

BASA's debut online nurtures real skills for arts entrepreneurs

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The arts economy holds promise for creative entrepreneurs to be their own boss and create further employment, but business skills are key to making the transition from idea to successful enterprise.



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Now in its second iteration, Business and Arts South Africa's (BASA) Debut Programme transfers enterprise development skills to artists from all nine provinces through an intensive knowledge and mentorship programme. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic officially hit South Africa, compelling the Debut team to forge new ways of assisting artists with limited opportunities. Thus far, the programme has had to rely heavily on digital platforms due to the lockdown restrictions and will follow a gradual evolution into a mixed-model approach as the context changes. At present, this has translated to the programme running exclusively via WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom. The result has been a lean, agile approach to online engagement, with the programme reassigned to an entirely digital space.

According to Mr Vusumuzi Mkhize, director-general of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC): "The Debut Programme's primary vision continues to align to the current drive from the entire sector's commitment to uplift, support and bringing relief to creatives."

Divided into three phases, Kickstarter, Hlanganisa and Catalyst, the current iteration of the programme has engaged 648

participants to date, and awarded grants to the value of R2,700,000 to seed exciting creative ideas.

A broad cross-section of young emerging artists was selected from the 1,885 applicants who submitted their videos, residents of both rural or peri-urban areas nationally, between the ages of 18 and 35. Beginning with the Kickstarter phase of the programme, 358 participants from all nine provinces took part in the online workshops, and 180 of these were then chosen to progress to the Hlanganisa phase of the programme.

The programme is currently in the Hlanganisa Phase, where participants have been introduced to a responsive way of testing services or products and developing a new business venture online. This phase also includes mentorship sessions with provincial mentors/facilitators as participants work towards the inaugural Debut Programme Online Art Fair Week (15–19 November). This is an opportunity for the participants to showcase and take their products to an online market. Ultimately, Hlanganisa's primary aim is to ensure participants emerge at the conclusion of the phase equipped to take their product to market.

Says Boitumelo 'Tumy' Motsoatsoe, BASA head of programmes: "Through intentional collaborations with experienced, young facilitators, provincial liaisons as well industry experts, the programme catalysed a narrative shift where participants began to see themselves as assets, equipped with ideas and innovations for their own communities."

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