

> Engaging your public

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JAM

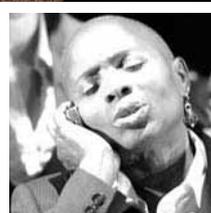
Time for a change of scenery

Mission possible

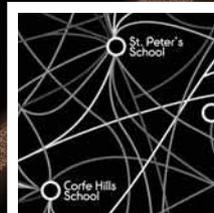
Public exposure



> Our city, our song



> Quality Street



> Real communities start with real people

Contents

> Regulars

Spotlight 3
 Research round-up 4
 Sticky Moments 22
 Resources 23

> Engaging your public

Time for a change of scenery 6
 Case study: Our city, our song 8
 Case study: Quality Street 11
 Mission possible 14
 Case study: Real communities, real people 16
 Case study: Generating audiences, regenerating organisations 18
 Public exposure 20



Photograph by Ruth Knight

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Research round-up



... a change of scenery



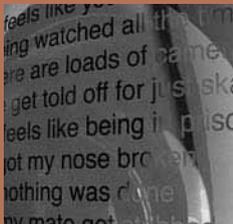
Quality Street



AMA member rep scheme



Real communities start with real people



Public exposure



This issue of *JAM* was edited by Katherine Dimsdale with assistance from Helen Bolt and Julie Aldridge. e katherine@a-m-a.co.uk

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Make *JAM* for the AMA

JAM is always on the lookout for new writers with good ideas for case studies and features, especially from some of those smaller organisations out there.

Have you got a case study that you would like to tell *JAM* readers about? Is there something that really gets your goat? If you would like to contribute, please e-mail: helen@a-m-a.co.uk.

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JAM is also available on the AMA website at www.a-m-a.co.uk/publications.asp

'P' is for...

'P' is already a magic letter for marketers and this edition of *JAM* looks at an alternative set of Ps: people, participation, partnership and, at the heart of it all, the public. The Oxford English Dictionary entry for 'public' offers some useful definitions – open to or shared by all the people of an area or country; involved in the affairs of the community – and throws some light on our role as arts marketers in bringing the arts and the public together. How do we ensure that we are open to the communities we exist within and involved in the affairs that concern them, while remaining true to our artistic vision?

This issue examines the relationship between the public and the arts and shows that the more personal the dialogue we have with our public, the more meaningful their engagement, and the more firmly we secure our place in the heart of a rapidly changing society.

Diane Ragsdale encourages us to embrace change and suggests how we might reach a wider audience by actually honing our products and services at the same time as broadening our communication networks (page 6). Ivan Wadeson demonstrates the value of revisiting your mission when it comes to understanding the relationship between what you do and the people you do it for (page 14). And Heather Stradling and Jonathan Goodacre share the lessons they learned about 'consultation' during their participatory arts project, *Being Here* (page 20).

Case studies highlight the benefits of partnership working and involving your target audience in all stages of the process from conception to realisation. Ros Fry describes an inspirational model of engagement with children and young people at its centre, the Cultural Hub in Bournemouth and Poole (page 16), while Matt Peacock shows that it is possible to make a real difference to people's everyday lives without compromising on artistic quality (page 11).

Heather Maitland gives us food for thought (page 4) in her round-up of research into the public's engagement with cultural activities, which leads us neatly onto the question we are addressing at this year's conference: why do some of us engage with the arts and others not? Come and help us explore this at *WHY? – discovering the secrets of public behaviour and the arts* at The Sage Gateshead in July. ■



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Spotlight on Anna Upward

In accordance with the AMA's little-publicised preference for local, organic produce – healthy respect for the exotic fruit but inclination towards the humble potato – I was plucked from a café in my home town of Cambridge to become the Events and Services Administrator. I will be 24 years old when this edition of *JAM* hits desks nationwide. Whether a person of 24 years should have lived enough to write 200 worthwhile words of autobiography is questionable, although any *Big Brother* star would doubtless vigorously and eloquently dispute this.

I was schooled in Cambridge and 'universitied' in Leeds, where I gained both a degree in, and a passion for, English Literature and Language. More relevantly, it was during my third year that I discovered my potential to become either an events organiser, or a fascist dictator: as president of the English Society I worked with a wonderful team to put on various events – trips to theatres, a masked ball, student vs. teaching staff quizzes. I was delighted, a year and a half on, to find that the AMA accepted these credentials so far as to offer me my current post. I love the structure and the planning involved in my role, and openly welcome any suggestions from members to improve the administrative service we offer. ■



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How do the public engage with culture?

Heather Maitland explores what we know about the way people experience the arts and what we are learning from this ...

Research into public engagement with cultural activities divides into four areas:

- What kind of people visit, attend and participate in culture and who is missing?
- What types of activity do they engage with and what is the crossover between them?
- What motivates people to engage, and what prevents them?
- How do people actually experience a particular cultural activity?

Taking Part is commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), surveying 29,000 people each year to answer the first two questions. Detailed findings for different regions and art forms are useful for benchmarking our own research into public engagement with our arts organisation and can be downloaded from the Arts Council England website.¹ You can download an annual report with data on visits to museums and galleries from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) website.²

Research into motivations and barriers to cultural attendance is abundant. Arts Council England commissioned extensive research as part of their *Arts Debate* published in February 2007.³

But a lot of the research into motivations is misleading, particularly quantitative research carried out by individual organisations. We have a tendency to restrict our research to what we think they ought to be motivated by, giving respondents options from a list we have compiled.

The reason for this limited view is twofold. First, we are usually researching whether we have achieved our stated objectives, e.g. whether a museum visitor has learned what we intended from their visit. Second, our understanding of how people actually experience a cultural experience is limited, particularly in the performing arts.

The most useful research takes an open approach, seeking to identify motivations by finding out how people experience a particular cultural activity. There's plenty of research into how people experience exhibitions in museums and galleries and a useful cross-section has been collected together into one book.⁴ One of the researchers, Colette Dufresne-Tassé, offers a psychological framework for analysing visitors' experiences that we could use in our own organisations. She concludes that adults don't go to a museum to learn something. Instead they are gaining pleasure from the intensity of their emotional and intellectual experience. They gain pleasure from seeing beautiful things and from managing to do something challenging and from using their intellectual skills to imagine, remember, reflect and modify their ideas.⁵

There is much less exploratory research into experiences of the performing arts. In the one exploratory project I was able to track down, researchers were commissioned to find out what impact pre-performance talks had on audiences' enjoyment and their confidence in interpreting dance. They discovered that audience members who had attended a talk didn't feel any more confident and

rated their enjoyment in a similar way to those that hadn't. What made the difference was the time spent after the performance thinking about and discussing what they had seen. The report concludes that the most effective way to build confidence would be post-performance events where the audience talks rather than listens to an 'expert'.⁶

So, why the lack of research into engagement with the performing arts? Perhaps because it is so much more difficult to assess people's reactions in an auditorium. Certainly, one of the key methodologies used in museums and galleries – recording people talking aloud about what they are thinking while they go round an exhibition – would be a tad intrusive in a classical music concert.

This makes Alan Brown's latest research particularly exciting. He explored attenders' 'readiness to receive' a performance as well as their reactions afterwards.

His results show that *how* people approach an event is important. People with high expectations of the performance tended to enjoy themselves more. The researchers couldn't prove a cause and effect between an attender's level of prior experience and knowledge and how much they enjoyed it because of the variables involved (the performance might have been awful) but there is clearly a link. The research also showed that most ticket buyers choose events that they feel comfortable with. Alan Brown points out that outreach and marketing before the event may have helped create an audience member's feeling that they are within their comfort

1. www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?sid=13&id=373
2. www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets/TT/Taking_Part_11721.pdf
3. e.g. www.artscouncil.org.uk/artsdebate/ArtsDebate_public_findings_summary.pdf
4. **Eilean Hooper-Greenhill** (ed.), *Museums, Media, Message* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995)
5. **Dufresne-Tassé, Colette**, 'Andragogy (Adult Education) in Museums: a critical analysis and new formulation', *Museums, Media, Message*, ed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) pp 245-260
6. **Glass, Renee and Stevens, Catherine**, 'Making Sense of Contemporary Dance: an Australian investigation into audience interpretation and enjoyment levels', downloaded at http://marcs.uws.edu.au/people/stevens/pubs/Glass_ConcConns_eforum.pdf (4/1/2006)

zone. He suggests, though, that we should explore other ways of increasing anticipation and levels of prior knowledge of the performance.

Being captivated by the performance and losing track of time is closely linked to high satisfaction with the performance. But this varies dramatically between different events and between performances of the same event in different venues. This level of captivation is strongly affected by temperature, lighting and comfort of the seats as well as the knowledge, experience and ability to empathise of the individual audience member.

Intellectual stimulation is important and Brown suggests that a possible benchmark would be the proportion of attenders who say that they had an intense discussion after the event. He also identifies a relationship between emotional and spiritual impact and levels of satisfaction with the performance. He argues convincingly, though, that satisfaction is too much of a blunt instrument for measuring the value of a performance. The most important outcome of this research is to offer us a toolkit of indicators of intrinsic impact that means we can phase out this blunt instrument.

You can download the research from www.wolfbrown.com/index.php?page=books. Or you can hear all about it from the man himself at the AMA's conference: *WHY? – discovering the secrets of public behaviour and the arts* at The Sage Gateshead in July www.a-m-a.co.uk/conference08.asp ■



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Audience members at 'Being Here The Event', Southend-on-Sea 2006.
Photograph by Ruth Knight

Time for a change of scenery

Diane Ragsdale recommends five steps to embracing culture change ...

We are in the throes of a culture change that has been evolving over the past two decades – largely as a result of demographic shifts, globalisation and technology – which is transforming the way people create, consume, commune and communicate. How can arts organisations adapt to this culture change? Here are five ideas:

Go cellular

Rick Warren is head of a highly successful mega-church whose membership is comprised of thousands of cells – small groups formed around shared hobbies and interests that function as social networks, fuelling friendships between church members. The cells are formed and cultivated by thousands of volunteers. In a 2005 *New Yorker* article on Warren called *The Cellular Church*, Malcolm Gladwell notes that church members who are in cells are more likely to show up at church on Sunday, stay a member of the church longer, and give more money.¹ In other words, the social connections that people form as an aspect of going to church compel them to attend and donate. To attract new audiences, arts organisations may need to foster small-group, socially driven arts participation.

Sample and share

While creating high-definition movie broadcasts like those from the Metropolitan Opera may be inappropriate or out of reach for most organisations, creating mediated experiences to catalyze, expand and deepen relationships

with audiences is not. If the premise of Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail* is true – that the future of culture and commerce lies not in creating blockbusters but in creating and mining niche markets – then organisations that do distinctive programming might be amazed at how many people around the world would pay to download their work – if it were available, free to sample, affordable to purchase, and easy to share with others.²

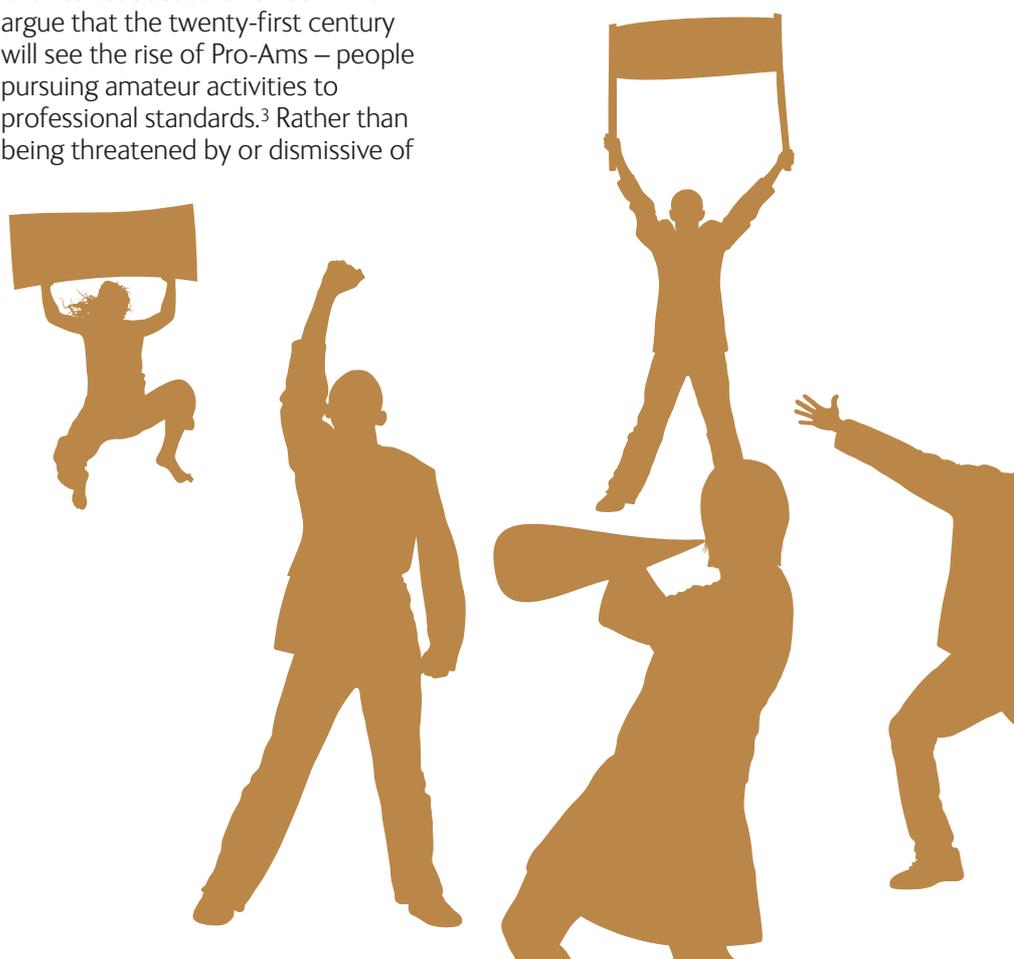
Embrace the Pro-Am revolution

In their 2004 pamphlet *Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society*, Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller argue that the twenty-first century will see the rise of Pro-Ams – people pursuing amateur activities to professional standards.³ Rather than being threatened by or dismissive of

Pro-Am artists and critics, arts organisations may do well to find a way to acknowledge and encourage them: for instance, ask them to host talkbacks, highlight their work on a website, involve them in the curatorial process, or invite them to write patron reviews posted as blogs.

Be arts concierges and filter

Consumers increasingly rely on recommender sites to narrow their choices and expect retailers to understand their preferences and market to them accordingly. Arts organisations need to move beyond transactional experiences and become arts concierges – trusted



friends who help patrons make decisions about what to see. Much as Amazon uses collaborative filters to make recommendations and the online dating service Eharmony uses surveys to match people, arts organisations could collect data on patrons and then help them make more informed decisions.

Aggregate supply and demand

In 1992 sociologist Richard Peterson coined the term Cultural Omnivore to describe the tendency of Baby Boomers and others to develop tastes for everything: high art and pop culture and everything in between.⁴ We may have a generation of Cultural Omnivores, but we've made it difficult for them to feast because we've created silos between non-commercial and commercial entertainment, and between the disciplines of music, theatre, dance, opera and the visual arts. In the minds of the consumer, it's all culture. By maintaining our 'separate and better than others' status the fine arts appear to be losing their spot at the banquet. Imagine scaling the 'arts concierge' idea above for an entire city. What if all the cultural products in a city were accessible through a single website and one could sign up to receive personal arts and culture recommendations via e-mail? In addition to making recommendations, the site could allow residents and tourists to create horizontal subscriptions, bundling artistic experiences across the product lines of the various non-profit and commercial arts and culture organisations: a 'Masterworks package', an 'Avant-Garde package', a 'Family package'. By bundling horizontally, one play in one season, or one exhibit in one museum, could appear on several niche packages. Imagine a demand-based pricing model like Priceline and being one click away from buying a ticket. Imagine purchasing a ticket to a play on such a site and then automatically receiving an interview on public radio

with the playwright as a podcast. Imagine purchasing a particular CD on Amazon and then being alerted automatically when a piece on that CD was going to be played by your local orchestra. In other words, imagine a Customised Cultural Omnivore Subscription. ■

1. **Malcolm Gladwell**, 'The Cellular Church', *The New Yorker* (September 12, 2005): 60–67.
2. **Chris Anderson**, *The Long Tail* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).
3. **Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller**, "The Pro-Am Revolution", *Demos* (www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy, November 24, 2004)
4. **Richard A. Peterson and Albert Simkus**, 'How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Groups,' *Cultivating Differences; Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, edited by Michele Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).



DIANE RAGSDALE

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Birmingham's our city ... and this is our song

Welsh National Opera in Birmingham

Welsh National Opera (WNO) is based in Cardiff but we tour throughout the UK with 60% of our funding coming from England.

Birmingham is of particular importance to WNO – we view it as our home in England – the only other place (alongside Cardiff) we perform our entire repertoire every season (at Birmingham Hippodrome). It therefore has a strategic emphasis on everything we do.

As a touring company one of our challenges is to feel owned by audiences in the cities we perform in – to have an impact and a place. In Birmingham it is more than ever the case that we need to be considered an integral part of the cultural landscape and not just as 'passers-by'. Birmingham has fantastic cultural provision (Birmingham Royal Ballet – based at the Hippodrome, CBSO, Birmingham Opera Company to name but a few). We too need to demonstrate value and position within the city.

A great thing that differentiates WNO from other opera companies is the approach and work of WNO MAX – WNO's enhanced education / outreach department, which also has the brief of maximising the resources of the company.

WNO has a full-time chorus and orchestra – creating significant overheads. MAX's job is to scrutinise schedules to make sure these resources are working hard for us and creating further opportunities. An example is where there is no male chorus in *Hansel & Gretel* – MAX created a show about why men sing, touring to middle/small-scale venues,

reaching different audiences. We were in two places at the same time.

City Songs

City Songs was created by MAX to engage with a wider public beyond our regular opera audiences. It was created with 250 children and young people, representing four Birmingham schools. They worked with a poet to create a text, which was set to music by a composer. Citizenship is a strong part of the piece and exploratory work, which saw them visit different parts of their city (Cadbury's at Bournville, the National Trust Back to Back Houses, the old Rover motor plant, the Canals and Highways agencies, etc). Involving singing, projected animation and speech, *City Songs* was performed by the young people alongside a professional opera singer, the full WNO orchestra and other musicians.

Four months of work culminated in two performances – one matinee for schools and one evening show for the public.

Taking risks together – believing your own arguments

There was no way of scheduling *City Songs* performances as an additional part of our Birmingham week on top of five mainhouse evening operas. For this project to be given due status, the performances had to take place in the mainhouse.

We decided it had to replace a mainhouse show, taking out one performance of *Carmen* – a popular production which would have achieved considerable shared box office income for us and the Hippodrome.

This represented a choice between short-term income on the one hand and potential positioning, regional profile and new audience engagement for the future. It was not as easy a decision as it might, with hindsight, sound but we both chose to sacrifice the short-term income – demonstrating our commitment.

This decision also required commitment and conviction from Birmingham Hippodrome – they too would lose income (a mainhouse show and secondary ancillary income such as hospitality sales). Both organisations had to believe it a risk worth taking and an investment in the longterm. Both organisations were keen to do more in this area, sharing definable objectives and imperatives – in a carefully planned, strategic way.

Along the way

Sales for the matinee started well – mainly to participating schools. The evening sales were much slower and became a real concern. Despite thorough, robust marketing and press campaigns the advance was fewer than 100 (*Carmen* was on 1,500 seats a night).

At times we struggled to retain our conviction. The marketing teams of both organisations had several 'why on earth are we doing this!?' conversations. With a low rate of return, the task of selling this performance (with negligible income) was draining marketing resources, diverting energy away from other campaigns with real financial targets. The impact of marketing an additional product to wider audiences as opposed to more similar products to a similar audience was significant.



The bull was photographed for WNO by Johan Persson with kind permission of the Bull Ring

On the night ...

We had taken a big risk and financial hit, so had to maximise every opportunity afforded us. Following a successful matinee (a full house of school children), almost unbelievably 1,400 people (80% capacity) attended the evening performance.

The audience behaved completely differently to our regular audiences – it was patently evident (and exciting!) how completely new they were to this

environment – not just to opera but to the theatre itself.

Everyone within WNO had expressed how committed they were to this kind of work so it was interesting how some people struggled with the reality. This audience's behaviour challenged some. Audience members moved around the auditorium to take photos, record and film on their mobiles (normally prevented as it would mean

a renegotiation of the orchestra's rights). They talked openly through the overture (like film credits), only stopping to listen to singing.

We held a post-show panel discussion with the city's arts educationalists. Some impacts and outcomes were discrete and we wanted to discuss them and engage in debate with key influencers and audiences. This was well supported with people demonstrating a real

appetite for this kind of work, giving us lots to think about in terms of audience development and engagement. The informal session attracted VIP guests from the arts community and the city council, local press, senior managers/governors and teachers from the participating schools, parents and siblings of some of the children.

Conclusion

How do we measure impact? Did *City Songs* achieve what we set out to? It is a long-term goal but all the indications are yes. We succeeded in maximising our resources and impact, reaching a new and wider audience and reinforcing the direct bearing opera can have on people's lives – and on budget.

Many of the participants are now involved in other work with the Hippodrome. One school integrated theatre into its 'local curriculum'. We wrote to thank every audience member for their part in its success and continue to invite them back, but it is important to state that repeat business for core programming from this audience was not our objective.

The opportunities *City Songs* afforded us to position ourselves in Birmingham in a different context and to re-establish our brand were significant. We created an image, which associated WNO with one of the city's cultural icons – the bull – used in all our print. A line of text from *City Songs* became the strap line: **Birmingham's our city ... and this is our song.** We achieved fantastic local press coverage (including the exploratory visits, film workshops, rehearsals, etc.). The marketing

included distribution of 60,000 postcards door-to-door in the schools' immediate communities and a further 60,000 city-wide. Some of the schools encouraged their older children to support the marketing effort locally.

This fantastic opportunity to assert our position in the city and engage with a wider public is as much the point as the actual evening attendance of 1,400 people. We continue to target the postcodes that received the door drop, regularly monitoring their attendance. Some have overtaken TGI rates of attendance for opera.

This project will not answer our every prayer – it is a part of a strategy. One of the most important things we've learned is about feeling comfortable taking risks, believing your own arguments, keeping sight of why you're doing things; and we plan another project on this scale for 2009/10. The McMaster report struck a chord – talking about engagement – with the Culture Secretary's introduction acknowledging the constraint of burdensome targets. We need to continue to engage more deeply with a wider audience and I am excited by (and only slightly fearful of) the further lessons ahead of us. ■



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Quality Street

Matt Peacock from Streetwise Opera shares the rewards of the company's commitment to quality

When an MP in the 1990s said that 'the homeless are the people you step over when you come out of the opera house', he inadvertently conceived the idea for a new charity. Streetwise Opera began as a direct result of this comment – a charity that uses music as a tool to support homeless people and help them make positive changes to their lives.

At that time I worked as a key worker at a night shelter in London where the residents were fed up with the public looking down on them and having misconceptions about them. Anyone can become homeless and many people who find themselves homeless had had very 'normal' lives that had been uprooted by marriage breakdown, redundancy or ill health. Residents were looking for a way to find public understanding and respect and here in front of us was a fascinating opportunity – by marrying opera and homelessness, two worlds that were poles apart, we felt we could send out a clear message to the public that homeless people could not only enjoy opera but could themselves perform *in* operas. This would help the public see homeless people in a new light and would earn them admiration.

What happened immediately was that in designing the concept, we realised that there was one vital element without which none of this would work – one ingredient that would provide the glue for the mission and vision for the whole enterprise: quality. It would be very easy for the idea to be seen as something worthy but ultimately tokenistic. If the productions were



highly professional and of artistic excellence in their own right, on the other hand, that would create real respect and understanding – not sympathy or pity.

Quickly, 'quality' became a central concept that ran through everything the charity did – the proverbial 'writing in the stick of rock' – and we wanted the entire experience and delivery of our work to be informed by quality. This meant that not only would we aim to stage productions that would be excellent (working with the world's best directors and singers), but that our engagement with participants would be delivered by workshop leaders who had had the best training and professional support staff would be at every workshop. We also wanted quality to be part of the organisation as a whole so that our website, posters, staff training, etc. were of the highest standard. It's easy to become obsessive about this but we felt strongly that if we could project this idea of quality running through the operation, it would ultimately make participants – a group more used to second-hand clothes and sandwiches that had passed their sell-by date – feel they were part of

something important and 'of worth'.

This is of course quite a challenge to put into practice – particularly staging professional shows with some of the most vulnerable and damaged people in society. We obviously don't want to exclude anyone and it would make a nonsense of our work if we were to cream off the most accomplished performers from our participants. But through providing a quality framework both artistically and in the way we support our participants we've so far been able to present shows of a consistently high standard – every one of our past productions has won 4-star and 5-star reviews in the national press and all have been at, or close to, capacity. Most revealing of all is that, as we hoped at the outset, the artistic quality has been matched in the 'social' results of the work: 90 – 100% of participants have experienced positive transformations in their lives. ■



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AMA Member Rep Scheme

YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

It is my pleasure to work with the member reps helping them put in place network meetings for you to learn new things and socialise at.

The AMA Member Rep scheme aims to facilitate networking between AMA members and, since its launch in October 2005, over 60 meetings have

taken place. We now have 33 member reps in place covering 16 of the 17 regions of the UK.

I'd thoroughly recommend attending a meeting. For £5 they're a bargain and the company is great too. Look out for the invitations to meetings coming from Anna and check the AMA website

over the next few months. And do try to attend if you can as I'm sure you won't regret it.



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Birkbeck College

3. London



Jessica Silvester
Royal Albert Hall



Edwina Vine



Charlotte Handel
Lyric Hammersmith



Jacqui Cassidy
Historic Royal Palaces

AMA REGIONS



4. Northern England



Craig Millar
arc



Jonny Tull
Tyneside Cinema

5. North West



Mike James
Unity Theatre



Marge Ainsley
Harris Museum & Art
Gallery

6. Southern England



Andrea Sheppard
The Mayflower



Rachael Easton
amh

7. South East



Howard Buckley
Chichester Festival
Theatre



Jessica Bevan
The Harlequin Theatre
and Cinema

8. South West



Jo Dereza
Audiences South West

... CONTINUED



South West continued



Ros Fry
Freelance Consultant



Louisa Davison
Secret Agent Marketing

9. West Midlands



Stephanie Falkiner
Birmingham Repertory Theatre



Katherine Flynn
DanceXchange

10. Yorkshire and Humberside



Daniel Ramsden
Dead Earnest Theatre



Linda Franklin
Square Chapel Centre

11. Northern Ireland



Alice Jackson
Audiences NI

WALES

12. Southern Wales



Siân Walters
Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales



Rachel Kinchin
The Riverfront

13. Mid Wales



Rhys Hopkin
Aberystwyth Arts Centre

14. North Wales



Meinir Llwyd
Galeri Caernarfon

Morwenna Honan
Clwyd Theatr Cymru

SCOTLAND

15. East Scotland



Amy McDonald
The Audience Business



Susie Burnet
Edinburgh International Festival

16. West Scotland



Dianne Greig
Glasgow Grows Audiences



Charlotte Winter
Glasgow Grows Audiences

17. Northern Scotland



Kirsty Anderson
GASD

Having received an invitation by e-mail, or fortuitously coming across the information on our website, and having recognised the wonderfulness of these networking opportunities, I will be your first point of contact when you make your booking. We have a booking system

so as to keep a track of the numbers; too many people and the usefulness of the event may be compromised. I liaise with the member reps, sending them the delegate lists which are distributed at the meetings, and the evaluation forms, which we take very seriously. One of the great things about the AMA

is the way in which we develop our training and services in response to our members' feedback.



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Mission possible

Ivan Wadeson gets to the heart of the relationship between mission statements and the people they serve

Preparing for the presentation on this topic I was asked to give at the AMA *Mission Possible* event at Sadler's Wells in London last November, I was reminded that an entire industry has grown up around mission statements. Try putting those two words into any internet search engine and returned will be pages and pages of agencies, consultancies, academics and pundits offering advice and services. This (largely American) industry and the attendant parodies (see the random Mission Statement Generator on Dilbert.com) can get in the way of realising just how crucial the notion of 'mission' can be for cultural organisations or how to apply this practically.

My preferred definition of a mission statement is from Jargonbuster (find it online at www.cafonline.org/default.aspx?Page=7589). This is a glossary written by Kevin Ashby and Colin Nee to help the voluntary and community sector and their funders be more consistent in the way they use technical terms. Jargonbuster describes a mission statement as:

Why an organisation or project exists and the broad effect that it wants to have. A summary of the overall difference it wants to make.

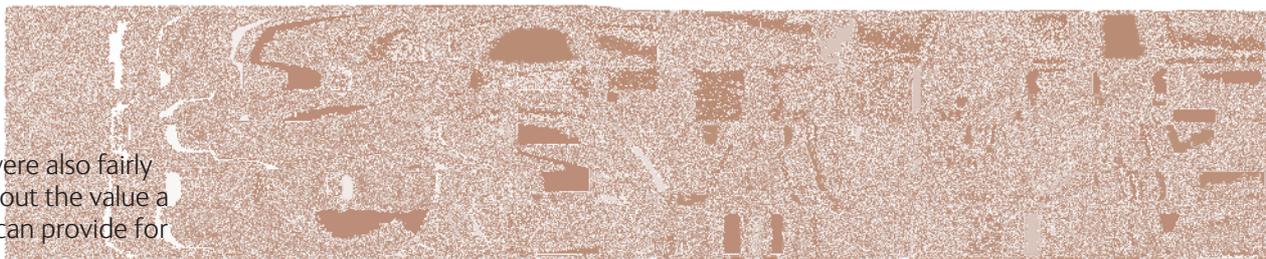
The mission statement or overall aim is also usually just one or two

sentences. It describes the people, situation or problem a project or organisation wants to make a difference to. It also describes the particular difference the project or organisation wants to make. As with a vision, the aim may take a long time, be very general or very specific. It is not what a group will achieve specifically this year, or next year, but the thing they ultimately want to achieve.

What I was asked to consider last November and what I am writing about now is the relationship of that mission statement to audiences, visitors and participants – the public.

To help inform my thinking for the presentation I approached fellow professionals. I sent a link to an online survey to 30 senior practitioners: a mixture of artistic directors, curators and chief executives of a range of venues, companies and festivals of differing scales. I received about thirteen completed surveys and was generally pleased about how those respondents rated the importance of mission statements. I had a sneaking suspicion that some people in the sector regard mission statements as a hurdle to be negotiated, a sop for funders or a good intention to hide behind.

Not only were these respondents positive about their own mission



statements, there were also fairly consistent views about the value a mission statement can provide for an organisation:

'A key sentence that acts as a beacon to navigate by and a filter to put projects and ideas through.'

'Keeps focus, enables us to monitor decisions against it, reassures funders and staff members, provides a "high bar" for us to reach.'

'It sets out what business you are in so very valuable.'

However, there were less consistent views about the relationship of mission statement to the public. I asked: 'What is the relationship of your mission statement to your users / audiences / visitors if at all? Does it reference them in any way? Are they aware of your mission? Should they be?' The following three responses show the spectrum of views:

'None. It's an internal working document only.'

'Our statement is visitor-focused but I expect few visitors are aware of it.'

'Yes it is devised to be inclusive and to address our needs. Yes we include it in print.'

I was drawn to the last comment. I can't recall many organisations that publicise their mission statement in print or on websites, let alone display it at the box office or the gallery entrance like other – public and private sector – organisations do (the BBC studios in Manchester have their corporate vision – *'to be the most creative organisation in the world'* – on a plaque on the wall in reception where all staff and visitors pass it daily). But shouldn't we? Isn't there an argument to say that these

aspirational, powerful statements of what we *'ultimately want to achieve'* should be shared with those who will benefit from us delivering this mission?

Many might not agree – and there is certainly a downside to seeing 'corporate-speak' slogans or empty gesture sound-bites pushed at the public endlessly. But there is another reason that I suspect there isn't such a public display of these statements. Too few reference the public.

Prentice Hall's *E-Business Plan Guide* states that a mission statement should answer four questions: *What business are we in? What do we want to achieve? What inspires us? What is our target market?*

To my mind there are very few cultural examples that cover the last question despite the fact that our audience, visitors and participants are all key stakeholders, along with staff and direct funders. And the latter two groups – generally – get to see the mission statement.

If serious about public engagement, about audience development, then I would suggest your mission statement is the right and proper starting point for this. Getting the public into your mission statement alone isn't going to change anything, but it might be a start, – it might be a powerful statement of intent.

If you are not in a position to directly influence the mission statement, can you help start a dialogue about this internally? Or are there others (board members,

consultants, agencies) who can do this for you? Is there a cycle of review and evaluation, often linked to business planning, of mission and direction?

Plus there are other considerations for public engagement and audience development to be taken seriously within your organisation. It may start with words in a mission statement or sections in a business plan but ultimately it should be a philosophy that helps underpin the organisation. This requires an organisation to recognise and understand how audience development relates to each department and individual role; it requires an organisational culture that promotes a collaborative approach to working with systems in place to facilitate such work; it requires excellent and accurate intelligence on the people you engage with; and it often requires a champion to oversee a holistic approach and drive the agenda forward.

None of it is easy. All of it takes time. But maybe by starting with the words that seek to encapsulate our mission, what *'ultimately [we] want to achieve'* and *'the people... [we] want to make a difference to'*, we are setting the correct course for that journey. ■



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Real communities start with real people

Ros Fry advocates strong partnerships and face-to-face dialogue as the keys to developing vital links across communities

I have a secret confession – once I wasn't very bothered about public engagement. My first job was in a museum and though I was passionate about our product I felt the education department was dull and not worth publicising. Later, at the South Bank Centre I was fired up to tell the world about cutting-edge dance, installations or contemporary music but community engagement had me yawning. Yes, we were keen to develop audiences but only so they could support our cool arts activities.

It was only when I had children myself and got involved with real communities with real people (as opposed to arty people dressed in black) that I fully began to understand the enormity of the task. Engaging ordinary people into meaningful dialogue with culture is quite something. Changing attitudes, removing barriers and developing

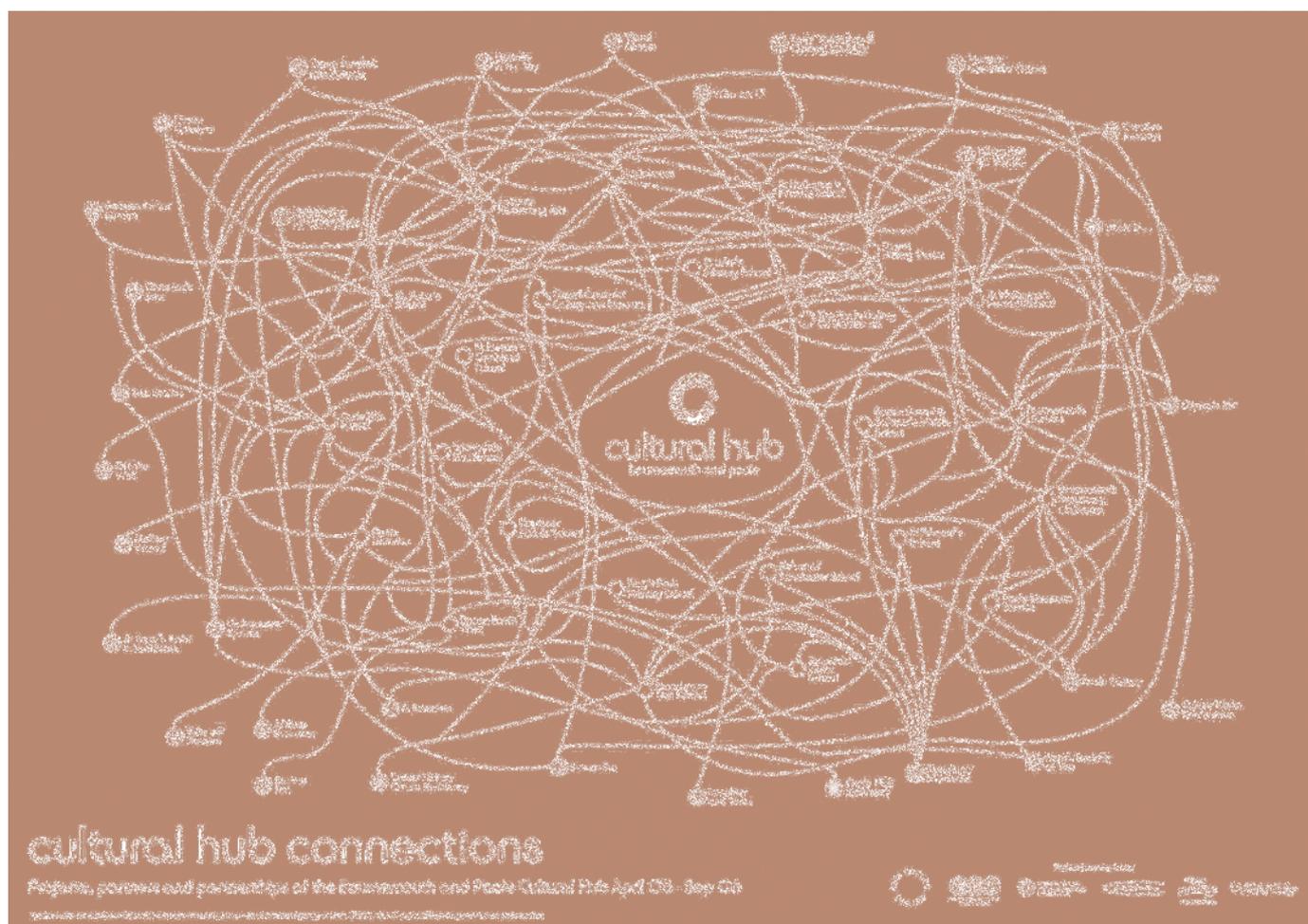
significant cultural links demand time, money and commitment.

An impressive model of audience engagement with children and young people is Bournemouth and Poole's Cultural Hub, a consortium of cultural organisations and schools working together to create inspirational learning opportunities for young people. It is co-ordinated by wave, the local arts education agency and is one of three Cultural Hubs in England, initiated by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, funded by Arts Council England and managed in partnership with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. £1.3 million over three years has made a big difference to relationships between the cultural organisations and agencies such as Lighthouse, Poole's Centre for the Arts, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – and fourteen schools.

Dozens of projects and schemes have been taking place in the area, all initiated by children, schools and arts organisations working in total partnership. Many have brought artists or performers into schools to create work or develop skills. Others have brought children and young people into cultural organisations to experience, participate in or promote events. All have involved major shifts in attitude and systems on both sides. Teachers have had to accommodate challenging artistic demands while cultural organisations learn to be more flexible and welcoming and, in some cases, to completely hand over decision making to young people or children.

Every proposed Cultural Hub project is presented at monthly partner meetings. The lead teacher, child, librarian, arts manager or artist outlines their idea and then, in small groups, they debate which schemes they will recommend to be funded.





There are always more projects proposed than money available but the openness of decision making inhibits peevishness. If only arts council funding decisions could be so easy! Teachers and children are more incisive than those of us working in cultural organisations. They ask awkward questions and are not ashamed to admit when they don't know something or someone. The curators, librarians, arts officers and programmers representing the cultural organisations have moved a long way towards them. The two sides are relaxed with each other, more able to understand their very different situations.

One of the most dynamic partners is The Study Gallery of Modern Art, Poole where curator Sandy Wilderspin is dedicated to engaging with hard-to-reach communities. All of their Cultural Hub projects seek out non-gallery-goers by inviting them to join in with the gallery's programme via quirky projects which make engaging with contemporary art virtually pain free! One current Hub project involved primary school children making art

books about their nearby shops and shop owners (featuring pie crusts, ears and golf courses). Another will involve every page 44 being removed from thousands of local charity shop paperbacks and replaced with a gallery invite!

One of the most successful initiatives is www.hubalicious.org, a young people's website for arts, culture and information on careers in the cultural sector, created every Wednesday evening by 15–17 year olds visiting the gallery. The teenagers are paid to design, commission and create the website. When I went to interview them, they ended up interviewing me!

Face-to-face dialogue is the most effective way to engage with the public, whether it's the world of young people, education, different races, income groups or abilities. Newsletters, promo packs, social networking websites and text programmes are great but they need to be designed alongside the target group and fully supported by personal, word-of-mouth communication.

After a decade of visiting schools as a parent and arts governor I finally understand the different way that they work. And I won't be sending trees of leaflets to market events. ●



ROS FRY

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www.thestudygallery.org
www.waveartseducation.org.uk
 (includes evaluation of the first year of Cultural Hub by Hayton Associates)

Generating audiences, regenerating organisations

Audiences London's *Generate* project is supporting Community Engagement, a group of friends who enable cultural organisations to invest in their local community while working towards audience development objectives, to mutual benefit



A new generation of specialist practitioners seems to be emerging. They draw on a varied knowledge base and skills set, but have in common the capacity to build bridges between cultural organisations and their local communities, referencing the practice of 'Community Engagement' (CE) in the public sector.

Audiences London (AL) hosts an informal network of practitioners based in arts and heritage organisations who prompted our research documenting what workers do and what makes them tick. The study has inspired a range of activities supporting their transformative work.

'Community Engagement' in the public sector is often driven by a reforming government agenda and is recognised as a particular process:

'involving [local communities] in major decisions that will improve their quality of life. This is

meant to be a two-way process, with organisations benefiting from the imagination and energy of local citizens ... [it] can involve individuals, voluntary and community organisations and public sector bodies working together to address local issues' – The Improvement Network (for Public Services)

The extra dimension we have in the cultural sector is that what we have to offer is personally fulfilling and, frankly, more fun. It is about people's creativity and learning, not just their involvement as well-behaved citizens.

While town planners, health administrators etcetera may be relatively new to such concepts, we have of course been doing this stuff for a long time. The new generation of workers is building on the legacy of Community Arts and educational outreach in terms of values and approach. Where their work differs, perhaps, is that it provides routes into a wider range of participatory and partnership opportunities. At its best, it forges relationships that are long term and have a transformative effect on the host institution. Typically, CE workers may be leading consultation exercises, neighbourhood networking, partnership development and ticket and local advocacy schemes linked to targeted participatory programmes. Bespoke activities are most successful where they grow out of a long



getting-to-know period and are co-designed, so workers spend a lot of time researching, networking, and brokering: all critical skills.

CE allows organisations to manage global peer relationships alongside local neighbourhood ones, to find a valued role at the centre of the social life of their local community. CE often opens conversations with a less culturally confident public than we are used to, with the people we find it 'harder to reach'. So CE is also a mechanism by which we can develop our awareness of public expectations and a more inclusive outlook.

'Arts organisations are going to come under increasing pressure to become responsive, customer focused organisations, which seek to engage customers in more dialogue and collaboration' – John Knell: *Whose Art is it Anyway (Personalisation in the Arts)*¹

CE is one way of addressing these challenges, but as the *Generate* study reveals, workers could be better supported. In particular, they need colleagues to understand more about their work, to recognise specialist skills, the sensitivities of the process, and the time (years) and resources needed to make a real impact. Workers do not fit neatly into institutional departments (marketing, education, front-of-house, etc.) – or skill sets – and so traditional 'silo' ways

of working frustrate the process. Organisations need to have a strategic framework for CE too. This is an intensive process which raises multiple expectations. To reap the benefits, organisations need to be clear about objectives, but open to the changes it will inevitably invite.

AL's *Generate* study has resulted in a professional development programme, designed – naturally – with and for CE workers (we are now recruiting for new intake). The network also continues, as do *Generate* debates and seminars.

To find out more about *Generate*, contact Helen Ball, Community Engagement Coordinator at Audiences London on **020 7407 4625** helen@audienceslondon.org ■

1. Arts Council England 2006; available from www.artscouncil.co.uk



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Public exposure

Jonathan Goodacre and Heather Stradling get up close and personal with 'the public' and reclaim the term for the arts

The word 'public' is suffering from an image problem. What kind of feelings do phrases like 'the general public' now evoke; something unwashed, anonymous, official and impersonal perhaps?

We tend to blur two concepts that should be distinct. In the UK, 'public' has increasingly come to mean 'provided by government or institution' (like public funding) rather than owned or created by the people (like public spaces). Public art, for example, often now involves a local authority commissioning an 'artist' to produce a sculpture that stands in a shopping centre with little or no input from local people.

It doesn't have to be this way. We should rescue that noble concept of the public which is about participation and democracy, allowing users to bring freshness, honesty and life to our work and organisations. In any case, as arts marketers we should be looking for every opportunity to generate mutual exchange and dialogue rather than one-way communication.

Active consultation provides a framework for the contribution of users. It is a stage on from focus groups or project evaluation and is about ownership as well as opinions. It can show demand, alert us to potential opportunities or problems and help us to communicate on equal terms and in common ways with users.

Consulting 'hard-to-reach' groups

As project managers on a long-term participatory arts project in Southend-on-Sea called *Being Here* we learned the value of taking consultation seriously. The project

involved over 1,300 young people from a variety of 'hard-to-reach' groups taking part in 51 individual projects over five years. It was important to ensure that participants were central to the overall direction and management of the programme and to explore ways in which they could contribute to, monitor and assess processes.

We invited two enthusiastic participants from the early stages of the project onto the programme's management group. They contributed to discussions on overall structure, project development and delivery, influencing decisions as they were made. This brought improvements and supported the participants to develop new experiences and skills. But there was also a need to consult more widely and to listen to different perspectives.

During the next stage, therefore, time and effort were committed to developing consultation sessions for young people, with clear briefs, trained facilitators, and so on. It was planned to form a participants' group, for regular consultation. The set-up was theoretically fine and we were ready to welcome them with open arms. The outcome: hardly anyone turned up and those that did, didn't like the sessions at all.

Peer-to-peer consultation

It may be hard for us to believe, but not everyone is sitting round waiting to be 'consulted' by an enthusiastic arts manager wielding a flip-chart pen. That is not to say, though, that they don't want to be involved. With further research and analysis it became clear that it was not that they didn't want

to be consulted but that *they didn't want to be consulted in that way*.

There are many ways of involving people and asking for their opinions. So, with a revised plan of action, the original participant representatives from the management group visited groups during workshops and integrated discussions into the rest of the activity. An artist worked with the representatives on preparation and planning the questions to be asked. This peer-to-peer dialogue saw a dramatic change in attitudes. Information was collated into a presentation, which was fed back to the management teams.

As well as this more formal approach to consultation, artists made time to involve participants in decisions around the themes, creative activities and artistic products within the different projects. There are a number of interesting initiatives around the UK that have used 'creative consultation' with a range of techniques such as model making, music and digital tools to manage the consultation process.

There were some clear lessons that we learned about consultation:

- develop a policy with aims, objectives and parameters
- clearly identify who, how, what about and when
- don't be tokenistic
- let people know how their views will be used
- make it clear what can be changed or not changed
- be honest and open
- welcome a range of feedback (including 'negative')
- ensure people have enough time and space to feed back

- use more than one consultation method
- don't promise what can't be delivered
- use people who are trained facilitators and use them appropriately
- be wary of people 'representing' an interest group or community
- consider how consultation will be accessible, comfortable and non-intimidatory
- encourage positive creative ideas in addition to feedback on current or planned activity.

Our consultation process influenced the way that *Being Here* was developed. We had been given priorities from stakeholders of addressing issues such as drugs, hate crime and teenage pregnancy. Through consultation, it became clear that the young people were more concerned with bullying, homelessness, local facilities (and, to some degree, drugs). These themes were then integrated into the programme with a range of artistic methods. The programme was turned around so that it fulfilled the needs of the participants rather than being a top-down tick-box exercise. ■



1



2



3

1. Participant in performance as part of *Being Here*. Photograph by Ruth Knight.

2. Photograph by Ruth Knight.

3. Artwork by participants from the *Being Here* project, led by artists Bob Clayden and John Row.



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HEATHER STRADLING and **JONATHAN GOODACRE** led the Momentum Arts *Being Here* project and are now freelance project managers and consultants. Together with Sarah Bedell, they are authors of *Turning the Tide: Managing a Participatory Arts Regeneration Project*, 2007 (available for £15 from Momentum Arts: info@momentumarts.org.uk).



They say never work with children or animals ...

Ben Jones from the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre has a *delumptious* sticky moment to share

School holidays – our busiest and most stressful part of the year ... and yet the most exciting and exhilarating time. That's what we are here for, isn't it? To get children, young and old, buzzing with creativity.

However, once it kicks off you don't really have a chance to appreciate how much fun everyone is having until it's over. You try your best to get everything ready in advance. Shop stock ordered? Check. Enough staff to cover the madness? Check. Everything in the museum working? Check. Room double-booked on the first day of the holidays? Check ...

Being such a small museum, even at the best of times we are always moving workshops around and encouraging our visitors to different parts of the museum for storytelling in an attempt to keep people moving. However, booking a private launch

party for the Haemophilia Society's new children's website (www.youngbloods.org.uk) in the same space as we do storytelling and crafts on the first day of a half-term holiday wasn't the best of plans.

Add into the mix our laptop, being used by the society to show off their new website, giving up on us just as guests were arriving and a couple of staff calling in sick, the holiday hadn't got off to the best of beginnings.

This is when team work, good communication and, above all, everyone's commitment to their jobs comes into play. A new laptop was found, extra staff dragged from their beds and our boardroom was acquisitioned and turned into a storytelling room, replete with cushions for kids and chairs for exhausted parents.

I don't think the admin staff minded having to listen to the sound of laughter and stories all day either. ■



Ben Jones

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Resources

Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand*, Random House Business Books, 2007.

Kevin Ashby and Colin Nee, *Jargonbuster*, available at www.cafonline.org/default.aspx?Page=7589.

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John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, Faber & Faber, 2005, ISBN 0571226027.

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Sir Brian McMaster, *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*, DCMS, 2008, available at www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CA3322E5-42AC-4A83-93FC-08EDAAE83831/0/supportingexcellenceinthearts.pdf.

Heather Stradling with Jonathan Goodacre (ed.: Sarah Bedell), *Turning the Tide: Designing and Managing a Participatory Arts Regeneration Project*. Momentum Arts, 2007, ISBN 0953432823.

MISSION POSSIBLE: AMA DAY EVENT, 2007

This day event included presentations and debates about the way that arts organisations can be both vision led and audience focused and investigated how such an approach could help to create, retain and engage audiences and visitors. Speakers included Diane Ragsdale and Ivan Wadeson. To download their presentations, go to: www.a-m-a.co.uk/publications.asp and click on 'reports'.

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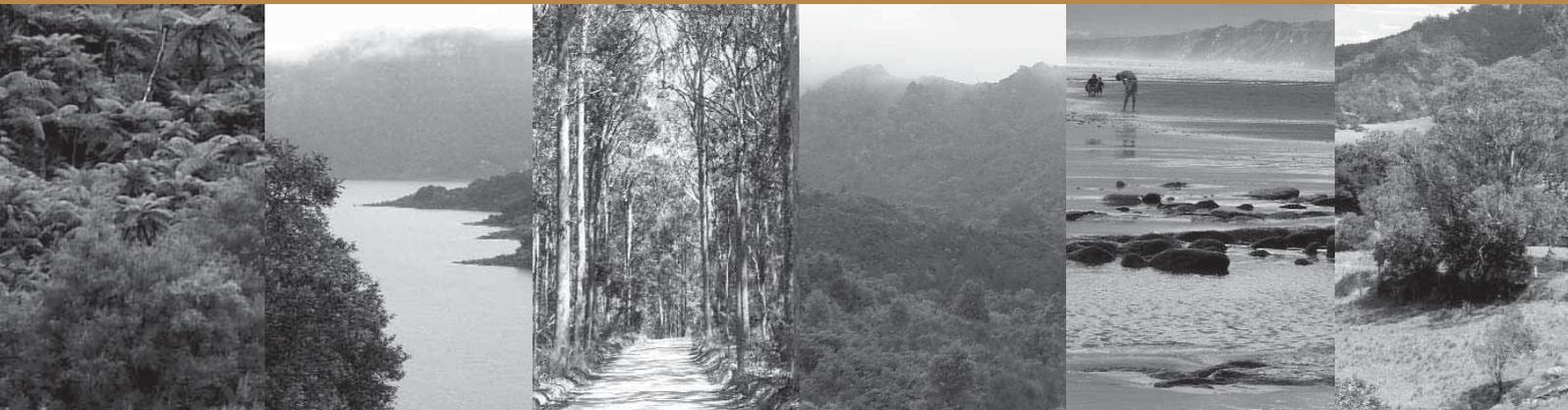
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