

Audience Development Guide

How to use this guide

You'll be glad to know that there are really only two ways to develop audiences:



However, what these audiences look like, and what you offer to reach them, is as unique as you are. So there's no one-size-fits-all audience development plan. But this guide will help you to put together a plan to figure out who your current and potential audiences are, how to attract them, and how to measure your success.

Firstly, the guide takes you through the thinking involved in creating your individual plan. It gives you some theory and tips to guide your discussions. Then at the end we pull it altogether into a one-page guide, which you can use as a framework for your own plan.

Audience Development – what's that?

Audience development is about putting the audience at the heart of what you do. It's often confused with marketing, but audience development is integral to all stages of making and sharing a cultural product. Most importantly, it is strategic and long-term.

- It's thinking about your audience before you create work – who are they, and what do they like, want, or need?
- It's linking your programming to your audiences – what are they interested in?
- It's thinking about your venue - who can access it? Is it friendly and welcoming?
- It's thinking about marketing - are you speaking your audience's language?
- It's listening to your audience - after it's over, do you know what your audience thinks? What about those who don't engage?

What it isn't:

- A one off initiative – it's an ongoing process.
- Just Marketing.

- Swapping current audiences for new audiences. It looks at **existing** and **potential** audiences.
- Thinking about how to get more "bums on seats" after you have created your product

Why create an audience development plan?

Relying on public funding isn't the ideal way to build sustainability over the long term. One income stream you can control though, is your box office and earned income. Using an audience-led approach can help you to grow your audiences and your income.

For organisations who don't sell tickets, audiences are still integral - even if they don't bring in any income. Think about your organisation's mission or purpose. More often than not it includes something about bringing the benefits of your form of arts, culture, or heritage to an audience. Without a strategic plan, you're only taking a shot in the dark that you're making an impact and your work is reaching the people you make it for.

What does a good audience development plan look like?

Above all, your audience development plan needs to lead to action. It should be a practical document, that helps you and your team implement change in many areas of your organisation.

The plan should be easy to understand. It should include a clear vision of what success looks like, specific key actions, and ways to measure if success has been achieved.

It is audience-led. It explains how your programming, products, venue, customer experience, and marketing are linked to and informed by your target audiences.

If you work in a venue, you might feel that you know who your audiences are – but you don't have any data to back this up. And if you're a producer creating touring work you may have no idea who is coming to your shows. So audience development always begins with learning about your audiences.

All good plans start with solid research and evidence. We'll guide you through collecting the right data so that you can make evidence-based decisions, and avoid relying on assumptions.

It's key too that your whole team and your key stakeholders have buy-in. They'll need an understanding of audience development, why it is important, and be willing to implement the changes outlined in your plan. Implementing the plan will be a collaborative effort – so designing it should be too.

For any real change to happen, your plan has to work in the long term. You should build in opportunities for review, and annual action plans, but the audience development plan should cover a longer period.

The Planning Process

1. Identify Your Purpose
2. Gather Data and Insights
3. Identify Your Target Audiences
4. Set Objectives
5. Outline Actions
6. Review and Refine

Step One: Identify Your Purpose

Your audience development strategy should flow from with your organisation's purpose. You can link it to, or create it as part of your strategic plan.

Your purpose is about the difference you are trying to make. It should be clear how audiences fit into this. For example, Disney's is "to use our imaginations to bring happiness to millions".

Identify how audience development can help your organisation reach your financial, reputation, engagement, and social goals. This will give you a steer on where you should be headed before you fully define the objectives of your audience development plan.

If you have other plans and major projects on the go, identify how audience development will fit into these and include clear links to these in your plan.

Putting your purpose at the heart of your audience development will help to give your team a shared understanding of success.

Step Two: Gather Data and Insights

One of the features of any good audience development plan is that it uses evidence instead of assumptions.



But sometimes it can be hard to know where to start especially when you're short on time or budget. And if you're a non-ticketed organisation, there can be a misconception that without box office data, there's nothing you can do.

Below we've outlined a variety of ways to find, collect and analyse information about audiences. These range from simple and no-cost resources that any organisation can use, to

more sophisticated solutions like box office systems. For more detailed information, see our [blog post on data sources](#).

Before you begin researching, think about you what you would like to know. Some things you might want to know about your **current audiences**:

- Where do they live?
- What age and gender are they?
- How often do they attend?
- What kinds of events do they attend?
- What do they think of your organisation?
- Where do they find out your events?
- What other kinds of things do they do?

Some things you might want to know about the people **who aren't currently attending**:

- Where do they live?
- Are there any barriers to attending?
- Do they know about your organisation?
- What other kinds of leisure activities do they do?
- Is there anything you can do that would encourage them to attend?

Remember to schedule in time to analyse and piece together what you find out.

Desk Research

Seek out any research that has been done already on demographics in your location, and common audience profiles for your sector. Our [Audience Insights](#) resources are a good place to start.

Ticketing Data

You might be in the lucky position that you sell tickets to your events or exhibitions. Increasingly, even free events and exhibitions are being ticketed to help plug the gap in our knowledge about these audiences.



To get the most out of your own ticketed data, you need to have someone in your organisation who knows how to harness the system to extract and use the data.

Staff Knowledge

You may have a front of house team, café staff, or volunteers on the ground in your organisation. Talk to them to get their thoughts on who exactly is visiting, and how they experience the venue or events.

Digital Insights

If you have no hard data about your audiences from ticket sales or research projects, checking out your online audience can be a great first step to understanding who is interested in your organisation.

With a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account, you'll have free access to audience insights that are built-in to these platforms. It's just a case of accessing them. You might have a google analytics account linked to your website too.

Surveys

Surveys are great at counting things, but can also be used to gather people's opinions and feedback in a structured way. When you already know what you want to find out, a survey could be your best option.



Focus Groups

Focus groups are less about counting things or getting an overview of your audience. They're designed to be more intensive with a smaller number of people, drilling down to find deeper insight or explore the things you don't already know.

Collaborative Research

This involves working with your sectoral peers to collaborate and share research. One recent example of this is the [Northern Ireland Museums Council visitor profiling project](#).

Observations and Insight

Use observation too - pick a selection of shows and see who comes. The aim of all this research is to arrive at some insights. Here are some examples:

- Family-centred events had the highest attendance.
- Programming a children's show during mid-term didn't work.
- All our bookers come from a 15 minute drive time – where does our marketing go?
- We have an above-average level of young people in our area, but this isn't reflected in our attendance figures.

Your insights may be things you knew intuitively. But now you have actual facts to back that up, enabling you to make evidence-based decisions.

Step Three: Identify Your Current and Potential Target Audiences

You'll need to look at all of your data sources to build a picture of who is attending your events or venue – and why. So, who should be your target audience to develop? You have a few options here.

Get your current audience to attend more

Once you have identified your current main audience you can see if there is room for them to attend more events in your programme. However, make sure that they aren't already attending most or all of the events available, or there won't be any room for growth. You could also focus your efforts on getting your current audiences to attend new types of work.

Attract more people like your current audiences

See if there are more people like your current audience in your area, or who would be willing to travel to you.



Target a new audience that has potential for growth

You might also want to grow new audiences too. This is a good option if your current audience target market has reached saturation point. You may also find from your research that there is a particular demographic living in large numbers near you who may be interested in your product but don't already attend in large numbers.

Diversify your audience

It may be part of your organisation's strategic aims to reach particular groups that don't access the arts as much as others.

Targeting 'everyone'

Sometimes targeting specific groups can make it feel like you are excluding others. But in reality, this allows you to focus your efforts in the area which will give you greatest return on your efforts. Here's an example...

It is a small chamber orchestra's first year to implement an audience development plan. From ticket sales, they found that their current audience base is 55+, well-educated and tends to book once every one or two years. They looked at sectoral trends and found that this demographic has a high interest in classical music. They also checked out the census information and found a large number of older people living nearby.

They decided to make their current audience their target audience. It is much easier and cost-effective for them to increase their current audience than to focus on a new target audience with less disposable income, time, or interest in the art form. Their shows are still open to anyone who wants to buy a ticket, and they welcome anyone who wants to attend.

Some questions to ask when thinking about potential target audiences...

- Do we have a product that will attract this group?
- Are we willing to create or re-package a product to appeal to them?
- Are there enough of them living near your events/venue?
- Can they afford to attend?
- Have we a way to market to them?

Developing Audience Personas

Once you have your target audiences it can be really beneficial to develop audience personas for them:

Audience Persona: Ashling, 36 - families with young children

Family: Ashling has one small child, Ben, and lives with her husband Niall.

Occupation: Works part-time at an estate agents. She has some weekdays off and is always looking for things to do at weekends with the whole family.

Location: Her family home is a 15 minute drive away from the venue.

Finances: She wants to make sure that a family day out is value for money.

Interests: She loves craft and DIY and is interested in improving her skills and meeting others through evening classes.

Goals: Finding somewhere she can bring Ben that will have kid-friendly activities and spaces, along with a coffee shop.

Marketing Channels: She keeps up with her friends on Facebook and plans craft projects on Pinterest.

It may seem trivial, but giving your persona a name and a photo to represent them will help make them more real, and allow you to think from their perspective. It's also a good way to get people across your organisation involved in and thinking about audiences - from the technical team to the volunteers.

Step Four: Set Objectives

Once you've identified the target audiences that you want to develop, it's time to identify exactly what you want to achieve. For example, increase retention of current customers over the next two years. Or have 5% of attendees from areas within the Top 100 SOAs (areas of deprivation).

It is best that all objectives are SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. It's important to not have too many objectives or attempt to be all things to all people.

At the same time as setting your wider objectives setting clear indicators at this stage will help you know if you're on your way to achieving your goals.



There are two main ways of measuring:

- Numbers (quantitative) – how many tickets sold, how much money made
- Experiences (qualitative) – comments, testimonials, feedback

You'll need to come up with indicators that tell you how well you're doing on achieving your own objectives, and in turn your overall purpose. You should plan for what times during the year you'll check them.

Step Five: Outline Actions

It's time to outline your strategy in clear detail, and list the actions that will take you to where you want to be. Connect products, programs, and activities with each of your target audiences. Decide on what needs to be changed to achieve your audience objectives.

When you're developing products for new or existing audiences, it can be helpful to consider the seven Ps of marketing. Go through each heading and think from the perspective of your target audience persona:

Product

Look back at your research – does this type of art form or product tend to be popular with this demographic?

Think about the features of your product: a small historical building, a circus school, a contemporary art show about science. Then think about the benefits of these for your target audience: experiencing history and stepping back in time, a fun physical and creative activity for teenagers, a chance to contemplate, reflect, and learn.



There should be benefits from each product that are relevant to your target audience. These can be improved, expanded, and emphasised in marketing. If you can't identify any benefits – it may be the wrong product for that audience.

Price

Consider the income of your target audience and price appropriately. Are there any pricing deals or promotions that could appeal to them, such as family deals or a senior discount? If some events will be free, you might still want to sell free tickets. This will not only give you an idea of capacity but will also allow you to gather customer details.

Place

This is about your physical location. Where are you and where are your target audience coming from? Is travel a barrier for any of your audiences? If you are targeting older people who may have mobility difficulties, listing disabled parking facilities, public transport, and offering to call taxis can help overcome this barrier.

This can also be an opportunity to think about what is around you, especially if you are a smaller venue. Can you work with other attractions, shops, or food and drink businesses in the area to offer a package or suggested itinerary?

Promotion

Think about how you can market your offer to your audiences. Identify the benefits that will appeal to them. Use language that is clear and accessible, and market using platforms, times, and places where your audience are likely to engage with it. For example, an email campaign to first-time bookers can be designed specifically to welcome them and encourage them to re-attend, suggesting another event that is relevant to their interests.

People

If you're focusing on attracting a particular audience it may be worth investing in staff training around giving them a great customer experience. Talks and tours can be tailored to suit the interests of different groups - this will involve the skills and buy-in of your tour guides. For example, dementia-friendly tours and tours for groups of teens from a local school could be programmed alongside an exhibition.

There may also be key stakeholders in the community who can help you to access hard-to-reach audiences.

Process

Does your potential booker have to click through a lot of pages to buy a ticket online? Is it easy to sign up for marketing mailings?

Physical Evidence

Is your venue welcoming and clean, are staff well-presented? How about labelling and signage – is the copy clear and accessible? Are there clear road-signage to the venue, and car parking facilities? For attracting families, you could make sure that there is somewhere to store buggies and heat milk, along with accessible baby-changing facilities.

Once you've identified all the possible actions, you'll need to think about budget, timeline, partners, collaborators, staff, and people responsible for each action. Consider your capacity and resources. This will help to decide what is just not possible within staff, time and financial resources.

Then, bring it all together in a timed plan. Sample part of an action plan:

Timeline	Product	Target Audience	Activity/Product Development	Marketing
Feb 18 – Aug 18	Mid-Summer Opera Event (Overall Budget: £40,000) (Audience Development: £2000)	Those who attended Christmas opera show. Persona: Susan.	Special café deal for seniors. Add transport info to website. Add easy-open doors to venue. Age-friendly training day for box office managers. Review in August.	Email with 20% discount sent out to those who have booked Christmas show in last two years.

Step Six: Review and Refine

As part of your actions, set out the points when you'll take the time to review how you're doing. How and when will you measure your impact and achievement of objectives? Keep an eye out for opportunities to collect data to keep your audience development process relevant and long-lasting.

Measurement of objectives and campaigns is important for a number of reasons:

- Learning – what worked and what didn't.
- Celebrating success when you've achieved what you set out to do.
- Internal reporting to your team.
- External reporting to wider funders and partners.



Regular reviews throughout the year will keep the plan on track, along with an annual review that can be part of your overall business planning. If an audience development plan is to be a long-term document it should have a three-year time-frame.

As you can see, audience development is a fluid and ongoing process. Your research and data collection will continue to feed into your action plan and your relationship with your audiences will strengthen more and more over time. Start small and identify achievable objectives. But keep your ambitions high. With an audience-led approach, you can make really transform how your organisation delivers on its core purpose.

Designing Your Plan

On the following page, you'll find a summary of what your plan should contain. By adding information and actions to each section you'll end up with a practical document that you can update and rework in the coming years.

If you would like some support with creating your plan, you can always book a free [Audience Appointment](#). For more in-depth professional support and services, check out our range of [Products](#) or [Contact Us](#) for a quote.

Plan Structure

Your Purpose

- Why your organisation exists.
- How audience development is part of your purpose.

Data and Insights

- Where you will get data on your audiences.
- Budget, timescale, and people responsible.
- Insights from your data - plus when you will review them.

Target Audiences and Personas

- Information on who is currently attending.
- Their demographics and behaviours.
- Who you are targeting (may be current or new).
- Personas.

Strategy Objectives

- What do you want the plan to achieve?
- SMART goals - eg. increase retention by 5% over next two years.

Audience Development Actions

- Use the 6 Ps to guide your actions.
- Connect products, programs, and activities with each of your target audiences.

Review Schedule

- How long the plan lasts for eg. 3 years.
- When the plan will be reviewed - eg. annually