

# **nalgao annual conference 2008: Open Space Forum Breakout Reports**

## **Introduction**

The nalgao Conference in Blackpool this year produced several active discussion forums, which were documents by the facilitators. Included below is a summary of some of the subjects raised.

### **1. How do nalgao and ACE work together?**

**Hosted by Gail Brown (Kent CC) and Kirsty Bell (W Sussex CC)**

In light of the projected nalgao& ACE: SE Regional Conference taking place at The Maltings in Farnham on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009, the group considers relationships between ACE and local authorities across England.

There were different historical 'subscription' examples from the different regions represented in the group, notably in Cumbria and the NE, as local authority arts services had been themselves RFOs prior to the funding review. The group therefore felt that the conference should acknowledge that we are approaching the topic from different baselines.

ACE has ceased to be a 'funding agency' and is now more interested in 'partnerships'. Is this true? What is the ACE definition of 'partnership'? The group felt it is a funding arrangement, not partnership. The regional commentaries were given as an example - local authorities represented did not feel that this was the role of a 'partner' and therefore question the role of ACE in this process.

ACE regions have very different relationships with their constituent local authorities/arts organisations - can there not be a more consistent approach taken by ACE, as it is a national organisation? Questions were raised around the amount of autonomy ACE now have in relation to DCMS?

The group felt strongly that the conference should have a SE focus and not be advertised nationally. It is felt that the national picture is very different from just the SE due to the inconsistency of agreements and relationships across all ACE regions.

"Please do not create a national model based on a regional relationship"

The group felt it would be more appropriate to share the findings from the conference on the nalgao/ACE websites etc but would not be interested in attending the conference itself.

### **2. Arts Strategies**

**Hosted by Esko Reinikainen (Monmouthshire CC)**

Most local authority arts services have either arts or cultural strategies. Discussion ensued about who should author them:

- A consultant?
- The Arts Development Officer?
- A forum representing local or regional interest?

One also has to question what is the need and ownership:

- From senior management
- From the voluntary sector
- From local artists and arts organisations

Is an arts strategy:

- Is an arts strategy an advocacy tool?
- A celebration of arts or is it
  - Arts “protection” v an arts enabling vehicle
  - Is it a consistency tool that can be used to compare and benchmark who we are and what we do.

An arts strategy can be a very effective way of getting an ADO post developed and arts services profiled internally to the authority. It can put the arts on the political map.

Some themes that emerged during the discussion included:

- There is an interdependent relationship between a local authority arts strategy, the ADO and the local arts sector.
- We could learn from the business world in strategy development, setting SMART goals, and achievable targets, as our objective are often presented as intangibles
- It is important to determine whether the drivers are coming from the bottom up or the top down. This has consequences in terms of the advocacy burden for future “buy-ins”.
- The strategy should be like a process of “lovemaking” between the often stuffy and inflexible local authority and the “beautiful” arts sector.

### **3. How can artists and art organisations and local authorities work better together?**

**Facilitated by Edwina Vine (Campaigns Associate) and the NCA**

**Some general comments:**

- Artists and arts organisation representatives often feel as though they are treated like staff by ADOs
- How ADOs are treated by arts orgs - respect and understanding works both ways!
- ADOs are seen as 'gatekeepers' to the language of government and funding
- There is presently no professional framework for ADOs
- Are arts organisations connected to LSP - arts strategy? Could be useful allies in arts cultural forums and RFOs as external partners can influence council members
- Arts Development is focused on service level agreements and performance measures. Social impacts are measured by outputs columns and constant monitoring - ADOs tick boxes where arts organisations don't have to. A number of different sets of measures - more strategic vision would help simplify this data collection
- Performance indicators across different agencies all vary which highlights the disparity of data gathering and reporting framework

**Advice on good partnerships:**

- Discuss funding early on so figures are kept in sight and effective planning can happen
- Ensure a partnership approach and combined responsibility
- Write measurement and evaluation into the contract or agreement
- RFOs annual submission highlights difficulty of forward planning
- Projects happen mainly due to word of mouth - so data is useful
- Have realistic expectations

**Thoughts on form-filling and increasing paperwork:**

- Monitoring is often so heavy that it restricts the artform
- Does evaluation 'devalue' the event or activity
- It's the arts job to engage - not to evaluate and report
- More interesting ways to monitor and evaluate i.e. video, photographs, volunteer attendees
- How can we measure experience and public value - McMaster relevant here in looking at excellence
- More trust is needed!

- Not just marketing but platforming what we do
- Monitoring can be our friend especially when negotiating with key organisations and funders
- Monitoring to fill the gap because ADOs can't always be there
- DO we need all this monitoring?!

#### 4. DCMS open space - What can DCMS do for you?

Facilitated by Mandy Barrie (Head of Arts) and Kirsty Leith (Head of Arts Policy) at the DCMS

Discussion points included:

- Improvement strategy - Passion for Excellence - LGA launch - no news since. It was welcomed when it was launched through LGA forums as a single tool at last but there's been a lack of messages about the 'how' since. Many local authorities still using TAES (often not appropriate as its a big tool) or Arts at the Strategic Centre. The draft arts performance checklist is found to be very useful.
- Competing documents seem to be out there - a policy review list would be useful and increased print runs so that documents are delivered to the ADOs desk rather than relying on downloads.
- Need for stability - plus more capacity and resources to 'prove' that they are proving that the projects they are delivering actually work - no time to prove impact and lack of creativity! ADOs are seen as bureaucrats, constantly tied to tick boxes.
- Communicating to team - advocating tools then having to choose something else - loss of credibility
- Leadership programmes that take people away from the job reinforce blockages to services
- There are different demands from different tiers of government - one size doesn't fit all!
- There is a need for better evaluation in making the case for the arts and we all need to work more closely on this. The Youth Justice Board - has a hands-on evaluation - LA inputs and YJB collates and reports. Sport England operates on per capita spend.
- Entitlements? No cultural plan, no framework
- Value of the arts: statutory or non-statutory - what would happen if they cut your arts budget? Have the NIs helped? - hard to tell. May be a better picture by Christmas.
- Local government review and unitization: Where are we with the roll out?
- When consulting - consult the enablers!
- A&B - is it directed?
- DCMS - baseline evidence for ADOs - well being, sense of place
- How is DCMS sending out its message to other government departments and supporting others agendas?
- LAs are frustrated that they constantly have to prove themselves
- Fitting arts into the health dialogue - DCOs support for art-for-arts-sake but no PSA
- Do dept of Health invite DCMS in? Dialogue is there - what will happen during the spending review?
- DCMS Leadership changes constantly.
- Creative Britain, Creative Partnerships are not touching everyone
- Confusion around the relationship between DCMS and ACE - what is it? It has effected leadership in the sector - too "fuzzy". DCMS does not want to get in to setting arts strategy but instead gives a broad overview.
- Infrastructure - how does DCMS make sure the experts are delivering? There's disparity across the regions. Inconsistent support and divergence in the ways artists get the support so that its dependent on which local authority they turn to - 'postcode lottery'
- Who takes responsibility for sustainability?
- We need more economists in the ACE - not more accountants!

## **5. Rural Touring (RT) and Rural Cinema (RC) Open Space Forum session: “ Inspired by the carbon footprint debate”**

**Hosted by Claire White, Arts Development Officer, West Lindsey District Council**

Four people who were all experienced in managing RT and RC projects joined the session. The RT scheme we felt was a great one and by looking at the scheme from a carbon footprint view could be a good way to promote it.

The core areas we discussed were:

- Low turnouts from young people regarding the scheme
- Marketing and selling tickets for events locally
- How a Rural Cinema could be set up and how it could be used to increase audiences
- Working more directly with the community
- Would it really help reduce the carbon footprint

**Low turnouts from young people:** Using the carbon footprint argument could be a way of encouraging young people to attend events locally. The group discussed how this could work through marketing events as a greener way to access culture. We discussed ideas around getting young people involved and this included working more closely with local schools and doing workshops beforehand at these schools with the performers.

**Marketing and selling tickets locally:** The group discussed how this could be effectively done; many of the promoters had used local newsagents to help sell tickets as a way of having a focal sales point. Also we discussed that many of the promoters were not comfortable using new technology such as websites and that young people could be involved to help with this area.

**Rural Cinema:** Running a film club could be a way of promoting rural cinema and was a way of getting young people involved. An ADO who joined me had others who had run similar schemes and explained how they trained up a number of people who were interested in using the RC equipment, resulting in no need for a technician. RC could work in the same way as RT by community selling and marketing points and promoting film in shops, post offices and newsagents, but films are ordered by the service and subsidised up to £100 per year if they make a loss in ticket sales. A film festival was a good way to start a film programme and to get people interested. Unusual and classic films could be shown along side young people's projects and films made by the community. This had worked elsewhere and with funky promotions and some money put into marketing it to a young audience, it had been successful.

**Working more directly with the community:** Undertaking workshops in community halls and working with schools was a good way of getting the people who live in the villages to use the RT scheme and be more aware of it. Running film clubs and getting young people on a panel to help choose films and shows was a good way of getting them involved. Having a buddy scheme for the experienced and successful promoters to help those who are new to the scheme or who have struggled with some aspects was seen as a good way of supporting others.

**Would it really reduce the carbon footprint?:** Overall we felt this would be a good way of reducing the carbon footprint. It was a positive environmental message and that even if people did travel 3-4 miles from a village nearby in their cars, it was better than them travelling more miles to the centre of a town. We discussed car sharing and exploiting venues that had licences so that people could have a drink too.

## **6. Arts & the Under 5's**

**Hosted by Emma Richards (City of York)**

- There is a history of activity in the community and private sector being product led, and training being process led.
- Arts fit very well with the process although most post development and funding remits require a balance with the product. This does not mean that the process is any less important.

Group members shared successful project ideas, including:

- Visual arts (ceramic and mosaic projects)
- Digital arts installations (playing on a child's awe of magic, when moving body parts transfers to light projections on the wall)
- Movement & dance
- Drama (using simple props to let the imagination of the children lead the way)

Other points included:

- Adults should not underestimate the imagination or abilities of children. It is often a barrier to artists and early years practitioners when they think: "2 year olds cannot do this". I bet they can!
- Parents need inspiration in order to support, encourage and continue the arts at home.
- Artists need training, mainly in the confidence to let sessions be very free-flowing and to be comfortable in observing children, letting them lead and learning from them.
- There is a question as to whether language is a barrier for young children whose first language is not English. However, even children who's first language is English may not have sufficient language skills under 5, so it is something that may be addressed with artists training; don't rely on verbal instructions: be creative in your approach, be visual and show rather than tell.

## **7. Can we make the Cultural Olympiad less boring?**

**Hosted by Paul Kelly (The Arts Institute at Bournemouth)**

How can we make the cultural Olympiad less boring and more inclusive?

The session included the following discussion points:

- It was thought that the Olympiad themes being developed were really complicated, and that the Hoops criteria excluded small voluntary groups and direct participation.
- An Essex project had the Inspire Mark withdrawn because it got sponsorship. A Dorset project had also had its Inspire Mark withdrawn for the same reason. It was agreed that the Inspire Mark was boring, with too many layers of bureaucracy.
- The 2012 badge is getting in the way -can we replace it with something else? How do you establish a different badge? Viral marketing? Can we discuss this with Cultural Programmers?
- We need to agree an alternative wording which everyone can be part of but which doesn't broach the Olympic copyright rules.
- Personal best is a uniting theme.
- Is a four-year programme too long a time to sustain? This will be the first 4-year Cultural Olympiad ever, and perhaps course for congratulations
- Westminster & London LA Consortium have come up with the Culture 8 programme
- An ideas trawl in Wales had resulted in many ideas, but only one was taken forward and survived.
- Cultural Programmers are making creative decisions.
- Allowing mistakes and experimentation can be exciting

- Give the decision making power to smaller arts organisations and companies to deliver money and projects.
- There was a fear that some of the programme may be boring, and that the British closing 8 minutes at the Beijing Olympics accentuated fears.
- Delegates thought that there were opportunities to talk about aspiration
- What do you want your area to like post-2012?

**8. Other unreported Open Space Forum sessions included:**

- Finding your Talent (creative minds and the 5 hrs of culture initiative): Gill Cooper (City of York)
- The down turn in the economy being a good focus for us and the effect on authorities: John Siddique (poet)
- Festivals & events and the development of communities & social cohesion: Nick Dodds (Festivals & Events International)
- Balancing excellence with participation targets: Heidi Bellamy (S Norfolk Council)
- Can arts organisations seriously be engaged in the commissioning process of the Local area agreement? Tina Glover: Junction Arts)
- Does the term creative industries actually help more arts happen? Adam Gent (Bournemouth BC)