



**Building relationships  
with people new to  
the arts**

**Some tips and  
approaches**

# Building relationships with people new to the arts

Creative People and Places (CPP) is at the Arts Marketing Association's conference in Edinburgh this week, with a panel session exploring how to develop relationships with people who don't currently engage in the arts.

Eleanor Turney spoke to the three panellists and other members of the CPP network about tips and approaches to engaging new audiences.

## Tips

### 1. What questions are you asking?

I tend not to say, would you like to start volunteering in the arts? Rather, I would say, would you like to see this place being more creative? What kind of events have you been to and liked? Would you like to see more things like that here? If you're building towards the same future, then people get behind that. *Helen Ball, Creative Barking and Dagenham*

### 2. Get out and about

The thing we see as important is personal invitations – demystifying what we do and making it a bit more accessible. One of the things we do is called Community Conversations, and that's about staff members going to community groups – neighbourhood association meetings, over 55s groups, lunch clubs, a home educators group, the WI... those sorts of groups. We're making sure that we're regularly on as speakers at those. *Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

### 3. Think about language

I think there is a fundamental issue with referring to low engaged groups as 'hard to reach'. It suggests that the 'problem' is with them, somehow - when really the problem is with us (as an arts sector) not providing what that market segment wants (product, place, time, positioning, etc). *Jan Lennox, Creative People and Places Hounslow*

#### 4. Get into schools

One thing we've found really great in terms of reaching families, is book bags at schools. Primary schools send kids home with their homework in their book bags, and that's also how schools communicate with parents. Schools have complete control over what goes in them. If you ring up and explain what you're doing, it can be very fruitful. They don't let just anybody do that, and by getting a flyer into a book bag it kind of has the endorsement of the school, from the parents' point of view.

*Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

#### 5. New approaches

Communities are generally not 'hard to reach', rather traditional models of engagement are less effective and need to be replaced by new approaches. Good planning and understanding how the community currently operates are important steps in effective engagement. *Andy Parkinson, Consilium (evaluator for bait)*

#### 6. What silent message is your marketing sending?

When we create our marketing materials, we don't try and make them look really expensive. For most things we go to a cheap copy shop to get them done, and we design them in-house. It's about where you think your self-worth is, I suppose; this is something that goes around the CPP group a lot. If something's in a glossy brochure, some people don't think that's for them, because they don't feel like they're a glossy brochure person. *Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

#### 7. Emphasise that this stuff is fun!

Lots of people do not engage with the arts and don't have a habit of actively searching for the cultural offer in the area. BUT, everyone likes having a great day out with friends and family – with a great atmosphere, great food, lots of fun, an opportunity to socialise and spend time together. So the 'fun' element is what we should be developing, offering high-quality arts in the setting that people are used to. It's a fun day out and should include all the attributes of a day out, such as: easy parking/accessible space/space for buggies/toilets/great food/etc. If these elements are right, people will enjoy the act that is put in front of them – and it can be a high quality arts experience that they will enjoy. *Elena Shampanova, Market Place*

#### 8. Find the right partners

The crucial part is finding the right contact – the right person, organisation or group to team up with. It's always best to rely on people who are already operating locally and know the area and people. Once you identify them, the next step is to come up with the most suitable and engaging activity or set of activities. Through workshops, discussions and similar activities, one can create a bond with the people attending, making them feel a part of the team. Combined word-of-mouth with social media campaign tends to bring people to events. *Milan Govedarica, Slough*

## 9. Be honest

We're building our projects with people. They're giving their ideas. Quite often, people will make a suggestion and I have to say, that sounds great but I don't see how we could do that at the moment, but what we could do is go on a trip to look at how someone else has done something similar, and start to explore it more. Or I might bounce it back and ask them to find out more for themselves. *Helen Ball, Creative Barking and Dagenham*

## 10. The personal touch

There's a great thing – a really important thing – of saying to people, this is for you; being able to go to them and say, these are the things that we've got on in the next few months, and it'd be great to see you there. We're quite a small staff team, so we know that they will actually see us there. If I go and talk to some people, they'll come in and they'll see me there and know my name and have met me before. That's a huge bit of familiarity for people and that's really important. *Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

## 11. Co-creation is key

Co-creating projects with the community is key to successful engagement. Having a group of people invested in the project, working alongside a professional artist and exploring their local setting/heritage/space through the arts is what gets people excited and involved, and brings their friends and family in. *Elena Shampanova, Market Place*

## 12. Reach out in the right places

Communities in CPP areas may (at the moment) be low or medium engaged with regards to the arts but will be engaged with other services and local 'offer'. The trick is to understand what services/agencies that low or medium engaged groups are engaging with and what approaches these services/agencies are using to develop a relationship and on-going dialogue. This often necessitates some element of mapping local services / agencies / offer and then using these channels and approaches. *Andy Parkinson*

## 13. Harness the power of Facebook

We specifically ask people at events, if you like this, can you mention it on Facebook, can you like our page, and next time we have an event like this can you share it and invite your friends? And people do actually do it. If you ask them in person, they really will do it. People realise that their friends might enjoy it, too. *Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

## 14. Don't be scared!

Sometimes, people have fears about working with the public, that they'll suddenly be accountable to all of those people. You are accountable in the sense that you have to listen and respond, but you don't need to worry that your work is going to keep changing tack or anything. You just need to be clear about what's possible. There are millions more ideas than there is time to do everything, so it's not about needing to act on everything, it's about not being afraid to listen to comments. *Helen Ball, Creative Barking and Dagenham*

## 15. Remove the risk

Offer an opportunity to try something new without having to travel somewhere and without committing much money, but at the same time try to develop a culture of paying for the arts (so a combination of free/suggested donation/pay what you decide/keenly priced). Take away the risk in terms of space – at the beginning, the art needs to happen where people are – where they shop/walk/meet/hang out/eat – without them having to make a special effort of walking into a building. *Elena Shampanova, Market Place*

## 16. Demystify “The Artist”

Every time we have an artist working with us, we ask them to film a very short video of themselves talking about the project. They go out on social media, and they're very much: here's an invitation to everyone to get involved. People can be scared of artists because they think art is for these fanciful people who live in London and are up in the clouds all the time. So, someone with a normal accent just talking to camera can be so helpful, especially when they are chatty and down-to-earth. In this world of decent camera phones, you don't need fancy equipment. It doesn't need to be a beautifully made and edited thing, it can just be two people having a chat. *Helen Willmott, Made in Corby*

## 17. Listen to people

I think that co-production is really important – understanding how professionals, arts professionals and local people can work together. They inspire us, and we inspire them, because they are the experts of their own communities and their own lives, and they know what does and doesn't work for them. So, listen to people. *Karl Greenwood, Appetite*

## 18. Don't give up!

It takes time – a lot of time. Change will happen in baby steps, but it will happen! Don't be discouraged by lack of quick wins; it's a long journey and you need to take the audiences with you on that journey. *Elena Shampanova, Market Place*

# Approaches

## **Appetite**

“Our approach has been to have ‘appetite builders’, where we made relationships with various community groups across the city and invited them along to ‘taste’ what was on offer. It was about starting a conversation, having a bit of debate about art, getting people to experience things they might have not experienced before. On the back of that, some of these groups said they’d be interested in working with Appetite, and we built it from there.

### **Getting a taste for art**

We got some artists to give people a taste of their work, but also to take people to different locations and to see things in non-traditional venues – we had a group talk about street art in an empty factory, we had theatre in pubs. We were not telling people what we think is quality; it’s about just getting people to have those kind of arts experiences. I think you’ve got to inspire people first, because if someone comes along and asks you to make decisions about something that you’re not interested in, then you won’t engage. We’re trying to create inspiring spaces for people to get excited about the programme and what Appetite is about.

### **Inspiration, inspiration, inspiration**

Our main goal to get people engaged and inspired and to see some new things, and create some kind of reference points. I think it’s not about getting someone in a room, saying we want you to be part of this project, do you want to be involved? I think sometimes it’s underestimated how important it is to get people inspired. Our vision is about inspiring more people into the arts and because people have got such negative ideas and perceptions about what art is, one of the major things that you’ve got to do is try and then offer some new possibilities or help transcend what they think art is.

I’m not saying that’s the right model for everyone, and I’m not saying it’s a perfect model, but I think in order to engage people, you’ve got to find a way to inspire them. The first thing you’ve got to do is to try and dismantle those negative perceptions, but for me that role of inspiration is probably the most important thing. Because it helps people to see art in a different way, but also to understand that art and culture are important to the city.”

Karl Greenwood

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## **Creative Barking & Dagenham**

### **Let the people choose**

“How we do try and reach new people? Well, our major strategy is that we let the public choose what we commission. Local residents are making the decisions about where the money goes. We manage that by including people in panels where they meet other local residents – every panel is 60% local residents. We call them ‘cultural connectors’ and we’ve recruited well over 100 people.

The requirement to be a cultural connector is just that you’re over 16 and live in the area – or have a very strong connection to the place. The only other prerequisite is that you have a connection with our aims, which is to make the borough a more creative place to be; making more opportunities for the people who live here to explore their creativity; and making those things accessible to people who aren’t normally interested.

A typical panel will consist of three cultural connectors, some kind of arts expert whose expertise is relevant to the style of commission, and then some local professionals – someone who works in regeneration or from a housing association, that type of thing. What we do is we create a mixed panel, recognising that everyone there has some kind of expertise, and they go through a briefing and shortlisting process etc, so that they learn to work together. It’s them, with our facilitation, who decide ultimately that the shape of the programme is.

### **Asking the right questions**

Often the decision that people make isn’t the expectation they came into the process with. That’s a great thing – it’s not about being fixed, it’s about interrogating together what the project could achieve, and then working out who can best deliver that. We do a lot of work to help people understand what it is that we’re trying to achieve, and that takes a lot of ego out of the process. It helps people to think, could I see my friend coming to this?

We facilitate the panels. We’re active on that, and we make sure that everyone gets to speak, etc. It’s not just about the panels – we also ask people to come to meetings and to go on walkabouts with artists. We’re quite open in that way. Even though you might not be at all of those things, people will know that they’re welcome and that we welcome people being around.”

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## **bait**

### **Importance of partnership**

“Our approach has largely been a partnership model. There wasn't a traditional arts infrastructure here – for example, there aren't any National Portfolio Organisations. So we are working through partnerships with community and voluntary-led organisations and groups that people in the area know and trust.

We are partly funded through Northumberland County Council's public health department as well, which has meant that we are able to have a dedicated Arts for Health Manager on our staff team who is a mental health specialist. This knowledge has been invaluable to working with partners in the health and well-being sectors.

In terms of our partners, it's really important to have shared aims wanting to make a long-term difference to benefit people in South East Northumberland. Once we've established that common ground, it's then been important to work together to do the often 'invisible' groundwork to build confidence with people before embarking on a project together. Familiarity, trust and safety all need to be in place, working with trusted gate-openers and community leaders, programming work in familiar community spaces.

### **Trust and time**

So how do we reach out to audiences? Well, interestingly, we rarely market the bait programme directly, but rather utilise known and trusted channels and networks, through our partners, to enable advocates to welcome people to take part. What we've found is that creates much more authentic reach because we're blending in – we're never positioning ourselves as the experts, but we learn and work with people.

Our mission is about creating long term change and we're really interested in that being driven by the people who live here. All of our projects are developed in partnership. bait is not leading the programme, but rather is brokering opportunities and supporting people to discover the arts, giving people practical tools to sustain longer term development.”

Kathryn Goodfellow  
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# What is Creative People and Places?

**Creative People and Places is about more people choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences in the places where they live.**

Creative People and Places takes place in areas where evidence shows that people are less involved in arts and cultural activities than elsewhere in England.

As an action research programme, we will take risks, reflect on what worked and what didn't, gather evidence and share our learning widely.

Developed by Arts Council England with an initial investment of £37m from the National Lottery, the first phase of the programme will run between 2013 and 2016.

There are now 21 independent Creative People and Places projects in areas where people have traditionally had fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts.

By talking to people about what they want to see happen locally, each project is creating a distinctive programme that's unique to the people and places that have shaped it.

Local people are involved with Creative People and Places projects in a myriad of ways – as participants, decision-makers, artists, producers, volunteers and of course audiences.

Projects are being developed with a diverse range of partners including health authorities, local businesses, schools, transport companies, community and voluntary groups, sports clubs, housing associations, local authorities and many more.

**21 places**

**Over 1 million people engaged in over 1600 events\***

**50% of participants from least engaged audience segments**

**10 year vision**

## **Find out more**

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

[www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning)

<http://culturehive.co.uk/tags/creative-people-and-places>

\*From 2013 til the end of September 2015