

WHAT DOES EASE FEEL LIKE FOR YOU?

Hello, welcome to Easeful DYCP: ways towards spacious project design and gentle application submission.

This is an audio guide designed to help you find a way to make the experience of applying for dycp more easeful.

We'll explore the reality of applying for dycp, and how this often makes people feel, and then I'll take you through some journalling prompts where we explore what ease feels like for you. By the end of the session hopefully you will have some clarity about what you would like your dycp application process to feel like, have identified what support or resources you need to help you with this, and feel confident that you can access them.

Intro to me

So before we begin talking about making your experience of dycp easeful, I'm going to introduce myself as you may not know much about me.

I'm Melody and I use they/them pronouns.

I 'm committed to working with professional artists, designers & contemporary craft makers who want to build ethical and sustainable creative practices full of care. Care for themselves, care for other people and care for the planet.

I take a trauma-informed, holistic, person-centred approach to my mentoring practice. Which is underpinned by a commitment to social and climate justice, informed by ongoing engagement with intersectional feminism, decolonial shadow work, radical imagination and post-capitalist futures.

As a queer person myself I offer an LGBTQIA+ affirming space.

I have many clients who are neurodiverse as well as people living with chronic illness or other physical and mental health issues. I have chronic health issues – migraines and long covid – and I want the work I do to tend to cultures of care for everyone within structures that are not built to care for us.

This work is conducted with an awareness of how everything we do with our creative practices is situated within the wider context of our lives and the world – so everything that is relevant to you as a human living through the polycrisis is welcomed and honoured with me.

My dycp work

In my work I regularly support people with their dycp applications, at all stages in the process. Sometimes I work with people on just completing the application form, offering more of a writing, proof reading/editing service, although I don't find this as satisfying. I prefer to be involved in the project design process. In an ideal world I come onboard quite early on, while the ideas are still forming and the project is yet to take shape, while there is still so much possibility and potential for things to be honed exactly the way it needs for the client. In the past 5 years I've been fortunate enough to have my mentoring be included in 5 successful dycp applications which means that we've been able to continue the work together beyond the application, having the expanse of a full year to explore and reflect on how the work is developing. This is the work I love. Getting to know a client and their practice in depth, walking with them on this journey.

Sometimes in the past people would include me in their dycp applications without my knowledge or would email to ask for my fee details because they wanted to put mentoring in the budget. But they would not ask to work on the project design or application with me. And this always felt strange. I think it's going to be a much better working relationship where we've been in it together from the start. And so from now on I won't say yes to being included in someone's project unless we have worked together on the project development.

You don't need to include mentoring or coaching in your dycp project but I do think it's a great idea for many reasons. The obvious one is that you have a companion in your journey who is solely focused on your experience and facilitating you achieving everything you set out to do. The mentoring can be used as a project management tool – a regular check in or accountability for keeping things moving along, but it works best when it offers you a regular space for reflection about how things are going, how you feel about what is happening. It enables you to respond to changes and adapt, it provides a structure of support when sometimes things may feel in flux. And, it's helpful from an evaluation point of view which makes writing your project report at the end easier.

So although this isn't a hard sell on my services, I would say that it's worth considering including mentoring or coaching in your project, and talking to that person as early as possible so that you have time to decide if it's a good fit and the right kind of support. I like to think that the work we might do together, in the process of applying and then in the heart of the project, allows for and promotes a sense of ease which can often be hard to achieve alone.

The reality of dycp

When dycp was launched in 2018 it was such a welcome addition to the funding landscape – offering people support for intensive focus on their practices which didn't have restrictions like other funding sources (ie weren't restricted by discipline, material, outcome etc) and which gave them the financial security to take risks. But unsurprisingly it's been incredibly popular and as the rounds have gone by the chances of success have decreased. (Now at around 20%).

Getting dycp funding is obviously a fantastic thing, but being unsuccessful does not, I believe, say anything about you as a person or as an artist. It isn't a reflection on the quality of your work or your ideas, merely that the competition is fierce and the selection process is opaque and hard to predict.

I have no doubt that there are many applications that are of poor quality – people applying with not enough time so the ideas haven't come together, not budgeting properly or considering the criteria that ACE wants you to meet. But in my experience with my clients, even really well designed, excellently expressed applications have not secured the funding. I don't believe that an unsuccessful application was necessarily a poor one. I suspect that ACE is under an enormous amount of pressure to ensure that the public money it gives to artists meets the criteria it promises. And because of this each round is potentially different to the previous one. The selectors have to balance a diversity of practice with a range of activities that will contribute to the organisation's aims. There may also be unspoken preferences which could influence their choices.

Because of this I don't think there's any trick to a successful application. I don't think you can hack or game the system. I think the only way to get a successful application is to design the best project for you and your practice, that is relevant and necessary, that also meets the criteria and aims ACE outlines in all its guidance documents. This isn't straightforward at all. It's hard work. And it might take multiple tries.

I want to urge everyone to try really hard to uncouple feelings of self worth from the outcome of the application. I hate to see people lose confidence in themselves or their work because they didn't get dycp funding. If you can approach this with a focus on the process – what you will learn about yourself and your practice. The potential that exists there, the ways you'd like to grow, the things you'd like to explore – rather than the outcome, then there will be the possibility of this being a worthwhile and satisfying endeavour in and of itself.

What does easeful mean to you?

I've called these resources Easeful DYCP because I'm interested in the quality of the experience you have while you apply. It can be a stressful experience, there's a lot of work to do, there's a lot of pressure and expectation, but that doesn't mean it has to be painful or overwhelming. I am not here to tell you it could be

easy, it takes work, but it is possible for all of this to be done with more ease. For things to feel different, maybe a little better. Some of this process could even be pleasurable or enjoyable.

But, your experience of this process isn't just down to your own actions. The context you are within right now will have its impact. This could be the context of your work, your health, your finances, your family and friends, caring commitments, responsibilities to others in your community. I also don't want to ignore the very real impacts of being a human alive in this world of climate collapse, ongoing genocides, the rise of fascism, to name a few aspects of the polycrisis. All these things will affect your capacity to meet the demands of your dycp application, and often they will make it harder. I don't believe in excluding any aspect of your life or pretending that these things do not exist so that you can just push through. When I talk of ease it is not to bypass the reality of your life, it is to acknowledge it all and to ask with compassion – where might there be small movements or moments towards this being easeful? What softening or slowing down might be necessary. Where can we make things more gentle, more care-full?

People's ideas of what ease/easeful means will vary.

So my idea of an easeful dycp application may not be the same as yours. For me an easeful experience is one that includes qualities like: being unrushed, having space to think, trusting myself, knowing enough, feeling open to possibilities. Ways I'd like to feel in the process are: capable, confident, connected, grounded, aware.

Understanding your own preferences for ease means you know what you are trying to move towards or away from, what conditions you are trying to create for it to be present.

It also opens up the possibility of things being different this time. Because you are paying attention to it. You can act with intention and prioritise the care you need throughout your experience.

Ease is not a destination or a fixed thing. It is an ongoing process of adjustment of noticing how things are and responding if necessary. It's an intention that you might need to keep coming back to.

We often have expectations of what applying for funding like dycp will be like and forget that we might be able to disrupt this ourselves. Forget that we have agency to tend to ourselves in the ways we need. To prioritise ourselves throughout the process.

Guided Journalling

Now that you know more about me and the work I do, and we've begun to consider what ease might look like for you, let's get started with the guided journalling session.

Make yourselves comfortable – get anything you feel you might need for the session (for taking notes, drinks, snacks, comfy blanket etc) please take care of your needs at any point during the session.

We'll take a moment to ground into the space today. Wherever you've been, whatever has been going on, for now we'll be here in this conversation about easeful dycp, so there is some time and space to put down the things that you have been carrying.

Take a look around the space you're in – orient yourself to where you are, what's there. What can you sense? How are you feeling in the space? Notice where your body meets the chair, the bed, the floor, the ground. Can you accept the support you're receiving from the earth, up through the furniture? Do you need to do anything to be more comfortable, do you need to move, stretch, yawn? Let your eyes wander beyond your immediate surroundings. Can you see further away? What catches your eye? Take a moment to let the sensations of everything around you meet you, and to really feel yourself in this place right now.

Gradually bring your focus back to yourself and the space you are occupying right here. Is there anything you can do to make yourself more comfortable? Is there any movement or change that you could do? If it feels accessible to you, maybe sit with your breath for a moment, not to change it, just to notice it's there.

The following **journalling questions** are designed to help you understand what ease could look like for you and the ways you'd like to feel during the experience of applying for dycp.

You might like to pause the audio after each set of questions to give yourself ample time to write. I won't be including the time for journalling in this audio and will move through the prompts. (You can also find a transcript of this session on my website if you'd like to have the questions to hand while you journal).

What does ease/easeful mean to you?

How would you like to feel during the process of applying for dycp?

What does the opposite of ease/easeful look like for you?

What uncomfortable things would you like to reduce your experience of (where possible)?

Which of these things can you affect/control? (Bearing in mind the context you are in).

Which ones are harder to influence?

How could you enhance or adapt your conditions (eg physical environment) to support more ease?

Who/what might you need to give you support to help things be more easeful?

What things do you need to take into account/be mindful of that might affect your ability to feel ease during this process?

How will you extend yourself compassion when the moments of dis-ease inevitably arise?

Reflecting and taking practical steps:

With what you've discovered about what ease could look like/feel like for you, what do you need to know or learn to do next? Spend some time making notes about what the next steps could look like for you. Things you might like to consider are:

What parts of the dycp application are concerning you most?

Where would you like to introduce more ease?

How will you do this? Who/what could you ask for support? (Get specific, and don't forget to include all the things - human and non human - that feel supportive)

How will you resource yourself for this work? And, how are you already resourced? Consider all the ways you know how to tend to yourself emotionally and physically, all the things you already do that help you feel soothed, fortified, energised. Maybe this is a good time to re-connect with practices that have been forgotten or that you know would help but haven't tried yet. (I have a pdf called 'Resourcing yourself' that might be helpful here).

The goal here isn't to create a rigid, fixed plan of action on how you're going to make applying for dycp more easeful (doesn't that sound like an oxymoron?) instead it's to remind yourself that you already have an intuitive sense of what ease could look like for you, what adaptations, changes or interventions you might need to make at any point to shift things (even slightly) from dis- ease to something different.

The process of applying for dycp will almost certainly be challenging, but it doesn't have to be drudgery or painful. I hope this short exploration into the concept of introducing ease has reminded you of your agency within this process, and has uncovered a wealth of wonderful ways you already know to support yourself in stressful times.