



Summary

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Operation Save the Industry

– State emergency support to sport and culture during the COVID-19 pandemic

Summary

The Swedish NAO has audited the financial support measures in the form of state grants to sport and culture in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our overall conclusion is that the Government and the donor organisations designed and distributed the audited emergency support in an essentially effective and efficient way. In particular, both the Government and the donor organisations have shown that they can act quickly and sustainably during a protracted crisis, where decisions on support have been taken in stages. At the same time, the audit shows that there are shortcomings in the transparency of the grant awards and that the responsible actors' focus on reaching out with the support to culture as quickly as possible has, to some extent, taken place at the expense of the efficacy of the support.

Audit findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit many parts of society hard. However, few sectors of society have seen their conditions change as fundamentally as sport and culture. In order to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, the Government has designed both general and targeted emergency financial support that has been available to actors in sport and culture. This support was designed in a short period of time, with limited information and at times under pressure of strong

public opinion. As a result, there has been a risk of inefficiencies in both the design and distribution of support.

This audit focuses on the industry-specific support that has been distributed in the form of targeted financial grants to sporting and cultural activities in response to the pandemic. The audit covers the Government and the Government Offices, as well as the donor organisations, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, the Swedish Sports Federation, the Sami Parliament, the Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Film Institute Foundation and the Swedish Authors' Fund. The audit concerns the granting of support from March 2020 to June 2021.

The audit shows that the Government decided on additional support for sport and culture in a short period of time, on several occasions, during the period under review. The high pace of decision-making was made possible through a close dialogue between the Government and the donor organisations. During the first round of support, spring 2020, support was designed under great time pressure and without knowledge of the severity and scale of the pandemic to come. Some changes were made ahead of the second round of support in autumn 2020. These changes helped to improve the efficacy of the support, particularly with regard to the support to individual artists. Minor adjustments to the support were then made gradually in order to further increase efficacy.

One of the shortcomings found in the audit is that some donor organisations, in particular the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee have not had time to investigate the grant applications to the extent they usually do. The Swedish NAO's conclusion is that the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee have thus in practice placed a great deal of responsibility on applicants to ensure that the applications contain sufficient documentation for the application to be assessed correctly and equitably. At the same time, many applicants were in unusually great need of help, as they were unused to applying for grants. There is therefore a risk that cases were not sufficiently investigated, which may have reduced the efficacy of the support.

The audit shows that decisions on individual applications made by the Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, the Swedish Authors' Fund, and to some extent the Swedish Sports Federation were not explained. The practice of the Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee and the Authors' Fund, where decisions on grants in individual cases are not explained, also applies to ordinary grant awards. The lack of explanation is therefore not only related to the increased workload.

The audit shows that the lack of reasons for decisions has created additional work for the Swedish Arts Council because the agency has had to expend resources on subsequently informing applicants why they were not granted support. The

assessment of the Swedish NAO is that it would have been more transparent and more effective to inform applicants of the grounds for refusal in connection with the decision.

According to the Swedish NAO, each donor organisation has tried to perform its task as well as possible. In some respects, however, a more developed holistic approach would have been needed, based more clearly on the applicants in the grant awarding process. The Swedish NAO considers that better coordination of the targeted support to culture could have led to a more efficient use of the State's combined resources and expertise.

Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Government:

- Review whether awarding grants in the field of culture can be better coordinated. The aim is to simplify the application process for applicants and to create better conditions for making use of the agencies' combined resources and expertise.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Swedish Arts Grants Committee and the Swedish Arts Council:

- Ensure that cases are adequately investigated so that all applicants for financial support are given the same opportunity to submit additional information if the application is incomplete. This is needed in order to make the awarding of grants more efficacious and equitable.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Authors' Fund:

- Develop procedures to explain grant decisions. The aim is to increase transparency and create more effective awarding of grants.