

# Debut programme empowers new graduates with entrepreneurial skills

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Despite its low barrier to entry, the cultural sector can be difficult to navigate without business skills, strategic vision and marketing expertise. Meeting the need to provide creatives with these entrepreneurial skills, the Business and Arts South Africa (Basa) Debut programme, with the support of the Department of Sports, Arts & Culture, has completed the second iteration of the Debut programme with the graduation of 24 participants in Cape Town on 24 November 2022.



Their graduation, at the Homecoming Centre, also gave the public an opportunity to see an exhibition of the businesses and products owned by the graduate 'artpreneurs'.

The three-year programme of intensive workshops, mentoring and product development began with a selection process across all nine provinces. Successful applicants began on the Kickstarter phase, a series of engagement workshops, Facebook live sessions, mentorship, networking and grant funding. 180 candidates were then shortlisted for the second round, Hlanganisa Phase, with further workshops, mentorship, grant funding, networking and the Debut online art fair for the Hlanganisa participants.

Through an independent adjudication process, 54 shortlisted candidates (six from each province) from the Hlanganisa Phase were assessed for the next (Catalyst) phase based on their achievement of multiple business milestones and on public votes generated in the Debut Online Art Fair.

In celebration of Basa's 25-year anniversary, 25 'Catalysts' were selected instead of the original 18. Although one candidate was sadly not able to conclude their programme, the rest of the group graduated on 24 November 2022.

Says Basa CEO, Ashraf Johaardien: "The Debut programme unfolds over time with participants slowly growing and refining their businesses and applying what they have learnt. Time and mentorship are among the most valuable quantities in the growth of any entrepreneurial skill set, and we hope our graduates will look back over these three years to note their

progress before further applying all they have learned.”

In total, the project impacted 450 participants who were collectively awarded grants to the value of R2,7m to seed exciting creative ideas.

“The Debut Programme is a focused and strategic empowerment project for creative entrepreneurs. Too often creativity and business skills seem to be thought of as two different compartments when in fact they are essential elements of any creative business. We wish the graduates well on their journey,” said Minister Nathi Mthethwa, Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

The 2020–2022 cohort were given a particularly challenging set of circumstances with Covid lockdowns necessitating an abrupt digital transition. This did, however, have the benefit of cultivating valuable digital skills and investment in technology for the participants. The inclusion of Yoco as a partner on the project enabled the participants to trade with handheld mobile devices and accept digital payments.

All Debut participants have been invited to join the Debut Alumni Network. A closed group for previous participants to share, network and develop ideas.

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