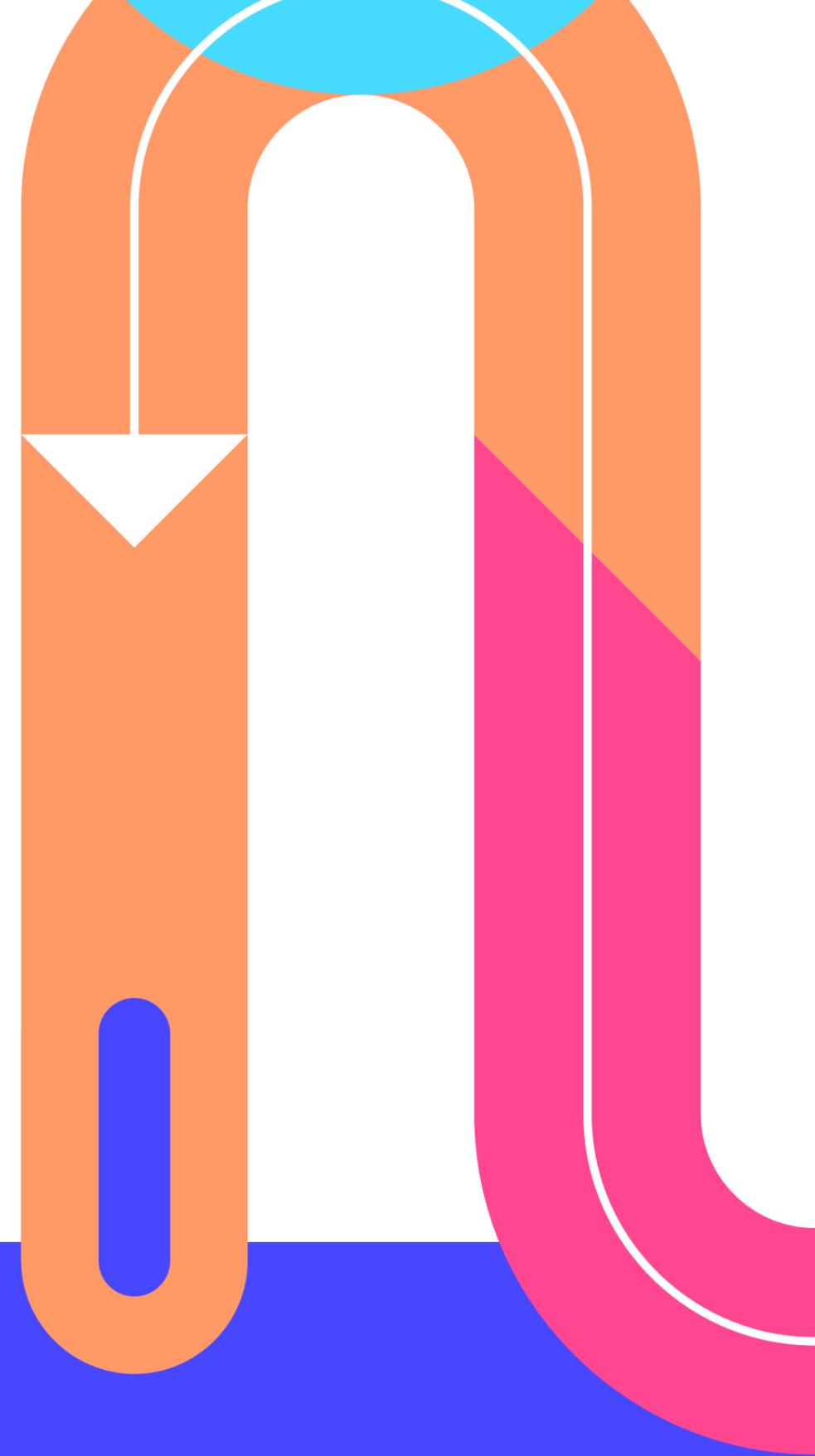# Creative Community Engagement
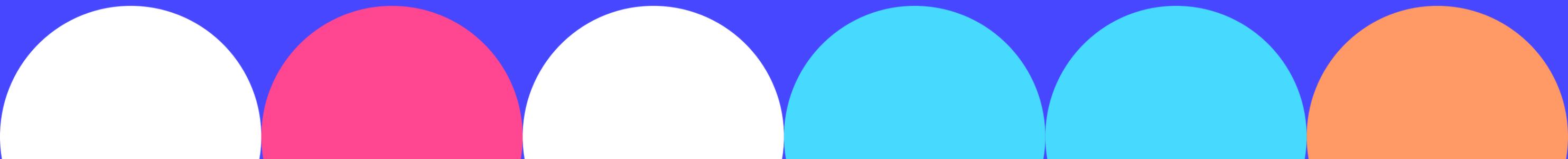
Learning Through the Pandemic

A Playbook for the Future

Contents

About this Playbook

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural organisations and practitioners have provided a vital support role in communities in response to the crisis, testing hundreds of different approaches to spark creativity in their communities and keep people feeling connected and supported. The nature of this support has been wide ranging, improving people's wellbeing, connection, and purpose in diverse ways.

At the same time, many cultural organisations have faced barriers to sustaining engagement in culture through successive lockdowns, grappling with mixed and interwoven challenges of inclusion, accessibility, resource and skills gaps, and funding pressures.

This has been an intense period of experimentation, testing and learning for many organisations and practitioners. This Playbook aims to join the dots between emerging practice today alongside potential 'signals' for the future of the sector and our communities. We explore what this means for developing cultural practice beyond the pandemic and the opportunities in months and years ahead to engage communities in culture using the learning from the pandemic.

"

During the pandemic, so many creative and cultural organisations and individuals transformed their work so that they could support their communities; often communities that were already facing significant challenges. We saw amazing innovation as our sector quickly adopted new approaches, many of which were totally untested. The value of that learning can't be understated, and we think it's vital it's shared for everyone to make use of, both as we continue to navigate our way through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in other ways too. Not least engaging more people in creativity and culture - not only because it can be fun and joyous, but also because we saw the demand for creative outlets grow, in what has been one of the most challenging periods in recent times.

We're delighted to support this resource which brings all this learning into one place, with examples, useful links and tools to identify local communities and how you can best engage them, taking you on a journey of activity from inside the home, to the doorstep, garden, street, local open spaces and of course, online."

Rebecca Blackman
National Director for Engagement and Audiences
Arts Council England

Who should use this Playbook

While the methods and case studies outlined in this Playbook draw on practices that emerged or were strengthened during the pandemic, together they present a sign of things to come for the cultural sector as a while. As society experiences the long tail of the COVID-19 crisis, cultural organisations will need to become ever more adaptive in terms of how they work with different audiences and wider communities, the ways they allocate resources, and how they articulate and evaluate their impact.

We hope this Playbook will seed conversations that eventually lead to deeper strategic planning or new practice. Insights will be useful for:

Leaders of cultural organisations, who want to reflect on learning through the pandemic, learn from others, and understand sector trends. The Playbook may also help you articulate and position your work within a long-term vision of the future of the sector and its impact on local communities.

Practitioners engaging communities with arts and culture, who want to develop new work, access practical resources, and learn about the methods and models which have or have not worked for others.

Funders of arts organisations and cultural activities who want to understand how to invest in and shape a context which enables more communities to benefit from active cultural participation. This includes Arts Council England, who has funded this work, as well as other public funders, government and independent charitable foundations.

Commissioners of art as part of social, local or wellbeing strategies, including community recovery strategies, who want to understand what successful community engagement through culture looks like, and how they can support it. This might include local authorities, NHS commissioners, policymakers, and civil society leaders.

Other supporters and advocates of the growth and development of cultural work in communities, including private sector leaders, community groups, academics, media commentators, and interested members of the public.

Methods and Acknowledgements

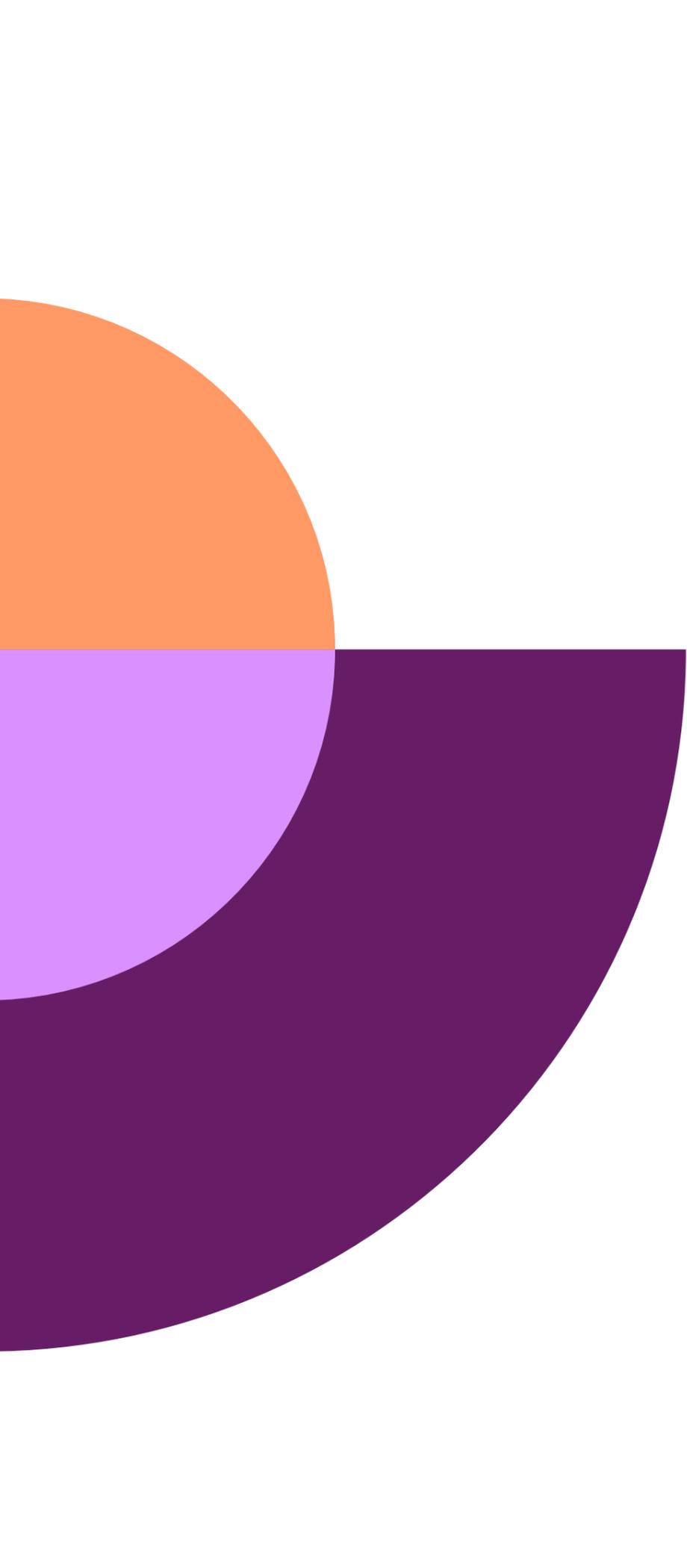The Playbook has been shaped and informed through an open survey with 120 responses from organisations around England; a series of 10 depth interviews and three focus groups with 50 cultural practitioners and cultural organisation leaders; and comprehensive mapping of resources on cultural community engagement through the COVID-19 pandemic. Common Vision led this work in partnership with Creative United.

About Common Vision

Common Vision is a think tank specialising in community listening, deliberative dialogue and public imagination. Our work joins the dots between emerging social and economic trends, shares learning from best practice, and identifies pathways to achieving common goals. We do this through a blend of qualitative research, deliberative events and creative engagement, sharing learning, insights and stories with public leaders, funders and others who can implement change in their personal or professional communities.

About Creative United

Creative United (CU) is a CIC supporting economic growth and social impacts in the arts, cultural and creative industries. We believe that people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities should have the opportunities to engage fully in arts and cultural experiences.

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences to enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries - from theatre to digital art - reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.

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Engaging communities during the pandemic
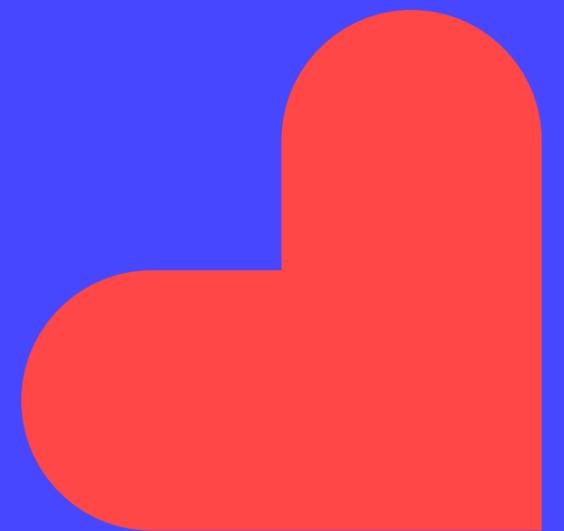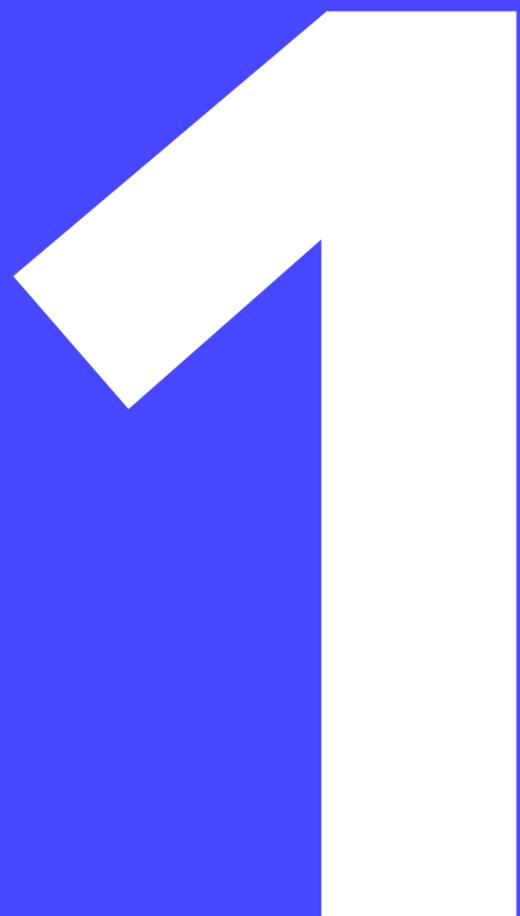
Engaging communities during the pandemic

Since spring 2020 many cultural organisations and practitioners have provided a vital support role in communities in response to the pandemic. Through workshops and interviews with practitioners from across the UK, we heard inspiring examples of how creativity and culture has helped tackle loneliness, ill-health, poverty, discrimination, and digital exclusion, alongside boredom, isolation, and stress.

At the same time however, many cultural organisations have faced real barriers in reaching isolated members of the community and sustaining engagement. We heard that many organisations often didn't have time to be strategic at the start of the pandemic, they just tried to do whatever they could to keep going during lockdowns and keep community members supported.

The pandemic demonstrated that having a first principles understanding of the communities you engage and the relationships you want to build on as an organisation or practitioner is key to achieving impact. You might refer to these communities as audiences, participants, beneficiaries, members, or stakeholders – and as you navigate the period of uncertainty, repair and change ahead of us, you will inevitably need to plan for how you sustain existing relationships and nurture new ones.

When it comes to engaging communities and audiences with culture during the pandemic, our research has highlighted two slightly different approaches:

Audience development approaches are about bringing new and more people to your cultural work and maintaining and deepening relationships with existing audiences. Often audience development in this sense is part of a marketing strategy, designed to keep people engaged in an organisation's work and expand reach through stakeholder networks. A lot of work during the pandemic has been just this, often using social media or big outdoors events to bring arts into more peoples' lives.

Community engagement approaches centre on improving the circumstances of both the organisation and the communities in which it operates, through building deep, trusted relationships around mutual benefit. In community engagement work, culture isn't something brought to people, but something that already exists in communities, that is celebrated and developed together. It looks at what matters to community members and builds a programme around that. Many arts organisations have deepened their community engagement work through the pandemic, focusing particularly on enabling everyday creativity and deepening responsive, reciprocal relationships in local areas.

Neither approach is right or wrong and throughout this playbook we describe both approaches. Many case studies employ aspects of both audience development and community engagement at different points in the production process.

TOP TIPS

Shifting communities: Developing audience profiles

Successful audience development work starts with a deep understanding of who your audience is, what they want and think, and the other kinds of people you might want to reach. During the pandemic your audience may have grown or shifted. To understand what this means for your future programming and outreach strategy, such work can help to refresh audience profile and develop a clear idea of who you're now engaging and who you still want to reach.

Here's a template you could use:

1. **Build an overview of basic demographic of your area**

   Think about who lives around you, and how you could group people together as existing and potential audience types. Map out information such as age, location, family, and life circumstances for each audience group.

2. **Identify your current and potential audiences**

   Is the project relevant to different kinds of community members? Is the project relevant to different people for different reasons?

3. **Plot practical and psychological drivers for engagement**

   Think about the evidence you already have to judge this, and if you'll need to do further consultation, like sending out a survey or running a focus group.

   • **Practical**

   You should consider the digital and physical places the audience group use, such as specific social media platforms, civic spaces, infrastructure, resources, or services.

   • **Psychological**

   You should try to understand audience members' expectations of engagement, previous interaction with the arts and what is motivating them to join/access your offer.

4. **Map barriers to engagement**

   Consider what might be a barrier to different audience groups engaging with your work, or that might stand in the way of successful outreach:

   • **Practical**

   Often basic but important considerations such as: Is it affordable? Is there parking? Are there stairs or lifts? What are the opening times and do they fit around parental, care, and work responsibilities? If you're working online, are there technical, skills, or material barriers to everyone joining in?

   • **Psychological**

   Fears and scepticism can be major influences on participation. Is the work relevant to them? Do they have previous negative experiences engaging with formal arts and culture? Will they be singled out as first-time attenders or made to feel that the offer is 'not for people like me'? Can they leave when they want? Think about the physiological barriers for different groups, and how you might adopt an asset-based approach to engaging new audiences, building on the positive experiences people already hold.

By considering psychology – and audience members' personal experiences – many organisations have found that they can work to unlock deeper levels of engagement, allowing people to experience a more significant impact from the work. Additionally, when practical barriers are mapped out, many organisations are able to start with the community's needs and assets, rather than their offer, and develop stronger audiences as a result.

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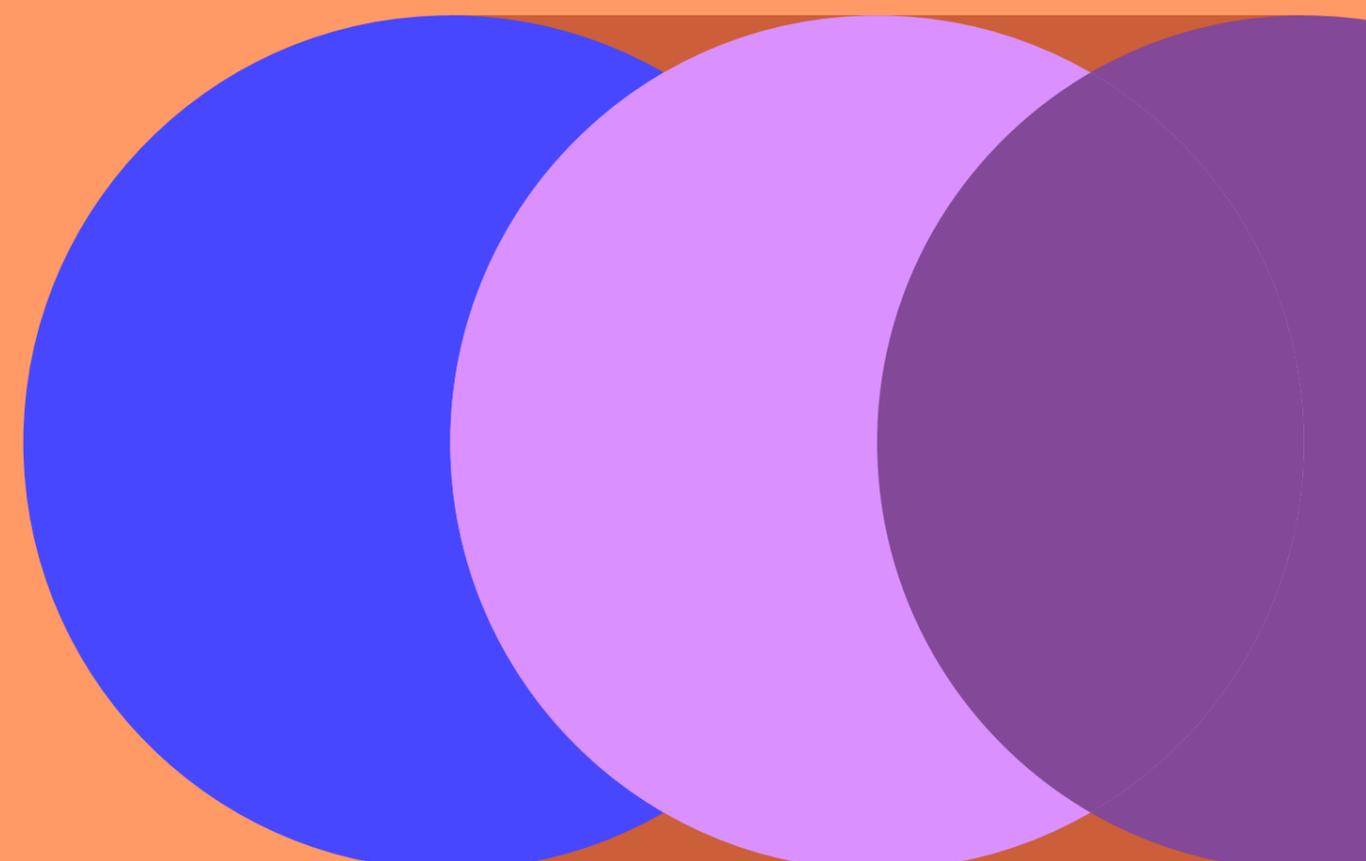
Creativity at home

2. Creativity at home

The pandemic resulted in an unprecedented context in which cultural organisations and practitioners have been unable to interact with their usual communities in conventional settings. As a result, many have adapted so they can reach people at home instead.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, cultural organisations and practitioners across the country have been testing hundreds of different analogue and distanced engagement approaches to spark creativity in their communities and keep people feeling connected and supported. Our workshops and interviews with practitioners shone a spotlight on how the arts can put people's needs and abilities at the heart of their work, meeting participants where they are. Many of these activities were targeted at those experiencing some form of digital exclusion, or who might not otherwise participate in the arts. Often, they were seen as a way of 'giving back' to communities and designed to feel like a gift for the recipient, boosting their mood and sense of belonging. Here we outline some of the most popular approaches.
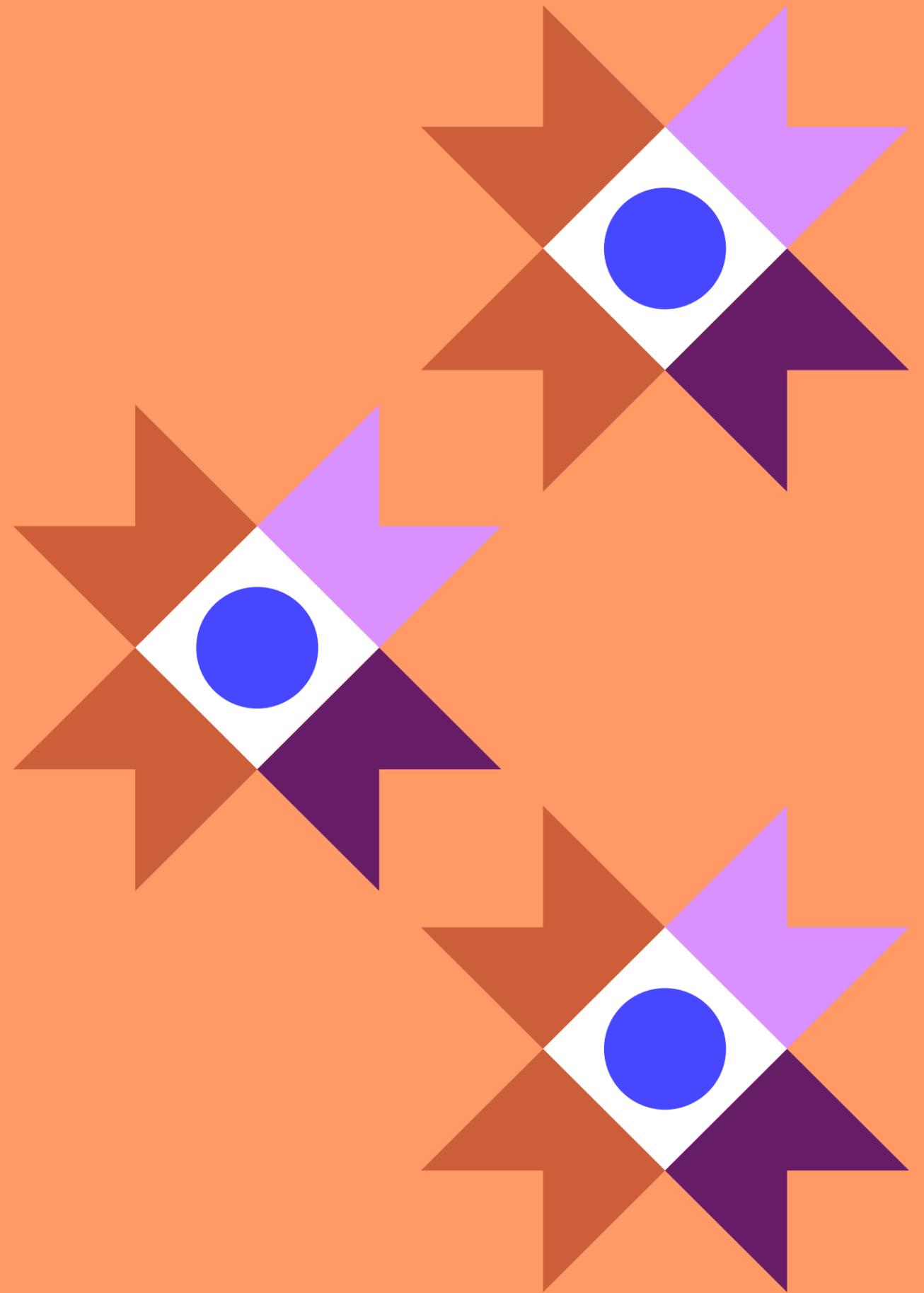
2.1 Creative Challenges

Faced with long stretches of time away from in-person activities and learning programmes, many organisations have used creative challenges to inspire accessible creativity and connection. These are short creative prompts to complete an artistic or cultural activity. Examples include:

64 Million Artists: Create to connect ⬈

A month of daily creative activities launched at the start of the first lockdown. By May 2020, daily challenges were going into 6,665 peoples' inboxes, with thousands more accessing challenges via over 30 local community connectors, and online via social media.

Grayson's Art Club ⬈

This series on Channel 4 was hosted by artist Grayson Perry and psychotherapist Philippa Perry and broadcast during the early months of the first lockdown. The show gave viewers ideas for creative activities to do at home, and had over 10,000 artwork submissions and over a million weekly viewers.

Staffordshire Libraries and Arts Service's Crafting Communities ⬈

This project used WhatsApp to post and share artist-developed weekly creative tasks, facilitate mutual support, and signpost people to other resources. Staffordshire Libraries are now using the same model to bring isolated residents back into libraries, through artist micro-residences.

Arts Derbyshire: Creativity at Home ⬈

Based on their experience of supporting people to be creative in their own homes over the pandemic, Arts Derbyshire have produced a free downloadable activity book accessible for anyone to do with basic resources.

Creative Lives: #GetCreativeAtHome ⬈

Launched in March 2020, this campaign provided more than 900 creative activity listings for people to try at home or online during lockdown, supported by programming across BBC TV and Radio.
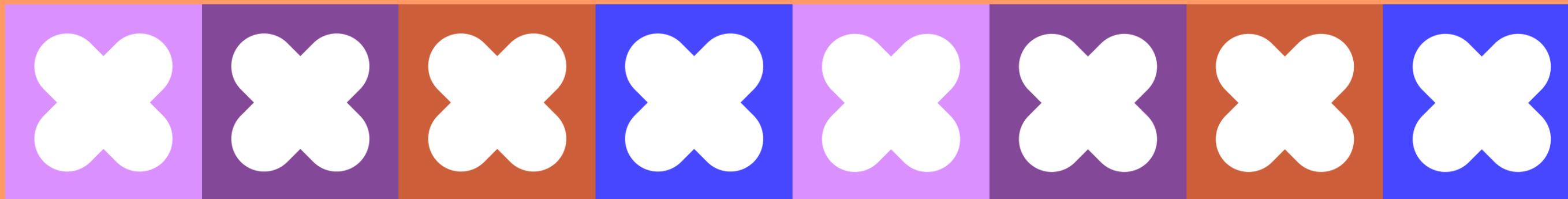
2.2 Creative packs

While creative challenges can be light touch and purely digital – as simple as a sentence or two of instructions – creative packs provide people with everything they need to take part in a creative project.

Emerging out of a concern that some people lacked the digital or artistic resources they needed to participate in creativity at home, creative packs have shed light on new ways to approach accessibility and inclusion in culture.

The scope and variety of creative packs produced through the pandemic is astounding. Sometimes they are used to teach certain skills like photography or ceramics and are accompanied by Zoom tutorials. At other times reaching new or specific audiences is the main goal.

Bags of Creativity ↗

These were distributed by eight Local Cultural Education Partnerships to 9,000 children in social care settings.

Let's Create packs ↗

Let's Create packs were produced by Arts Council England and distributed to 25,000 children across England through bridge organisations and local delivery partners.

The Auxiliary ↗

The Auxiliary in Middlesbrough worked with local charities to send out 100 disposable cameras to refugees and vulnerable older residents, and then returned to them postcards of the developed film.

6 Million+ ↗

6 Million+ worked with an established group of local migrants and refugees to mark the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. Project participants used a WhatsApp group, supplemented by hand-delivered creative packs and socially distanced artist visits in gardens, and together created a series of commemorative decorated cubes.

Creative Scene ↗

Creative Scene the Creative People and Places project for Kirklees, created a series of creative packs for people to use at home. They were distributed through third sector partners, and through a market stall in the town centre that they rented out, which enabled them to get in-person unmediated feedback.

CASE STUDY

Greater Creative,

a Creative Civic Change

project in Blackwell,

Derbyshire

"

Our Create a Crest packs encouraged individual residents to be part of a group project. We delivered 440 plain clay tiles across four villages. Each household designed their individual crest on their tiles, which were then sent back for firing and pieced together to create a shared public mural in the town.

It was Greater Creative's 'working party', a diverse group of local residents who co-create our work, who developed the idea for the project. We wanted to use organic materials and physical activity, and fight 'Zoom-fatigue'.

Working party members hand-delivered and collected tiles to shielding residents who couldn't travel. The WhatsApp group was on fire with daily updates from each village and members taking time to discuss the precious hand-made art creations. Since Greater Creative was set up there is a greater sense of community, it feels like we're all working together now and things are getting done".

CASE STUDY

The Cultural Spring, a Creative People and Places project working in South Tyneside and Sunderland
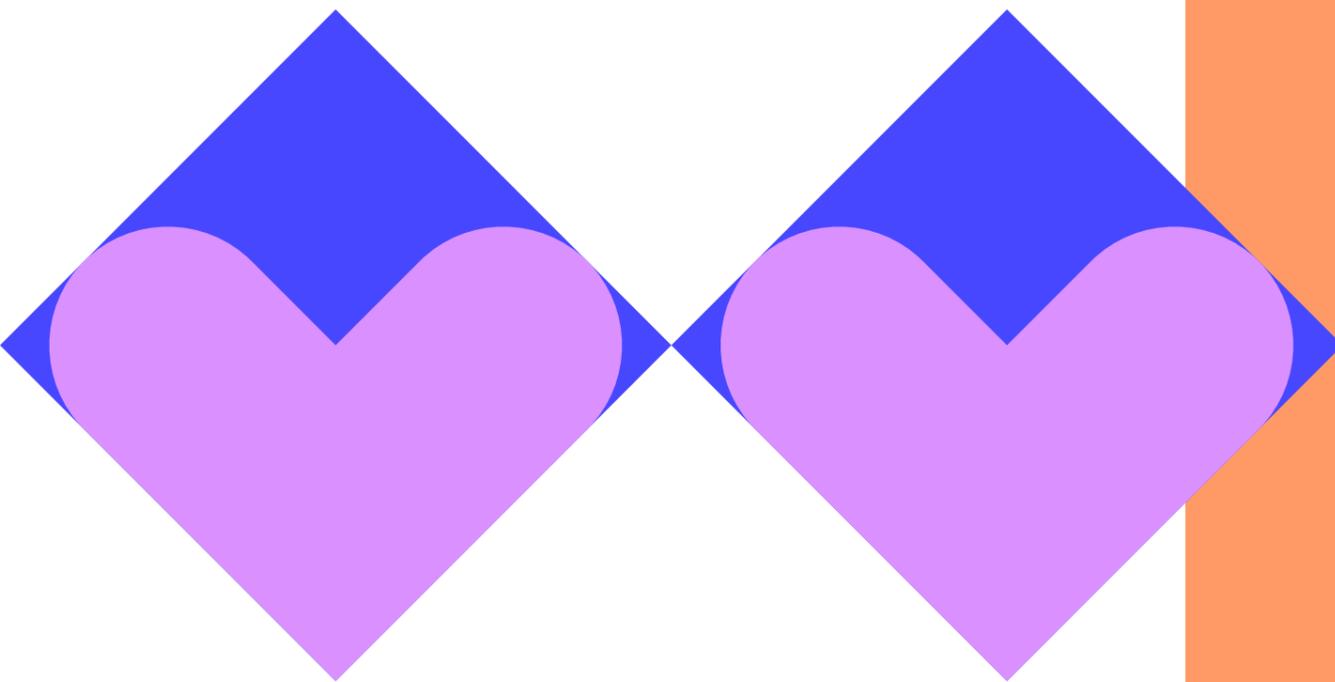
"Our work focuses on enabling and highlighting the creativity of local residents and shaping local cultural investment around resident's passions and priorities. Through the pandemic we worked with artists to develop craft packs for isolating community members. They were a way to engage people who can't get out of their home, and to build relationships with under-represented audiences. We previously distributed the packs through partners, but this meant we didn't really get to know the people who were taking part. So we then distributed packs ourselves, working at a smaller scale - around 20 people per artist. Though this has been more time intensive, it has enabled us to build direct relationships with residents.

There are currently 100 people working through the craft packs, supported by monthly check-in calls. We still involved partners - for example two packs have gone out through supported living schemes and Wearside Women in Need, so we can reach women who might not come to a community centre to do a craft class, but would participate in a safe and supportive home environment. At the end of the project there is an opt-in to come to an in-person session with the artist and other participants to share what everyone made. Anxiety about stepping into a cultural space is a big thing for people and hopefully the craft packs are a gateway into in-person activities".

TOP TIPS

Eight tips for creative and craft packs beyond lockdowns

Beyond the pandemic and national lockdowns, creative packs, done well, can provide an inspiring model of accessible and participatory everyday creativity. Here are some tips based on what we've heard worked – and didn't – through the conversations which informed this playbook:

1. **Design-in evaluation from the start**

    Organisations often found it hard to evaluate the impact of creative packs because evaluation was left to the end. Instead, those who built in mechanisms for feedback and sharing from the beginning – such as WhatsApp channels to share results, postcards to send back to the organisations, and ways to collect contact details before distribution – could best develop and evidence successful packs.

2. **Build-in mechanisms for co-creation**

    Mechanisms for communication and evaluation can also be used for co-creation, developing activities with participants over time, rather than simply delivering a pre-set list of tasks. Organisations that used this approach could be responsive and participatory, valuing the expertise, culture, and contributions of participants.

3. **Work strategically with partners to co-design and distribute**

    Organisations often found that they effectively reached more isolated community members when they built partnerships with charities, housing associations, and community groups. Successful mutually beneficial partnerships started with collaborating on the activity design, rather than simply using other organisations' distribution networks.

4. **Involve artist**

    Rather than sending out material designed by education teams, more experimental and engaging packs were often created when artists were commissioned, either to set the challenge, or to process the results (e.g. firing clay activities, developing film photos).

5. **Embed social connection in the process**

    Whether it is dropping the packs off by hand, following up on the phone to talk through the activity, or sharing the results on WhatsApp, creative packs are often more powerful when they fight isolation.

6. **Explore collaboration and exchange**

    Similarly, just because creative activities might be done in individual homes, it doesn't mean they have to be independent. Consider ways to create collaborative outputs in modular parts, or create psychical swaps between participates to create shared, group achievements.

7. **Consider practical resources carefully**

    Creative packs work best when they contain everything you need to complete the activity, down to a sheet of paper. This makes then accessible and practical for all participants.

8. **Design for different accessibility needs**

    Creative activities that can be redesigned, scaled up or down according to each participants individual abilities work best. By asking about accessibility needs at the start of the project, you can design activities to meet them.

2.3 Postcards and newspapers

Many cultural organisations and practitioners have been turning to paper distribution to keep communities engaged and connected. Low cost to produce, and easy to distribute safely through post-boxes, these are also versatile in terms of art form.

New Perspectives ↗

New Perspectives' postcard drama unfolded over six successive postcards portraying a drama through mocked up correspondence between characters. Rural touring theatre company New Perspectives then mailed the postcards out weekly, reaching more than 2,200 people in 26 countries worldwide. "We transform the stage into your doormat, essentially," explained their Artistic Director.

The Turnpike ↗

The Turnpike's Art by Post aimed to keep older audiences socially connected, they commissioned artist Kate Bufton to create simple activities as creative prompts to design A5 postcards using collage and drawing. These were delivered to 10 older people on doorstep drop-offs and shared online for wider audiences.

Sheffield Museums ↗

Sheffield Museums supported volunteers to hand write personal messages on hundreds of postcards. Together the postcards formed a project, called Museums by Mail, and were then sent to older people in care homes or distributed through luncheon clubs.

CASE STUDY

LeftCoast, a Creative People and Places project in Blackpool

"

We worked with Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside to create a project that engaged with isolated, digitally excluded elderly people living in Blackpool. We wanted to create something joyful that would provide gentle support for reconnection. The Upside is a beautiful limited edition newspaper featuring mood lifting news and stories from neighbours, life support and advice from local organisations, and guides for creative activities readers could do at home. Residents also shared wisdom, art and stories between themselves through the newspaper's features.

The publication was hand-delivered to residents by a group of volunteer 'Upsiders' as well as during housing association officers' regular neighbourhood rounds to vulnerable residents in their housing estates. This also meant our community partners could do a welfare check while knocking on doors. Evaluation was also conducted by door-to-door rounds and in focus groups, which we held outdoors. The project helped us to see different ways people were dealing and not dealing with the pandemic, and helped realign our efforts with a wider community mission".
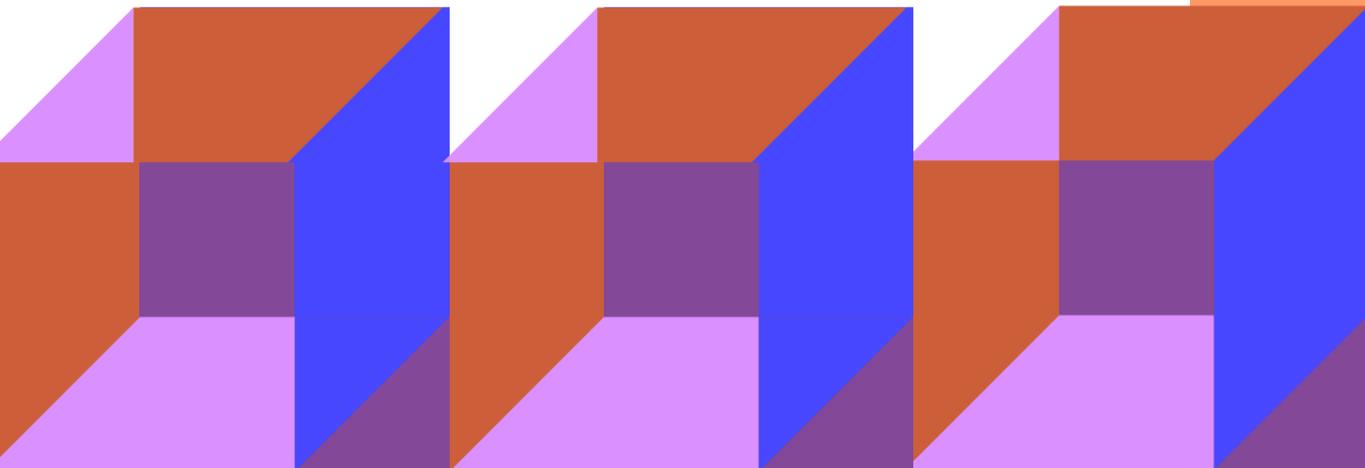
CASE STUDY

Company of Others, a small dance theatre organisation in the North East

"

We wanted to tackle the social and educational inequality experienced by digitally-excluded young people in our community. So we created Dance in an Envelope, a free, illustrated, dance game for children and parents to enjoy together, and keep physically active and creative while staying at home. The game removes the 'expert' from creativity and gives children the tools they need to make their own choreography, in their own homes, on their terms. As a game, it can be played over and over again with endless outcomes, rather than being 'used up' in one go like an activity pack might be.

We delivered 4225 packs across Byker, Walker and Gateshead; distributed through food banks, schools who were delivering meals, Newcastle Children's Hospital, and via members of Walker Workers, a youth health and public service organisations network. It was then requested by several organisations in Yorkshire who distributed a further 2000 through their activity packs.

Although the project was designed for lockdown, there are so many children that will continue to not be able to leave their home as much because they're shielding or because they can't get the vaccination, so it's something that will continue to be needed. 37% of five to nine year olds weren't getting that weekly exercise that they need in lockdown. It's important to remember that just because they're back at school, it doesn't mean that their lives have gone back to the way they were."

2.4 Phone calls

Phone calls have proved an effective way to deliver creative work, such as songs and stories, while doubling up as important welfare checks or a form of personal and emotional support to isolated participants:
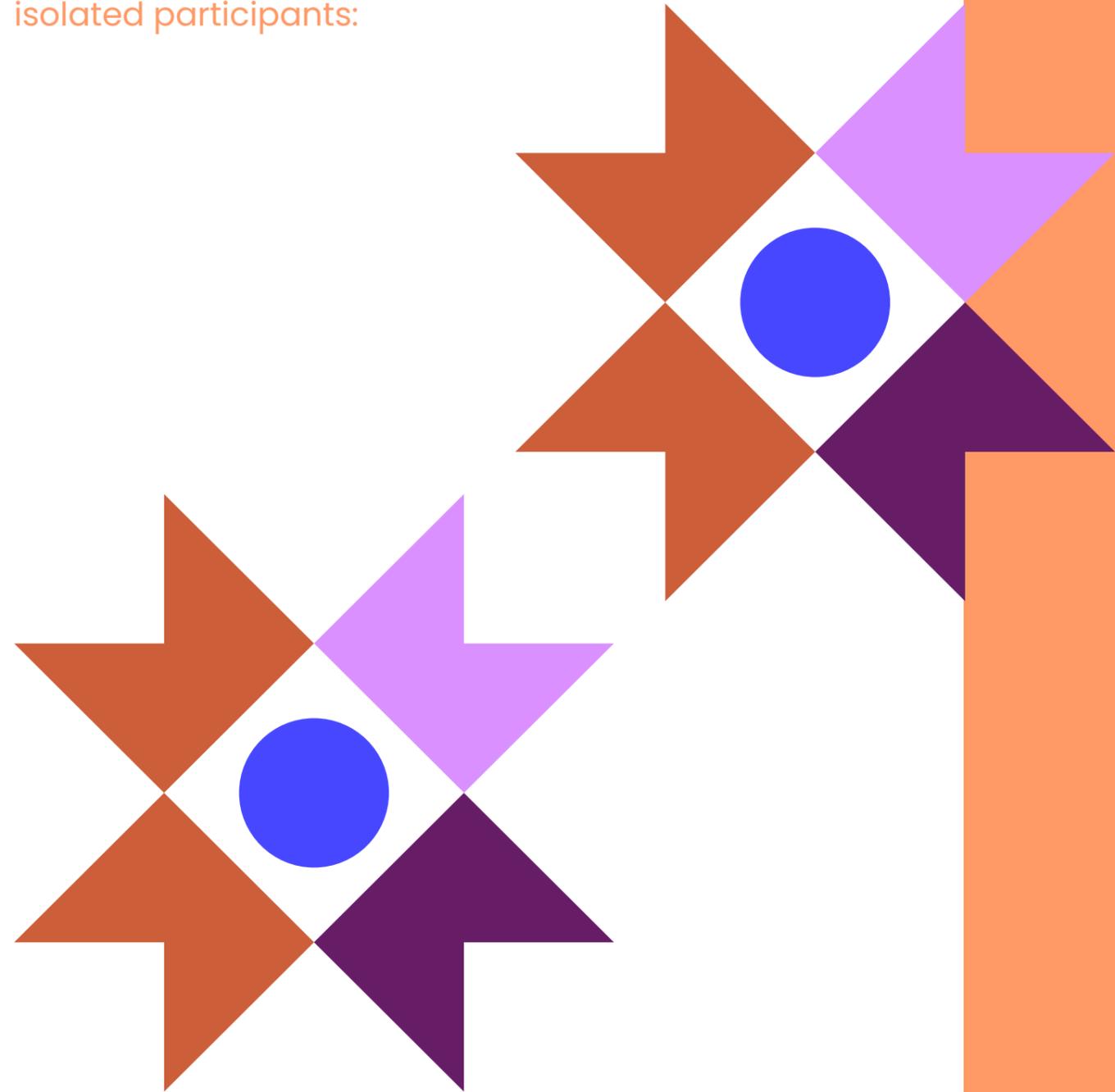
Arts La'Olam Telephone Jazz Singalong ↗

Arts La'Olam's Telephone Jazz Singalong took jazz song requests by phone and artist Helen Macdonald sang along with participants over the phone.

LeftCoast's The Story Line ↗

LeftCoast's The Story Line set up as a phone-in service for local shielding residents who could ring in and get a new story every day. However, take-up was lower than expected, and only about 20 people used it, so they pivoted to work in-person with a befriending service.

Southbank Centre (B)old ↗

Southbank Centre's (B)old programme of singing and poetry workshops for people with dementia was adapted for lockdown through a mix of postal activity packs and telephone calls.

Arts Derbyshire ↗

Arts Derbyshire used one-to-one phone calls as their main method of running their workshops and creativity programmes for people with dementia, their family or carers, and housebound older adults.

TOP TIPS

Joining local networks

Many of the most successful at-home cultural projects during the pandemic relied on the organisers being strongly rooted in the community, with trusting local relationships. For some, they already held direct relationships with diverse community members who most needed support to express their creativity through lockdowns. Other organisations worked with and through third sector and community partners.

If you're looking to deepen your community roots and get better connected there are plenty of ways to start. The networks available to you will depend on your location and communities, but most areas will have some form of the following. These networks have all been successfully used by the practitioners we spoke to:
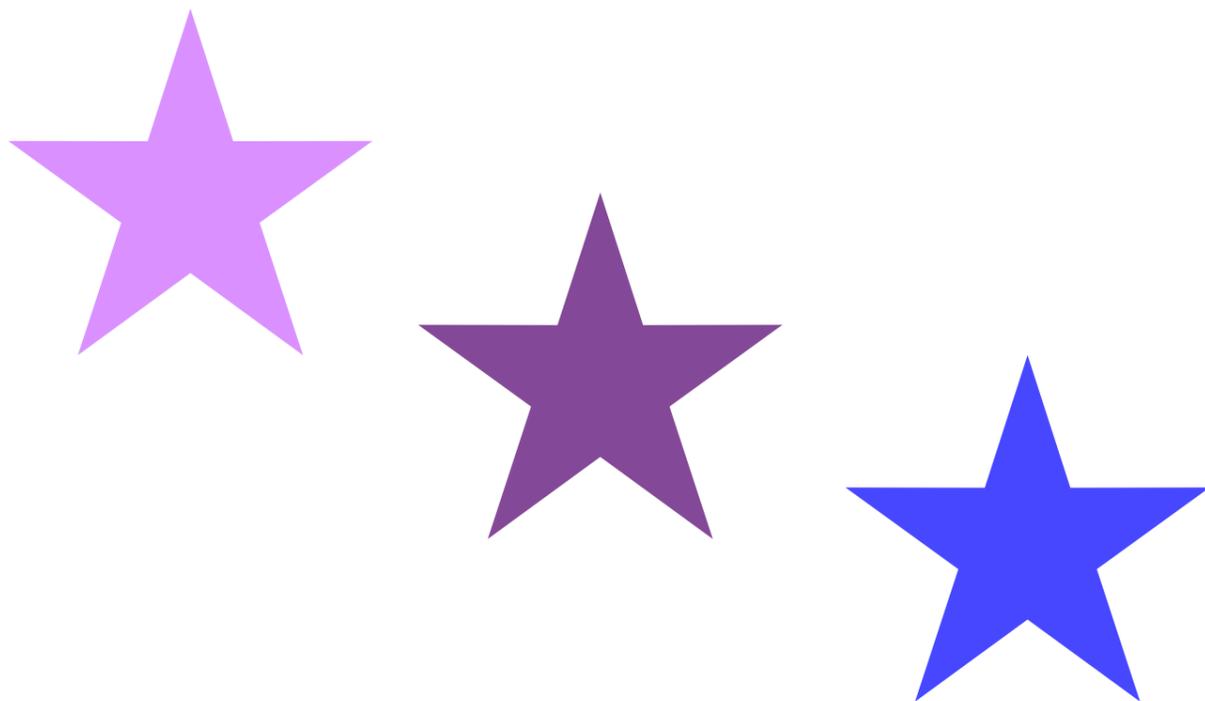
1. **VSCE networks**

   VSCE networks sometimes called 'CommunityAction' (or 'CAN'), 'Voluntary', or 'Inspire' networks. These are local membership networks for social organisations, often coordinated by your local authority.

2. **Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEPs)**

   Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEPs) led by local authorities linking cultural activities and schools.

3. **Health and wellbeing boards**

   Health and wellbeing boards are a council-run forum for leader from the local health and care system. Every local authority has one and some host wider networks, including cultural organisations and those contributing to social prescribing.

4. **Local economic development group**

   Local economic development groups such as Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs), oversee investment across several regions, and include both business and civil society stakeholders.

5. **Faith and cultural networks**

   Faith and cultural networkssuch as interfaith programmes like Near Neighbours, can be gateways into working with local people invested in faith-based and community-based social action.

6. **Local hubs of national charities**

   Local hubs of national charities like Mencap, Mind, Citizens UK, often have local branches which are connected into wider national networks, and can connect you with specific audience groups.

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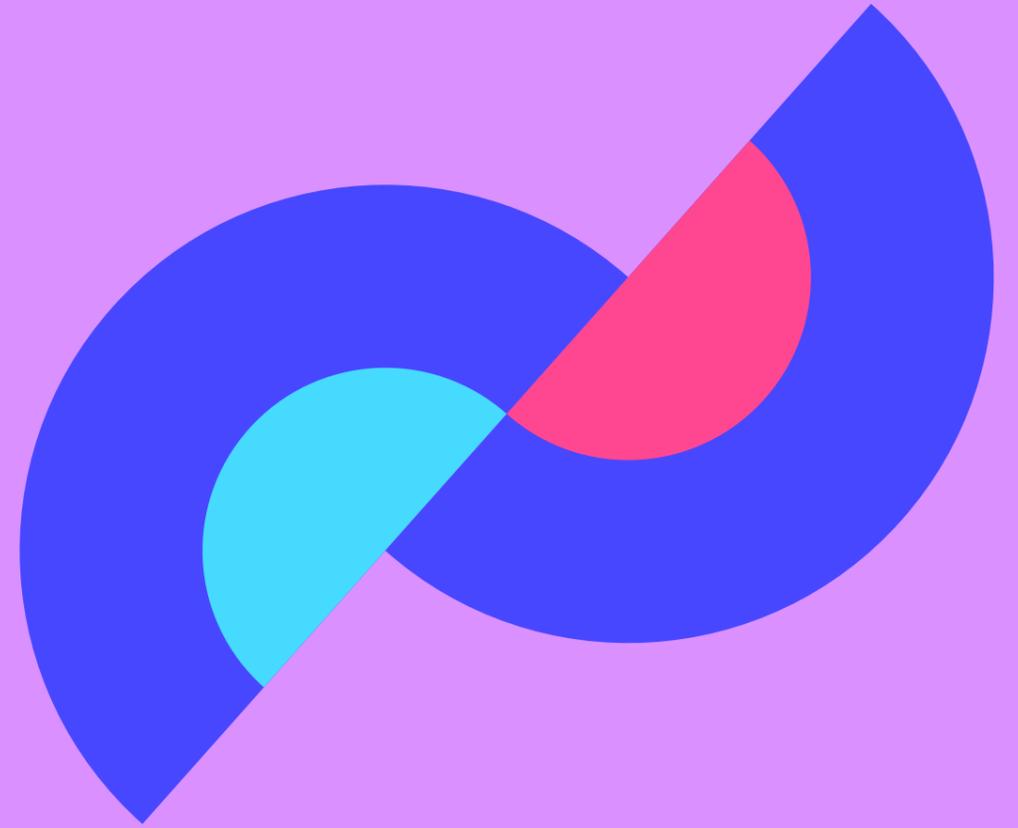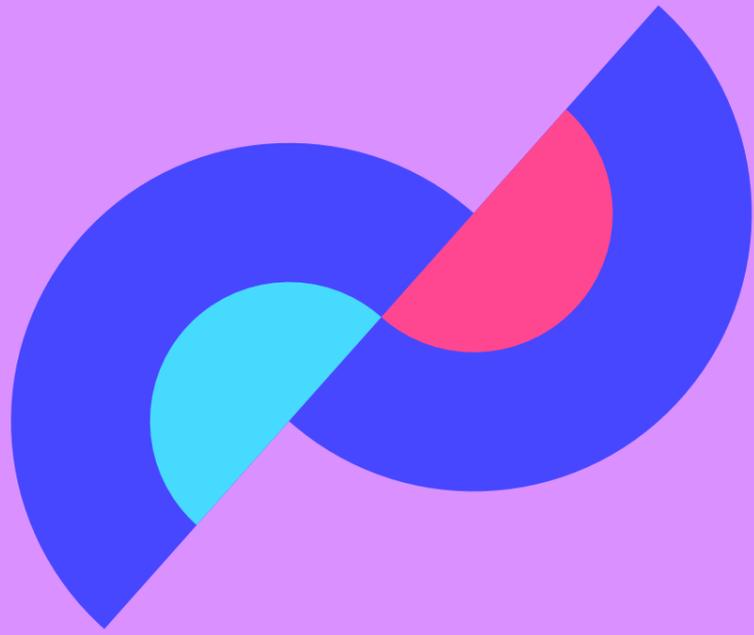
Connection
online

3. Connection online

The last two years have seen a gear shift in the use of digital tools and channels by cultural organisations and practitioners, and in the level of digital skills and confidence within the sector. Many cultural organisations have shifted to online engagement and delivery, driven by an imperative to keep supporting and connecting with their communities.

The use of digital channels has broken down physical barriers to participating in culture, allowed people to engage in the arts on their own terms in their own environments, prompted innovative delivery methods and formats, and facilitated new collaborations and partnerships. However, shifting online is rarely straightforward. Through workshops and interviews we heard about resourceful approaches to developing new delivery formats for an online environment, closing the digital skills gap among staff members, producing new kinds of content, building digital communities, and expanding the reach of arts during lockdown.
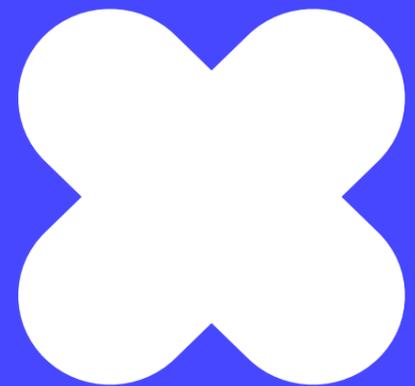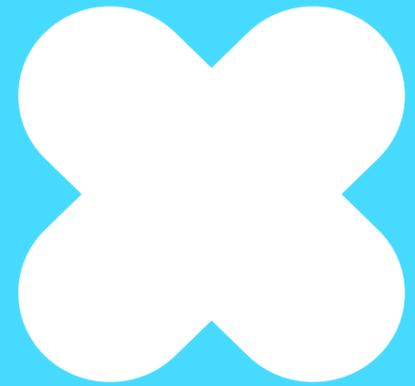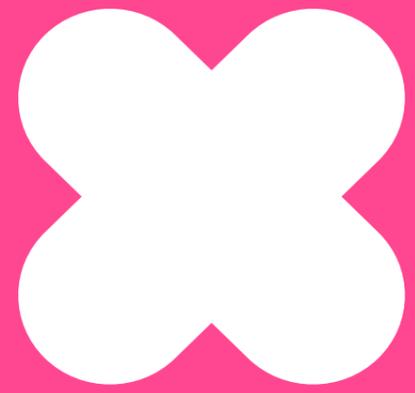
TOP TIPS

Eight tips for delivering cultural work online

Almost all organisations we spoke to had learnt a lot about working online through the pandemic. Through our fieldwork we've heard about a lot that worked, and a lot that didn't. We can extract a set of guiding points that tend to underpin successful digital work:
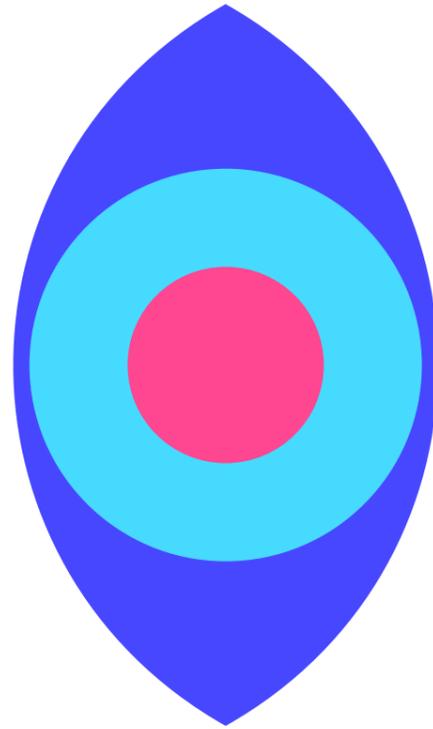
1. **Digital technology is a tool, in the same way as a pencil**

   Rather than thinking of digital technology as its own world, it is better to think of it as a toolbox. Like any other tool, you need to use it to do something, and it has its own strengths and limitations.

2. **Think about people before output**

   Digital technology is at its heart a tool for connection. Rather than zooming in on the product (a video versus a live call or an Instagram post, for instance), first think about the relationship you're trying to build, and the impact you want to have.

3. **Keep accessibility at the front of your mind**

   Digital working can both break down barriers for audiences and create new ones. In section four we explore different accessibility considerations.

4. **Blend digital and physical**

   Use digital engagement as a tool to augment, extend and support in-person work and community engagement, rather than relying on it in isolation.

5. **Tailor digital work for online environments**

   When working online, it is good to think about how to work with, rather than against, the digital environment. So, for instance, rather than streaming a conventional performance, play with interactive functionality to augment the experience, or integrate polls into social media.

6. **Invest in staff skills and digital infrastructure**

   Many cultural practitioners have been on a steep digital learning curve over the past couple of years, but it is important to build in budget for digital skills training and tools within project budgets.

7. **Analyse audiences and engagement...**

   Getting to grips with digital stats – from views to impressions – can be confusing. Spend time setting up analytics and putting in place a framework for monitoring and understanding impact and success.

8. **...But don't get lost in the numbers**

   A thousand views for a live performance could be incredible for an in-person play, but not carry the same punch online. Rather than aiming to sky-high impression stats, aim to evidence the depth and quality of engagement. Look for comments and replies rather than views, and local engagement as well as international reach.

3.1 Streaming

Streaming performances, workshops, and activities online has helped audience outreach and development during the pandemic. Musicians and theatre companies particularly turned to streaming to keep audiences entertained and connected with performance, but so too have libraries and community arts centres, which have streamed tutorials and workshops to audiences across social media. Some organisations found that streaming was most successful for reaching people who were already active and engaged, and we found that cultural organisations had less luck reaching targeted groups with this approach.

National Videogame Museum ↗

National Videogame Museum in Sheffield reached 5,000 people with their YouTube and Twitch streams, designed to help families stuck at home by teaching kids how to make games with free online tools.

Kingston Library Service ↗

Kingston's Library Service worked hard to engage a wider audience and support the most vulnerable through a new digital library offer. Starting with the first ever live streamed rhyme time, they expanded to create over 450 original videos and 140 interactive events which were used by thousands of residents to keep connected and active in lockdown.

London Symphony Orchestra ↗

London Symphony Orchestra launched the Always Playing programme. LSO musicians streaming live performance from their own homes on LSO's regular Thursday, Sunday, and Friday lunchtime slots. LSO often facilitated live discussion and interaction with the artist alongside the performance, by responding to Facebook and YouTube comments.

Hounslow Creative People and Places ↗

Hounslow Creative People and Places moved their popular public live dance classes to Facebook Live, attracting many participants, including some disabled participants who couldn't have joined in other ways, international viewers, and a culturally diverse audience.

3.2 Interactive digital events and workshops

A common approach for many cultural organisations through the pandemic has been to transfer group learning and engagement from in-person workshops to online video calls, using platforms like Zoom. This is different to streaming in that interaction between participants is enabled. The physical-to-virtual translation was rarely 'like-for-like', but nor was it always negative:
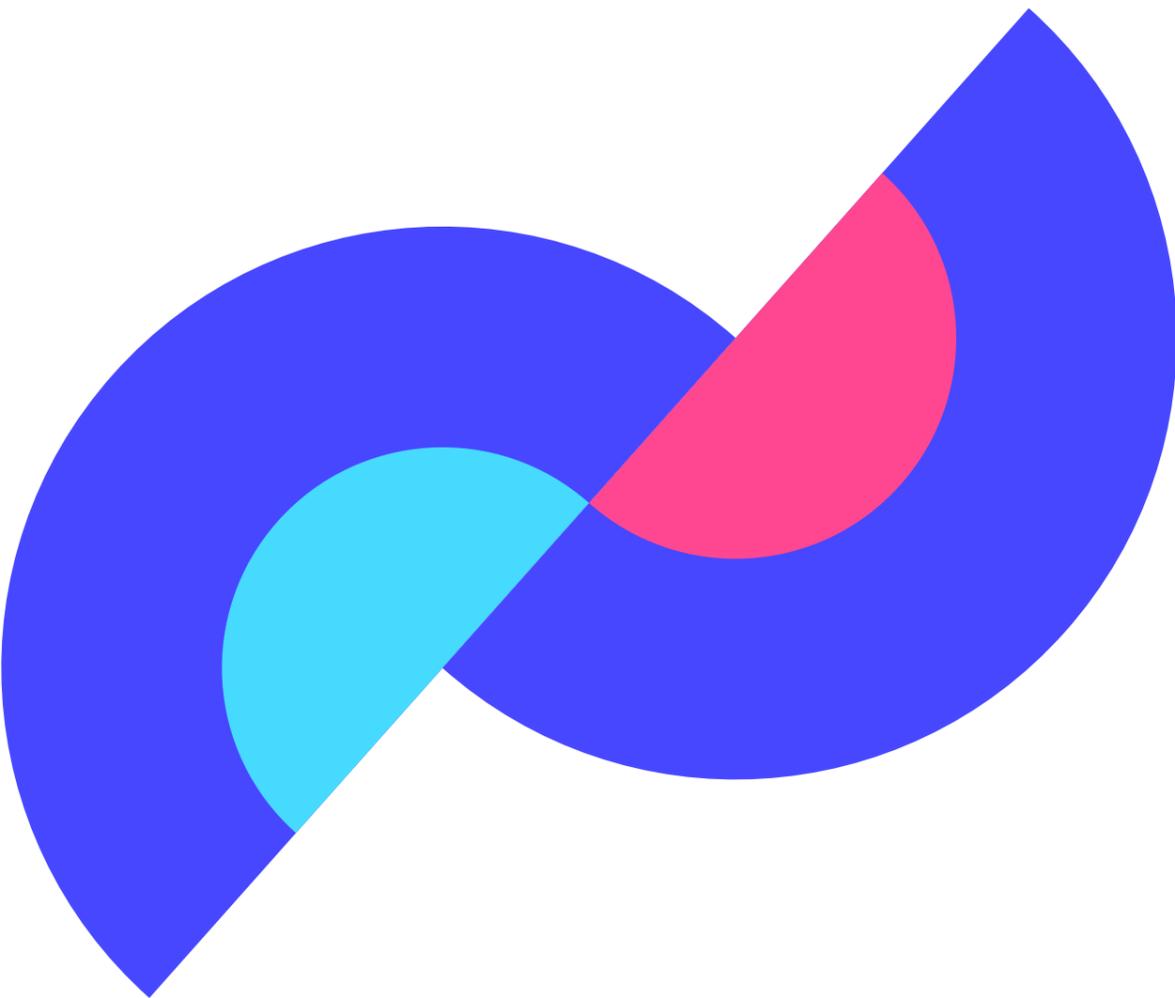
Yorkshire Dance ⌐⃗

Yorkshire Dance found that their small group Zoom sessions enabled a safe and interactive environment that had space for socialising and for art, and new participants who had previously struggled to attend live sessions due to their disabilities could take part.

Sonia Sabri Company ⌐⃗

Sonia Sabri Company worked in partnership with Saheli Asian Women's Project to provide 77 Zoom dance classes for women who would not normally have access to the arts, giving them a chance to step away from their daily lives, build confidence, and improve wellbeing.

Company of Others ⌐⃗

Company of Others continued to run their group for older dancers via Zoom, re-designing the choreography to be safer in peoples' homes. They produced filmed performances of different members dancing together in their own homes to celebrate International Dance Day.

DanceWest & East London Dance ⌐⃗

DanceWest and East London Dance provided digital access to dance classes for young people and older people at home or in care settings. Both organisations fundraised to provide tech to those without access to a device, or DVDs of pre-recorded classes.

CASE STUDY

Megaphone, a talent development programme for children's writers of colour

"Shifting from in-person to online was a significant challenge, both in terms of getting to grips with online delivery, and getting participants properly set up to take part. We used Zoom for classes and a networking app called Band for community-building (similar to Facebook but with greater privacy). The digital shift meant we could expand our programme and reach more people – in 2015 there were five participants, in 2020 there were 55. Most of those who took part during the pandemic said they wouldn't have been able to in-person. Travelling to Birmingham would have been hard because of caring responsibilities, disabilities, or other barriers, but online working overcame these limitations. Digital delivery also helped us save money on travel costs, and meant we could draw-in bigger name speakers to contribute.

You do lose something, there's a different dynamic when you're sitting round a table together. But the fact we could reach people who otherwise couldn't have got involved balances it out. We also learnt how accessibility means different things for different people - one writer, for instance, was writing a novel on her phone as she didn't have a laptop. Moving forward we want to develop a hybrid programme, blending core online provision and meeting in person for community building. We're thinking about rolling out a distributed model around the UK, rather than hosting everything in Birmingham."
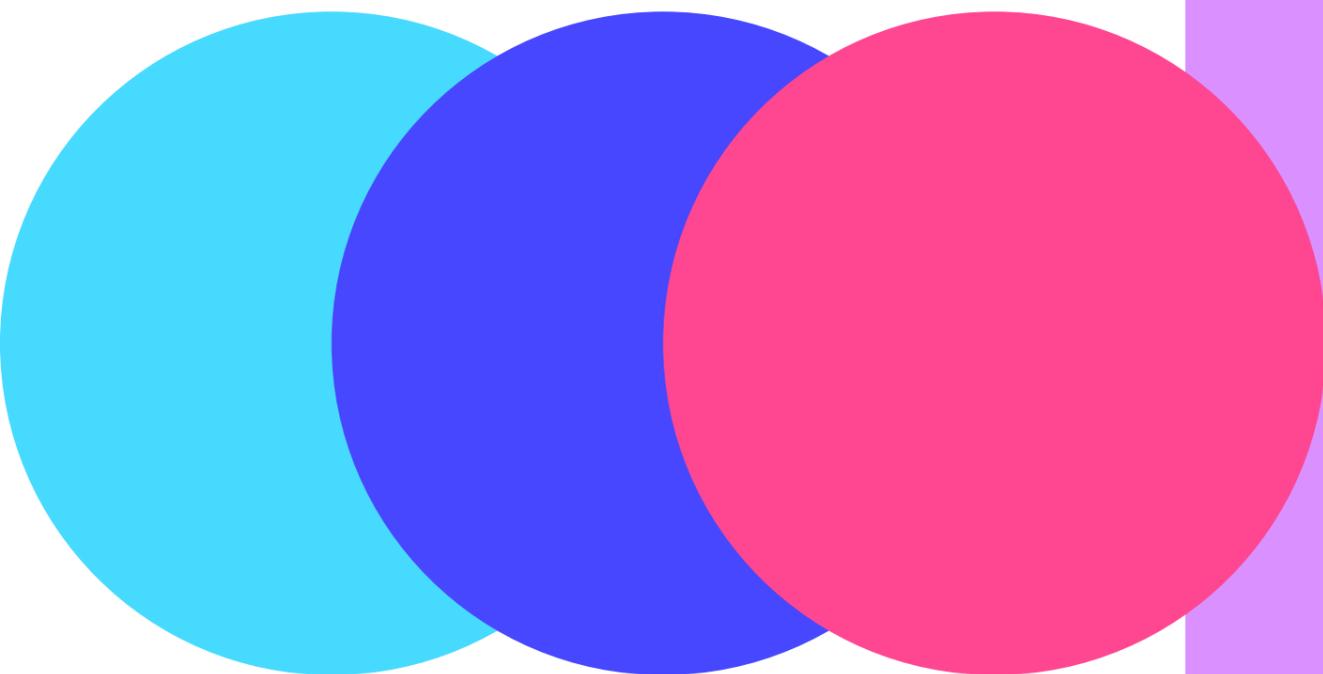
CASE STUDY

New Perspectives, a rural touring company based in the East Midlands

↗ Click Here to discover more
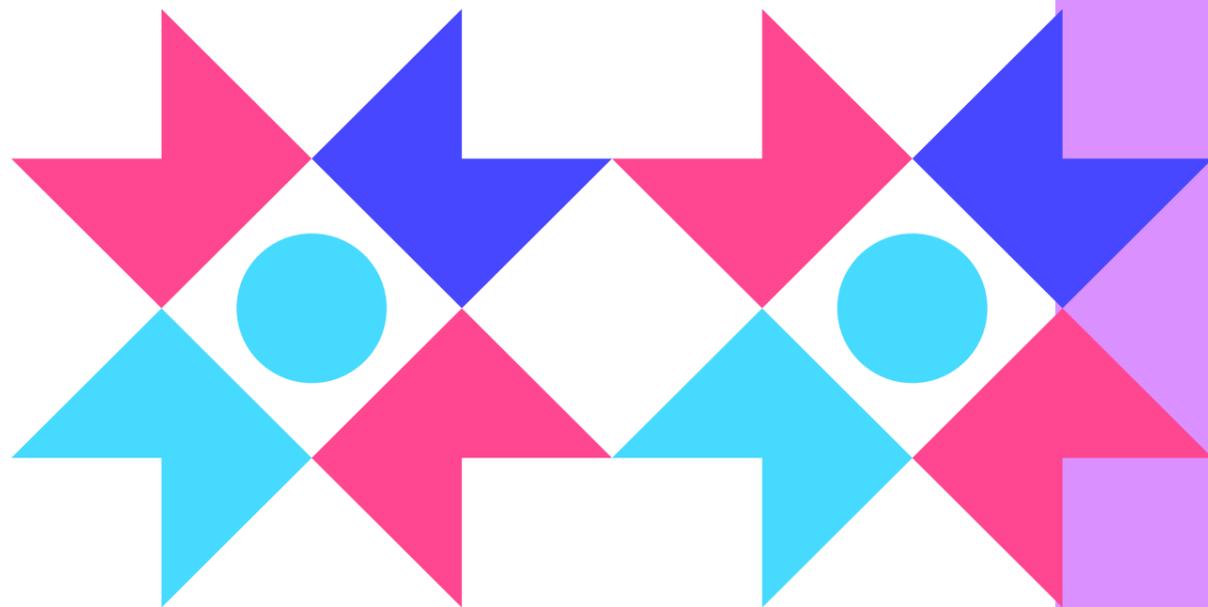
"We work to bring thought provoking theatre to a wider audience. During the pandemic, we went through a period of shape-shifting and adaptation, pivoting from in-person performance to a digital and distanced programme. One of the first things we developed was a postcard drama, a series of six postcards landing on doorsteps every few days, that tell an unfolding story through conversations between characters. One participant sent back a video of themselves applauding the postcards propped up along their mantlepiece; many others wrote back to the characters within the dramas. The final, seventh, postcard contained evaluation questions and an invitation to join an online writing workshop, for people to try their own postcard drama. We also experimented with other things, from WhatsApp plays to video compilations.

For New Perspectives, the audience, and what they want, is our first consideration. We've been thinking hard about where the stage is now, if it's not in your local theatre, church hall, or auditorium. During lockdown, often the stage was digital. For some audiences this posed practical challenges – for many over-55s it was their first-time using Zoom for example. What was really fascinating is that people wanted to give more of themselves when sitting in their own home - our older writers felt safer and more comfortable expressing themselves. It just gave the writing so much more beauty. It also enabled people who might be less forthcoming in a physical room, to have an equal voice in the Zoom room".

3.3 Reaching participants via social media and mailing lists

Social media use by cultural organisations and practitioners has blossomed. Many have shifted from seeing social media sites as a marketing platform, to a tool they can use to talk to, engage and support community members. This has not been without its challenges - producing a steady stream of good social media content is harder and more time-intensive than it looks - but it can facilitate strong interaction.

London Philharmonic Orchestra [↗]

London Philharmonic Orchestra ran Lean in and Listen, a series on Instagram which reached hundreds of thousands of people worldwide with a weekly opportunity to reflect through listening to music which was programmed to be soothing and relaxing.

Derbyshire Libraries [↗]

Derbyshire Libraries developed Detective Book Off, a popular social media challenge which played out through the comments section of their social media accounts. Rather than producing new content for social media they focused on facilitating interactive discussion and signposting to live events and reading groups.

Freshly Grated [↗]

Freshly Grated the Create People and Places project in Great Yarmouth, was welcomed into hyperlocal private Facebook community groups to share outcomes, upcoming activity, images from events, ideas and nostalgic images from those neighbourhoods, building trust and awareness.

York Museums Trust [↗]

York Museums Trust held online exhibitions that were curated by the public via social media polls, with local residents along with international audiences. They designed their social media presence to playful, bitesize, and interactive, focussing on sharing their collections.
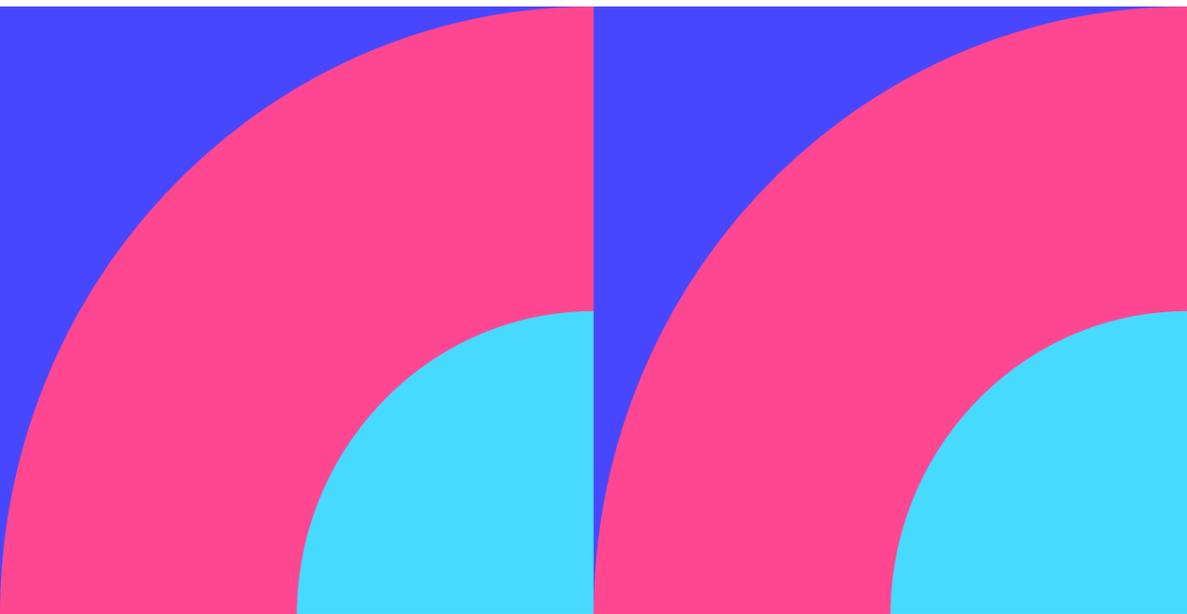
CASE STUDY

Black Country Living Museum

[↗] Click Here to discover more

"Like many museums during the pandemic, we wanted to keep audiences engaged while our doors were closed. We grew the BCLM TikTok account from nothing to 570,000 followers in six months, and in doing so engaged a new and younger audience with the work of the museum. 80% of the people that we are talking with on TikTok are under 30, 50% of our followers haven't visited us before, and 80% of our followers said interacting with us was the first time they had interacted with museums on social media at all.

TikTok then approached BCLM to becoming a learning partner, providing us with a budget to support the production of a couple of videos a week prior. It's a collaborative effort across the organisation to sustain the creativity needed for demanding social channels. The videos themselves are not resource-heavy to produce, they just require a phone, lighting rig, some form of camera stabilisation, and are edited using Premiere Pro. It goes to show you don't need a lot of investment to get lots of engagement."

3.4 Digital-first content production

Beyond shifting existing activities into digital formats like streamed performance, many organisations and practitioners experimented with producing content such as videos, podcasts, and interactive websites. This approach enabled organisations to deliver high-quality content tailored to the needs and preferences of their communities.

Producing digital content has required staff to develop whole new skillsets which undoubtedly will continue to be important far into the future. It is also important not to under-estimate the money and time needed to produce high-quality digital content, which can require specialist equipment, expertise, and extensive production time. Nevertheless, many organisations have found it to be a powerful tool for engaging and supporting communities.

Emergency Exit Arts: TEMO TV Lockdown broadcasts ↗

Working with young Thamesmead residents, EEA produced weekly lockdown broadcasts for local people from May to June 2020. It entertained watchers and developed young participants' digital production skills.

Duckie's Posh Club: Posh Club TV ↗

To keep their older and isolated members connected, alongside a full programme of analogue engagement, Duckie's created four TV-style live broadcasts of their performances, with interactive elements.

SouthPaw Dance: Dance digital ↗

This Newcastle-based dance company are exploring how to make performances that build on the possibilities of digital tools, rather than are constrained by them, by developing a digital dance Augmented Reality app. It shows characters from their productions projected into the viewer's real space, through their phone camera.

CASE STUDY

Made by Mortals, a participatory theatre company in Tameside

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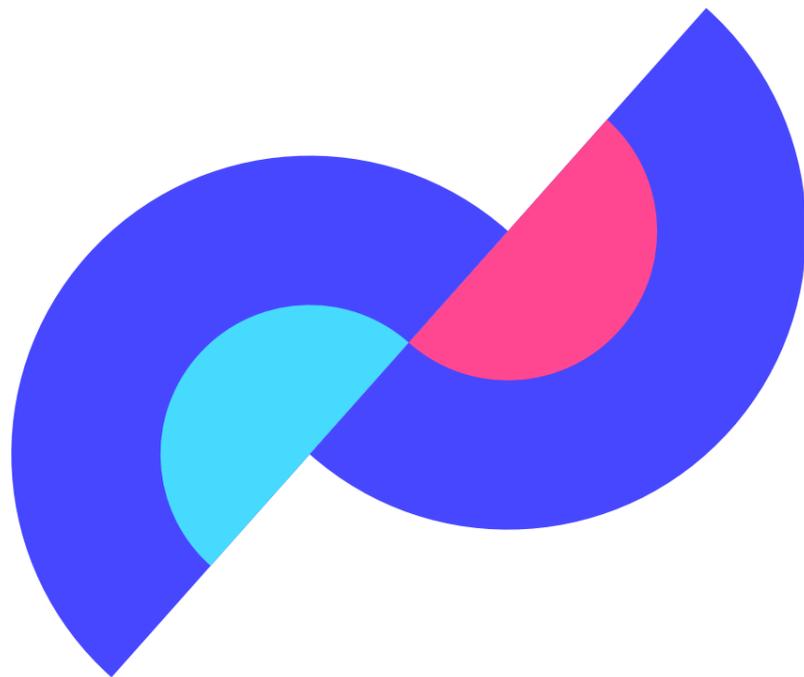
We started a new project in lockdown called Armchair Adventures – a podcast made by older people for children. We already had established links with people aged 65+ at risk of social isolation, who were largely initially referred from health and social care organisations. We set up Zoom software and wi-fi for our participants, as well as a dial-in freephone number, and hosted digital workshops, through which we co-produced monthly podcasts based on participants' lives. We also ran follow-up live performances via Zoom where participants could see the enthusiastic response of young audience members, signing, moving, and acting in their own homes. After lockdown, we went back into performances schools, and our participants, the podcast characters are treated like local celebrities when they visit.

Initially it was about families connecting with each other, so grandparents could do something with grandchildren while they were both isolated in their separate homes. Then, to engage other young people, the podcasts were distributed through a mix of direct marketing to parents, word of mouth, and school partnerships. From a couple of schools in Tameside in 2020 to now, the audience has grown exponentially - in the second lockdown we were engaging schools all over the country. As well as distributing through schools, we want to work with other groups and partners to produce podcast episodes in the future, such as LGBTQ+ young people and Black elders. The podcast series has had over 40,000 listens, received a Digital City Award for 'Best Use of Technology', we've been charted in India, and we've got a following in Australia. That does blow your mind a little bit!".

TOP TIPS

Evaluating online and distanced work

When a cultural activity, performance or project is participated in online or in the privacy of a participant's own home it can be hard to evaluate its success and impact. You often are not able to see participants' reactions or even ask them questions about their experience. Some online videos boast huge viewer numbers, with thousands of impressions from all around the world, but it can be tricky to know what value to assign to this engagement.

When it comes to understanding the success of your work, and bidding for funding, it's important to have a clear set of outcomes and a way to understand the impact of your work. The practitioners we spoke to used various methods to listen to community members and collect evaluation data:
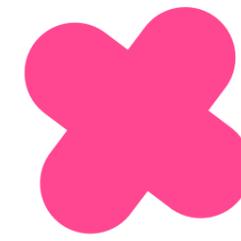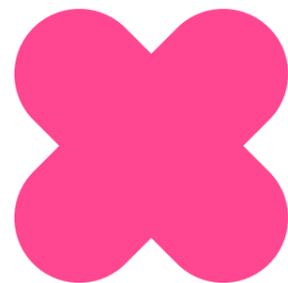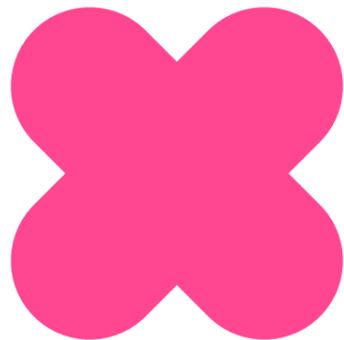
1. **Competitions and challenges**

   Made by Mortals found analytics didn't allow them to fully understand how children were listening to Armchair Adventures because the children used their parents' devices. Therefore the team supplemented analytics data with creative competitions for young listeners, and used the submission form as a way to gain qualitative insights, such as where they heard about the podcast.

2. **Follow-on workshops and live performances**

   Many cultural practitioners paired creative packs, postcards, and digital engagement with follow-up live, interactive workshops. These were places to make connections and create together, but also gave the practitioners a chance to ask for feedback, reflections, and impact.

3. **Facilitated sharing through WhatsApp and Facebook**

   Other practitioners facilitated conversation around a cultural project through online groups. Again, these were spaces for sharing and creating, but could also be used to ask evaluation questions.

4. **Phone calls and door knocks**

   Often practitioners accompanied creative packs with a hand-delivery service, or artist support over the phone. This connection meant that practitioners could gain rolling feedback and ask formal pre- and post- evaluation questions.

5. **Community researchers**

   For live events – whether distanced, in-person or online - it can be hard to speak to many people. Some organisations got volunteers to act as researchers, having conversations with community members and asking questions about their experiences in a safe way.
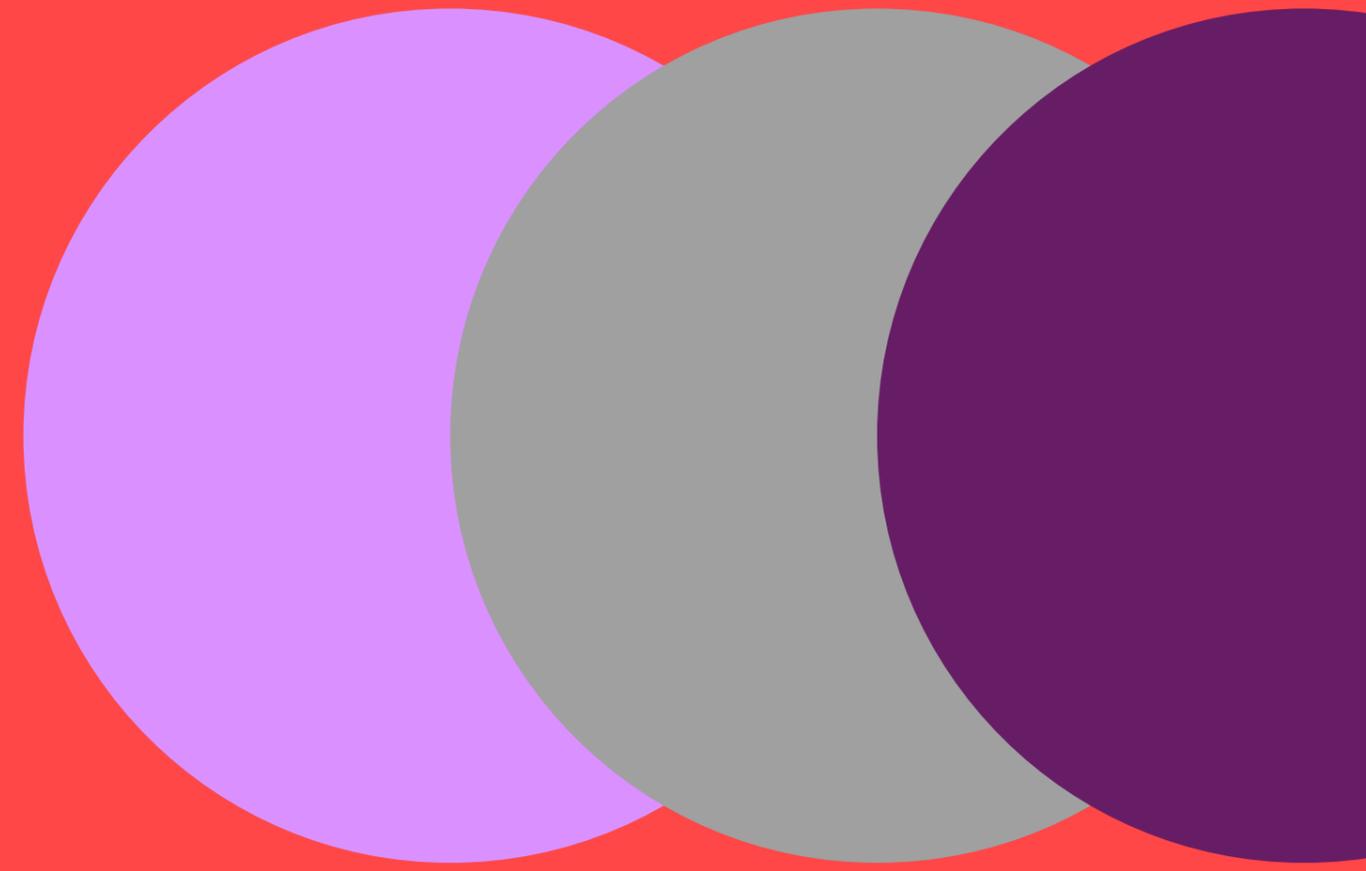
4 Access online

4. Access online

The shift to online has broken down many traditional barriers to accessing arts and culture. Many community members are more able to participate in culture inside their comfort zone, and on their own terms. Yet over the past two years, cultural organisations have been keenly aware that digital doesn't work for everyone. Practitioners have seen how many people lack the resources, environment, skills, confidence, support, or inclination to participate in the arts and community life online. In response, cultural organisations and practitioners around the country have been working hard to get people the tools and skills they need to join in, creating safe, supportive, and accessible digital environments.

Our research has highlighted the breadth of approaches to developing safe and accessible online cultural opportunities. We have heard about the rise of hybrid delivery approaches with phone calls and creative packs supporting online resources; schemes for donating and repurposing unused devices to enable participation; and new best-practice standards in digital facilitation.

Anecdotally, our research has suggested that the pandemic has provided a more fundamental impetus for many cultural organisations to reassess how they practice inclusivity. As work shifted online, there were opportunities to redesign engagement methods that were leaving people out before the pandemic, making them better for the long-term. By adopting key lessons from the first two years of the pandemic, we can continue the work of building a more inclusive and equitable sector.
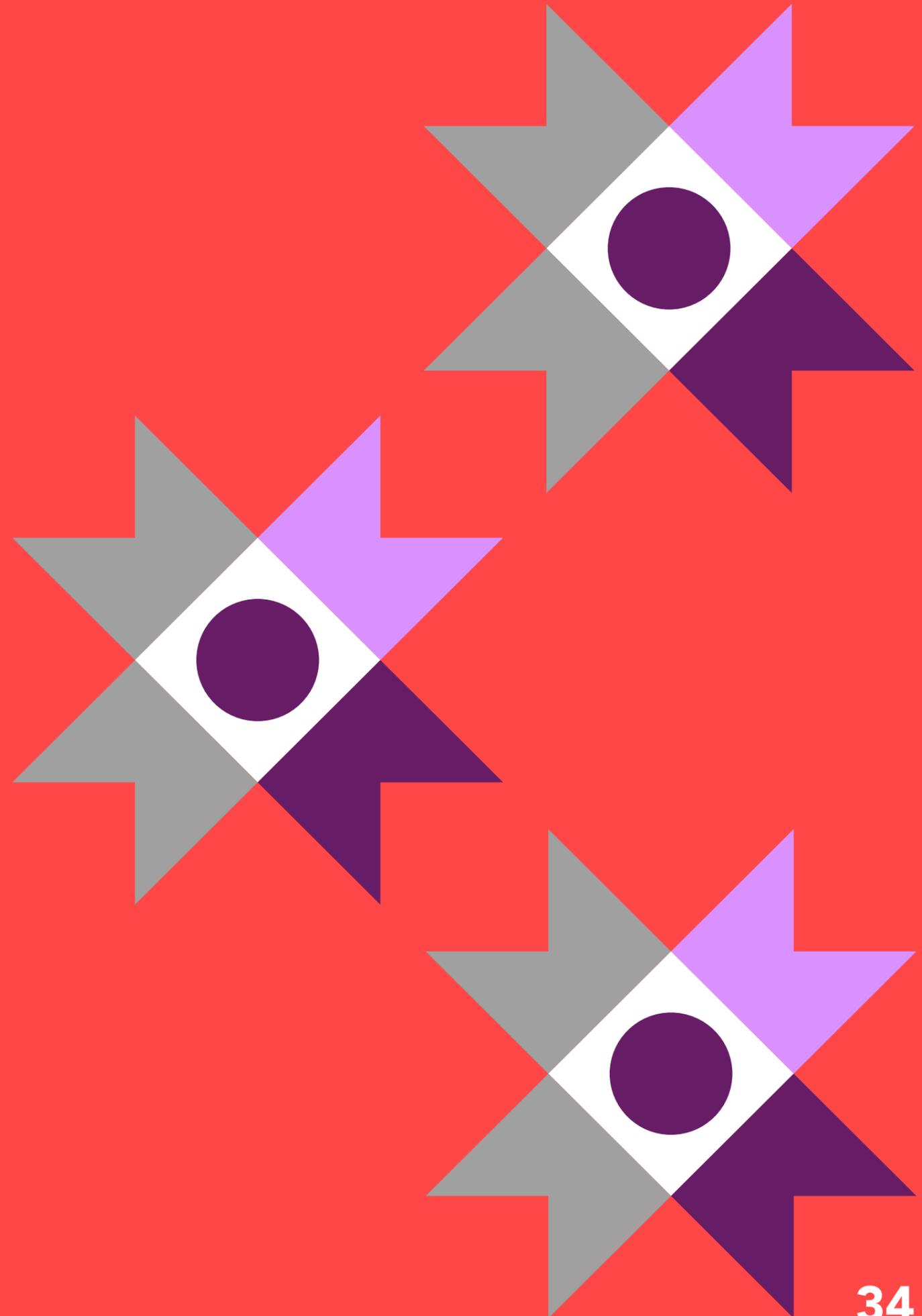
TOP TIPS

Designing inclusive digital experiences

Digital inclusion specialists Good Things Foundation worked with Arts Council England to produce a guide for cultural practitioners. This is a small, edited excerpt, and sits alongside other considerations for designing inclusive digital organisations.

1. **Awareness**

   How can participants who are offline be made aware of the activity? Is the activity being advertised through offline channels, and through the online channels that 'limited users' are more likely to use, such as social and entertainment media?

2. **Engagement**

   Have you consulted with people in your local community about the barriers they face in accessing your activities online and the best ways to address these barriers?

3. **Communication**

   Is support required to help people to see how the experience is of value to them, and to encourage them to continue participating?

4. **Connection**

   Is practical support required for people who do not have an internet connection or device (e.g. distribution of devices or data dongles)?

5. **Resourcing**

   Is there a way to provide a lower cost (or free) way for people in financially vulnerable situations to engage online?

6. **Skills**

   Is digital skills training required in order for people to engage?

7. **Design for slow connections**

   Is the activity enriching for participants irrespective of their device or internet speed?

8. **Design for different abilities**

   Do any adjustments need to be made to improve the accessibility of online content e.g. for people with lower levels of literacy, people with disabilities or impairments, and people who have English as a second language?

9. **Design for home working**

   Is the activity designed to take account of the resources and support that someone has at home?

10. **Design for safety**

    Are there any safeguarding concerns related to delivering this activity online? How can the activity be designed to reduce risk?
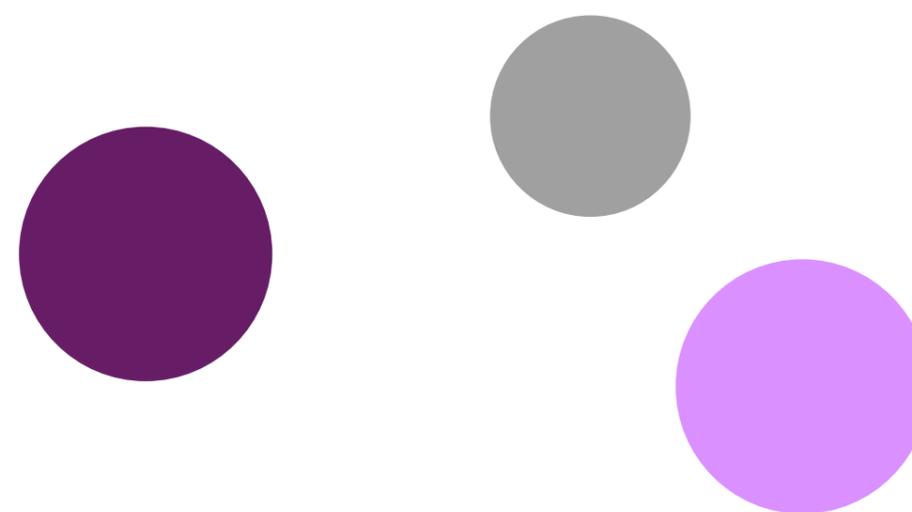
4.1 Digital access and getting community members online

A big concern for many cultural organisations during the pandemic was digital exclusion and data poverty. While some pivoted to analogue methods such as creative packs to bypass the digital divide, others tried to tackle it head on by offering tech, data, and skills support to participants. They found that different audiences face different barriers to getting online. For example, for many children it is not having a quiet space of their own; others struggle to afford data or live in a rural area where reliable connection is hard; and people of all ages don't have all the digital skills they need to participate fully.

Arts organisations around the country stepped up to connect their participants with the wi-fi and devices they needed to stay connected with culture, friends, and family. We heard that it is best to think of data inclusion/exclusion as a spectrum rather than a binary, that in turn requires of spectrum of approaches to address it. Here are some examples of digitally inclusive practices in the cultural sector:

Artspace Cinderford ↗

Artspace Cinderford used culture as a tool to support older community members with dementia to develop their digital skills through the process of growing a runner bean plant and sharing the results with a Facebook community.
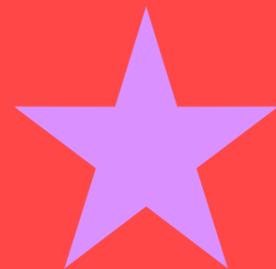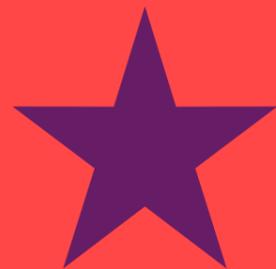
Company of Others ↗

Company of Others drew on their people-centred approach to respond quickly to digital access. In the week before lockdown their Artistic Director Nadia re-assigned funds to buy devices and data for all participants who needed it, and safely visited their homes teaching them how to use the technology whilst conducting risk assessments of the spaces they would be moving in.

Westminster Libraries ↗

Westminster Libraries like many other library services, Westminster Libraries offered internet access to communities, opening up physical space at the library in the heart of lockdown to those with no access at home. Westminster's PC service was used by just under 400 people per week through the first lockdown.

CASE STUDY

Collective Encounters, a specialist participatory theatre organisation in Liverpool

⧉ Click Here to discover more

"

At Collective Encounters we specialise in participatory theatre for social change. We've worked with Liverpool communities since 2004. We were used to several staff members working remotely, so had a good head start, but pivoting all our work online was a massive learning journey for us all. In early March 2020, all of our programme leads called up and spoke to each and every participant on the phone, firstly, to maintain contact, and then to establish their digital needs – we talked them through a digital needs survey. We then re-assigned grant funding to buy data and the tablets to equip everybody on our programmes.

Many of our community members are over-80 and needed a lot of technical support. For some people it took a while longer to get comfortable online, but we kept in touch through phone-in sessions and postal packs. We also partnered with a local charity in Liverpool to provide expert digital support to community members. It was exhausting! When we describe it now, it sounds like it was just all in a day's work. But it took long hours and was phenomenally intricate - it was the steepest learning curve we've ever been on."

CASE STUDY

Kingston Libraries, an innovative library service in Greater London

"

Before the pandemic we ran a good, but not particularly trailblazing physical library offer. But through the pandemic our work changed to be ambitious and experimental. In early lockdown many of the library team were re-assigned to triage community need for the Kingston Stronger Together Hub, supporting more than 2,000 residents over seven months. This gave us stronger community connections and greater visibility, showcasing the role that libraries could play in terms of being the front door of the Council.

At the same time, the remaining library staff ramped up our digital offer to residents. We ran the country's first live-streamed rhyme time, a lifeline to many parents in those initial frightening weeks of lockdown. We had close to a thousand interactions on social media. Since then, we've created hundreds of reading and cultural activities – from dementia singing groups to digital escape rooms - alongside practical support, such as the virtual job club. We underpinned all these activities with a considered approach to digital inclusion - we gave out digital devices and data to residents most in need, recruited ten digital champion volunteers to provide one-to-one digital support, and ran Zoom sessions for housebound residents.

The pandemic has been a catalyst, transforming our libraries into a totally different service. Moving forward, the council is developing a new communities' strategy with libraries at its core. Libraries in the borough will become community hubs, with a physical presence locally, a digital hub online, and at-home servicing housebound residents. The libraries will also have a key role to play in the council's new digital-first strategy, upskilling community members in libraries so that they can access other public services online. We have secured public health funding to develop this work."
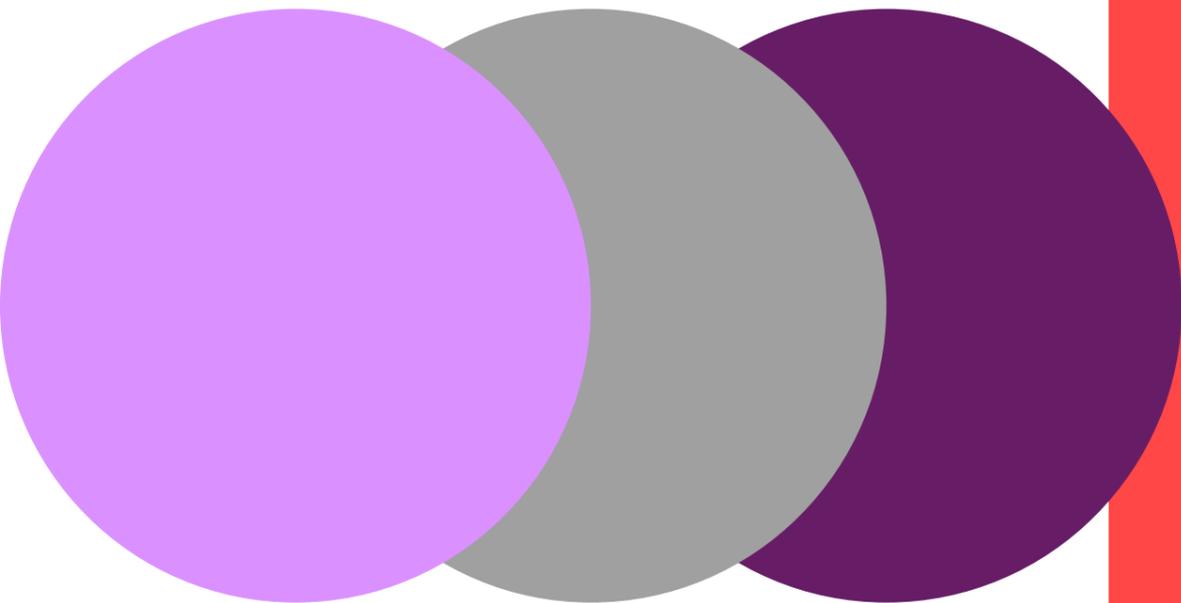
4.2 Accessibility for disabled participants

Accessibility for disabled participants has been a mixed picture during the pandemic. On the one hand, many people with physical disabilities and mental health problems have found engaging with culture online easier than having to access a physical venue or gallery. Anecdotally our research suggests that cultural organisations have seen the number of disabled people taking part in their work increase. Campaigns like #WeShallNotBeRemoved have been working tirelessly to bank the gains experienced by disabled audiences as venues reopen, and push for inclusivity to be at the heart of designing online arts activities. Accessibility comes in many shapes and forms, and examples include:
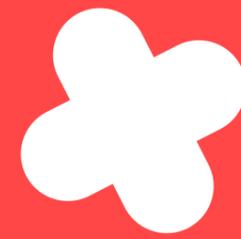
Bamboozle ↗

Bamboozle, a theatre company for disabled children, made sure their online performances were engaging for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities by personalising their sing-a-longs, incorporating every child's name into the songs, and focused on one family at a time

Heart n Soul ↗

Heart n Soul formed a steering group to co-create an online programme of activities for those with learning disabilities; and cultural organisations across the country have developed their commitment to captioning and audio/text-describing videos and calls, using inclusive facilitation techniques, and designing activities for people with different abilities.

The NewBridge Project ↗

The NewBridge Project transitioned their artist residencies to be online, and found they attracted 89% more applicants with disabilities. They are now focussed on maintaining this accessibility and continuing to support more disabled artists, for instance commissioning Kolia Bene to create a pamphlet to help disabled people participate in activism.
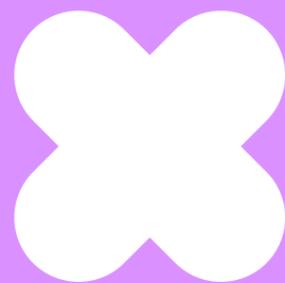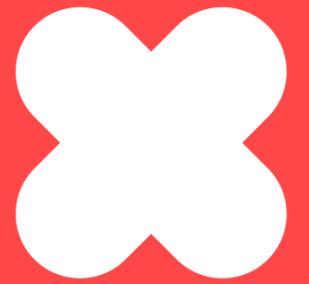
4.3 Safe and supportive working

Furthermore, the digital shift poses new challenges to many organisations' safe working and safeguarding policies, particularly for those that work with children. Digital environments can make it harder for cultural organisations to control the online environment they're asking people to participate in, while the wider COVID-19 pandemic context is having a negative toll on peoples' mental health and family relationships, meaning more people might be at risk than a pre-pandemic risk analysis accounted for. As such, cultural organisations have developed different approaches to supporting prticipants' safety and wellbeing online.
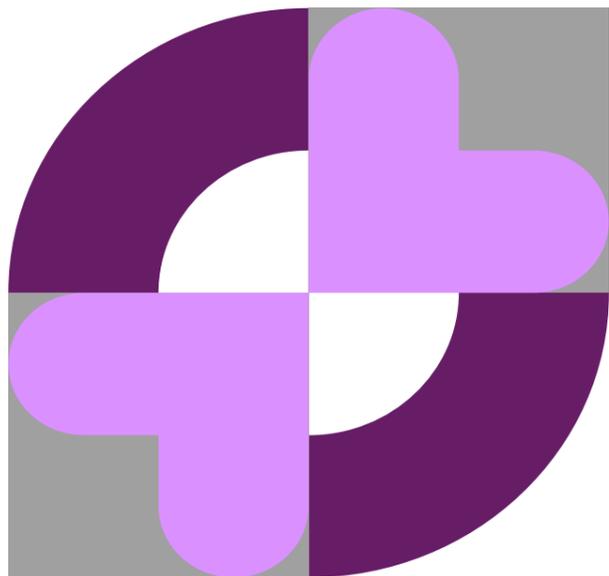
Conductive Music CIC ↗

Conductive Music CIC tried to create a welcoming and safe environment for children with anxiety by keeping mics and cameras off.

Restoke CIC ↗

Restoke CIC like many other groups developed new safeguarding policies before starting work online, putting the safety of participants first.

Open Clasp ↗

Open Clasp women's theatre company produced a number if of 'digital-first' shows based on the real-life stories of women who have survived difficult situations, like domestic abuse. They work with partners to ensure participants and audience members can take part safely, with both practical and emotional support in place. You can read more about their approach in this case study by Good Things Foundation.
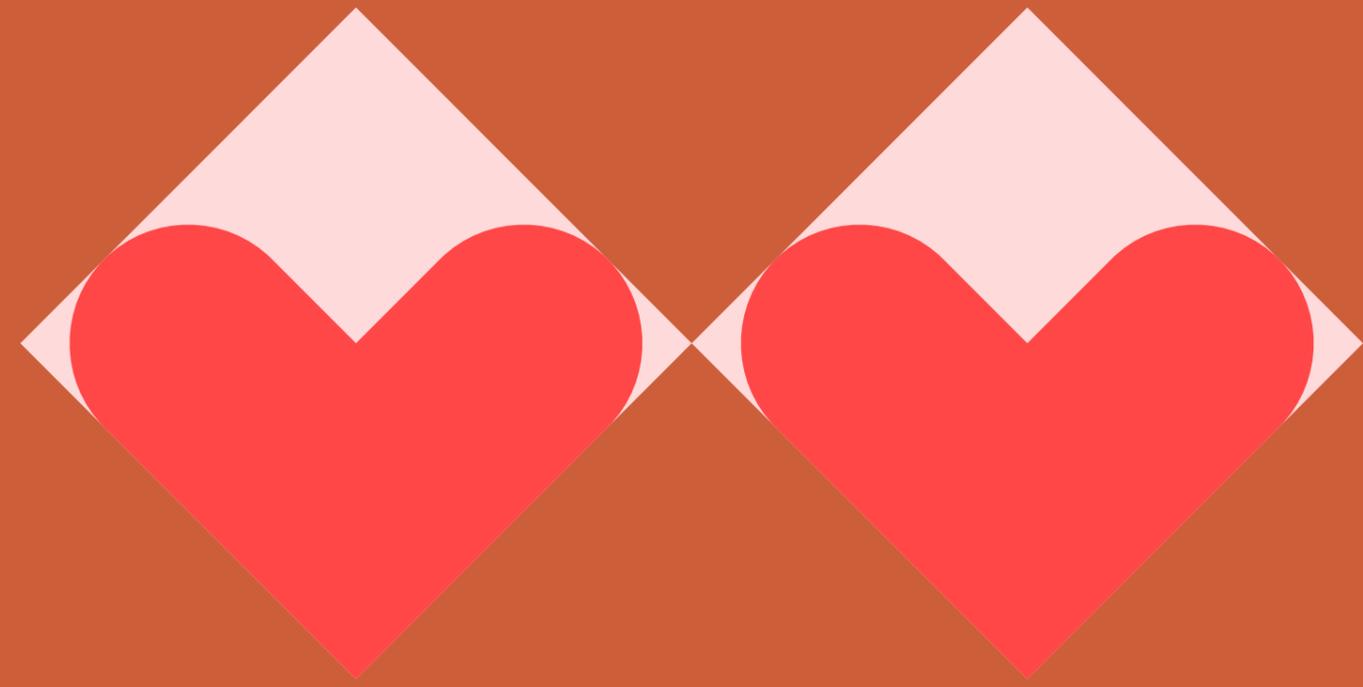
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To the doorstep and beyond
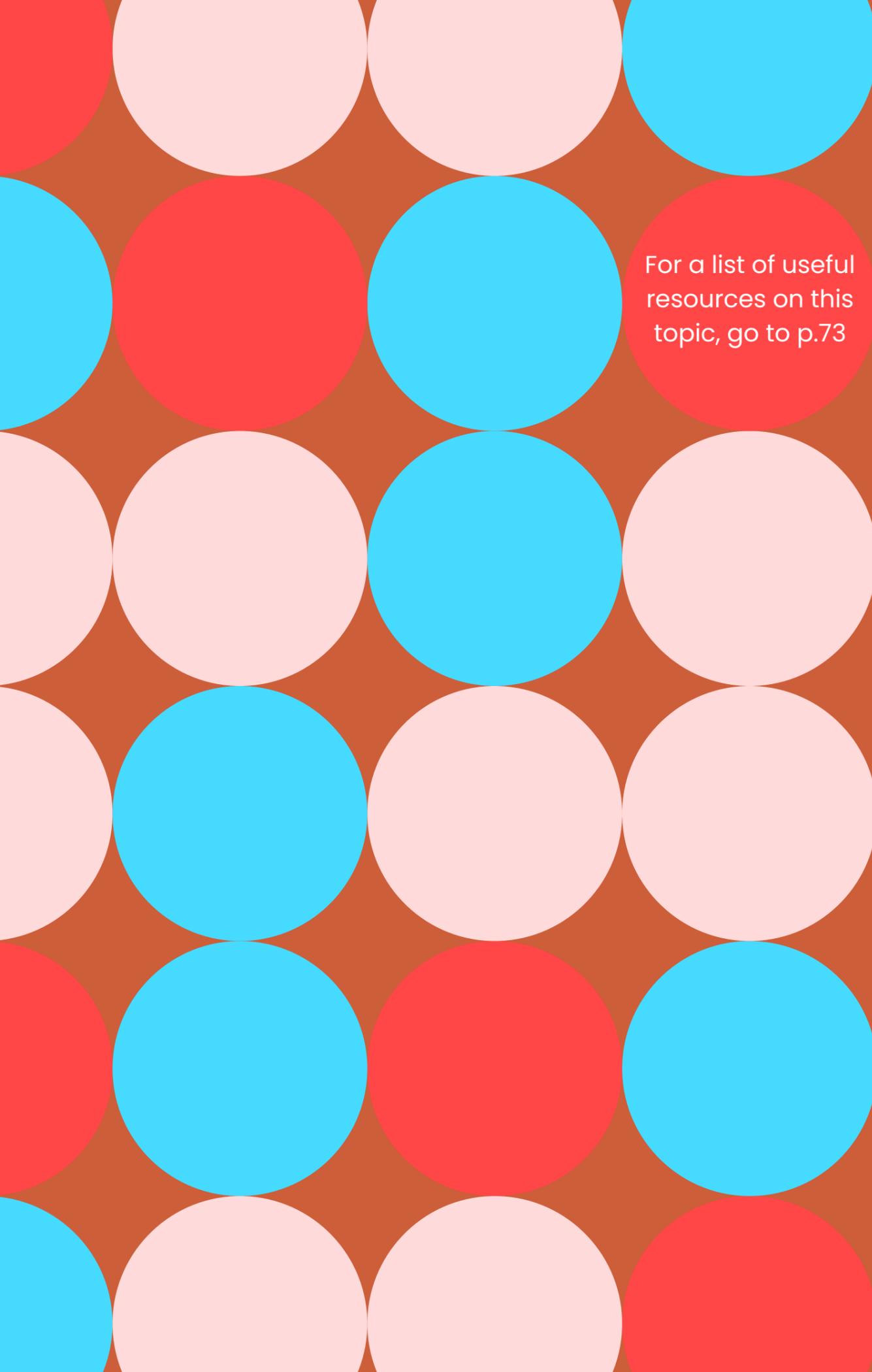
5. To the doorstep and beyond

Through the pandemic our streets, back gardens, town centres and beaches have all become places for art to be experienced and enjoyed. Many cultural organisations and practitioners stepped outside the comfort of their venues and studios to meet people in their own neighbourhoods and public spaces. Whilst outdoor arts specialists had been developing these ways of working for many years, working in these environments was a learning curve for many organisations.

Successive lockdowns meant many people around the UK hardly left their homes for months on end, leaving them feeling socially detached and isolated. Our desk research, interviews and focus groups have highlighted how cultural organisations worked tenaciously to engage and support people in their own homes by developing at-home creative resources and digital experiences. But these still often lacked something: human-to-human connection, and a sense of shared, collective enjoyment and wonder. As soon as it was possible, many organisations channelled their efforts into restarting live in-person connection, while keeping people safe and healthy, by working outside. We've seen how organisations worked with the constraints and opportunities of many different contexts.

5.1 Doorstep and garden

Taking performance and culture to local residents' doorsteps and back gardens started as we emerged from the depths of lockdown. Cultural practitioners developed specialist shows to adapt to the boundaries of this context, slimming down the number of performers, or playing with the limitations of social distancing. This work on doorsteps and in back gardens was often developed for people who were sheltering inside for longer than everyone else, and therefore had a welfare focus as well as a creative one.
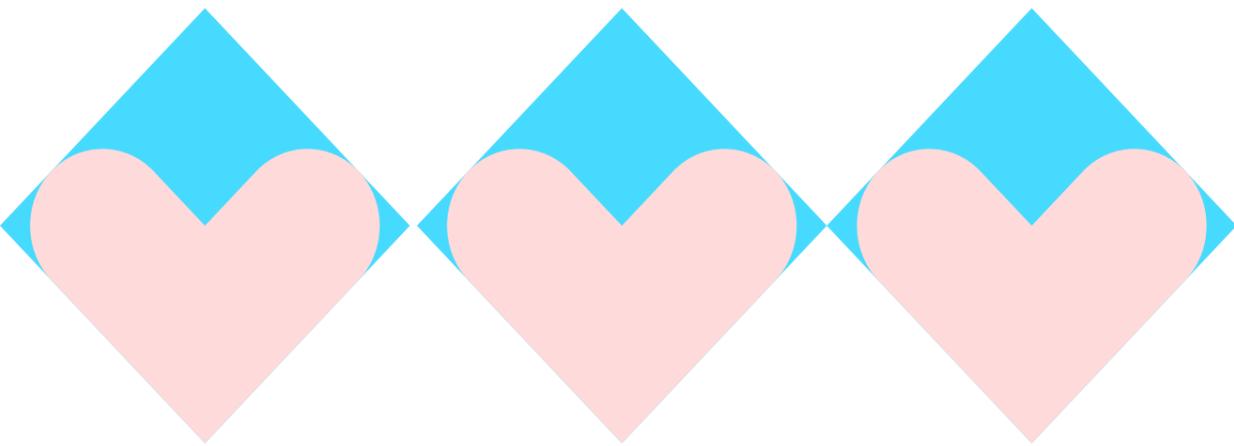
Acta Community Theatre ⬀

Acta Community Theatre's Lockdown doorstep visits film was produced out of material developed when visiting their Malcolm X Elders Theatre group on their doorsteps.

Duckie's Posh Club ⬀

Duckie's Posh Club's Easter bunny doorstep tour was aimed at older isolating community members.

Tamar and Jo's Doorstep Dance ⬀

Tamar and Jo's Doorstep Dance pay-it-forward programme supported Hull's more isolated community members and frontline grassroots groups.

Bamboozle ⬀

Bamboozle's Front of House garden performances bought theatre to the doorsteps of shielding children with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and their families. Families could watch from their front doors, or a gazebo, and their neighbours could join too, watching from the street.

5.2 Street and neighbourhood

To help facilitate community connection and social confidence, many cultural organisations and practitioners worked in socially distanced ways through entire streets or neighbourhoods. This work often aimed to create the energy and excitement of big public events, sparking the imagination of those who wouldn't typically choose to participate in the arts.

Theatre Factory ⬈

Theatre Factory's commission of a four-metre-long street puppet of Border Collie 'Bowie' generated so much interest from local residents that it led to an outdoor dog-making workshop followed by a 'dog show' and parade.

Theatre Alibi's St Thomas Story Tours ⬈

Theatre Alibi's St Thomas Story Tours collected stories of the neighbourhood from local residents to develop a social-distanced walk guided by actors and storytellers, and a bookable doorstep performance everyone in the street could watch together.

Winter Windowland ⬈

Winter Windowland supported communities to make trails of festival window displays, inspiring spin-off projects in towns throughout the country.

Creative Scene ⬈

Creative Scene worked with three schools to create a window exhibition for Dewsbury town centre. They commissioned artists to design activities packs which inspired children to create clay or carboard models of buildings they loved, and describe why in a poem or story. The models were then displayed as a miniature town in shopfronts over the summer.

Slung Low's S11 Lampost art gallery ⬈

Slung Low's S11 Lamppost art gallery printed out artforms created by members of the local community on plastic board and put them up on the lampposts around Holbeck and Beeston.

5.3 Civic spaces and town centres

The energy and fun of outdoor collective culture has the power to enliven an area, bring joy to passers-by, and spark connection between community members. Some organisations experimented with novel social distancing:
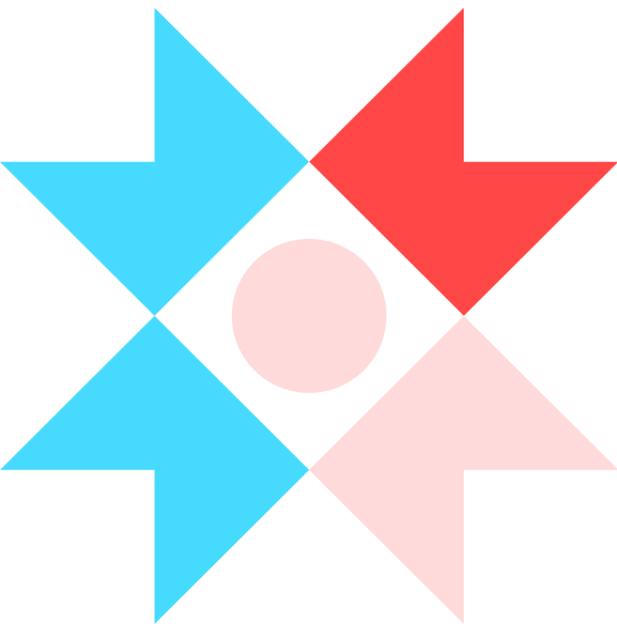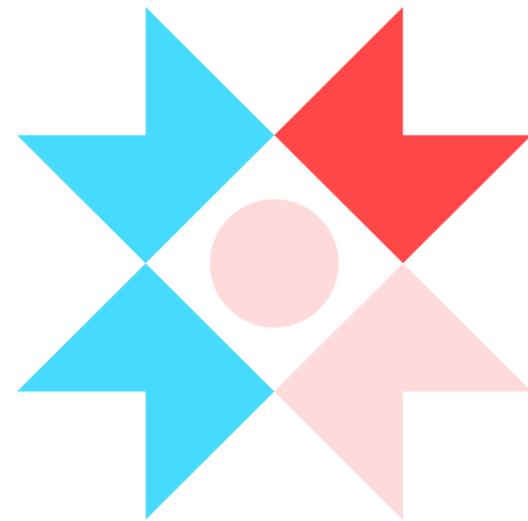
ZoieLogic Dance Theatre's Grid Experience [↗]

ZoieLogic Dance Theatre's Grid Experience provided a safe way for people to dance together and boost wellbeing outdoors.

Southpaw Dance Company's Performace Reach [↗]

Southpaw Dance Company's performance REACH explored the possibilities and sense of optimism of re-connecting after lockdown. It was performed at three Metro stations around Newcastle as part of a wider programme which turned the station platforms into community arts venues.

Slung Low's Wrongsemble car park performance [↗]

Slung Low's Wrongsemble car park performance was held in the two-by-two-metre bays in the car park, with tents for each bubble to watch a performance safely, and headsets so the play could be heard by all.

Peterborough Presents's Millfield Link exhibition and memory tours of Millfield [↗]

Peterborough Presents' Millfield Link exhibition and memory tours of Millfield reached 38,000 people with hybrid online-content and street-based exhibits. You can see more examples on Outdoor Arts UK's mapping project of work during 2021.

CASE STUDY

Creative Folkstone, a vibrant creative hub on the south coast

⬈ Click Here to discover more

"As well as digital projects during the pandemic, we developed The Plinth, a massive open exhibition across social media which encouraged people to engage and be creative outside in the open space. We placed 14 empty plinths in different locations across the town. We then invited local people to find them and display their own work, perform, or just enjoy them. We saw people using the plinths to display everything from pottery to textiles, painting to mosaics, drawing to wood carvings. Many people used the plinths to celebrate themselves, each other, and their dogs! There was also a performance plinth in Payers Park, hosting a curated programme, three artist commissioned plinths, and a special mobile plinth that toured 17 local schools accompanied by creative workshops for 150 students.

Beyond The Plinth, we also ran the Open Sesame programme. It offered 'residencies' in the ground floor windows of our performance venue to local artists and creatives to display their work. The windows, which were easily viewed from the pavement, provided passers-by with the opportunity to see artwork in a safe outdoor environment while walking along the street. We also offered space within the venue for local performers to rehearse new work, whilst adhering to the COVID-19 safety guidelines."

5.4 Parks, woods,beaches and innature

Green space, trees, and nature have been a refuge for many people during the pandemic, providing a safe space to socialise, play, and relax. Many cultural organisations and practitioners have been exploring how to use green spaces as a site for art and performance.

East Durham Creates & The Barn at Easington ⧉

East Durham Creates and The Barn at Easington created a series of Fishes and Wishes digital storytelling and video guides for children and families, connecting them via a Facebook group and guiding them to make artwork including fish out of found natural materials on the beach, outdoors and in their homes.

Company Of Others' Grief Floats performances ⧉

Company Of Others' Grief Floats performances used the resistance of the North Sea and the stretch of a Tyneside beach as a natural distancing device, with dancers performing in the sea and audience members watching from the sand.
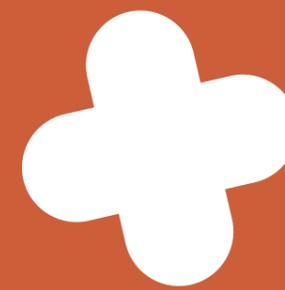
Nottingham Poetry Festival's word walks ⧉

Nottingham Poetry Festival's word walks guided by professional poets in local parks, led participants through writing exercises to explore the poetry in the everyday.

Nene Park Trust 42Words project ⧉

Nene Park Trust's 42Words project developed responsive artist commissions, based on words fed in from community members, that were displayed on the park's trees, fences, and an underpass.

Darts' Creative Rambles ⧉

Darts' Creative Rambles led groups of older residents on poet-led walks around Mexborough parks.

LeftCoast & Luke Jerram's In Memoriam ⧉

LeftCoast and Luke Jerram's In Memoriam was an installation of 120 flags, all made from NHS bedsheets, on the beachfront. The flags created a space for safe outdoors contemplation and coming together, at a time when many couldn't grieve at hospital bedsides or funerals.

6
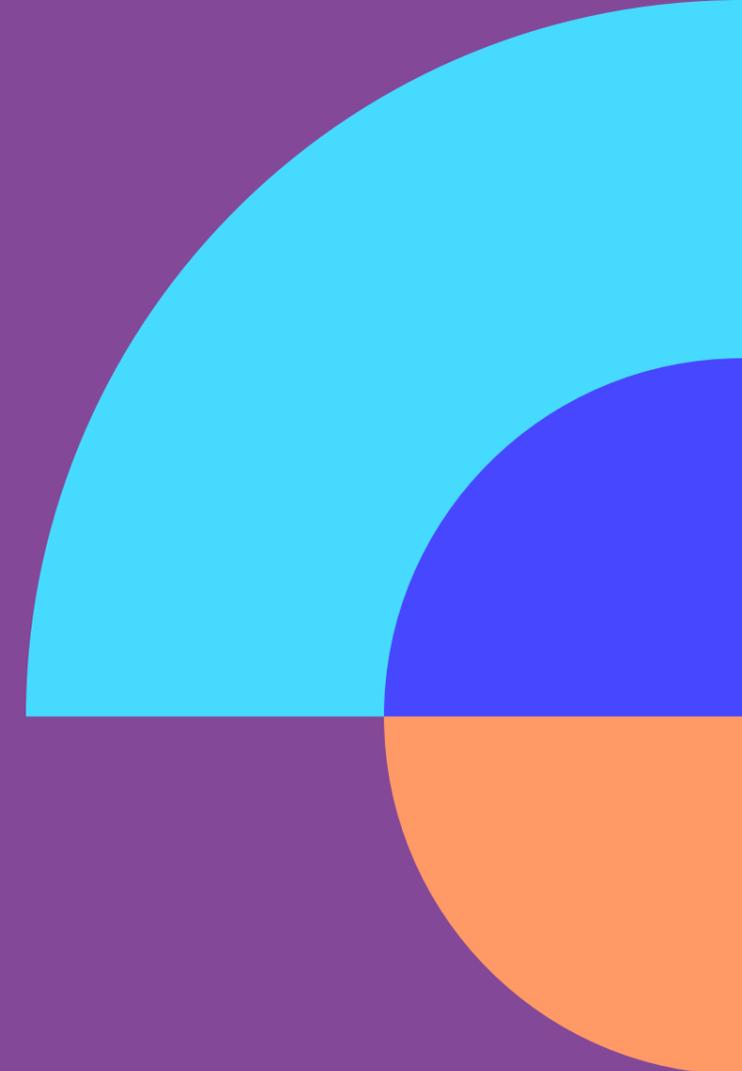
Other community settings
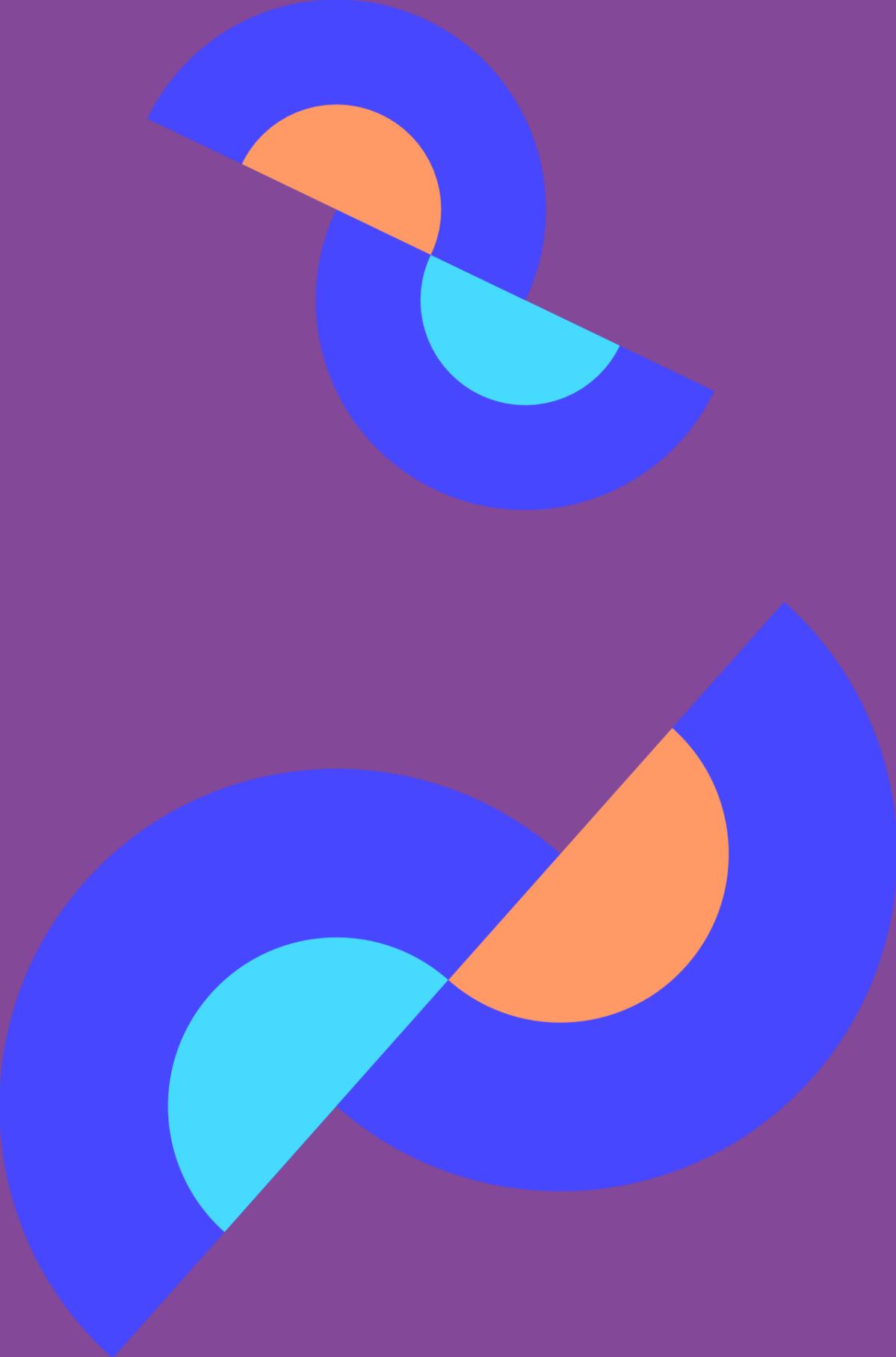
6. Other community settings

With most venues shuttered during the pandemic lockdowns, cultural organisations and practitioners have been adapting to create art with and in communities in schools, care homes, prisons, and homeless hostels. These approaches pre-date the pandemic, but the scale and spread of work has grown enormously in the last few years. The skills, knowledge, relationships, trust and capacity to work with community partners, developed before lockdown, enabled much of the most successful work to be designed and delivered.

Through conversations and focus groups with practitioners, we heard how many cultural organisations had to develop new techniques for working closely and safely, with others such as care home staff. Often these relationships were strained by the practicalities of social distancing and partner capacity. Yet cultural practitioners worked hard to demonstrate the social value of culture and how creativity can support wellbeing. Developing these relationships further will be crucial through the recovery.

For a list of useful resources on this topic, go to p.75

6.1 Schools

Through strong relationships, embedded ties within schools, and well-designed programmes, lots of cultural organisations have successfully worked with schools to support children and young people through the pandemic.
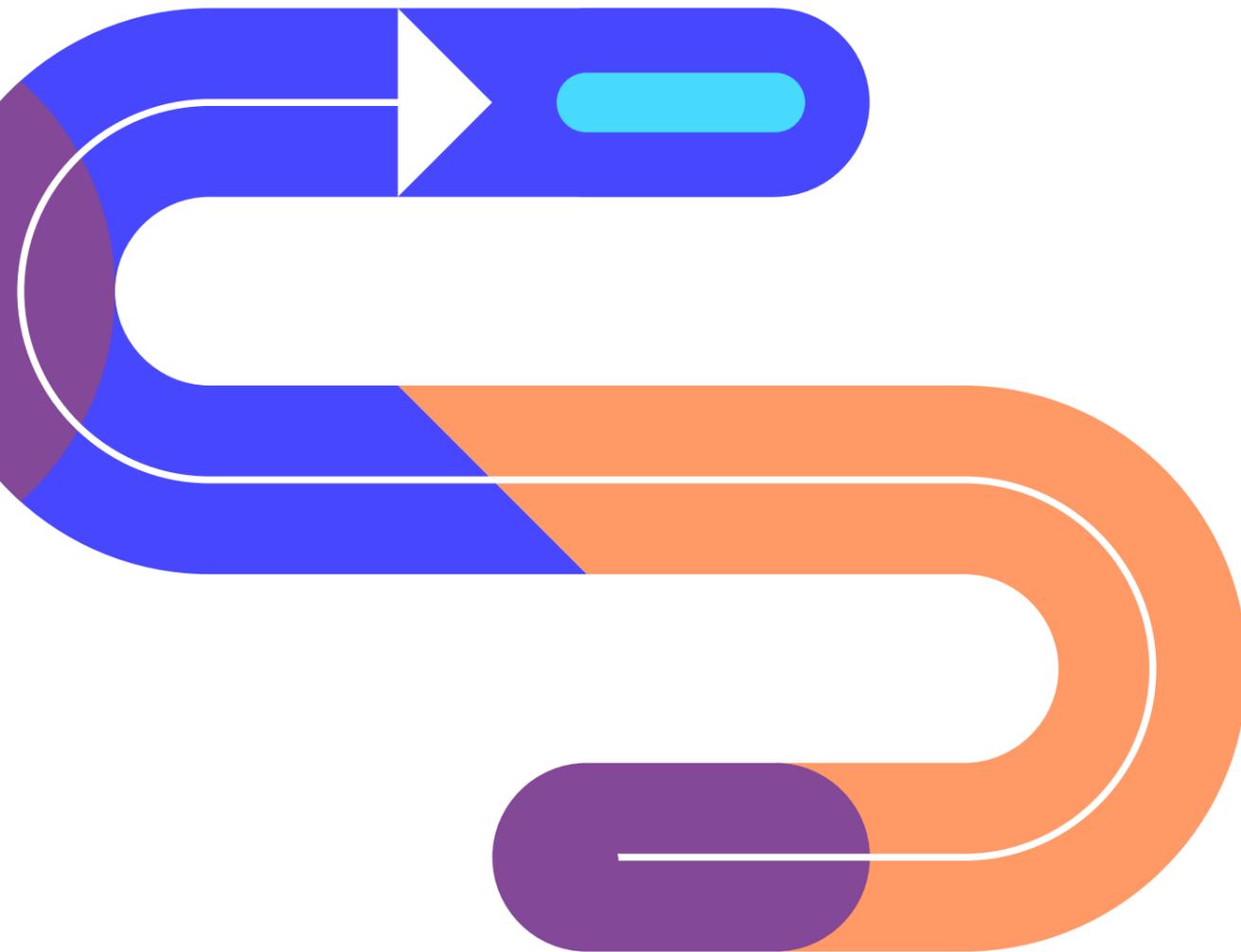
Attenborough Arts Centre ⬀

Attenborough Arts Centre commissioned artists to make tailored sensory packages for students in SEN schools.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's partnership with Wandsworth Music ⬀

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's partnership with Wandsworth Music devised tailored musical pieces with small groups of children in five SEN schools.

People United's Steampunk Bob's Videogram Express ⬀

People United's Steampunk Bob's Videogram Express organised video exchanges - children of key workers at St Stephen's Primary School asked questions to older people supported by the Cares Family, and they responded by video back to the school.

St Helens Borough Council's Library Service ⬀

St Helens Borough Council's Library Service continued to run their Schools Library Service through lockdown, becoming an essential resource for children of keyworkers.

Company of Others ⬀

Company of Others were supported by their local Newcastle City Council to get vaccinated early, allowing them to get back into schools whilst they were closed to the full student body. They worked in class bubbles, and one-to-one with disabled children and those experiencing challenging environments, to create a filmed performance.

CASE STUDY

Theatre Alibi, an intergenerational theatre company in Devon

⧉ Click Here to discover more

"Over the past 40 years, much of our work has been delivered in primary school and community settings, recently reaching around 12,000 children a year. The pandemic posed a big challenge to this way of working. One of the goals we set ourselves was that in whatever way we could, we would reach children in Devon primary schools that autumn with a new piece of work. To achieve this, we planned to make a piece that was uncancellable. So we created two versions of Down to Earth: a live classroom performance, and a live digital show. In the classroom version, the classes first watched a video animation of the astronaut talking about life isolated in the space station, then an individual actor 'landed' in the playground and toured the school periphery waving into windows. In many cases, the astronaut was the first visitor to the schools since the first lockdown had started. When the play had to go online during the January lockdown, we used the interactive tool Padlet alongside the video performance, giving the children the opportunity to actually work together.

Going into schools during the pandemic took real care and a lot of listening–. We had to have four or five conversations with schools to get to a point where an astronaut was walking around it. At times it felt that we were supporting the teachers to offload about the stress and complexity of safe teaching during social distancing. In this context, the trust we had built up over years of going into schools really mattered."

6.2 Care homes and day centres for older people

Older people and those living in care settings often experienced heightened vulnerability during the pandemic, and cultural organisations stepped up to help residents through extended periods of physical isolation. Care partners needed skills and confidence to host artists and creative work through the pandemic when communication was hard, and staff were already over-stretched. Arts organisations that had a groundwork of trust laid before lockdown were better able to adapt.

Barnsley Museums ⧉

Barnsley Museums pivoted their in-person Reminiscence programme to be delivered through fifty care packs containing archive film, activities, and games, prompting residents of care homes and others to talk, share their stories, and find comfort in unsettling times.

South East Dance's Luan Taylor ⧉

South East Dance's Luan Taylor also kept connected with residents of Brooke Mead extra care residential home through care packs, letters, and gentle activities.

ZoieLogic Dance Theatre ⧉

ZoieLogic Dance Theatre performed a series of live dance theatre shows RIDE, in the car parks of five Southampton care homes, designed to support the residents' healing process through fun and creativity.

Magic Me ⧉

Magic Me reworked its regular care home arts practice with 24 homes for older people. Unable to visit, artists partnered with care home staff to codesign and deliver creative activities that met isolating residents' needs and priorities. After Party stimulated people's appetites when eating alone; Inside Out created a touring activity trolley and a listening arcade; and Magic Moments skilled up care home staff to experiment with light, touch and colour.

Wyldwood Arts' The Meeting Post ⧉

Wyldwood Arts' The Meeting Post magazine was distributed in print to care homes and packed full of dementia-friendly activities.

6.3 Hospitals

Hospitals have been at the centre of the COVID-19 crisis and have often been hard places to work in during the pandemic because of disease control. However, cultural organisations have managed to find creative ways to work within restrictions and support patients through illness.

Ex Cathedra [↗]

Ex Cathedra continued to deliver their long-running Singing Medicine project in Birmingham Children's Hospital by turning in-person visits into short, personalised, interactive singing videos for referred children to watch at their bedside.

London Symphony Orchestra [↗]

London Symphony Orchestra made online visits to children's bedsides via a touring iPad; as well as playing in the corridors and foyers of hospitals to lift the spirits of passing patients, staff, and visitors; and creating 'musical hugs' in the form of short films of improvised music that individuals could send to their loved ones.

CASE STUDY

LeftCoast, a Creative People and Places project in Blackpool

⎘ Click Here to discover more

"

When the pandemic started, we weren't able to connect with residents the normal way and we had to think differently. So Gillian, our artist in residence, started a scrub-hub, a call for volunteers to sew scrubs for NHS workers in the local hospital. Hundreds of people signed up - they wanted a way to be practically useful in an emotionally turbulent time. We raised £4,800 and made over 400 scrubs, all the while cultivating a network of creative people.

The project began to take on a life of its own when the sewing volunteers started sharing their other art and skills. A volunteer-led exhibition called Inside Out was held within the Old Fleetwood Hospital, showcasing the creativity and talent which exists in our local community. We also commissioned professional artists to elevate this amateur work - they turned some of the art which the community created into wallpaper, fabric, and furniture. The hospital setting meant we could do the curation differently, hanging nude paintings behind hospital curtains for example - this would have never happened in a white cube gallery. The co-creation meant we had an immediate audience, people were so proud of that work that they asked relatives they hadn't spoken to for years to come and see it. The dynamic between the professional and amateur artists were really important to this sense of pride."

6.4 Criminal justice settings

People in the criminal justice system faced some of the toughest lockdowns, isolated in their cells for long periods of time with most shared activities stopped. Many cultural organisations had to adapt quickly to these restrictions, finding novel ways to maintain relations with incarcerated people and prison staff, and to keep creative support in place.
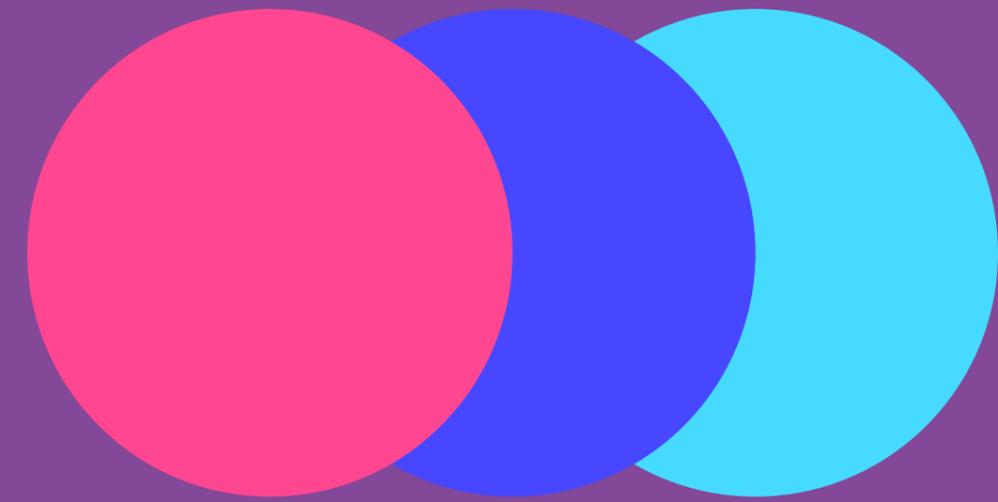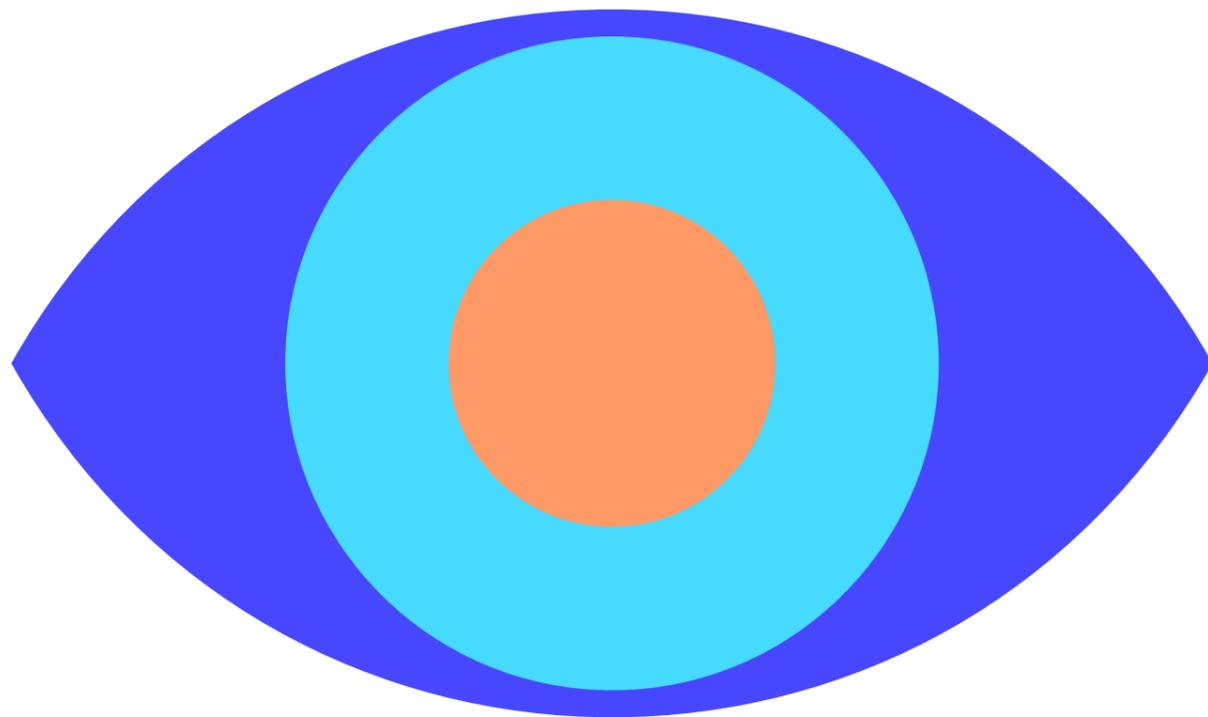
Peterborough Presents ↗

Peterborough Presents adapted their Bretton Royalty programme, nominating 20 isolated Bretton residents to receive a gift made by one of four local artist or a member of Jailbirds, a social enterprise based in in the women's wing of HMP Peterborough Prison.

Open Clasp Theatre ↗

Open Clasp Theatre devised the digital play 'Sugar' with women who are homeless, on probation or in prison. The play was realised through partnerships with women in HMP Low Newton, Women's Direct Access Centre and women on probation attending a Women's Hub at West End Women & Girls centre; it was screened in 50 prisons.

Clean Break ↗

Clean Break ran a letter-writing project, connecting women in cells with women in the community.

Koestler Trust ↗

Koestler Trust ran weekly creative activities, designed around the limited tools and resources which prisoners could access.

6.5 Homeless shelters and supported accommodation

In the early months of lockdown there was a huge push to get everyone warm and secure homes, with hotels and hostels around the country taking unhoused people.
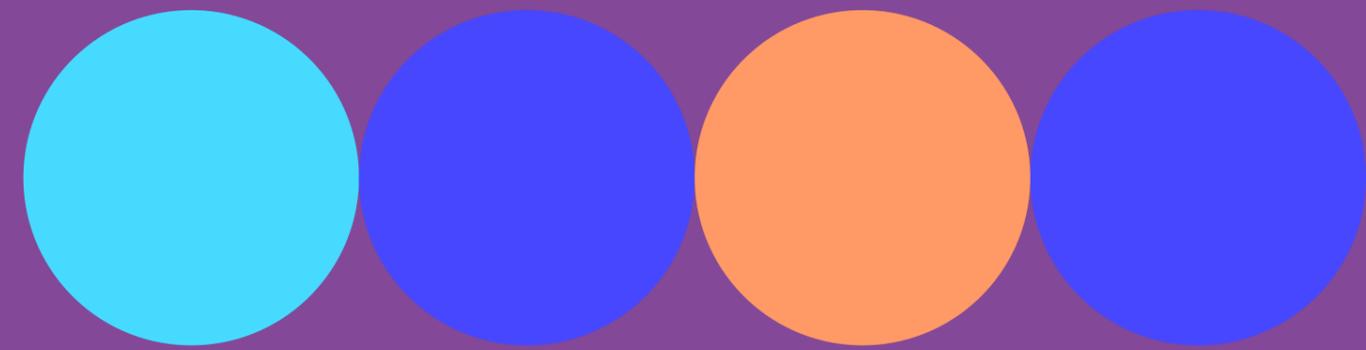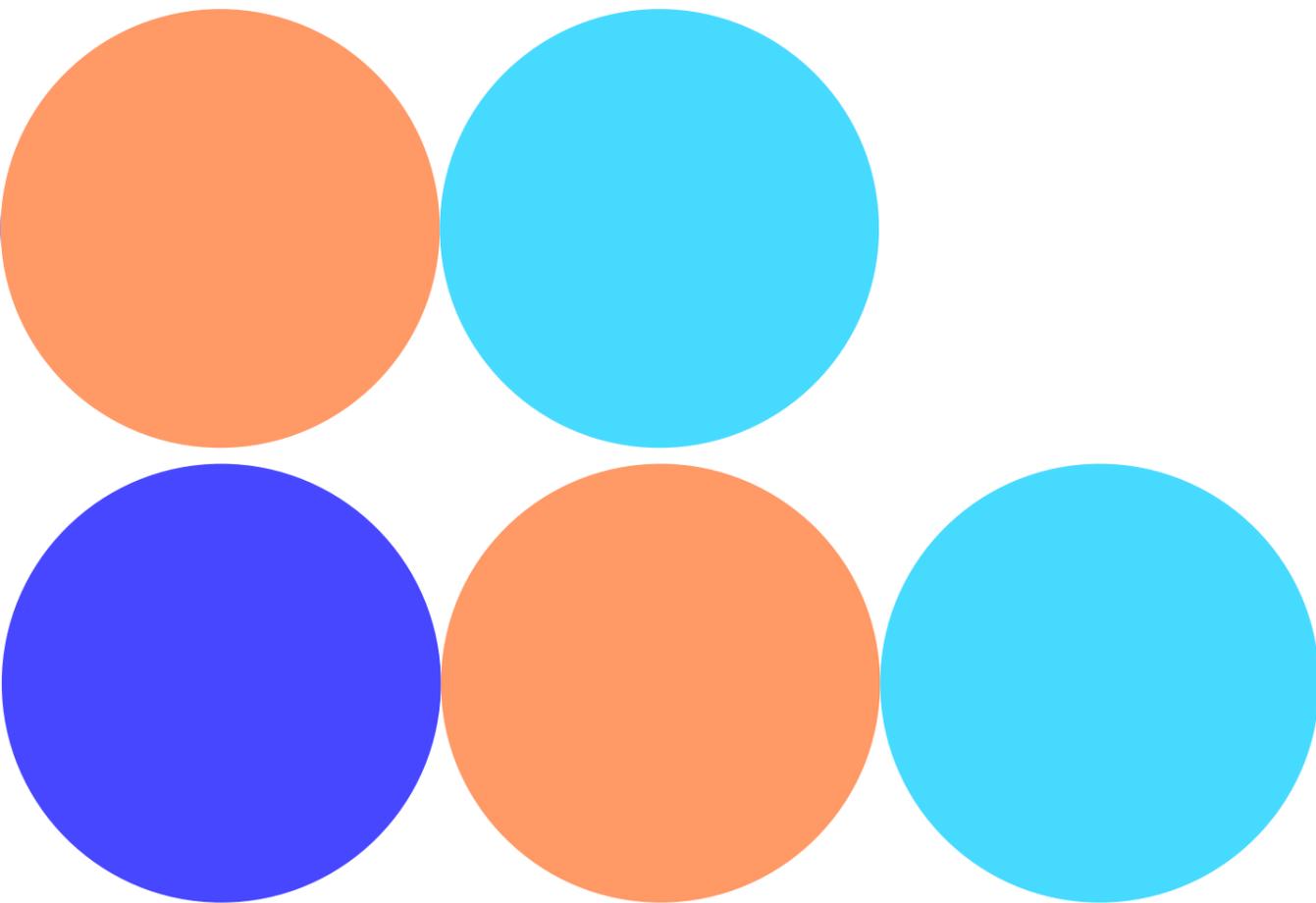
The Museum of Homelessness ⬈

The Museum of Homelessness initially pivoted away from creative work to focus on lobbying and mutual aid, borrowing a vacant council community centre to launch a seven-days-a-week operation and even repurposing their museum shelving for dried goods and cans.

Accumulate ⬈

Accumulate delivered over 3,500 art packs to hotels and hostels around London and Bristol.

Cardboard Citizens ⬈

Cardboard Citizens ran weekly Hotel Creative Challenges in partnership with St. Mungo's hostel and its residents.

Street Wise Opera ⬈

Street Wise Opera launched a busy programme of digital activities for people with experience of homelessness, including virtual singing classes, an online gallery, and digital dance.

TOP TIPS

Growing nourishing community partnerships

The pressure of lockdown helped many organisations work in a more open and collaborative way. With venues closed, many organisations found that they had to work with and through others to engage and support community members. As the cultural sector recovers, organisations have an opportunity to strengthen their community bonds and build lasting relationships with other organisations in the social infrastructure of communities.

We can draw from what worked during the pandemic to redesign a more open, rooted, and responsive sector. Our pointers below have in particular been guided by conversations with 64 Million Artists, LeftCoast, and Made by Mortals, each of whom worked with through several third sector and community partnerships during the pandemic. They are meant to be read as points to consider, not a blueprint of 'top tips':
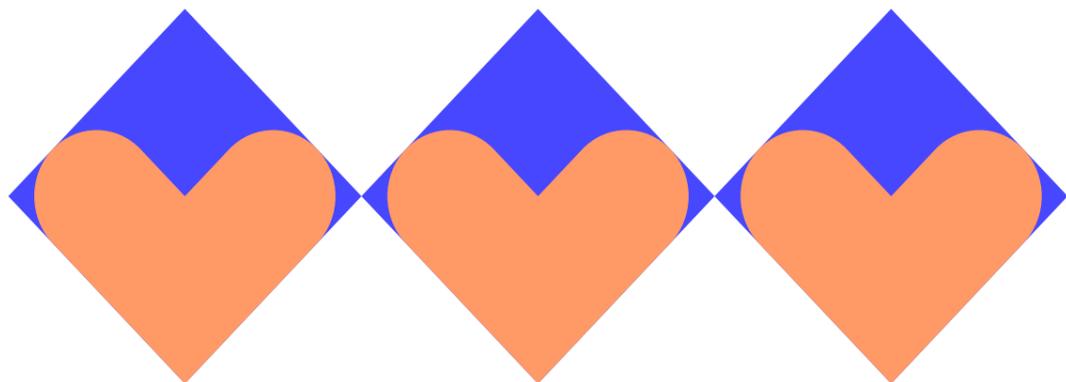
1   **Understand each other's priorities.**

Third sector organisations often have limited capacity and are responding to immediate need. Consider how culture can support their core work, uplifting and augmenting existing activities, or serving as a vehicle to meet the organisation's needs, rather than adding extra work. This could mean taking time to go along, volunteer, and listen before suggesting how you could work together.

"We have partners that are saving lives and we are making music etc. so we need to have context with what we are doing and be sensitive to time, resources and expertise they have available."

– Paul Hine, Director of Made by Mortals.

2. **Think about power.**

Power shapes all relationships. It is good to think about how you are acknowledging and then sharing power, resources, and recognition equitably. Are you valuing the knowledge and expertise of all partners equally? Often partnerships are most difficult when there are big imbalances of power or money.

"It doesn't matter if you're the director or the administrator, if someone spills orange juice, somebody mops it up, there's no hierarchy. One of the things that we do is hang around long after the end of the party. So, people know that we are committed. A lot of what we do is really unglamorous and so people who work in our social justice sector recognise that we've got the same values as them."

– Tina Redford, Artistic Director, LeftCoast

3 Be clear about your commitment.

The strongest partnerships are built over several years. During the pandemic the organisations that were best able to continue working in school and community settings had been doing so for years or decades, and so had nurtured trust. Consider how you can create a network of local social collaborators beyond individual projects. And if not...

4. Consider legacy and set expectations.

Not all partnerships have to last forever to be valuable. But if you have short-term funding, or will only work with a partner for a single project, think about how you can devolve resources and capacity so that partners can take the lead in the long-term.

"As a national organisation that sometimes helicopters into place-based projects, we are always questioning power. Who are we? Who do we represent? What does power and identity look like in those spaces? And thinking about how we make sure we don't set up something that is unintentionally oppressive, by over-promising or developing relationships that we have no capacity to prolong once funding runs out. How do we discuss legacy sensitively and realistically?"

– Chris Rolls, Head of Training & Development, 64 Million Artists

5. Put in the time.

Collaborative and co-creation processes take longer than working alone, so consider how you can build programmes around a longer, deliberative, working process. In the words of Paul Hine, Director of Made by Mortals: "You have to put in the time, a couple of emails back and forth is not enough, you need to build a relationship where you communicate what you are doing, why, and are actively capturing their imaginations."

6. Find and develop creative champions in the partner organisation.

Partnerships between organisations often come down to the relationships between people, so cultivating internal advocates for culture is key. As Paul describes: "It's a mistake to just talk to the person at the top, you need to talk to everyone who will be helping bring this to life" and identify "allies in that organisation who are willing to invest with their time, energy and connections."

7. Focus on relationships and values, as well as artistic outcomes.

Through the pandemic, we often saw that it was the process of creation and collaboration that was most valuable to participants and partners. How can we work with partners in relationships of care and agency and embed co-creation? In Tina's words: "It's about who you are, and why you are doing things, not how you do them. Often to get to the elevated work, you've got to do things that are really unglamorous and simple."

8 Leverage partnerships for impact.

Recruiting through partners can lay the foundations for wider impact, for instance working with groups with lived experience, to co-create work that can win hearts and minds on a social issue. Partners may have connections to decision makers and be able to use cultural expression as a tool to drive systems change.

"One of the pieces that we did in partnership with MIND, explored a character who had lived experience of alcohol addiction, and at that time Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board were looking to invest in a service that prevented people from reaching rock bottom. However, through the show, and from speaking people with lived experience in the show and the audience, they began to understand that that service wouldn't be effective for most people, that in fact, what they needed to do is, is put their resources into recovery. So, through the piece, we were able to work together to create a great show where the audience could really kind of bring that social impact to life and change things for people."

- Paul Hine, Director, Made by Mortals

7 Conclusion

Building resilience and sustaining efforts into the future

7. Conclusion: Building resilience and sustaining efforts into the future

An inevitable question when considering how to plan and sustain community engagement and support for the long term, is how to resource the relationships and activities that have emerged from the pandemic. Here lies an opportunity to underpin innovation and socially-impactful experimentation with robust business planning, to ensure that the work is budgeted for, funded, evidenced, integrated, and strategically aligned to your organisation's long-term priorities and operations.
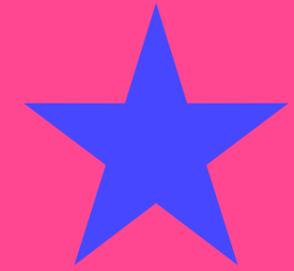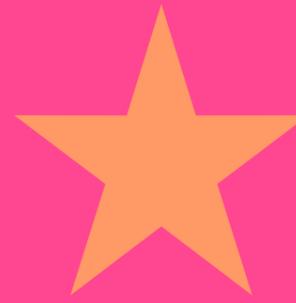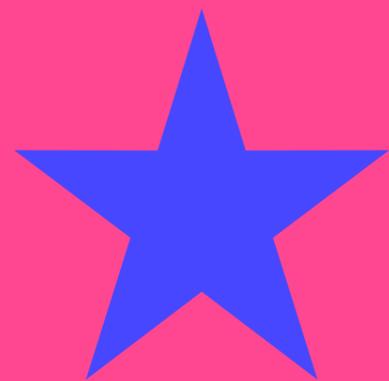
"Through the pandemic we also saw that there was a solid business case for the people-centred way we work. Before that we were always trying to get people to see value differently. But over the past two years we more than doubled our turnover and acquired a building while not charging our members – our deep community relationships and responsive way of working has proven to be an also financially beneficial way to work for us."

- Nadia Iftkhar, Artistic Director, Company of Others

Best practice when it comes to business planning is not new, and the same principles organisations used before the pandemic still apply. However, many cultural organisations are now paying greater attention to how they resource and plan for community engagement and relationship-building. The business planning process can enable organisations to consider what from 'before' will resume, change, or potentially be jettisoned. What is going to enable you to resource and achieve your organisation's impact goals over the next five years?

TOP TIPS

Business planning pointers developed by business support experts Creative United:

1. **Don't write a plan in isolation**

    Get a range of perspectives from your team and Board, and welcome feedback and revision.

2. **Consider what you've learnt by working with your audience through the pandemic**

    What did meaningful engagement look like to them.

3. **Don't be vague**

    Be specific and only provide detail that is concise and relevant.

4. **Ensure plans are 'defendable'**

    Don't overhype or set unrealistic or unachievable targets.

5. **Understand your competition**

    They might also be your collaborators.

6. **Be aware of your organisation's weaknesses and strengths**

    Consider which weaknesses you want to strengthen, and which you want to avoid.

7. **Remember, a business plan doesn't have to be fixed**

    Think of it as a design for the future of your organisation that will also enable you to flex and respond to challenge and opportunity.

Thinking about organisational sustainability also means thinking about the capacity, wellbeing and resilience of the individuals within it. A lot of people in the arts sector – like people in other walks of life – are feeling worn out and overwhelmed after two years of rapid delivery during the pandemic. Socially engaged arts practice can place significant psychological, practical, and emotional tolls on practitioners. This is particularly the case for people with other caring responsibilities, or who have experienced heightened discrimination and inequality over the past two years. The Centre for Cultural Value's report Culture in Crisis evidences that feelings of burnout are high in the sector, and that this may be entrenching existing inequalities in the cultural workforce.

As we move towards a wider social and economic recovery, arts organisations also need to consider how they enable their team members to rest and recover, and build caring and supportive organisational practices for the long-term.
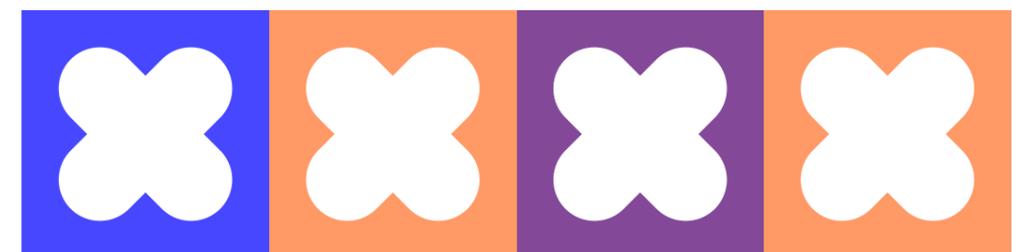
TOP TIPS

Fostering regenerative working practice

"Regenerative practice accepts and works in tune with natural and seasonal cycles. It embraces the "less is more" philosophy and aims for sustainable development rather than unsustainable growth. It promotes and carves out time for rest, recuperation, wellbeing and celebration. But it also involves sacrifices: less relentless producing and production, less product and income, less hidden labour and overworking, less solipsism and introspection"

– Centre for Cultural Value (2022) Culture in Crisis

1. **Creating safe spaces for reflection.**

   Some organisations set up artist development groups as safe spaces to share fears and frustrations, and get peer-to-peer support, with funding for artists and team members to attend these sessions as part of their contracts.

2. **Nurturing a culture of openness.**

   Many cultural leaders talked openly about their mental health, establishing a culture in which seeking and receiving emotional support, and time off for rest and recovery, is normalised.

3. **Flexible hours.**

   Letting colleagues work around home and childcare commitments during lockdowns created a healthier working balance for many people. Letting people shape their work around their lives is likely to stay a firm part of many organisations' cultures in the future.

4. **Trust and autonomy.**

   Trusting practitioners and communities to set their own boundaries, and empowering them to make decisions to protect their own wellbeing, has been a positive cultural shift some organisations have adopted.

5. **Saying 'no' and understanding your role in a wider system.**

   Many organisations felt that if they did not help their community and produce work, no one else would. While the role smaller and front-line cultural organisations played in the emergency response cannot be understated, it can be useful for organisations to understand their role as part of a wider social infrastructure. If responsibility is shared, you don't have to say 'yes' to everything, you can pass the baton while you rest.

6. **Building inter-organisation professional communities.**

   Professional networks flourished in 2020, with many cultural workers finding solidarity and support from their colleagues across the sector. Keeping these networks alive and sustained will be a key part of a successful recovery.
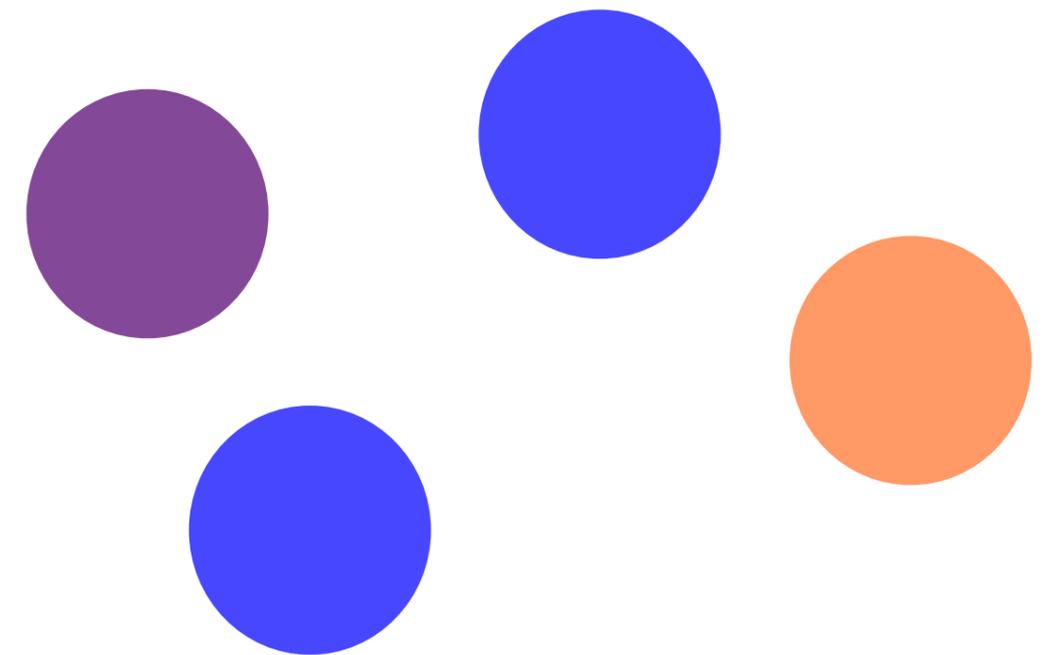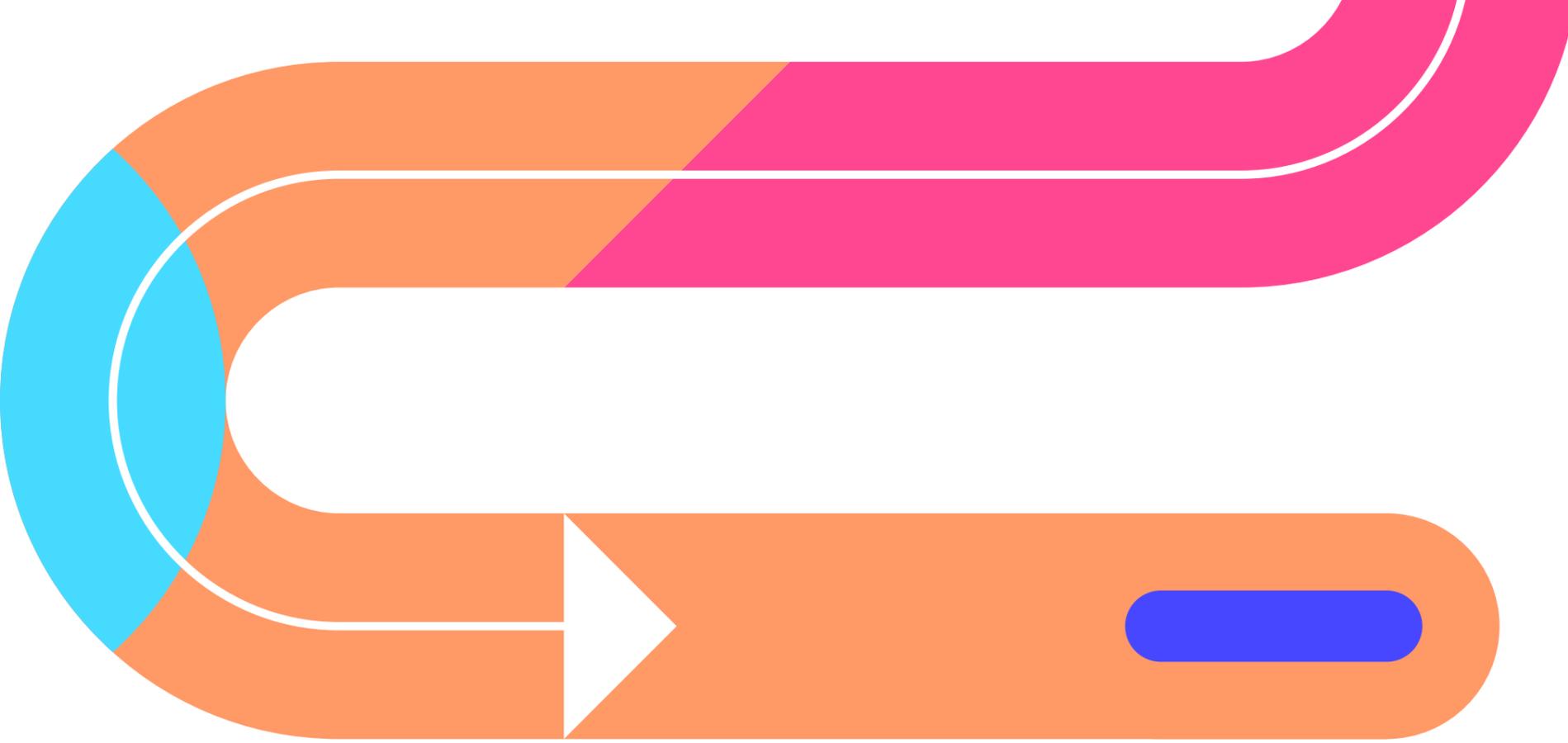
Resource Library

Engaging Communities
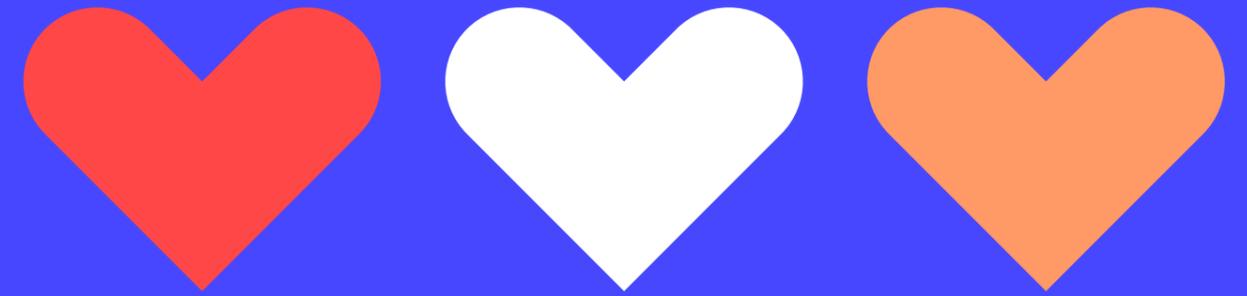
Building relationships

OF/BY/FOR ALL: Quick community mapping guide ⧉

This community mapping guide is not pandemic-specific but provides a useful starting point for thinking about what communities you may need to support and engage in this time.

Relationships Project: Toolbox ⧉

A set of beautifully designed materials to help you reflect on and develop the relationships you or your organisation hold. The guides for relationship makers and bridge builders between communities may be particularly helpful for arts and cultural organisations.

Community Covid planning canvas ⧉

A worksheet produced for community leaders and third sector organisations at the start of the pandemic, it uses seven question prompts to help you consider needs, resources, and support for your community.

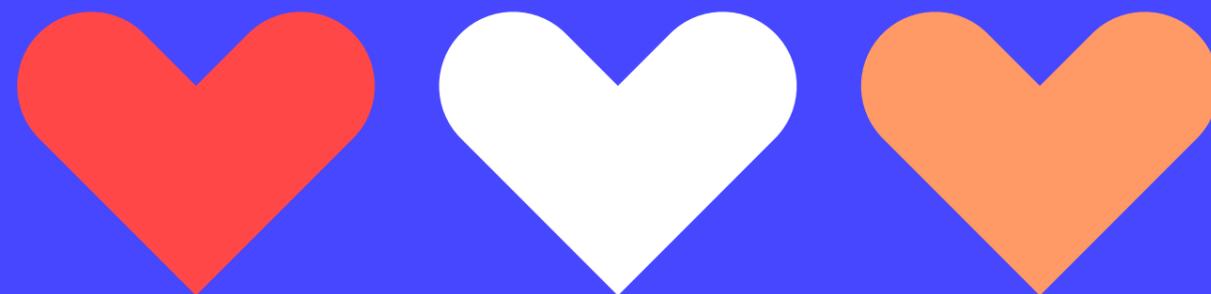### The National Lottery Communities Fund and RESOLVE: Communities Toolkit ⧉

A series of three exercises developed in parallel to The Emerging Futures Fund. These exercises could be useful starting points for working with your communities to reflect, listen, imagine, and develop new work during this time.

Crafts Council: Planning community projects toolkit ⧉

A concise toolkit that walks you through planning co-creation as part of work to engage your communities. It has three activities to work through: a 'why co-create?' canvas, a 'control-ometer', and a project design and decision-making tool.

Locality: Top tips for community engagement ⧉

The first three resources on this page – The seven principles of local marketing, Top tips for community engagement, and How to get and keep local people involved in your work – are useful when planning any creative work that seeks to engage and support local community members. The more in depth guide, 'Engaging your community in a meaningful way', walks you through different methods of physical and digital community engagement, weighing up the pros and cons of each.

Involve: Participatory methods [↗]

Involve are a public participation charity and much of their work focuses on democracy in public institutions. Their 'methods' guide could be useful to arts practitioners as they consider different ways to involve community members and democratise culture.

Nurture Development: Four essential elements of and Asset-based Community Development process [↗]

This guide is a useful primer to 'Asset-based Community Development', an approach to building communities based on their strengths and potentials, rather than problems. The principles of this approach inform most successful community engagement work.

Audience Development

Audience Agency: Audience Spectrum [↗]

This website segments the whole UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and what they like to see and do. It profiles the population at household and post-code levels and can be used as a tool for prospecting and data-tagging as well as profiling and mapping. The website has further practical tools and guidance for developing work around what you learn from audience profiles.

Arts Council England: Engagement in Arts and Culture dashboard [↗]

This resource brings together existing data from their Active Lives Survey to provide detail on levels of art, museum, and library engagement. It also provides statistical significance testing to indicate whether an area's engagement level is statistically lower, higher, or similar to the national engagement levels in England.

Creative People and Places: Mapping and Analysis of Engagement Approaches [↗]

Though produced in 2018, this report remains an important resource for understanding the wider context of community engagement and audience development, alongside practical tips and resources on what has worked when connecting with new audiences.

Creative People and Places: An audience-led approach to programming and marketing [↗]

Drawing from what worked and didn't in East Durham, this guide provides tried-and-tested practical tips on audience development.

Creative People and Places: Building relationships with people new to the arts, some tips and approaches [↗]

This guide gives 18 top tips for audience development based on learnings from three Creative People and Places organisations that are applicable both during and after the pandemic.
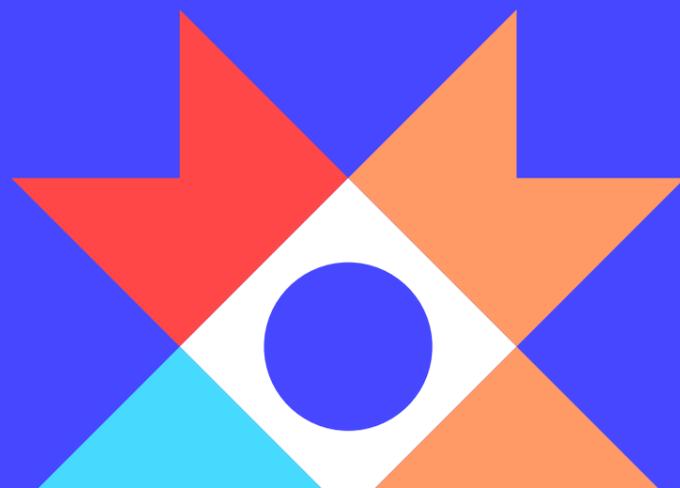
Creativity at Home

Creative Challenges

64 Million Artists 🗗

Activity Packs Alongside the 64 Million Artists <u>archive</u> of creative challenges, they have produced activity packs with ideas and guidance for creative challenges in group settings. The first is designed for community groups, with tips for both offline and online working. The second is for schools and families, with guidance on safeguarding and tips for getting creative at home.

Fun Palaces: Tiny Revolutions of Connection 🗗

Resources and ideas from Fun Palaces for over 25 small creative activities for fun and entertainment during lockdown. These could be useful starting points for designing your own creative challenges and creative packs.

Creative Packs

Creative Arts East: Developing Creative Wellbeing Packs for an Older Audience 🗗

This blog draws learning from Creative Arts East's Creative Wellbeing postal packs. It contains tips for recording audio for CD (which they put in the pack to guide people through activities), and practical guides for making accessible instruction booklets for older audiences.

Local Trust and Creative Civic Change: Creativity Connects 🗗

A guide with examples of creative activity packs developed during the first COVID-19 lockdown across the country. Take a look to get ideas and inspiration for your creative packs.

Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance: How creativity and culture are supporting shielding and vulnerable people at home during Covid-19 🗗

This report from June 2020 has 50 concise case studies of creative work that happened in the early stages of the pandemic in people's homes. It also has an overview of challenges and strengths in these organisations' approaches, and recommendations for leaders in health, social care, local government, and culture.

Let's Create Packs: Impact evaluation 🗗

This evaluation provides a detailed description of the Let's Create pack scheme led by Arts Council England, and its impact. It also contains wider learning points for other cultural organisations using this method.

Postcards

Health in Mind: #WritingToSayHello 🗗

Scottish mental health and loneliness charity Health in Mind has created a set of downloadable postcards. If your organisation is short of time, this could be a good initiative to join to support your community.

Phone calls

The Eden Project: Phone tree template 🗗

At the bottom of this page on forging community connections during the pandemic, there is a PDF template with instructions for setting up a phone tree.

Creative engagement online

Introductory resources on digital culture

Libraries Connected: Engaging with a digital audience toolkit ↗

This is a general best-practice guide to developing and engaging audiences online, produced for library services but useful to any organisation starting out creating an online profile.

Local Trust: Digital Toolkit ↗

This is a good entry-level guide to the different kind of digital platforms, software, and resources you might want to use in community engagement work.

Audience Agency: Digital Culture Compass ↗

A free online toolkit to help you integrate digital technology into your work. It contains a tracker to help you find out your strong points and areas you might want to develop, and a charter of best practice for inspiration.

Digital Culture Network ↗

This resource, funded by Arts Council England, provides free training for all levels, as well as 'how to' guides to, for example, make video on your phone, get started with podcasting and virtual conferencing.

Heritage Digital ↗

Access free digital skills training and support for heritage organisations, and develop strategic skills for digital with recently the launched Heritage Skills Academy.

Coronavirus Tech Handbook ↗

A crowdsourced library of tools, services and resources relating to COVID-19 response. It was initially developed in the early weeks of the pandemic through rapid contributions from thousands of experts, and contains a wealth of highly specific advice and resources.

Streaming

Arts Marketing Association: Everything has changed, but what role does digital streaming have in the future? ↗

A write-up of an experiment in running a hybrid streamed and in-person festival, Unlimited, by Sharon Chou, Marketing Manager at the Southbank Centre. It has useful reflections on accessibility and engagement for hybrid events.
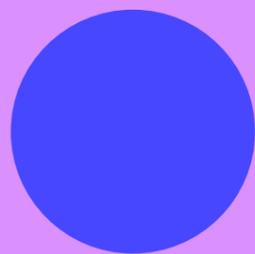
Digital Culture Network Resources: How to stream a Zoom meeting to YouTube [↗]

This guide describes the steps to be taken in order to stream a Zoom meeting via YouTube for webinars.

Libraries Connected: Facebook Live toolkit [↗]

A PowerPoint presentation that takes you through the step-by-step process of setting up a Facebook Live video.

Incorporated Society of Musicians: How to put on online concerts and gigs. [↗]

Beginners' advice on setting up, promoting, and recording online music gigs and performances. They also have specialist advice on livestreaming and copyright.

Attitude is Everything: Access guide for online music events [↗]

A guide produced with fans and artists, it provides some quick solutions to break down the barriers that online gigs or events can create for Deaf and disabled audiences.

Interactive digital events and workshops

Collective Encounters: Participatory Theatre Top Tips for Online Facilitation [↗]

The guide includes top tips for getting online, accessibility, fostering a welcoming environment, helping participants feel safe, making the most out of digital space, object play, postal packs, and a list of guides on zoom functionality.

A New Direction: Reset digital facilitation toolkit [↗]

A resource for cultural educators working with younger audiences, this toolkit contains great ideas for activities to do online which boost creative engagement, support participant wellbeing, and help with evaluation.

Kazzum Arts: Gamejam, a guide for online arts facilitation [↗]

Packed with practical ideas for creative and accessible online arts facilitation, this guide is designed for arts leaders supporting isolated and excluded young people during the pandemic.

Culture Hive: Remote Intimacy How to lead at a distance [↗]

This listicle by RADA Business tutor Claire Dale describes the challenges of creating a sense of intimacy with audiences online, and gives eight top tips for overcoming it as a facilitator or performer.

Collective Encounters: Games and exercises for zoom and social distancing [↗]

A collaborative, open-source google sheets document with online activities to run via video calls crowd-sourced from participatory theatre practitioners.

Libraries Connected: Running digital events for adults [↗]

A useful breakdown of different kind of activities that libraries are using during the pandemic to engage adults, with examples and reflections on why certain techniques do and don't work.

Social media and other digital tools

Digital Culture Network: Engaging audiences with social media ⬀

This entry-level resource looks at the pros and cons of Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and gives examples of the ways these platforms are being used to engage with audiences.

Locality: Engaging your community in a meaningful way ⬀

Pages 16 to 37 of this practical guide reviews and weighs up the benefits of using different kinds of digital tools to support and engage communities. Although it is designed for a neighbourhood planning context, the same advice would apply to most creative community engagement.

Association for Cultural Enterprise: Getting started on TikTok, a quick guide for museums ⬀

Black Country Living Museum's Abby Bird shares learning from their success on TikTok and provides practical guidance for other museums to get started.

Digital content production

Made by Mortals: Leanring in lockdown ⬀

Reflective article from Made by Mortals on working online, including tips for embracing technology, digital facilitation, making music via Zoom, making it fun, and much more.

Collective Encounters: Making digital participatory theatre ⬀

A series of filmed essays and case studies that explore the work of those making participatory theatre using digital means and platforms both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 they published six short and practical case studies on hybrid participatory theatre.

Theatre Uncut: Digital Theatre resources ⬀

A document of links, resources and considerations when making digital theatre. It signposts activities to try, and tools to use. It signposts practical resources of production and storytelling.

### Digital Culture Network:Podcasting and how to get started ⬀

This beginner resource is a great introduction to making podcasts. It walks you through developing the concept and content of a podcast, along with the tools and tech considerations. They also have a whole library of other useful guides, such as this one on producing video content.

Libraries Connected:Screen capture photos and videos toolkit ↗

Screen capture videos are useful for creating step-by-step instructional videos, enabling a person to see a process start to finish as it is narrated. This detailed guide takes you through how to make one.

Museums Computer Network:The Ultimate Guide to Virtual Museum Resources, E-Learning, and Online Collection ↗

A wealth of examples looking at how museums are putting their collections and learning offer for communities online, with links to collections around the world.
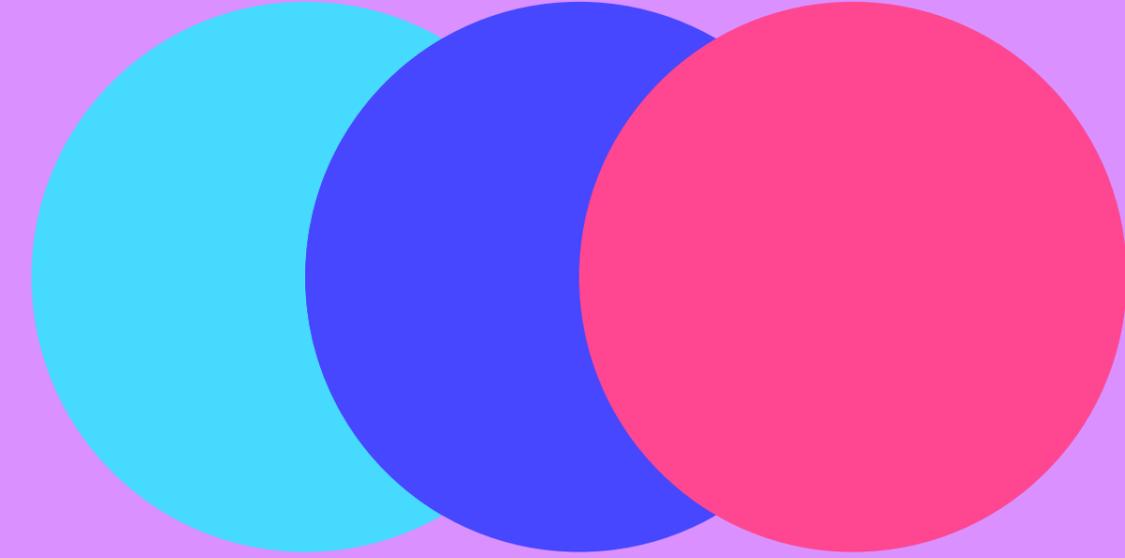
Evaluating digital activities

The Audience Agency:Using evidence to evaluate online activities ↗

A practical guide for helping you think about how to use data to evaluate the impact of your online work. It covers setting objectives for online engagement, reviewing data and identifying gaps, collecting data, and reviewing the data that you collect.

Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance:Evaluating Remote and Online Creative Activities During the Pandemic ↗

This write-up of a discussion about evaluation methods during the pandemic raises some important considerations for evaluating online engagement. Though not a practical guide, the discussion might be useful for framing your evaluation approach.

NPC:Coronavirus response toolkit for charities ↗

A useful starting point for any third sector organisation working to adapt activities and processes during the pandemic. The resources it signposts on monitoring and evaluation may be particularly useful, such as the five types of data explainer.

Opening up digital participation in arts

Digital inclusion

Learn my Way: Resources for helping someone else get online ↗

From this page you can download our learning guides to help someone learn about the internet. It contains learning guides for common computer hardware and software, and could help you support participants to take part online.

Local Trust: Digital Pathways guide ↗

Simple, easy to use guide, to help you develop your own and others' core digital skills. It takes you through a digital journey from 'Getting going', to 'Building confidence' and 'Helping others'.

Project Reboot: Guide to recycling and distributing devices ↗

A customisable toolkit that takes you through the step-by-step process of collecting unused devices, cleaning, and rebooting them, and getting the devices to those who need them in your community.

Good Things Foundation: Digital Inclusion and Exclusion in the Arts and Cultural Sector ↗

This report is a useful primer on the digital inclusion context, and how it applies in local communities and the arts. Pages 17 to 19 are particularly helpful, with practical tips and considerations for arts organisations to become more digitally inclusive.

Catalyst: Digital Inclusion tools and resources ↗

An open-source spreadsheet of over 50 resources, services, and guides to help you overcome specific digital inclusion challenges.

Ability Net: Request free IT support at home ↗

A free service for older people and disabled people to sort IT challenges, from setting up new equipment, fixing technical issues, showing you how to stay connected to family and use online services.

Accessibility

Disability Arts Online: What we've learnt about online access during the COVID-19 crisis ↗

Reflecting in June 2020, this article considers how to address the physical, sensory, cognitive, technological, and financial barriers disabled people experience accessing culture.

#AccessIsLove: Places to start ↗

An entry-level resource for people and organisations who are just starting to think harder about how to make their work accessible, it walks you through the first ten points actions you should take.

Kolia Bene: Accessible Activism Beyond the Streets ↗

Designed for activists, but more widely applicable, Bene's toolkit is designed for disabled people themselves, and event organisers. It walks you through accessibility considerations for many different kinds of disabilities.

Digital Culture Network: How to make your online content accessible ⬈

An introductory guide to accessibility across websites, social media, language, images, and video.

StageTEXT: Digital Subtitling guide ⬈

A detailed, practical guide for subtitling audio-visual material, covering everything from how long a subtitle should last, to how to describe sounds.

Drake Music: Accessibility in Video Conferencing and Remote Meetings ⬈

This practical blog covers accessibility for disabled participants across a series of different considerations: controlling pace; making audio accessible; sign language; using visuals; and security.

Little Cog: Guide to hosting an accessible online meeting ⬈

This guide helps you navigate a series of accessibility considerations for digital meetings and facilitation, and the access features you should be providing.

Online safeguarding

Guidance for working online, and online safeguarding if you're working with vulnerable people ⬈

Produced by a network of organisations, it covers two areas: a general guide to meeting online, and how to make the space as welcoming and safe as possible; and online safeguarding. It has a particular focus on assessing the practical tools you're using.

Collective Encounters: Remote Working Safeguarding Guidelines ⬈

This document from participatory theatre specialists Collective Encounters demonstrates safe communication methods, social media interactions, creating ground rules for participants in live sessions, and sharing content/recordings online.

Norfolk and Norwich Festival: Online safety module and toolkit ⬈

Designed help arts organisations safely produce online cultural content for schools during the pandemic, this training has a 25-minute video, alongside a training toolkit and a safety checklist.

Incorporated Society of Musicians: Safeguarding for music teachers giving lessons remotely ⬈

Simple advice for anyone giving one-on-one lessons or activities to young people during lockdown. It gives practical guidance on things like asking for the door to be kept open, and how it is safer to use parents' Zoom/Skype accounts.

NSPCC: Keeping children safe online hub ⬈

A comprehensive hub of guidance on all issues surrounding online safety, from minimising risks when streaming, dealing with inappropriate content, and using social media responsibly. It has specific resources for professionals.

Libraries Connected: Safeguarding for online events toolkit ⬈

Produced for library professionals, but useful to others too, this is a brief top-level guide for keeping online events safe.

Socially Distanced Engagement

Becoming closer through distance

Take A Part: Non-Digital Isolation Engagement Ideas ⬏

A crowd-sourced document listing almost 60 different ideas for non-digital, covering everything from Micro Charity Shops to Street Discos, with links and examples for each.

Eden Project: Stuff you can do ⬏

30 project or activity ideas that you can run or be part of in your community, with a practical guide and tutorial video for each activity.

Doorstep activities

Oily Cart: Doorstep Jamboree participant guides ⬏

Guides that accompanied Oily Cart's project in which a travelling Balkan band popped up across London on the doorsteps of families who were still shielding. The Doorstep Jamboree Home Gig Social Story is a good example of pre-performance material to send participants.

Doorstep Theatre Project: Performance and safety guidelines ⬏

This set of guidelines for doorstep performance produced by an American theatre company provides useful examples of the kind of safety precautions you may want to consider.

Outdoor events and performances

Outdoor Arts UK: Outdoor Arts COVID-19 sector guidance ⬏

Guidance from July 2020 covers pointers for a wide range of outdoor performance including static street shows, processions and carnivals, park festivals, instillations, light nights, and walkabout events.

Exeter Culture: Get-in, Get-out, Get On: Successfully Delivering Outdoor Performance Work in Covid Times ⬈

A practical guide that walks you through the considerations of outdoor performance during the pandemic, from how to do risk assessments to what to include in your briefing to performers. It is studded with case studies covering static street shows, walkabout performers, stilt and aerial artists, self-contained performances in vans or tents.

Creative Lives: Get Creative Outdoors Festival toolkit ⬈

A briefing for taking part in Creative Lives' open-source outdoor creativity festival. The guidance provides wider pointers for putting on outdoor events during the pandemic.

The Audience Agency: Using evidence to... reprogramme outdoor events ⬈

A guide to re-engaging audiences in a socially distanced way by putting on outdoor events and performances. It guides you through knowing who to contact to get permissions, understanding who might come, how to ticket it, and knowing who turned up.

Events Industry Forum: Making Outdoor Event Gatherings Happen Again ⬈

Published by the trade body for event professionals in May 2020, this guide makes the case for safe re-starting of public events but has some practical pointers that may continue to be useful as the pandemic develops.

Art in nature

Tanio: How to guides for forest arts ⬈

Welsh organisation Tanio received a grant from Engage to produce a set of woodland walk guides for family audiences. This worksheet approach displays an interesting adaption of outdoor creative learning to the pandemic context.

National Rural Touring Forum: Rural Touring venue Risk Assessment and Check list ideas ⬈

A spreadsheet that lists different kinds of risks associated with touring (whether in a venue of outside) and suggests different mitigation measures.

Other community settings

Working in the classroom

Mighty Hub: One-stop-shop of online creative resources for children and young people ⬈

Over 100 examples of creative activities which could be used in a school or at-home environment to feed children's creativity during lockdown.

Arts in Education Recovery Group: Eight case studies of creative learning during the pandemic ⬈

Focusing on work in schools, this report profiles eight organisations who found a way to continue face-to-face delivery safely in the pandemic. It covers a range of approaches, from online and outdoor working, to distanced delivery in classrooms.

Norfolk and Norwich Festival Bridge: Making the most of your digital content for schools ⬈

Developed with consultation from teachers, schools and education settings, this toolkit provides good examples of how cultural organisations can practically support schools and classroom teaching during the pandemic.

A New Direction: Learning under lockdown series ⬈

This series of practical guides and reflections from educators is useful for understanding more about the experience of schools during the pandemic, and how cultural organisations can best support pupils and teachers.

Working in care settings

Age and Opportunity: A Toolkit for arts and creativity in care settings ⬈

A practical toolkit to help cultural practitioners and care home workers deliver meaningful cultural activities to residents.

Arts in Care homes: Creative Communities Resource Pack ⬈

Produced in 2020 during the pandemic, these five activity guides revolve around a set of themes: nurture, play, create, relax, and celebrate, with a range of arts activities to try.

Baring Foundation: Treasury of Arts Activities for Older People, Volume One ⬈ **and Volume Two** ⬈

Both volumes contain 50 accessible creative activities, long and short, for use in any setting with older people. Alongside the activities, the treasury contains practical tips for working in alternate setting like care homes – from finding a project champion to getting a sense of the centre's rhythm.

Repository for Arts & Health Resources: Arts, Ageing and Wellbeing Toolkit ⬈

Produced by an academic and practitioner working in Singapore, this guide also contains a range of activities to use in care settings, usefully arranged according to participants' physical abilities.

Libraries Connected: Libraries in the community response ⬈

This research found that a quarter of library staff were redeployed to other areas including core council services and the emergency community response. It shows how staff, as well as buildings, supported communities beyond their usual scope and purpose.

Working in prisons

National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance: Creativity in a restricted regime ⬈

Though designed for prison officers, this guide gives insights for anyone trying to do work in prisons during the pandemic. Page five gives a set of recommendations for creative practitioners to support participants to feel they are a part of something beyond their cell.

Clinks: Engaging people with convictions ⬈

Brief guidance for voluntary sector organisations working with people in criminal justice settings. It is largely about approaches and project design, but also includes practical resources.

The Irene Taylor Trust: Music in Prisons ⬈

These in cell Learning resources contain lessons that help learners work at their own pace, including written handbooks and DVD lessons, even when people are not able to learn in groups.

With homeless people

Homelessness Link: COVID-19 guidance for hotel staff ⬈

Designed for hotel workers who housed homeless people during the government's 'Everyone In' campaign in the first lockdown, these six short webinars could also be useful to arts practitioners working in these settings. The webinars cover safeguarding, alcohol and drug awareness, trauma-informed care, and maintaining boundaries.

Art and Homelessness International: Project map ⬈

This map contains examples of 27 projects made with people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. Most examples are from the UK, but there are also a couple from the United States, providing a source of inspiration.

Cardboard Citizens, The Reader, St Mungo's, and Arts and Homelessness International: Setting up a mobile library for people who are homeless during COVID-19 ⬈

A practical easy-to-follow one-page guide to help others replicate their approach of setting up mobile libraries in hotels housing homeless people during the pandemic.

Art and Homelessness International ⬈

Co-produced Arts and Homelessness Practice Guide A co-produced guide which offers suggestions, good practice and values when working in participatory arts and creative projects with people who are or have been homeless.

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