

Your plans for Public Engagement

Who is this for?

This document is intended for Arts Council funding applicants to assist you in providing accurate and relevant information about your public engagement plans as part of your application for funding.

Questions relating to public engagement planning may vary from one funding programme to the other – however, here we outline what the Arts Council’s general expectations are when assessing the details you submit as part of your application.

Background

The Arts Council’s ten-year strategy [Making Great Art Work](#) sets out a number of goals for the Arts Council and the arts organisations it funds. One of these is:

More people will enjoy high quality arts experiences

In order to reach that goal the Arts Council has set out actions which it will take, including to:

Promote and develop good practice in audience development and public engagement

And to:

Create opportunities for increased engagement in the arts by particular communities

The Arts Council wants organisations it funds, whose work is public-facing, to be part of achieving that goal. This means organisations making a contribution towards more people enjoying high quality arts experiences. The application process is the opportunity for applicants to demonstrate the work they currently undertake towards this, and to share their plans to continue and develop their work in this area.

The Arts Council wants organisations applying for funding to **demonstrate a clear sense of direction and understanding when it comes to public engagement**, and to communicate clearly about:

- What their **goals** are for public engagement
- How they **plan** to achieve those goals
- How they will **measure** their achievement, outlining the **methods** that they will use

Assessing your Application

We will assess your **plans** for public engagement by looking at your application and any relevant supporting material. You should ensure that:

- The application shows an awareness of the need for organisation-wide thinking about audiences and participants and that this is integrated with artistic programming, education work and other elements, including marketing and communications.
- The number and breakdown of potential beneficiaries are identified and are realistic. This may cover both physical and digital engagement.
- The plan shows an awareness of how to set audience targets. Your plans should include measurable objectives expressed in numeric or other terms that can be monitored. You may find it helpful to use the tool hosted on <http://www.artscouncil.ie/public-engagement/> *How to set an audience target*.
- Qualitative objectives are also described within your plan (for instance: improved feedback from participants or developing deeper relationships with under-served communities) and how you will measure the outcomes.
- You demonstrate a commitment to retaining current audiences and building new ones in new ways in the current context.
- You demonstrate an awareness of effective techniques and approaches to reaching and engaging the public as audiences and/or participants.
- You have a system/s in place to allow you to know if you have met your engagement targets and objectives.
- You have allocated sufficient resources to the engagement targets – e.g. that any projected increase in your audience is backed up by a marketing budget, freelance expertise or staff allocation for that work.

What we are looking for in your Public Engagement plans

In [Making Great Art Work](#) the Arts Council undertakes to grow and diversify the range of people who engage with the arts as audiences and participants. There can be several levels of engagement– e.g.

- **Increasing** audiences – attracting more people with the same profile as the current audience
- **Deepening** the relationship with audiences – adding value to the audience experience by facilitating and encouraging an audience to explore other related (and non-related) art forms. This promotes audience loyalty and encourages return visits
- **Diversifying** audiences – attracting people with a different profile to the current audiences, including people who have had no previous contact with the arts¹
- **Involving** participants –as co commissioners, co-creators and / or decision makers.

We do not expect every plan to cover all of these areas - but the details of your plan should clearly reflect the **objectives** of your organisation and the **outcomes** you are hoping to achieve.

Some funding programmes (for example, Arts Grant Funding) require an ‘*Outline Public Engagement Plan*’ to be included as a supporting document. With an Outline Plan, you may not as yet have all the information you need to answer all the questions listed above. In this case, your plan should set out **when** and **how** any gaps will be addressed.

What we mean by ‘Audience and/or Engagement’ numbers

The two key goals of the Arts Council’s current strategy are *the Artist*, and *Public Engagement*.

While for many arts organisations the primary target of their work might be commonly understood as the *audience* for that work, there are other types of engagement with the arts that we would like to know about. Arts organisations attend to the needs of different kinds of publics, audiences and dedicated groups. Some organisations make work for, by, or with children and young people, while others make work with communities of place and / or interest (e.g. people with disabilities, older people, and people from minority ethnic groups that may not be from the same area).

Other organisations provide resources, services, support, guidance, advice, advocacy and training to practising artists, and/or to other key providers or facilitators of arts experiences. This means that not all engagement supported by the Arts Council is *public* engagement.

¹ Please see the Arts Council policy on [Equality, Human Rights and Diversity](#).

Because of this, for the purposes of gathering data, ‘engagement’ is taken to mean four things:

1. **Audience** members, or readers, listeners, viewers, attenders, visitors, or others *engaging* with art and arts events (e.g. recitals, concerts, plays, dance performances, art exhibitions, books, etc.)
2. Members of the public **participating** or **collaborating** in the making or creation of art, or in arts-related workshops, classes or events (e.g. older people participating in a dance workshop, or a theatre work co-created with non-arts professionals)
3. People **volunteering** to work on or at an event (e.g. an arts festival, or as front-of-house staff at a local arts centre). **Note:** this is **not** the same as *participants* in arts events, where they are actively involved in the creation, making or presenting of work.
4. Artists, arts professionals, and/or other practitioners **taking part** in workshops, classes, services or other developmental activity. (**Note:** this is **not** the same as arts professionals being employed to make work).

What to include in the AAR template

Within the AAR template, we ask for two types of audience/engagement numbers:

1. The ‘**Audience/engagement number – paying**’; this is the number of people who **pay** to engage with, or participate in, the activity. This should include the number of **sales** for a book, publication, or other art object/artefact.
2. The ‘**Audience/engagement number – free**’; this is the number of people who engage with, or participate in, an activity, but who **do not** pay. This would mainly be free events, but might also include complimentary tickets, invitations to the opening of a performance or an exhibition, or copies of a book sent for reviewing/publicity purposes.

Ticketed, Paid Events, or Sales Figures

It should be possible to verify your paid numbers by means of box-office data or sales reports. You should be happy that any figures you give for paid engagements are ones that you can stand over at the end of the funding period.

Activities which are free of charge – Ticketed and Un-ticketed distribution

You may undertake activities for which people engaging are not charged. It may be that you provide some complimentary tickets or artefacts (opening nights, complimentary copies, etc.).

Participatory Activities

If your work involves participatory or outreach activities, you should record the number of people participating by means of a booking form or a sign-in sheet or another method.

Broadcast/Digital Audiences

For an activity or event you are proposing that has a broadcast/digital audience, use a verifiable method to predict or capture realistic audience numbers. For instance: official figures from broadcast partners; numbers signed in to streaming events or downloading artistic or creative content. On-line analytical tools may help to understand engagement via social media.

Street Arts and Spectacle Numbers

For free, outdoor street arts or spectacle or similar non-ticketed events, use a verifiable method for calculating and reporting on your audiences.

Some examples of acceptable methods are set out in the Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle guide: <http://www.isacs.ie/images/documents/ISACS-street-arts-handbook.pdf>

Exhibition Attendance

If an exhibition is not ticketed, use a standard methodology for calculating or reporting attendance.

Exhibition spaces use a variety of methods to record audience numbers, including clickers, sampling, survey activity, and automatic visitor-number recording systems. Include only audience numbers from the method that you use to record these, and keep a detailed record of how you calculated the number you report to the Arts Council.

If you need guidance on how to calculate exhibition attendance, we recommend this report, which will give you an idea of what some visual-arts institutions do, and we recommend that you immediately undertake a robust method of collecting data if you are not already doing so.

<http://artsaudiences.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Here-and-Now-Sketches-of-my-audience-2013-Public-Dissemination.pdf>