

Lights, Camera, Action! Using SPSS Statistics to extract meaningful and insightful data quickly!



The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is a public sector establishment that distributes public money, National Lottery funds and other public sector body contributions totalling approximately £12 million per annum.

This funding supports the development and delivery of a wide variety of arts projects, events, and initiatives, primarily across 97 organisations in receipt of core and programme funding throughout Northern Ireland.

The Arts Council fulfils an extremely important role in collaborating with and providing financial support to a wide range of creative organisations; from production to performing artists that engage with local communities to deliver arts programs based on themes that resonate with various groups across society.

Annual Funding Reporting Responsibilities

One of the main responsibilities for the Arts Council is to create the 'Annual Funding Survey'. From this survey, which 97 organisations complete, the Arts Council can assess each organisation's funding requirements by looking at their workforce, expenditure, audience, activities, partnerships, and finances. ACNI also collects participation and general engagement data from funded local community theatres and music venues. This analysis and output underpins the evidence that ACNI outlines in their annual report and is a crucial element of the annual fund allocation decisions.

"Now that we are using SPSS with Version 1 we are able to extract meaningful and insightful data from our surveys in a more timely manner. This has real business benefits"

Graeme Stevenson, Arts council Northern Ireland

The survey also allows the Arts Council to track the funding and income for each organisation which helps to identify any key stresses that could impact the ongoing production of events, such as the pandemic, the energy and the cost of living crises.

Furthermore, the report illustrates where funding for specific social themes helps to raise awareness of The Government's objectives, such as in mental health, and the impact of the organisation's activities within wider society. It also aims to demonstrate the value of using the arts to support key government objectives. With specific data analysis, the Council is able to identify the extent and nature of activity-funded organisations use to reach



marginalised groups such as older members of society, disabled, neurodivergent and younger people living in deprived areas, for example.

For the Arts Council, it is crucial that this report is accurate – that its statistics can be trusted and will stand up to public and Government scrutiny, as necessary. After all, its multi-million-pound funding is reliant upon the report’s analysis of where the money has been spent, how many people have been engaged, where more needs to be invested, and where it’s had the biggest impact.

Background – Data Analysis via Excel

Historically, users within the Arts Council were using Excel to calculate and deliver the analysis for the reports, which was hugely time-consuming, .

This was inefficient and unsustainable as a long-term solution, particularly as the Council’s own resources needed to be as productive as possible. With this in mind, the team decided to adopt an SPSS solution which reduces the chance of human error and delivers enhanced data interpretation for their annual reporting – a customised SPSS solution would also allow for a quicker turnaround of their analysis.

Version 1 SPSS Solution Delivered

The SPSS Team in Version 1 has worked exclusively with SPSS for over 20 years providing software licensing, predictive analytics excellence, analytical software, installation services, analytics consultation and training across UK and Ireland.

The Version 1 SPSS Account Manager Laura Watts was known to the Arts Council through a previous contact and reached out to Laura for assistance.

When working with the Arts Council, the SPSS team were able to assess the Council’s current methodology for producing their reports, understand what they wanted to achieve and what their budget requirements were so that a solution could be tailored to their day-to-day working and financial expectations.

Ultimately, through a comprehensive consultation process, the SPSS team was able to create a clear road map detailing the software requirements and associated commercial arrangements, outlining how this would help them achieve what they needed to do in the short and long term.

Once there was agreement on the solution required, the SPSS team provided the necessary information for the Council to deploy the solution software. The SPSS Team was available to support the installation of the software along with, highlighting the key features that would provide both time and analytical benefits to the end users, and provided access to a wide range of [online resources](#) to help the Council get started.

SPSS Benefits Delivered

The Arts Council team has benefited in many ways as a result of using their SPSS solution to help collect, analyse and present their annual reporting, including the following;

- **Efficient Report Creation & Submission** -The Council release the annual funding survey statistics publicly. In 2022 by using the SPSS solution, they were able to bring the release of the report forward by 3 months. The figures were released in September, when historically they are released at the end of November.
- **Syntax** – Syntax is a way of automating repetitive tasks. Utilising the SPSS syntax functionality, in addition to the GUI, Arts Council NI were able to rapidly design and implement procedures to collate their data, prepare it for analysis and save the process to automate the preparation steps for the next data upload quickly and confidently. Syntax has enabled the team to work quickly through all stages of their data analytics cycle; from data gathering, preparation, evaluation, analysis and reporting. They can do this with full confidence in their data and when compared to using Excel, can interrogate the data much more thoroughly.
- **Data Interpretation with SPSS** – The Council’s bespoke SPSS Syntax enables the Council to move cleanly from data collection to data interpretation. The Council now has a better understanding of their data and can run more advanced analysis for deeper insights. Their confidence in interrogating their data ensures that it is representative from all sector activities and enables them to stand by the accuracy of their analysis.
- **Forecasting Trends** – Their SPSS solution allows them to evaluate key trends over time – an activity they were unable to do when using Excel. As a result, they can now build a multi-year plan looking at, for example, the financial trends of the arts groups and venues over a pre-defined period rather than just a point-in-time analysis.
- **Future-Proofed Solution** – The SPSS team’s consultative approach with the Arts Council established an understanding of exactly what was needed in the short term and what additional features or capabilities they would like longer term. Taking into account any growth plans, upgrades, additional user requirement and budget allocation, the SPSS Account Manager proposed a solution that would allow them to adopt an SPSS solution immediately, taking advantage of the software’s analytical and interpretational robustness, and plan ahead for any growth and additional analytical requirements as necessary.

Confidence & Flexibility in their Data Interpretation – The Council has complete confidence in the data reporting and analysis from their SPSS solution and are reassured that their decision making on funding is accurate.

- **Supporting Government Social Themes** – The depth of data analysis from their SPSS solution provides a greater level of detail in understanding the impacts on society from groups and their social themes. The reporting can point to where funding has helped to



raise the awareness of social imperatives through the arts and creative outlets and where more funding is required.

Next Steps

When looking forward, there are new areas that the Council's team would like to explore, such as:

- Text analytics: a feature that will allow the Council to obtain deeper insights from their data.

As the team grows, the Version 1 SPSS Team will be able to easily expand the Council's analytical capability within their budgetary requirements.

Finally, the Council may consider developing their SPSS skills further by taking part in Version 1's publicly available training courses run by our SPSS experts. Alternatively, our tailored courses, which are designed to the specific needs of each client, could also be of value.

About Version 1 – IBM SPSS Analytics Partner

Over 20 years of Version 1 SPSS Analytics delivering data excellence, providing analytical software, installation services, analytical consultation and training.

Version 1 works together with organisations to supply the right analytical software, design the best solution for your requirements and provide all the support and services for you to excel in your analytical journey.

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