

Innovative approaches to growing private sector support for arts and culture

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*Since its creation in 1988 the **Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland** has been the catalyst, driver or supporter of a number of innovative approaches to growing private sector support for arts and culture. Here are just a few.*

The Sponsors Club

Set up in 1990/1 by North East businesses and hosted at the Community Foundation, The Sponsors Club was the first and central plank of the Foundation's engagement with arts and culture. There were two drivers for its creation. Firstly a few big companies who understood the benefits of arts sponsorship were being asked to sponsor everything and wanted to encourage others to be involved and benefit. Secondly, although Arts & Business (then ABSA) existed and looked after the Government's Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme, the region felt it was a poor relation, a satellite of ABSA Leeds.

The initial idea to come together came from English Estates who suggested using match funding to incentivise other companies to support the arts. Along with Northern Electric, Tyne Tees and BT, they met with Northern Arts, ABSA and The Arts Council, agreed a structure and became the founder members of The Sponsors Club putting their membership fees into a match funding pot held by the Community Foundation. Other major companies soon followed including Northumbrian Water, Northern Rock, and P&G. A business and their arts partner could apply for £1 of match funding for every £1 of the businesses sponsorship up to a certain amount. The business had to be a first time sponsor of the arts in the region and the match funding had to be used for additional activity to enhance the relationship. The first 'Sponsors Club Awards' were given in 1991 and the scheme sat at the heart of The Sponsors Club until 2011 when the scheme ended. In that time our 68 business members supported 306 arts organisations to partner with 620 new business sponsors across the North East. Our total investment was just under £900,000 against business sponsorship of at least £2.5million.

The Sponsors Club – More than just match funding

With the awards at the core, the partners were also keen to provide their expertise and sponsorship advice to businesses and their arts partners. After an informal beginning and with support from Arts Council and the expansion of the team this area of work developed to include over 200 one-to-one meetings with artists, arts organisations and businesses a year as well as training sessions and other initiatives to grow corporate engagement further. In 2000 The Sponsors Club partnered with Arts & Business to deliver A&B's activities in the North East.

Over the years The Sponsors Club ran a number of schemes to get businesses engaged in the arts. The Sponsors Club ran artist residences, creative training, placed business people on the boards of arts organisations and even created and curated its own contemporary art collection – The Business Collectors Network (BCN). Another membership based scheme, the BCN bought works from emerging local artists and offered them to the business members for display in their offices. The collection was brought together annually for public exhibition. In 2011 the whole collection was gifted to the Laing Art Gallery to kick-start their own North East contemporary art collection.

The RSC – Sponsors Club to the rescue

Towards the end of their 1994 Newcastle season the Royal Shakespeare Company were looking at the viability of continuing to come to Newcastle. Concerned about the loss of a cultural gem to the city, members of The Sponsors Club decided to again work collectively to support the arts and deliver a package of sponsorship to ensure the RSC's continued annual residency in the region. Initially eight companies came together and pledged £150,000 for three years to keep it going. The support continued for the rest of the decade and the RSC still continue to come to Newcastle. Interestingly for fundraisers, the most important sponsorship benefit cited by many of the sponsors (other than keeping the RSC in the region) was the simple on stage thank you given to them by the RSC at the end of the season. Never underestimate the value of a thank you.

Sage Gateshead

The business plan for Sage Gateshead always envisaged building an endowment fund which would subsidise running costs at about £500,000 a year. A common practice in American arts institutions this was a relatively new departure in the United Kingdom. The Community Foundation was approached at the development stage by the Arts Council for advice about whether the sums envisaged were practical and achievable. The Community Foundation offered to manage fundraising for the endowment fund if it was to be held at the Foundation. The foundation's board considered Sage Gateshead was the "jewel in the crown" of the Newcastle Gateshead regeneration scheme and an outstanding cultural attraction. It was also influenced by the fact that there was such a prominent educational programme designed to benefit the whole community.

The Community Foundation took on the £10m endowment appeal appointing an appeal director, Lucy Bird, to work alongside staff at the Community Foundation. Lucy was previously the Development Manager at Northern Sinfonia – one of the contributing partners of Sage Gateshead and went on to become Sage Gateshead's Director of Marketing and Development.

The Community Foundation developed a prospect list and organised a series of cultivation events including a dinner hosted by the Duke of Northumberland at his London residence for national donors. A development board was established chaired by a Community Foundation Board member who was also a Board member of North Music Trust.

Sage Gateshead was by this stage under construction and a very attractive proposition to donors. The Community Foundation successfully facilitated gifts of £1m each from Northern Rock Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, the Barbour Trust and the Halbert family. There were also smaller but substantial gifts from The Shears Foundation and Northumbrian Water. Many of these donors were also donors of the Community Foundation.

The appeal also allowed for naming opportunities including the naming of the overall building which was costed at £6m. There was much discussion about the right levels for naming opportunities as there was little precedent for sponsorship of this kind. The Community Foundation made the initial introductions to The Sage Group plc, which is based in Newcastle, and which has not previously sponsored the arts in any significant way. Sage saw an association of "world class brands". Detailed negotiations were handled directly by

Sage Gateshead and resulted in the naming opportunity which received national attention and awards for setting new levels of arts sponsorship.

By the time this sponsorship was concluded the fundraising and development activities for Sage Gateshead had been taken in house with the endowment remaining at the Community Foundation where it continues to support Sage Gateshead.

What about individuals?

The majority of the over 200 funds at the Community Foundation support groups rather than individuals. Of the few funds we have that support individuals most support individuals to pursue arts activity. All the funds were set up as a result of an individual's passion for the arts and their desire either directly or in their memory to support other's passion for the arts. We have funds set up by musicians (Kathryn Tickell's Young Musician Fund), funds set up in memory of musicians (Alan Hull Award), in memory of actors (Sammy Johnson Fund) and in memory of dancers (Emma Newton Fund). By sheer coincidence all of them specifically support children and young people to pursue their interests in the arts, firing the ambition of the next generation.

North East Fund for the Arts

The North East Fund for the Arts came out of a discussion about a collective endowment for the arts in the North East. The Community Foundation had previously researched the idea in the mid 1990's but timing wasn't right.

The idea was revived during discussions about the future of The Sponsors Club following the economic downturn of 2008 as businesses tightened their belts and as the arts philanthropy debate began to grow. With support from Arts Council England, a feasibility study was put together in 2010-11. The research found an interest in the concept with potential donors and made two main recommendations. Firstly the fund should support local communities to access the arts and secondly to encourage donations match funding should be sought.

With The Sponsors Club 21st Birthday approaching there was a natural launch pad for the fund and the next chapter of The Sponsors Club and arts philanthropy at the Community Foundation. The 21st Birthday became a fundraiser for the fund made even more important when Arts Council announced their Catalyst match funding scheme. The fund was launched at The Sponsors Club's 21st Birthday Dinner in May 2012 just a week before it was announced that the Community Foundation had been successful in a bid for Catalyst support. As well as match funding the support allowed the Community Foundation to integrate the work of the Sponsors Club into its core offer under the new name Culture Partnerships.

The fund has a mix of individual and corporate donors with donations ranging from £1 to £50,000 and hit the fundraising target set out in the Catalyst bid a year ahead of schedule. It has already begun giving out grants to communities across the North East giving out 3 grants in the first year and 10 in the second. . A film of the first three groups supported can be seen here <http://vimeo.com/76048044>. The next challenge is to maintain donations without match funding.

How do these examples help others?

We are proud of these successes but can they be replicated around the UK?

The short answer is yes but it's not easy. Yes, because throughout all these activities the core driving forces have been three simple things; people, passion and collaboration. Indeed the North East even recognised it with the 'Passionate People Passionate Places' marketing campaign. However they are not unique to the North East. Every town, city, region of the UK has passionate people determined to make their community a better place. Add to this a willingness to cooperate and you have the makings of great opportunities. You just need to find a focus for the passion. The arts have been just one for us.

Sometimes the focus comes out of a sense of missing out or being forgotten about - usually by central government. Sometimes it comes out of sheer stubbornness and pride. Sometimes it's about a legacy, a memory, a monument. Sometimes it's about making a statement or saving something. Sometimes it's about creating something, exciting and new. All the time it's about making the place better. Better for individuals, better for communities and yes better for business and other partners.

Why wouldn't it work in your area?

Some say the geography of the North East helps. You'll often hear talk of how the North East is a 'village'. It is largely true that whenever you go out you'll bump into someone you know and every event has a lot of the 'same old people' but a lot of work goes into that, a lot networking goes on. People make connections because they see the benefits. As mentioned, this may be down to feeling left out by central government, by having to go it alone but that is not unique to the North East.

Maybe the issue is there isn't any money in your area? We hear that a lot and while there isn't enough there will be some. The North East is not the richest region and we have very few big companies headquartered here yet until recently Sage PLC's sponsorship of Sage Gateshead was the single biggest arts sponsorship in the UK. Not London, Gateshead. Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland is the biggest in the UK with an endowment of £60million and there are two other Community Foundations in the North East (County Durham and Tees Valley). Recent research showed that nearly 25% of all grants given out by the Community Foundation went to support arts activities in the communities in the North East.

Like for all income we need to make the case for the arts. Arts and Culture are important. They can be educational, economic and social drivers but they also bring colour and creativity, give us identity, provoke questions and above all bring fun to our communities making the region a better place to live.