



The Art of Commissioning

How commissioners can release the potential of the arts and cultural sector

“ If we are really thinking about the outcomes that matter to individuals we have to move away from providing services and getting a diverse offer to meet a diversity of needs. Arts and culture can be part of that journey towards providing person centred services.”

Emma Hanson, Head of Strategic Commissioning Community Support, Kent County Council

Introduction

When arts and cultural organisations team up with public authorities, they can deliver better outcomes for people and communities. That's the main finding from a major three-year initiative, the Cultural Commissioning Programme (CCP), which is supported by a growing evidence base. This report brings together insights and practical resources from NEF's work with two pioneering localities, Kent County Council and Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, to help commissioners better engage with the arts and cultural sector. The CCP has identified specific challenges that arts and cultural organisations face, and that have prevented them from being regarded as credible option for providing services. It also outlines the practical changes that commissioners can make to address this problem.

The most common barriers for arts and cultural organisations trying to engage with local authorities and the NHS include: inappropriate procurement approaches; inflexible service

specifications that exclude non-traditional services; not being invited to market engagement events; and a 'burden of proof' – demanded of new providers, which existing services seldom face. Our work with Kent and Gloucestershire has shown how commissioners can make changes to remove these barriers and work successfully with the arts and cultural sector.

Why Commission arts and culture?

Arts and cultural organisations have lots to offer, particularly to a new model of public services that focuses on preventing harm and reducing people's need for acute services, such as clinical treatment. These organisations tend to be part of their communities, with places and networks that people use on a daily basis. Importantly, they don't look like traditional services. Research has shown that arts and cultural activities can be an effective alternative because they are appealing, inclusive, and reach people without stigmatising them.

The Kent Pilot: new horizons for mental health and wellbeing, early help services, and waste management

In Kent, arts and cultural organisations are now being brought into new commissioning opportunities. These include a £4 million community-based mental health service, early help and preventative services for around £8 million, and the recommissioning of Kent's £50 million Waste Management Service, where the arts and cultural sector have been engaged alongside traditional providers to generate fresh ideas on how to involve the community in understanding the impact of waste upon the environment.

It is the first time the arts and cultural sector had been strategically integrated alongside mainstream, traditional providers. Only one of these tenders – the mental health and wellbeing tender – had been completed by the time this report was published, but early indications were promising, showing a step change in the number of arts and cultural organisations that the programme has engaged. Twelve are now working with existing mental health organisations to deliver a range of activities. There are plans to engage eight local reading, singing, writing and dance groups, and there is scope in the contract to involve additional organisations later on.

The Gloucestershire Pilot: transforming clinical pathways

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) funded a project manager to lead the Gloucestershire programme, and invested £150k to run nine projects that are applying arts and culture across a range of clinical pathways, including cancer, mental health and diabetes. They are also exploring how arts and cultural activities can be aligned with the county-wide social prescribing scheme.

The nine arts and health pilots in Gloucestershire will be collecting a range of data and the CCG will use this to inform future decisions about where and how arts and cultural activities might support health outcomes. The team is hoping that they will be able to use this data to compare arts and cultural interventions with more standard NHS interventions.

Understanding arts and culture

A common question from commissioners was: “what’s the offer from the arts and cultural sector?” Few knew much about the sector, or how its various organisations, individuals and buildings can add value to public services.

Arts Council England is the national development agency for arts and culture. It provides investment and support for: dance, literature, theatre, visual arts, music, combined arts (where organisations work across a range of art forms to bring cultural experiences to people), touring live performances, museums and libraries. But beyond this is the value that people derive from arts and culture, and how these activities can be art applied to different activities or integrated into various public services. Here we share two short examples of how arts and cultural activities are helping to achieve better outcomes for people and communities.

Case study 1. Core Arts

Core Arts offers a fully-equipped creative day service for people with severe and enduring mental health conditions. Since 1992, it has supported members in Hackney and City of London to participate in art, music, performance, cultural events, exhibitions and sports, and to achieve personal goals. The Core Arts project supports care teams to avoid admitting individuals to crisis services. It communicates with GPs to ensure coordinated care and offers members information, pathways and referrals to other third sector agencies, as well as to wider Core Arts activities and the Core Arts Wellbeing Network. The cost of delivering the service to 400-plus clients is approximately £707k. A six-month performance review found that the service delivered savings of £148k, predicted to rise to £300k per annum depending on how many sessions a member attends per week.¹

Case Study 2. Artlift

Artlift is an arts and creativity programme which runs participatory arts sessions in GP surgeries and community spaces across Gloucestershire. An in service audit showed that Artlift session costs £33.48 per patient and the programme has resulted in fewer visits to GPs, outpatient appointments and hospital admissions – delivering a cost saving of £471 per patient.²

Key recommendations for commissioners of public services

Our practical recommendations are designed to help public service commissioners realise the value that the arts and culture sector can bring to services, to shift the culture and process of commissioning public services.

Raising awareness of the arts and cultural sector

To raise awareness and develop a local vision of what arts and cultural organisations can offer for services, patients and communities, we recommend that commissioners:

- Build a group – formal or informal – of people who are interested in what arts and cultural organisations can offer public services. They should consider engaging senior advocates and sponsors, as well as people who can represent the arts and cultural sector at a strategic level, such as the local authority arts development team, or local arts and health networks
- Identify the priorities of the local authority and NHS and where arts and cultural organisations align with these. Consider how your working group might bridge the gap between arts and cultural organisations and commissioners, perhaps through events, conferences, presentations or specific examples in Cabinet papers.
- Invite arts and cultural organisations to speak at commissioner focused events. Invite commissioners and elected members to local arts and cultural organisations to find out what the sector is already working on.

- Some localities across England have developed a 'Plan on a Page' which showcases what the sector can offer, and how it can meet local public service priorities. If you are a commissioner, consider asking the local voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations or arts and cultural sector to develop something similar that you can use to demonstrate the value of arts and culture to colleagues.

Market engagement and relationship building with the arts and cultural sector

Bringing together commissioners, arts and cultural organisations, and other providers can generate fresh ideas and new partnerships, as well as creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. We recommend that commissioners:

- Encourage the VCSE to engage arts and cultural organisations in their networks, and in any associated training and capacity building programmes.
- Find ways of continuing communication between the arts and culture sector, and the public sector. For example, Gloucestershire has created an Arts Forum which is jointly facilitated by the VCSE Alliance and Create Gloucestershire to bring both sectors together regularly.
- Contact as many organisations as possible before the formal procurement process begins as your ability to involve further groups can be limited once the process has started.
- Establish an expectation that current service providers who are responsible for sub-contracting or grant giving also consider engaging the arts and cultural sector in their work.

Improving procurement processes to involve and support the arts and culture sector

Changing the nuts and bolts of the procurement process will make commissioning more open to new organisations and sectors. Local government and the NHS can take the following practical steps to better involve arts and cultural organisations when designing services, including:

- Focus tenders on the outcomes that services provide for people, rather than on specific activities or service models as an end in themselves, which might exclude new ideas.
- Explicitly write arts and culture into the tender. This is an important technical change which can back up the message that commissioners convey at events and with providers.
- Consider the scale of the contracts, and whether you need to build smaller amounts of funding into long term contracts that can be used to support the involvement of smaller organisations at a later stage. Kent's mental health and wellbeing tender is a good example of this.

Improving monitoring and evaluation processes

- Work with arts and cultural organisations to develop a range of appropriate outcome indicators for their work.
- Ask for a balance of evidence, including both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Draw on measurement expertise from elsewhere, including academics, national arts programmes and individual organisations.

A full report, with in depth case studies, practical resources, and detailed recommendations, can be downloaded from www.neweconomics.org/theartofcommissioning

The CCP (www.ncvo.org/CCProg) is funded by Arts Council England and seeks to help commissioners of public services understand how they can improve outcomes by integrating arts and cultural activities into a range of services, including mental health and wellbeing, older people and place-based commissioning. It also works with the arts and cultural sector to support knowledge and skills, and to strengthen relationships with public service leaders and commissioners. It is delivered by National Council for Voluntary Organisations, in partnership with NEF and NPC. As part of the CCP, this report brings together insights and practical resources from NEF's work over 18 months with two pioneering localities, Kent County Council and Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, to help commissioners better engage with the arts and culture sector.

Endnotes

1. Core Arts, 6-month performance review. p.3.
2. Opher, Simon (2011, 9 December). Cost-benefit evaluation of Artlift 2009–2012: A summary. Gloucestershire County Council/NHS Gloucestershire. Retrieved from http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/1482593/19171593/1341830741930/Simon_Opher_cost_benefit_report_2.pdf?token=k%2B%2F1rorBzqZoxAldlpjgqep2Byc%3D

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