

Case Study: Using data to make the case

Jayne Knight, Arts Development Manager, Suffolk County Council

The New Anglia Culture Board is part of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and was created to play a clear role in contributing to the LEP’s strategies for growth for Norfolk and Suffolk. Coordinated by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils’ Arts Development teams.

The Culture Board recognised the need to collect data to understand the impact of COVID 19 on the whole sector and this prompted the development of the Norfolk and Suffolk Venues Consortium (NSVC) to collect data on performance venues. By the beginning of June we had clear, powerful data on the impact to the sector and the economy and we were able to have objective discussions about the needs of the sector. This ensured that the media, MPs, local councillors and the LEP were all able to make the case and the plight of the sector was understood. This understanding led to:

- Local authorities paying revenue grants in full, accepting that performance targets would change significantly.
- Public Health supporting rehearsals and performances with free testing for specified bubbles.
- A comprehensive ‘data ready’ approach to bids for Culture Emergency and Recovery Funds (just under £14 million was secured by the region)
- Ongoing recognition that the sector has suffered and will need time and investment to recover efficiently and effectively e.g. inclusion in LEP Recovery Plan.
- Investment and support for the development of a detailed five-year recovery plan for culture and a celebration of culture in 2021 from LEP.

Headlines

| Performing arts venues March – June 2021 | Whole sector – including freelancers |
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| A collective total loss of income across the consortium venues totalling £15,389,450 over the 6-month period April-Sept 2020 | Income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 48% of respondents said that all income had stopped - 33% said that most income had stopped - 17.5% said that some income had stopped |
| Since March 2021, 1,605 performances were cancelled, 700 have been able to be re-scheduled | Contracts with freelancers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 27% have had to cancel all contracts - 16.5% cancelled some contracts - 10% had cancelled no contracts with freelancers |
| Over the period March–September 2020 the venues collectively have £2.5m of unavoidable staff costs associated with continuing to maintain buildings and plan for re-opening. | Estimated value of lost contracts with freelancers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 21% estimated the value exceeded £50,000 - 25% estimated between £10,000-£50,000 - 47% estimated between £500-£10,000 |
| The NSVC projected a total collective loss of income until the end of September 2020 as £15,389,450 | - Total grants received from ACE emergency funding and from DCMS Culture recovery Fund – just under £14 million |

Case Study: The challenge of balancing the Corporate COVID response with making the case for Culture under COVID. A District Authority Experience

Jane Wilson, Culture and Community Manager, Cambridge City Council

The Culture and Community team at Cambridge City Council covers direct delivery (Cambridge Corn Exchange, a major regional venue, and Cambridge Guildhalls; Cambridge Folk Festival and large scale free outdoor events), and development (with small teams for arts development and inclusion and diversity). The vast bulk of the turnover sits with the direct delivery, but the development teams make a significant difference to the wider sector.

As COVID came over the horizon the immediate challenges were all linked to closure: managing customer expectations, reassuring staff, limiting the financial losses : we shut the venue doors on 16th March and cancelled Cambridge Folk Festival and outdoor events just over a week later. From then on it was became a process of unwinding the programme, furloughing as many staff as possible, with a skeleton team managing the rescheduling of shows and box office refunds.

Almost as rapidly it became clear that the team had specific skills relevant to the Council's corporate response to community need. By the beginning of April I was redeployed to the project management team working on community resilience and support, along with the Event Managers and support staff. The Marketing Manager moved over to COVID messaging, the senior Arts Development Officer brought data management skills in to work on identifying people likely to be vulnerable to the wider impacts of the lockdown, and the Inclusion and Diversity Officer focused on working with specific communities. The combination of flexibility, problem solving and the solid awareness of the importance of process common to all event management staff proved invaluable as we confronted a series of new challenges and problems, building solutions on the fly to support the remarkable community led response that developed in the city. Equally, the arts and culture team came face to face with the practical realities for residents living in one of the most unequal cities in the country (with or without COVID), and got to know the communities and community organisers working on the ground to make a difference.

This involvement in the corporate response has continued all the way through, most recently with the City Events Manager developing plans for the safe re-opening of the city centre after lockdown 2.0, once again using event management skills to address a novel problem. Internally it has raised the profile of the team and changed perspectives about the skills and capacities of staff working in 'the arts'.

At the same time, when the initial thought that we might be back in the venues for the Autumn started to look wildly optimistic, it became obvious that we needed to find other ways to deliver on our core purpose, and provide different ways for residents to enjoy and experience cultural activity. This really stretched the team, given the level of commitment we already had to the COVID response work. By working collaboratively (another innovation: direct delivery had only transferred back into the Council from an external charity the year before) the development and delivery teams created and delivered Creative At Home activities – from physical packs to radio broadcasts and on-line content, all informed by the experience of working directly on the COVID response. The Arts Development team ran a series of Culture Under COVID on-line workshops for arts organisations at the end of the Summer, and the outcomes from those sessions informed the immediate work programmes for both the development and delivery teams.

Looking back, the question is whether we got the balance right. I don't think there was much choice at the time: there was an over-riding need to support the vulnerable members of our community and the Culture and Community team staff had the skills and experience to be a core part of the response to that need. Could we have done more to provide specifically cultural activity if we hadn't been as involved in the corporate COVID response - quite possibly. However, although our involvement might have compromised our immediate cultural offer, I think the long-term benefit will be immense.

Case Study: Advice, Information & Support for Culture under COVID – the WM COVID Cultural Response Unit (CRU) led by Culture Central.

Symon Easton, Head of Cultural Development, Birmingham City Council

Purpose

A (Cultural) sector-led action orientated unit set up to develop and deliver a coordinated response from the sector to the Covid-19 crisis, in the short, medium and long term with the purpose of ensuring the visibility, viability and recovery of the Cultural Sector in the West Midlands.

Scope

A Central point for promotion. (West Midlands in the widest sense, from rural, towns, cities and urban centres. (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire)

- Collective Voice for advocacy and public messaging for the whole West Midlands Cultural Sector.
- Not a funder or distributor of funds or producer of artistic work/events
- Coordinate and Facilitate Collaboration

Coordination

Led and administered by Culture Central (Birmingham's Cultural Sector members organisation). Erica Love, Director. Working with stakeholder across the region including; Local Authorities, The WM Combined Authority, ACE WM, Public Health, Higher Education, LEP's, BID's, NPO's and the wider cultural sector. Work strands are led and delivered by representatives from these stakeholder groups including an Artistic Directors and Creative Leads Group

Funding & resources

Financial support has been secured from various agencies / LA's to support programme delivery. A large majority of resources / commitment required to deliver activity has been supported by existing staff of various stakeholders plus volunteers from the cultural sector.

Work strands

1. Strategy - Research and evidence of impact

- Research and evidence of impact
- Lobbying regional and national bodies and Government
- Coordination and support for creative activity
- Cross-sector planning
- Funding and Investment

2. Communications

- Coordinated in-sector communication flow
A central access point for information, support and advice
- Coordinated campaign for digital programmes
- Region wide audiences' campaign

3. Help and support – advice and guidance

- Central resource space
- Health, Well-being
- Legal and HR support
- Training, mentoring and leadership
- Coordinated recovery planning

Headlines (Activity)

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| Weekly (Zoom) meetings established for anyone working in the region’s cultural sector, whether employed in organisations or freelance/self-employed. Work strand leaders’ meetings also held weekly. |
| Dedicated CRU website established https://www.culturecentral.co.uk/wmcru/ PLUS regular newsletter - Providing relevant information and signposting visitors to training, funding, employment opportunities, HR, Finance and Legal advice etcetera |
| Regular recovery strategy meetings - Update on national strategies, Updates on sector/venue/activity action groups, Focus on practicalities of social distancing, health and safety, training, licensing etc. |
| Commissioned Arts & Culture Sector Covid impact study (survey) for arts organisations and freelancers to generate a clear West Midlands Narrative of impact for the whole arts and culture sector across the region, including organisations and freelancers/independent artists of all kinds, working in the sector. |
| Direct ‘sector advocacy’ communications campaigns undertaken with regional leaders / politicians, the media and central government around support for the sector. Includes commissioning of a cultural sector ‘Comeback’ Film for social media distribution. |
| A survey of regional arts audiences undertaken to research how audiences feel about returning to arts events (5,700 respondents). A wider mapping of WM region cultural audiences survey underway |
| Cultural Mentoring Scheme established: matching artists, freelancers and organisations with an experienced mentor to help support individuals through particular challenges - including bid writing, planning, producing and more (60 mentors and mentees so far) |
| A range of helpful free on-line seminars and workshops arranged and delivered for the sector over last five months including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding Arts & Cultural Events outdoors • Young Creatives ‘All Access’ workshop week • ‘Making great video on your phone’ • Cultural Education recovery – working with schools • Focus of freelancing • Arts in Health |
| Coordinated and delivered a range of collaborative, cultural experiences incl; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A free ‘Midsummer Festival’ a free one-day festival celebrating arts and culture in the West Midlands featured over 12 hours of performances, from 33 companies around the region, including 13 never-before-seen works. • It Gets Lighter From Here; a virtual day of hope and positivity, showcasing a collection of 60-second digital commissions from organisations across the region. • Three West Midlands Weekender events put together to showcase the diversity and innovation of the region’s arts; creating culture in new ways to keep the West Midlands on the creative map during this hugely challenging time. |
| Launched More Than A Moment pledge - the West Midlands Arts sector’s promise to take radical, bold and immediate action, to dismantle the systems that have for too long kept Black artists and creatives from achieving their potential in the arts and cultural industries. https://www.culturecentral.co.uk/mtam/ |

Case Study: Retail Therapy, an innovative cross sector partnership. Jasmin Vardimon and McArthurGlen.

Tony Witton, Arts & Culture Service Manager, Kent County Council

A contemporary dance company occupying two shops on a retail park is not a commonplace sight but in Ashford, Kent, through a unique partnership with developers McArthur Glenn, Jasmin Vardimon Company occupy two shops alongside the likes of Nike and Hugo Boss on the Ashford Designer Outlet placing international dance students in a dedicated studio just metres away from fashion, homeware and gifts retailers.

The relationship started shortly before lockdown and has become a lifeline for the dance company and changed their way of working forever. JVC opened a pop up space at the designer Outlet in January to raise public awareness of their work locally in advance of moving to a brand new production space in Ashford in 2022.

Finding themselves homeless when the leisure centre, earmarked for redevelopment and housing their current production space, remained closed after lockdown, the company made a bold move to relocate their administrative and production operations to the shopping centre.

Turning to digital technology to maintain their profile and enable them to continue engagement with their diploma students, the company has not only established a firm foothold in the retail world but has also grown its audience exponentially and established new ways of working from which it will never look back.

Headlines

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| Jasmin Vardimon Company and McArthur Glen |
| Major International dance company based in Ashford and touring nationally and internationally occupies two high street retail units at Ashford Designer Outlet managed by McArthurGlen |
| McArthurGlen manages 25 shopping outlets in the UK and a further 20 across North America and Western Europe including Venice, Vancouver, Athens, Luxembourg, Provence and Malaga |
| 14 International students able to undertake JV2 Diploma |
| 20,500 on line video views |
| 300% increase in web traffic |
| 5,000 audience members for livestreamed productions |
| 1,500 class places filled |
| Participants from 29 countries across the world |
| local participants from Ashford, Kent engaging in classes alongside international participants from Brazil, India, Australia, Japan |
| 150 requests for educational study resources |
| 100% increase in education website page views |