3	2
Total	48

18. 7 organisations received two or more grants each. The maximum aggregate grant from the ILTC over the last five years to any single organisation was £26,062 and the largest number of grants awarded to the same applicant was 3. (See **Table 4**). In comparison to other funding programmes managed by the CFCMT within the Central Grants Programme this is a low level of repeat successful applicants and access to the portfolio is well managed by the Panel.

Table 4		
Organisation	Number of grants awarded over 5 years	Value of grants awarded over 5 years
London Youth Choirs	3	£26,062

Arab British Centre	3	£25,730
The Baytree Centre	2	£20,000
Inspiring Audio	2	£19,050
City Music Foundation	2	£18,000
Curving Road	2	£16,900
The Voces8 Foundation	2	£11,640

19. The ILTC has no limitation on the number or value of continuation grants that can be awarded to an organisation. Although the introduction of such a policy can be a useful tool to ensure that access to funding is not dominated by well-established larger organisations with dedicated funding support, restricting the number of grants awarded to a single organisation could negatively impact very small grassroots and community organisations who may need support over a substantial number of years in order to become established.

Inspiring London Through Culture Fund grantee organisation by type – turnover, user-led, sector

20. As would be expected in relation to the low value of the maximum grant (£10,000) available from the ILTC, over the last five years 56% of grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500k. Just under a third (31%) of all ILTC grants awarded over the last five years were to 'very small' organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100k. (See **Tables 5 & 6**).

Table 5		
Annual Turnover of grantee	Number of grants	% of grants
£5m+	3	6%
£1m to £4,999,999	10	21%
£500K to £999,999	8	17%
£100K to £499,999	12	25%
< £100K	15	31%
Total	48	

Table 6			
Financial Year	Number of grants awarded to small orgs turnover less than £500K	% grants awarded in the year to small orgs turnover less than £500K	Total number of grants awarded
2020/21	6	50%	12
2021/22	7	78%	9
2022/23	3	38%	8
2023/24	6	67%	9
2024/25	5	50%	10
Total	27		48

21. Over the last 5 years approximately a two-thirds of ILTC grants were awarded to applicants that were UK registered charities (63%). (See **Table 7**).

Table 7		
Organisation Type	Number of grants	% of grants
UK Registered Charity	30	63%
CIO	6	13%

CIC	5	10%
Charitable Company	4	8%
Constituted voluntary organisation	3	6%
Total	48	

22. 26% of grants awarded over the last five years from ILTC have been to organisations/groups that were user-led representing a £104,616 investment. Unusually, the average value of grants to user-led organisations from ILTC is higher than the average grant to non-user led organisations. (See **Table 8**).

Table 8					
Type of user led organisation	Number of grants	% of grants	Value of grants awarded	% of total ILTC spend	Average value of grant
BAME user led	8	17%	£69,347	17%	£8,668
Other user led	4	8%	£35,269	9%	£8,817
Not user led	36	75%	£293,863	74%	£8,142
	48		£398,479		Av.£8,302

Grant distribution across artforms

23. Over the last 5 years ILTC grants were awarded across a wide spectrum of artforms. 27% of grants were awarded to music projects representing 25% of the total value of funds awarded (£98,274 investment), 13% of grants were awarded to theatre projects representing 13% of the total value of funds awarded (£51,924 investment) and 13% of grants were awarded to film projects representing 12% of the total value of funds awarded (£48,002 investment). (See **Table 9**).
24. It is not unusual to see grant funding programmes awarding significant investment to music and theatre projects in London. For example Arts Council England National Lottery Projects grants in London in 2024/25 were similarly distributed with 33% of grants awarded to theatre projects and 21% of grants awarded to Music projects.
25. What is significant in the distribution of ILTC grants over the last 5 years is the lack of investment in the visual arts. Over the last 5 years only 4% of ILTC funded projects were in the visual arts representing 5% of the value of grants awarded (an investment of £18,500). In comparison in 2024/25 ACE National Lottery Project grants awarded 12% of its grants to visual arts projects.
26. Given the abundance of key heritage sites and collections across the City of London it is also surprising to see such low ILTC investment over the last five years in heritage related projects – only £17,710 investment over the last five years across 3 projects. This is despite ‘encouraging access to local buildings and local heritage within the Square Mile’ being a priority for the fund. Heritage projects funded through ILTC also have a low average value grant in comparison to other artforms. (See **Table 9**).

Table 9					
Main Artform	No of grants	% of grants	Value of grants awarded	% value of grants awarded	Average value of grant to art form
Music	13	27%	£98,274	25%	£7,560

Other	9	19%	£84,116	21%	£9,346
Theatre	6	13%	£51,924	13%	£8,654
Film	6	13%	£48,002	12%	£8,000
Dance	4	8%	£35,412	9%	£8,853
Outdoor Arts/Festivals/ Street Art	3	6%	£24,541	6%	£8,180
Literature	2	4%	£20,000	5%	£10,000
Visual Arts	2	4%	£18,500	5%	£9,250
Museums/Heritage	3	6%	£17,710	4%	£5,903
Total	48		£398,479		Av.£8,302

Meeting Inspiring London Through Culture Fund core criteria

27. The ILTC has four core criteria. To be eligible for funding each application must meet at least one of the following four core criteria:
- i. Promote access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer
 - ii. Enhance London's creative future through championing excellence in the development of innovative practice and/or skills
 - iii. Deliver positive social impact through culture and/or heritage in the City of London
 - iv. Support the development of the City of London's Destination City
28. Over the last 5 years 98% of grants awarded 'Promoted access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer'. The ILTC also contributed to the delivery of the City of London's Destination City policy (63% of all ILTC funded projects). (See **Table 10**).
29. In comparison with other arts/culture project grants a relatively low percentage of grants awarded through the ILTC (only 27% of grants awarded) championed excellence in the development of innovative practice and/or skills.
30. The ILTC fund also has 11 priorities for funding over and above the core criteria for a fund that awards 8-12 grants each year. Whilst such a large number of stated priorities enables the ILTC Fund to support an extremely wide range of projects it can also potentially dilute the strategic focus of the fund.

Table 10		
ILTC Fund Core Criteria met	Number of grants	% of total grants awarded
Promote access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer	47	98%
Support the development of the City of London's Destination City	30	63%
Deliver positive social impact through culture and/or heritage in the City of London	27	56%
Enhance London's creative future through championing excellence in the development of innovative practice and/or skills	13	27%

Delivering against City of London Corporate Plan Strategic Outcomes

31. The ILTC delivers against five of the six CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. For example, the City of London Corporate Plan strategic outcome 'Vibrant Thriving

Destination' with 69% of all grants awarded contributing to 'providing a world-leading culture and leisure offer' and 44% of grants awarded contributing to 'increased visitor spend'. (See **Table 11**).

32. The ILTC also strongly delivers the City of London Corporate Plan strategic outcome to create 'Diverse engaged communities' with 60% of grants awarded contributing to 'increasing community cohesion' and 40% of grants awarded contributing to 'reducing social isolation'.

Table 11		
Main grant purpose (outcomes)/ Corporate Plan Strategic Outcome	Number of grants	% of grants
Provision of a World-leading culture and leisure offer – 'Vibrant Thriving Destination'	33	69%
Increased Community Cohesion - 'Diverse engaged communities'	29	60%
Increased visitor spend – 'Vibrant Thriving Destination'	21	44%
Reduced Social Isolation - 'Diverse engaged communities'	19	40%
Increased weekend footfall - 'Vibrant Thriving Destination'	19	40%
Improved mental or physical health - 'Providing excellent services'	11	23%
Pathways to employment - 'Providing excellent services'	5	10%
Improved public realm & cultural icons – 'Flourishing public spaces'	4	8%
Climate mitigation - 'Leading Sustainable Environment'	2	4%
Increased participation in co-creating and delivering services – 'Diverse engaged communities'	1	2%

Grant beneficiaries

33. The ILTC grant programme delivers activities and services for a range of beneficiary groups. Many projects target more than one main beneficiary group. 69% of ILTC funded activities over the last 5 years were for general beneficiaries, 29% of all funded projects benefitted children under the age of 11, 25% benefitted young people aged 11-25 years and 25% benefitted people from minoritised ethnic groups. (See **Table 12**).
34. Perhaps due to the generalist nature of the ILTC Fund only a handful of projects over the last 5 years have had a beneficiary group focus for those from the LGBTQ+ community, people with physical disabilities or older people. This is surprising given the cultural sector's recent focus on creative health including arts and older people.
35. Over the last 5 years the ILTC has not funded any projects with a primary focus on beneficiaries with learning disabilities.

Table 12		
Main grant beneficiary group/s	Number of grants	% of grants
General beneficiaries/ no specific target groups	33	69%
Children < 11yr	14	29%
Young People/Youth 11-25yr	12	25%
People from minoritised ethnic groups	12	25%
Tourists and day trippers	6	13%
Families	5	10%
Refugees & Asylum seekers	4	8%
LGBTQ+	2	4%
People living in poverty	2	4%
People with physical disabilities	1	2%
Older people	1	2%

People with learning disabilities	0	0%
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Recommendations

36. The primary purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the 'Central Grants Programme: Inspiring London Through Culture' over the last five years to illustrate the impact of the fund in delivering both Destination City and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.
37. Analysis has evidenced the significant contribution of the ILTC in delivering both Destination City and the City of London's Corporate Strategies. This represents excellent value for money given the small value of the fund in relation to its breadth of impacts.
38. The Culture Team has undertaken extensive consultation to develop a new Cultural Strategy for the City of London. The ILTC funding programme's policy is due to be reviewed to ensure it aligns with the new strategy's priorities. As part of that review it is recommended that the following key issues identified in the above paper be considered:
 - i. Analysis of the ILTC fund is undertaken annually to track trends in funding.
 - ii. Statistics from the ILTC analysis are incorporated into assessment report recommendations to provide context and arguments for future investment in sectors where there has been historically low ILTC investment, for example grants to visual arts and heritage projects.
 - iii. Review the pros and cons of identifying funding priorities in addition to funding criteria in enabling the funding of a wide range of projects versus creating a clear strategic focus for investment.
 - iv. Review of the pros and cons of ILTC Panel decision-making process in relation to 'salami-slicing' applicant project budgets in order to award grants across a broad spectrum of artforms and size of organisation.
 - v. Review the pros and cons of holding a single funding round each year versus the flexibility for applicants of a rolling-deadline.
 - vi. Consider whether receipt of pre-application advice from either CFCMT or the Culture Team should be made mandatory for first time applicants to the fund.
 - vii. Review and update the ILTC web pages to provide additional pre-application information for potential applicants.
 - viii. Culture Team to seek additional funding to meet increasing demand for ILTC support.

Appendix A

Inspiring London Through Culture Fund: Core Criteria

- i. Promote access for all to participate in the City of London's cultural offer
- ii. Enhance London's creative future through championing excellence in the development of innovative practice and/or skills
- iii. Deliver positive social impact through culture and/or heritage in the City of London
- iv. Support the development of the City of London's Destination City

Key information and learning questions
What is the total ILTC grant allocation/year? Total invested over last 5 years?
How many ILTC grants have been awarded/year? Total number of grants awarded?
What is the spread of grants in terms of value & number? How has this changed over time?
What is the demand for ILTC funding (total number of applications) and how has this changed over time?
What is the approval rate for ILTC grants and how has this changed over time ?
What is the percentage of repeat funding?
How are ILTC grants spread across turnover (size) of grantee?
How are the ILTC grants spread across organisation type (constitution)?
To what extent is ILTC supporting user-led organisations?
What is the spread of ILTC funding across artforms?
Which artforms are least well represented in the funded portfolio?
To what extent have different ILTC core criteria been met through ILTC funding?
Which CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes does ILTC contribute to delivering?
Which groups of people benefit from ILTC funding?