

APPLAUSE OUTDOOR TOURING

Artist Feedback Report 2023-2026

Summary of Responses, Impact Statement & Recommendations



Cultivating creativity
Connecting communities

Overview

This report draws on three years of artist feedback gathered across the Applause Outdoor Touring programme from 2023 to 2026. The programme is supported by Arts Council England as part of Applause's National Portfolio delivery, with additional funding from co-commission partners. Over that period, artists and companies working across a wide range of outdoor disciplines - from walkabout and puppet theatre to dance, street theatre, and interactive installation - were asked to reflect on their experience of working with Applause, the new skills and approaches they had developed, and the impact of commission and development funding on their practice.



A total of 28 responses were gathered across the three years (eight in Year 1, ten in Year 2, and ten in Year 3). The feedback is candid, detailed, and overwhelmingly positive - painting a clear and consistent picture of a scheme that is making a genuine, lasting difference to artists, companies, and the communities they serve.

Experience of working with Applause

Across all three years, artists expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by Applause. The organisation is consistently praised for clear communication, responsiveness, and a genuine commitment to the wellbeing and development of the artists it works with. The pre-show check-in introduced during the programme is particularly valued as a signal of care.

Payments are highlighted as consistently prompt - a practical but significant factor for small companies and freelance artists managing cash flow. The streamlined booking and contracting process is valued for freeing artists to focus on creative work rather than administration.

"Payments have always been quick, which my cast and I greatly appreciate." - Year 1 artist

"Amazing. The team at Applause has been fantastic... Applause shows are a dream. They have given me the headspace to focus on developing and refining the work." - Year 2 artist

"Information is always provided in a timely manner with follow-ups to check that everything is in place." - Year 3 artist

"Having the Applause team attend means the world, it highlights the care and investment that you as a team have for artists and does not go unnoticed." - Year 3 artist

Eventotron

Eventotron - the online portal used for contracting, feedback forms, and administration - receives consistent feedback across all three years. Most artists find it straightforward once familiar, though most note a learning curve on first use. The addition of post-performance feedback forms to the platform in Year 2 is specifically welcomed as improving efficiency.

“After the first time of using Eventotron then it became super easy to navigate. It is quick, paperless and easy to find when we want to go back and check the contracts etc.”

- Year 2 artist

“Eventotron wasn't easy for me, but after navigating it for the last three years, I've learned my way around it. It might be nice to offer newcomers the option of a short Zoom walkthrough on how to use Eventotron.”

- Year 3 artist



New Skills, Approaches and Developments

Artists consistently report gaining new artistic, technical, and logistical skills across all three years. The demands of rural touring - varying venues, unpredictable audiences, limited infrastructure - are cited again and again as a powerful catalyst for professional growth. Artists develop resilience, flexibility, and a deeper understanding of how to connect with communities that may rarely encounter live performance.

Across the programme, artists report developing skills in:

- Adapting work for rural and outdoor contexts, including weather, space, and audience variation
- Developing flexible, scalable performances that work across a wide range of settings
- Building touring logistics and production knowledge - from budgeting to trailer management
- Expanding creative practices, including puppetry, walkabout, co-creation, and electronic costume elements
- Marketing, audience engagement, and strategic planning for outdoor touring

“We have learnt so much about rural touring... adapting to different environments, the weather and the audiences.” - Year 1 artist

“This partnership... allowed us to... start with rural audiences front and centre in our thinking and show development.” - Year 3 artist



“We have learnt how to market ourselves and our show. This being our first show to tour and to make as a company, the entire process... has been a huge learning experience.”
- Year 2 artist

Touring also strengthens artists' confidence and professional sustainability, with several companies crediting Applause with keeping them viable as businesses during periods of wider sector challenge.

“Touring with Applause boosted our confidence with touring rurally.” - Year 2 artist

“We were able to keep the company sustainable.” - Year 2 artist

“I’ve learnt how to organise information into clear, shareable spreadsheets, as well as how to budget and work around touring costs - all skills I’ve developed through our experience with Applause.” - Year 3 artist

Artistic Innovation and New Work

Applause funding directly enables the creation of new work and artistic experimentation - particularly for formats and approaches that carry commercial risk and would not be developed without dedicated investment. Artists describe being able to properly research and develop their work: spending time in residency, working with dramaturges and specialists, and refining shows through multiple iterations.

“Simply, I wouldn’t have been able to make the act without the funding.”
- Year 2 artist

“The funding is what got this show off the ground.” - Year 3 artist

“Applause funding gave us access to take our show through a full research and develop process. We could not have done any of this without the funding given from Applause.” - Year 2 artist

Artists highlight opportunities to:

- Develop new performance formats, including walkabout, small-scale outdoor work, and hybrid static/walkabout approaches
- Test and refine shows across multiple performances and contexts
- Integrate new creative elements such as puppetry, music, interactive design, and electronic costume technology
- Develop smaller-scale outdoor versions of existing indoor productions

“After the success of including a puppet... I will certainly be including puppetry in future acts.” - Year 2 artist

“We have developed our outdoor sector as a company.” - Year 1 artist

“The original commission enabled us to create this new show. We plan long term to develop this small scale show into a larger scale production.” - Year 2 artist



Touring Reach and Audience Development

A major and consistent outcome across all three years is increased access to new and underserved audiences, particularly in rural areas. Artists describe the distinct quality of these encounters - reaching communities for whom live, professional performance may be a genuine rarity, and the lasting impression this leaves on both audiences and artists.

“Going to rural areas and exposing new audiences to high quality work and in some cases being the first live show that some children have seen.” - Year 1 artist

“Taking work to those communities where live performance may be a rarity.” - Year 3 artist

Touring through Applause also enables:

- Repeat engagement and relationship-building with specific communities over time
- Broader geographic reach than artists could achieve independently
- Increased visibility and bookings beyond the Applause network itself

“Having our show... on the Applause menu, gives credibility and makes our work visible to promoters outside of the network as well as within.” - Year 3 artist

“It has made a huge impact; we have been able to create small-scale work, with Applause’s support, that has gone on to tour more widely from it being part of the programme.” - Year 1 artist

Career Progression and Sector Development

- 4 Applause acts as a catalyst for long-term career development, with many artists describing a clear pathway from initial Applause support to wider sector recognition, further funding, and sustained professional growth.



“This was a vital stepping stone for us as a company.” - Year 1 artist

“Without the foundations and momentum... we would not have been able to experience many of the opportunities that we have, such as performing at Arts Fresco 2023, being a visiting lecturer at my former university, and speaking at the NRTF conference in 2023.” - Year 2 artist

Specific examples of career impact across the three years include:

- Securing further commissions and bookings within and beyond the Applause network
- Expanding companies by employing more freelance performers and artists
- Leveraging Applause funding and credibility to access further investment, including Arts Council England support
- Building long-term relationships with rural venues, promoters, and communities

“Instrumental in... getting support from Arts Council England for the development of the show.”

- Year 3 artist

“Without the infrastructure and support of Applause, we simply wouldn’t have been able to develop or tour our show. As a company of twenty-year-olds, creating and performing with genuine financial stability is almost unheard of - it’s been an extraordinary privilege.” - Year 3 artist

“Applause funding, in-kind support and tour dates for this show was instrumental in getting support from Arts Council England for the development of the show.” - Year 3 artist

“Having our show commissioned and on the Applause menu gives credibility and makes our work visible to promoters outside of the network as well as within.” - Year 3 artist

“It has made a huge impact; we have been able to create small-scale work, with Applause’s support, that has gone on to tour more widely from it being part of the programme. We have also been inspired to create projects based on this broadening of network.” - Year 1 artist

Impact Statement

5 The Applause Outdoor Touring programme has had a profound and wide-ranging impact across three years of activity. The evidence from 28 artist responses consistently points to a scheme that is transformative in its effects - on individual artists, on companies, on audiences, and on the outdoor touring sector.

For Artists

For individual artists, Applause provides a rare combination of financial support, logistical infrastructure, and genuine human care. It gives artists the freedom to focus on creative work, the opportunity to develop new skills and approaches, and the confidence to take their practice in new directions. For emerging and younger artists, it provides a foundation that would simply not be available elsewhere.

Artists describe the programme as enabling firsts: a first walkabout act, a first puppet, a first rural tour, a first co-creation project. These firsts become permanent additions to practice, shaping careers long after individual commissions have ended.



For Companies

For companies - especially small and mid-scale outdoor organisations - Applause provides the infrastructure to develop and sustain outdoor work in a sector where commercial risk is high and funding is scarce. Companies credit Applause with helping them grow their outdoor arms, expand their teams, develop new revenue streams, and build long-term viability.

The scheme's willingness to take creative risk - supporting work based on ideas rather than proven commercial track records - is consistently identified as a defining feature of its value. This approach enables innovation and diversity in outdoor arts in ways that more risk-averse funding models cannot.

“Applause massively impacted our artistic journey. It elevated what we do and it was recognised beyond our home town thanks to multiple bookings and trusting in us.” - Year 2 artist

For Audiences and Communities

The programme reaches audiences in rural and underserved communities who may rarely encounter professional live performance. Multiple artists describe the powerful effect of bringing high-quality outdoor work to places that are hungry for cultural investment - and the ways in which those encounters create lasting connections between artists and places.

“Outdoor touring, particularly to rural and artistically under-served communities, has shown us what a community that is ‘thirsty’ for cultural investment looks like.” - Year 1 artist

For the Outdoor Touring Sector

At a sector level, Applause is building a more resilient, more diverse, and more skilled outdoor arts ecosystem. By investing in new companies entering the outdoor sector, supporting established companies to develop new work, and creating networks of connection among artists and promoters, the programme strengthens the foundations of rural outdoor touring for the long term.

Applause funding frequently acts as a lever for further investment - with Arts Council England, festival programmers, and other funders following where Applause has led. This multiplier effect means the true impact of Applause investment extends significantly beyond the programme itself.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from artist feedback across all three years. They reflect areas where targeted development could enhance the programme’s impact and largely represent extensions and refinements of what is already a well-regarded scheme rather than wholesale changes.

Onboarding and Platform Support

- Offer an optional short Zoom walkthrough of Eventotron for new artists joining the programme - specifically requested by multiple artists across Years 2 and 3.
- Review Eventotron forms for returning artists not applying for new commissions, removing questions irrelevant to their situation.
- Provide clearer guidance on the administrative timeline, particularly around programmer handover and venue communication, to reduce instances of premature advertising or incorrect show information.

Peer Connection and Network Building

- Create a mechanism for artists within the programme to connect with one another - a shared channel, mailing list, or informal forum. This is requested consistently across Years 2 and 3.
- Explore a contact list or directory of experienced artists and professionals whom newer companies could approach for advice and mentorship.
- Consider a season launch event or mid-season gathering to foster networking, shared learning, and a sense of community among programme artists.

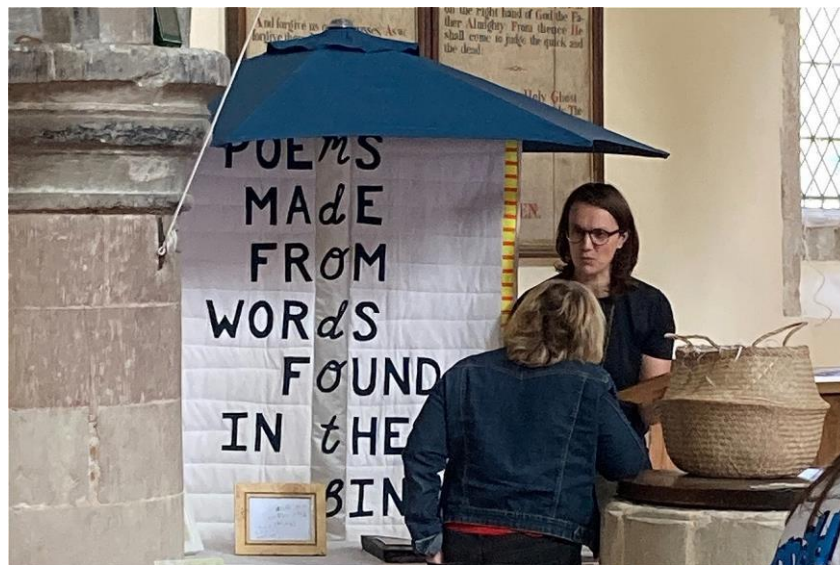
“We’d love a way for artists to communicate amongst each other.” - Year 2 artist

“A contact list of other professionals whom we might be able to talk to and invite to help with developing our own project would be a brilliant help, especially for younger inexperienced performers.” - Year 2 artist

Scheduling and Artist Wellbeing

- 7 • Review the number of performances expected per day, particularly for companies delivering multiple shows, to prevent artist fatigue and protect performance quality.
- Ensure venue and promoter briefings include clear guidance on artist requirements for breaks, get-in and get-out time, and scheduling, so that flexibility is genuinely reciprocal.

“With two hours of get in, three 35-minute shows, resets and one hour pack down - it’s a pretty full day and breaks need to be carefully considered.” - Year 3 artist



Financial Support and Commission Levels

- Review commission amounts in the context of rising costs, particularly for companies requiring significant R&D, specialist expertise, or technical development.
- Acknowledge that for some artists, Applause funding acts as a springboard rather than full project cover, and explore how signposting to complementary funding sources could be built into the support offer.

“I sense many commissions aren’t enough to make work in full, especially if you want to work with depth, the highest production values and integrity. Rather, they act as a springboard/ encouragement to keep going or find other funders.” - Year 3 artist

Programme Development

- Explore opportunities for nighttime and light-based work within the programme, particularly for artists whose work is designed for low-light or evening settings.
- Consider extending lead-in times for booking confirmations where possible, to allow artists - particularly those working with freelance performers - to plan more effectively.
- Continue to prioritise emerging and younger companies within the programme. The evidence strongly suggests that Applause investment at early-career stages has an outsized and lasting impact.
- Maintain and celebrate diverse artistic disciplines and flexible performance formats to ensure broad audience development and an inclusive programme offer.

Conclusion

Three years of artist feedback present a coherent and compelling picture of a programme that is working - and working well. The Applause Outdoor Touring Programme is enabling artists to make work they could not otherwise make, reach audiences they could not otherwise reach, and develop skills and resilience that will sustain their careers long into the future.

What comes through most powerfully in the feedback is not simply gratitude for funding, but a deep appreciation for the way in which Applause works: with care, with trust, and with a genuine belief in the artists it supports. That combination of financial investment and human relationship is what makes the programme distinctive - and what gives it its transformative impact.

“It has been a scary but rewarding process with a good learning lesson to myself to ‘just do it’.

Thank you Applause.” - Year 3 artist

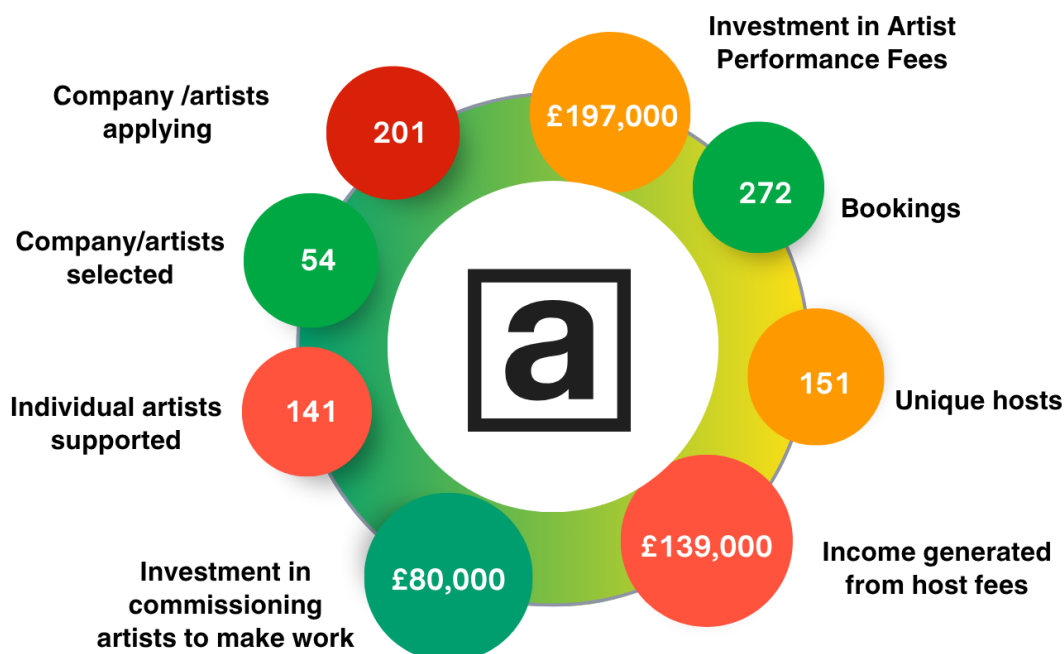
“Working with Applause since 2019 has allowed us to reach new audiences and think about developing work in a new way. Applause have communicated very well throughout that time, readily answering questions and making time to have conversations.” - Year 1 artist

The recommendations in this report are reflecting artists’ desire not to change what Applause does, but to extend and deepen it. The foundations are strong. With continued investment and the modest refinements suggested here, the programme has the potential to grow its impact further: for artists, for audiences, and for the future of outdoor touring across the UK.



Source: Applause Outdoor Touring Programme - Artist Feedback Survey, Years 1-3 (2023-2026). Based on 28 company responses

OUTDOOR TOURING 2023-26

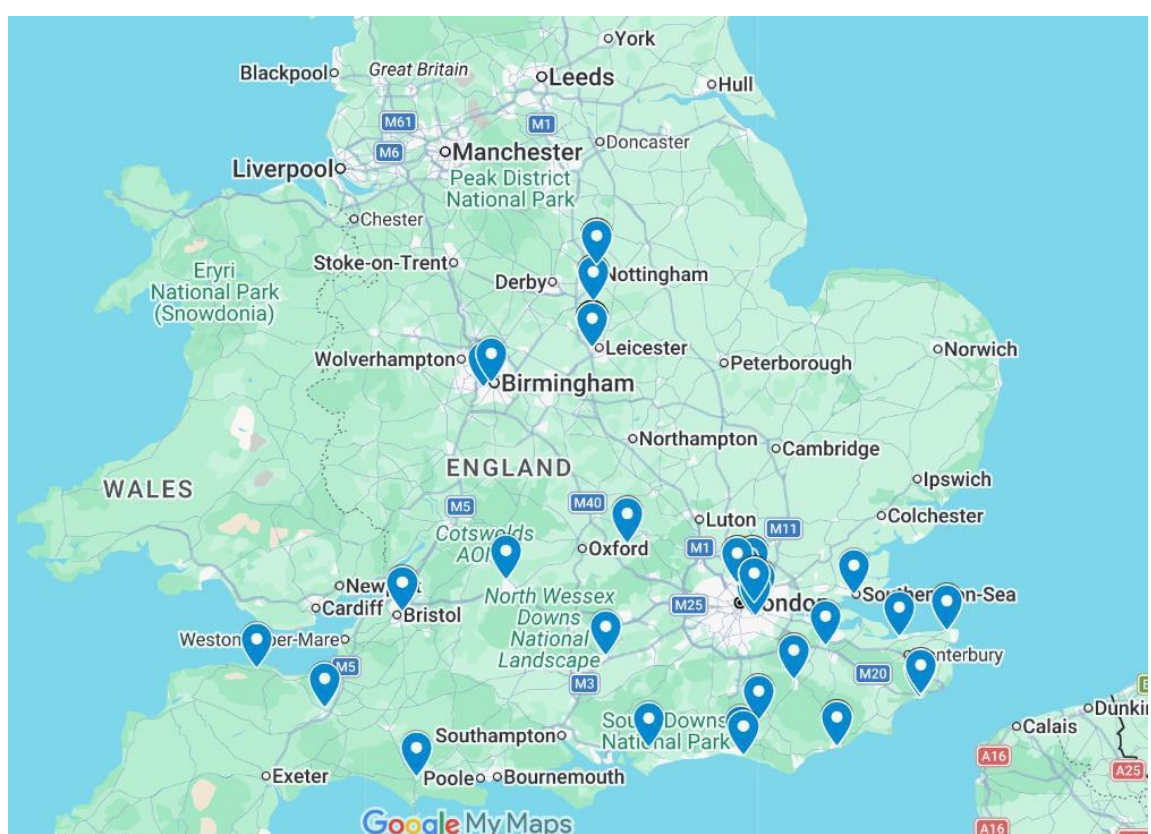


Artists supported to create and tour work

- Zig Zag! by Autin Dance Company
- Tidings for the Bees by Judith Hope Puppet Maker
- The Butterfly House by Handmade Theatre
- Stephanie Definitely Tells Your Fortune by I Am Jess
- Tractor Time! by MDCDC
- The Gazelle and the Hunter by Sonia Sabri Company
- Caspian's Storm by LAS Theatre - co commission with 101 and 1DE
- Wellbeing Wells by Working Boys Club
- Magical Market Stall by Scratch Built Productions
- The Elephant and the Drummer by Sonia Sabri Company
- The Jukeboxes by Bootworks Theatre
- Shed-ache by AKA Dance Theatre Company
- 55 Years by Stacked Wonky
- Aquanauts Adrift by Enter Edem - co-commission with Gravesham Borough Council
- Emoto-Matic by Four Eyed Theatre

- Puppet Petting Farm by Handmade Theatre
- Cracking the Crinoline by Moving Memory Dance - co commission 1DE
- Memories with Connor by Connor Turansky- co commission 1DE
- Daria Drake and the Dragon by Rust and Stardust
- Never a Gull Moment by Feasible Ferret
- Arcade Mini by Casson & Friends
- Ukulele Apothecary by Karina Garrett
- Library at The Edge of the World (Rekindle) by Touched Theatre
- It's Classic Connee by Daryl & Co
- Mughal Miniatures by Sonia Sabri Company co-commissioned with Creative Estuary
- Dubious Dolphins by Frank Wurzinger
- The Woolly Mammoth by Enter Edem
- The Allotment Project by Casson & Friends co-commissioned with Creative Estuary
- Laika the Space Dog by Lori Hopkins
- Let's Go Clubbing by Nearly There Yet

Artists' locations



Additional Information

Artists Lab

Applause has also run an annual Artists Lab - This practical and informative professional development event gives artists insight into how rural touring works in the UK and how to apply for commissioning opportunities. The sessions are facilitated by a range of artists and producers who have successfully toured small-scale shows in rural settings to share the low down on how to get gigs on the rural touring circuits, pricing models and producing tips, the practical do's and don'ts and what to expect when on the road. Artists who have attended the labs have gone on to be commissioned by Applause and work with other Rural Touring schemes.

www.applause.org.uk/news/rural-touring-101/

Community co-created work

A dedicated co-creation/participation strand supports artists wishing to collaborate closely with communities in the development and delivery of new work and often developed in partnership with other organisations.

www.applause.org.uk/about-us/projects/letsplaythurrock/