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Case Study

Connecting with the  
business community

Karen Malim, Development Manager, Dorchester Arts  
speaks to AMA Associate Editor, Sara Lock



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

Following the loss of regular Arts Council England funding in 2015, Dorchester Arts has sustained its level of ambition through strategic planning and stronger relationships with its local community.

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**Case Study:**

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Dorchester Arts



Published 2016

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# Connecting with the business community

## fundraising for a small-scale organisation

### Background

Dorchester Arts had a long-standing membership scheme for individuals but nothing at a low entry level for the business community.

We had recently moved premises from a small 80-seat venue hidden away on the outskirts of the town to the Dorchester Corn Exchange. Situated on the high street we were now at the heart of the town and the Business Improvement District. It felt an opportune moment to start building links with the business community.

We wanted to keep the price point low to encourage small businesses to get involved with us and we wanted the membership to feel mutually beneficial.

### 50/50 Business Membership Programme

We pitched the membership as a 50/50 partnership with mutual benefits. Businesses were asked to make a small financial contribution to our work and promote our events to their customers and we would provide profile-raising benefits in return.

We made the fee just £50 a year to enable even the smallest businesses in Dorchester to join. On top of that £50, we encouraged those that could afford it to donate a further £50 to support our work.

We incorporated a 10% discount on brochure adverts into the package as an additional benefit and a way to encourage businesses to invest further.

### About Dorchester Arts

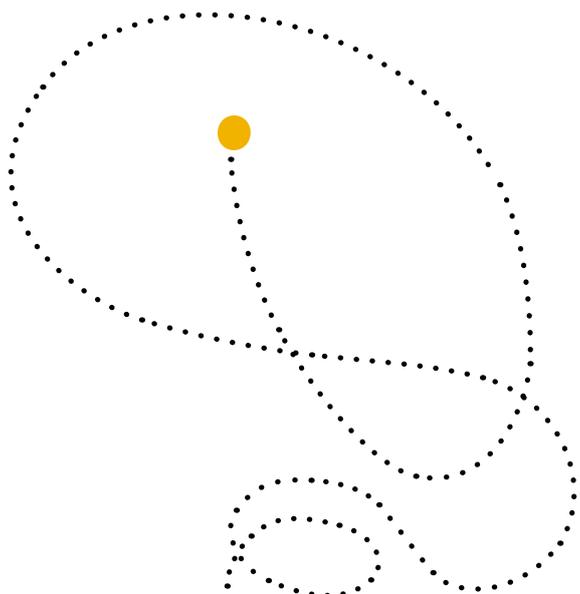
Dorchester Arts is a small-scale multi-artform organisation based in the heart of Dorset.

We're on a mission to bring the best of the arts to Dorset's county town, give our community creative opportunities and nurture local talent, because we believe that where the arts thrive people and places do too.

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[www.dorchesterarts.org.uk](http://www.dorchesterarts.org.uk)

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## Promoting 50/50

We launched the 50/50 membership through a series of networking meetings. Our Artistic Director Mark Tattersall spoke about the scheme and our belief that 'where the arts thrive people and places do too'.

We promote it through our brochure and website and I visit businesses to talk about the membership.

Businesses can pay online or download a form and pay by cheque or BACS.

## Making time

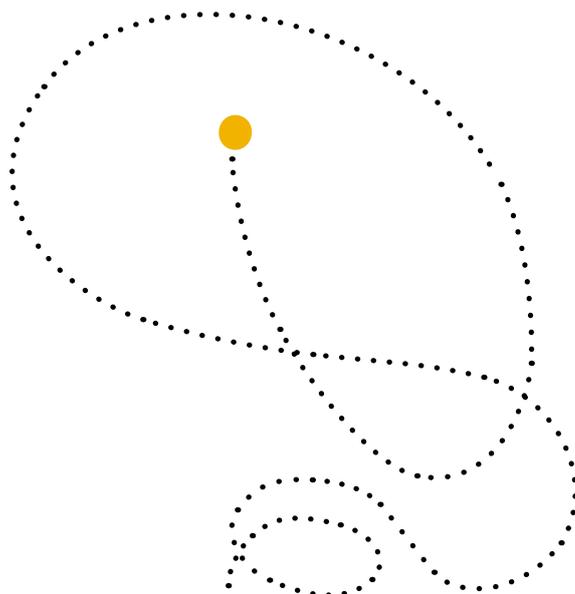
The team at Dorchester Arts is small and I only work part-time so being efficient with time is essential.

We have a brilliant volunteer who has supported the organisation in selling raffle tickets for years. He now supports me in setting up appointments with businesses to talk about 50/50.

Having a volunteer set up the appointments means I am able to make optimum use of my days in the office. It also avoids being put on the spot to explain the scheme over the phone. It is far more effective to have those conversations face to face. A volunteer can simply explain that they're helping set up appointments but don't have all the details and encourage the business to meet with me instead.

See how 50/50 is pitched at  
[www.dorchesterarts.org.uk/  
business-membership/](http://www.dorchesterarts.org.uk/business-membership/)

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## The results of 50/50 so far

It is still relatively early days for 50/50 but we have already signed up around twenty businesses. None of those had ever made a financial contribution to Dorchester Arts before.

Only three members have added the £50 donation on top of their membership so that hasn't worked quite as we had hoped. We are reviewing how we shape that ask and hope to build on donations.

## Extended benefits

It was never our intention to raise lots of money from 50/50. We wanted to build connections with the business community, raise the profile of Dorchester Arts and open doors for the future.

Events and galas are a key part of our fundraising strategy and 50/50 has provided a strong pool of business contacts to invite and spread the word. Members have bought tables at events or items in auctions and are contributing above and beyond their membership fees.

Others now advertise in our season brochures and attend or promote events for us. We have strengthened our relationships with the business community and are seeing knock-on effects across a broad range of income streams.

## The future of 50/50

We aim to achieve 50 members in total. We're currently working on plans to increase momentum again following the initial excitement of the launch.

We are also encouraging 50/50 members towards sponsorship. This will increase income for Dorchester Arts and provide more targeted benefits to businesses. Our focus is always on building mutually beneficial partnerships in order to grow sustainable income streams.

We have a range of sponsors including a drama sponsor, a fundraising events sponsor that contributes £5,000 a year and a communications sponsor who pays £150 per month.

## Recommendations

- Attend network meetings - you will learn about businesses you never even knew existed
- Get your Director or CEO involved - businesses respond well to senior staff
- Use a volunteer to open the door - particularly in small-scale organisations, time is precious and you need to use it wisely
- Value your volunteers and utilise their strengths and interests

