arts acumen

TIPS for identifying community need and demand

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Understanding community need and demand, including through community consultation, is critical to planning arts and cultural programs and activities that are relevant, responsive and sustainable.

5 Tips to identify need and demand

1. **LOCAL DATA.** Look at existing demographic and other local data to understand your community's composition. Are your activities reflective of the diversity that makes up your community? Does your planning take into account how your community is changing?

2. **RESEARCH AND EVALUATION.** Find out if any research, needs analysis or program evaluations have been undertaken in your community that might provide helpful insights about local demand. Are there learnings that can be applied to your own planning?

3. **PAST PERFORMANCE.** Revisit what you and others have delivered in the past. What was well received by the community? Where was the greatest demand? What was tried that didn't work well? Use these insights to inform your ongoing planning.

4. **FUTURE TRENDS.** Consider what is on the horizon both locally and globally and the impact this might have on people's arts and cultural needs. Are interests changing? Do people want to participate in arts and culture in new or different ways? Plan for how you will respond to emerging demand.

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5. **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION.** Ask your community about their needs and interests. What are their priorities for local arts and culture? How do they want to participate? What would they like you to deliver? Use the tips below to help inform your community consultation strategy.

10 Tips for community consultation

1. **PLANNING AND PURPOSE.** Spend sufficient time planning your consultation strategy. Reflect on past experiences of community consultation – what worked well and what would you do differently this time? Be clear about the purpose of community consultation. What are your objectives? What insights do you hope to gain? How will the consultation findings be used? If you are part of an organisation, make sure the leaders and decision makers are on board with your consultation strategy.

2. **BUDGET.** Know what budget you have to work with as this will influence the scope of your consultation, the methods you select and the type of promotion you use.

3. **PARTICIPANTS.** Identify who you need to include in the consultation. Is this a broad community consultation or something that is more narrowly defined? Are there groups you would like to reach that you do not usually hear from? What tools are best to promote your consultation to your identified participant group?

4. **LEVEL OF INFLUENCE.** Be clear with participants about what their level of influence will be in the decision-making process. This is important for managing community expectations. Who is responsible for the final decision and to what extent will community feedback influence that decision? Refer to the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation in the links below to assist with understanding the implications of different levels of participation.

5. **METHODS.** There are endless methods you can use as part of community consultation, including online surveys, face-to-face interviews, workshops, focus groups, community polls, social media, advisory panels, information kiosks and citizen juries to name a few. Think about how your stakeholders like to participate and if possible, aim for a variety of methods to suit different preferences. Also consider if there are existing processes you can build on, such as planned meetings and events into which you can add some consultation. Other considerations when selecting methods include budget, the skills and knowledge of facilitators to manage different processes, and what type of process is appropriate to the level of influence participants will have on decision making.

6. **FACILITATION ROLES.** Think about who is best placed to facilitate consultation – would someone from within your organisation or someone external to it be most appropriate? Also make sure you have clear processes in place to record and document community feedback.

7. **THE EXPERIENCE.** Whichever methods you select, consider how you can make the consultation experience a positive one which feels safe, enjoyable and productive for participants. This ranges from having clear questions to guide people's responses, to selecting a neutral venue that feels welcoming, to providing opportunities for participants to connect with each other.

8. **IDEAS INTO ACTION.** Spend time carefully analysing the data you have gathered from consultation. What were the common themes? What were the differences of opinion? What were the needs of different stakeholder groups? What ideas were raised that align with your current practices? What might you need to do differently to take on board the feedback you heard? Were there ideas that you can act on quickly? Which ideas need longer term planning and development? Make sure you involve a range of people from within your group or organisation in discussions about the findings to ensure the consultation outcomes inform ongoing planning in a real way.

9. **FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION.** Respect the time and effort people have contributed by following up with findings and themes from the consultation, information about decisions made and how community input has influenced outcomes. Also take the opportunity to ask participants for feedback on your consultation processes to inform future consultation planning.

10. **ONGOING CONVERSATION.** Ideally, community consultation should not be a one-off event. Now you have started building a database of people interested in having their say on arts and culture, find opportunities to keep the conversation going. Seek regular feedback on your programs and activities, use social media to pose questions or stimulate discussion, build opportunities into the events you deliver for people to share their ideas and opinions about local arts and culture or about particular issues happening in your community.

Useful links

Engaging Queenslanders: an introduction to community engagement

http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/introduction/

Engaging Queenslanders: a guide to community engagement method and techniques

https://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/documents/engaging-queenslanders-methods-and-techniques.pdf

A Guide to Engaging the Community in Your Project

http://www.artscapediy.org/Creative-Placemaking-Toolbox/Who-Are-My-Stakeholders-and-How-Do-I-Engage-Them/A-Guide-to-Engaging-the-Community-in-Your-Project.aspx

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum and Code of Ethics

www.iap2.org.au/resources/public-participation-spectrum