

Arts Festivals Summit 2026 Budva

Workshop on optimising the cost of funding

18 May 2026, 12.45 - 14.15 PM, Cetinje

Facilitated by: Fanny Martin, Music Biennale Zagreb

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Introduction

The first part of the workshop introduced the concept of the workshop. This was based around four questions to be discussed in smaller working groups by the participants.

- What was your most recent grant deadline?
- What was your last grant application that was rejected?
- Has there been a time when you did not get the full money you asked for? What did you do?
- Has there been a time when you were glad that you did not get a grant?

The workshop asked to consider the emotional aspect of writing grant applications and to figure out which seeds grant writers can plant in advance to make the grant-writing process a win-win situation, even if the grant is rejected. This is important, because grant rejections are frequent in smaller cultural ecosystems. Funding costs are not only financial but also include time, emotions, administrative work, partner management and invisible labor. Funding needs to also be measured in the amount of work it takes from a team to get it.

Case study

Milica Popovic afterwards presented several strategies and approaches from her own work at the Cultural Centre “Nikola Đurković” Kotor and her experience in applying for grants.

Four different strategies were presented to use to still get value out of a rejected grant application: Resize. Phrase. Rebuild. Reframe and reapply. The idea is to structure the project in such a way that it can be adapted and still implemented, even if the funding is rejected or only parts of it are granted. In general, ideas need to be sustainable, even without yearly funding.

For this reason, it is not recommended to adapt the ideas to the call but to start from a project idea first, which needs to be strong. Applications often get rejected because a strong idea gets watered down to fit a specific grant programme.

Group work

Walk around exercise

The group moved to the corridor of the building to start a walk around exercise. Participants were encouraged to speak to each other about the four questions described in the introduction. Participants had to walk around the corridor and stop to talk to the person in front of them upon a signal by the facilitator Fanny Martin.

1-2-4-All

The second part of the group work took again place in the classroom. Participants entered into conversations in the 1-2-4-All format. In this format, a specific problem or task is analysed first alone by taking notes, then discussed in groups of 2, then in groups of 4 and finally is shared with all present in the workshop.

The problem to be discussed was an application for an EFEEA grant. After running through the first three stages of the exercise, all groups of four presented their results to the other workshop participants. The first group presented a festival performance built around the theme of Cinderella and presented an idea of having additional income on the back of the received income through an after-party. The second group proposed a programme in which a young pianist would travel to Switzerland, the UK and China. They concluded that the budget of 7.000€ would ultimately be too little since advertising costs for an emerging artist would be very high.

Participants were encouraged to first choose partners and then decide on the project to apply for an EFEEA grant.

Conclusions

Raising money takes a huge proportion of festivals' administration time, unless they are among the lucky very few that can rely on an automatic full grant from public or private funds. For most, finding funds is a continuous toil of filling in forms, meeting external criteria and presenting programmes to unimpressed officials or juries. The workshop in Budva looked at the strains this place on festivals and the unsatisfactory outcomes.

At its worst applying for grants can be a waste of time and emotions for artists as well as administrators. A great deal of effort can be expended trying to form partnerships that then fail. Many find themselves lured into the trap of designing their festival programmes so that they conform to the demands of funders.

The workshop gathered ideas for 'gaming the system', finding ways to invent programmes that appealed to funders without diverting the festival from its intended artistic objectives

Pictures





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Credits

This workshop was part of the Arts Festivals Summit 2026 of the European Festivals Association's (EFA) hosted and co-organised with Theatre City Budva, with the support of the European Union and the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro.

