

A practical guide to working with arts ambassadors

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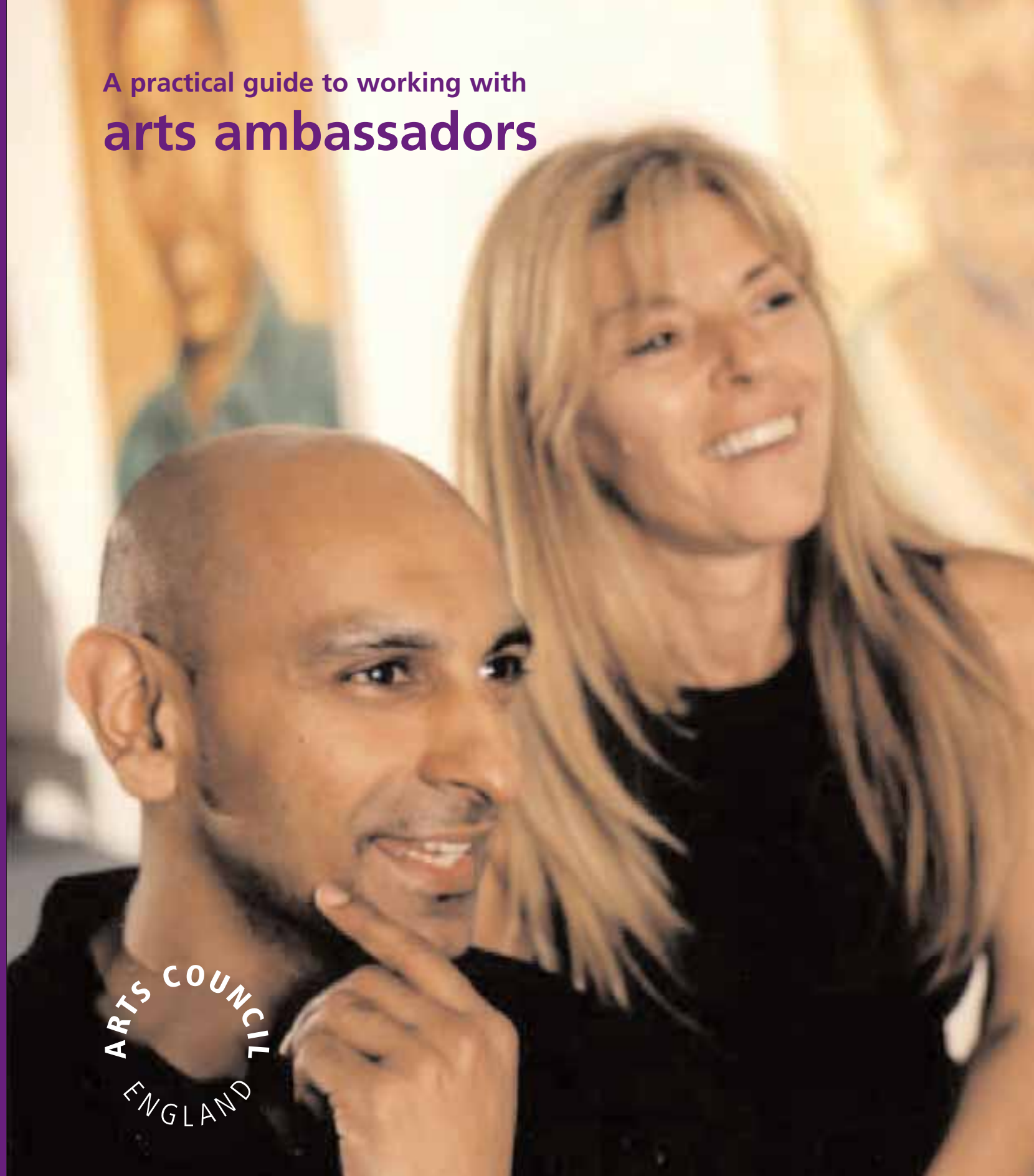
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ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



A practical guide to working with
arts ambassadors

Mel Jennings

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Foreword

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England, distributing public money from Government and the National Lottery.

We want people throughout England to experience arts activities of the highest quality and we believe that access to the arts goes hand in hand with excellence. To help to achieve this we have commissioned a series of practical guides aimed at anyone wanting to learn how to engage more effectively with existing audiences or to reach new audiences.

Ambassadors have been effective in helping audiences to engage with the arts for at least the last two decades. Ambassadors should not be seen as simply another marketing tool. We often only get one chance to reach out to a new audience and the quality of that initial relationship can have a critical impact in the long term. The ambassador approach requires commitment and can even bring about fundamental changes in the host organisation. This guide takes the lessons learned from people with first-hand experience and summarises what we know currently about good practice.

Phil Cave
Director of Audience and Market Development

Case study finder

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What is an arts ambassador?

Top tips

- arts ambassadors are community networkers who can help you access specific target audiences
- ambassadors are usually part of the community you want to target, eg student ambassadors targeting students
- use ambassadors when you want to reinforce your promotion or when traditional methods aren't working
- ambassadors can work for many kinds of arts organisation or artform, including those offering non-ticketed arts experiences

Caution

- the ambassador remit is more flexible than that of 'Friends' or sales reps and brings different expectations, opportunities and challenges
- ambassadors rely on trust to get the job done. Relationships with their contacts must be respected and not over-stretched either politically or financially
- ambassadors are not multi-level marketers and although they may be paid, they should not profit directly from sales

What is an arts ambassador?

An ambassador, or diplomat, acts as a communication bridge between two parties. In this guide, the term arts ambassador is used to mean:

'A community networker with the objective of spreading the word about arts and cultural events and/or representing the views and aspirations of a target community'.¹

The word *audience* is used to refer to attenders, visitors, readers, purchasers, viewers and participants.

What's so special about them?

Usually, an arts ambassador is representative of a target audience or is closely connected to a specific community. They are often employed to stimulate positive word of mouth and to listen to audience feedback in order to generate greater audiences. Increasing attendances is not always the core objective: ambassadors are also valued for their ability to broaden audience type, promote good public relations, gain market information and see things differently. These days, word of mouth also includes 'word of mouse' (email) and text messaging.

Whatever the medium, the message is passed on in a *personalised way* and the ambassador is motivated out of *genuine personal enthusiasm*, even when paid to do so. It is this personal endorsement that gives the ambassador technique its effectiveness, offering an immediate, live and direct form of communication.

'Everybody I brought and the extended University College London family who were brought along by my colleagues, a) loved the show, b) had a fabulous evening at the theatre that most of them would not have otherwise enjoyed, and perhaps most importantly, c) asked me to keep them posted and get them tickets for the next one!'

*Student Rep,
Donmar Warehouse*

¹ Based on a definition created by the Arts Ambassador Unit, Manchester

When to work with ambassadors

Arts ambassadors can be used as a kick-start or booster for core campaigns using traditional tools such as direct mail or print distribution. They are also employed when other methods have just not worked, typically in situations where long-term relationship building is required to overcome competition, audience inertia or misconceptions. A skilled ambassador can address customer concerns on the spot, and is able to overcome some of the key barriers to arts attendance.

The power of word of mouth

As a marketing 'tool', ambassadors sit alongside other 'below-the-line' activities, eg promotion, direct selling and PR. In the wider marketing world, individuals who act as ambassadors are known by a variety of names such as: *opinion-formers, connectors, champions, lead users*² and *community advocates*.

Whatever you call them, when the energy of social networkers is managed for marketing purposes, the effect can be powerful. For example, 94 per cent of First Direct customers have recommended this bank to others at some point and 30 per cent of new customers say First Direct has been recommended to them.³ Another example is the rapid rise of the email server Hotmail, which grew from 0 to 12 million subscribers in 18 months.⁴

If recommendation is the natural reaction of a happy customer, why is managing word of mouth necessary? There are three key reasons:

- 1) to accelerate the energy of enthusiasts by speeding up and sustaining the recommendation process
- 2) to channel the energy of enthusiasts towards new, hard-to-reach or excluded customers
- 3) to counteract any negative gossip

² Source: Rosen, Emanuel, *The Anatomy of Buzz: creative word-of-mouth marketing*, HarperCollins Business, 2001

³ Source: First Direct Press Office, Leeds, July 2003

⁴ Source: Rosen, Emanuel, *The Anatomy of Buzz: creative word-of-mouth marketing*, HarperCollins Business, 2001

Who uses ambassadors and what do they do?

Currently, a variety of arts organisations work with ambassadors, including venues, promoters, touring companies and audience development agencies. In theory an ambassador can promote any artform. The research for this guide has found good examples from the visual arts, rural touring theatre, community carnival, contemporary and classical music.

This guide refers to ambassador 'schemes' or 'initiatives'. These terms could imply short-term projects, but there are many different approaches to employing arts ambassadors. Some organisations work with arts ambassadors over long periods of time as an *integral* part of their promotional or audience development toolkit. Others work with ambassadors on a time-limited basis.

In its simplest form, working with arts ambassadors is a way of managing positive word of mouth in order to increase attendances (the promotion model). At its most complex, it goes beyond a promotional technique to being a partnership with the target audience itself, assisting the long-term development of the organisation (the audience development model). Here, the wider meaning of the term ambassador arises; for example they may aim to broker new partnerships or overcome negative perceptions from the target audience. This approach combines the use of ambassadors with other development methods such as test drives, artist and promoter development or new programming.

Section 3, Choosing an approach, looks in more detail at both the audience development and promotion models.

Who started it?

Word of mouth is the oldest form of promotion and has perhaps always been managed to business advantage. The practice of using ambassadors has roots both within and outside the arts. In the commercial world, multi-

'Do you know how amazing it is to take people to the theatre who have never been before, or went so long ago they can't remember live performances?'
Ambassador, Tipping Point 150, The Lighthouse (previously Poole Arts Centre)

level marketing uses a hierarchy of product distributors who are like ambassadors, although distributors aim to profit directly from sales.

One of the oldest and most famous multi-level marketing companies is Amway, which sells a range of goods without a retail outlet presence. Other well-known multi-level marketing companies include Kleeneze, Avon and Herbalife.

There are many examples of ambassador prototypes in the arts. One of the first recorded are district publicity assistants (DPAs). DPAs are basically *informed* distributors. In the UK arts sector the DPA concept has been pioneered and honed by a number of venues.

In 1979, with Arts Council funding, the Bristol Hippodrome set up a team of 12 part-time DPAs, employed to distribute print to rural areas. More recently, the Ambassador Theatre Group has developed the DPA concept into district sales assistants (DSAs). Their core role is to develop new group sales and they are extremely successful.

See [Choosing an approach](#) and [Case studies](#) sections – for more information.

Other important influences on the ambassador technique have been: education and outreach workers – who work in communities to develop participation in education and development projects; volunteers – who have always supported the workforce of the not-for-profit arts world; ‘Friends’ – who boost subscriptions and offer a range of support and finally, the sales promotion technique of ‘people get people’ – where an existing customer refers friends or family to a mailing list.

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Pros and cons

Top tips

- don't overlook the range of benefits ambassadors bring: it's not just about audience numbers
- remember that the value of ambassadors can show up indirectly and in non-financial ways, eg new ideas, information, relationships, organic networks, 'wild card' opportunities and unexpected contacts
- ambassadors can add value to the experience of the arts event itself

Caution

- be prepared: ambassadors present the same management issues you would face with any 'employees'
- a casual attitude towards 'casual staff' will waste time and opportunity
- ambassadors need support too, eg back-up promotion and customer care
- even great ambassadors will have a hard time selling poor-quality arts experiences!

Pros and cons

Ambassadors have been employed by arts organisations for well over two decades. Employed for basic promotion and sales they can be very effective. How far they can impact on organisational and infrastructural issues is yet to be fully tested over the long term.

The ambassador approach is highly dependent on personalities and relationships. As such, a critical success factor is the ability to manage these elements well. You may find yourself suddenly having to manage a team of 30 people calling you daily, or caught between your organisation resistant to change and a community calling for action.

It is vital to plan ahead and consider thoroughly whether you can afford the time, money and effort required to do it all properly.

Sections 4 and 5 – *Designing your scheme* and *Recruitment and training* – will help you plan ahead.

Positive experiences

Effective promotion

Arts Ambassadors Unit, Manchester: 43 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted during this three-year project cited the ambassador as being their primary motivation for attendance.

Increased attendance

The Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) set up a district sales assistant (DSA) scheme in Brighton and found group attendance quickly rose from 8 per cent to 15 per cent. Across the seven regional venues, DSAs account for over 25 per cent of all group visits across ATG regional venues, and approximately 35,000 visits per regional venue per year are achieved through the DSA network.

Using an ambassador scheme, the Corn Exchange arts centre in Newbury, West Berkshire increased the percentage of young attenders from 6 per cent to 12 per cent (a figure higher than the 9 per cent representation of young people in the local population as a whole).

New programme: new audiences

In 2000, 23 per cent of attenders to Birmingham Repertory Theatre's presentation of *The Ramayana* were first-time visitors. Of these, 55 per cent were of South Asian origin. This presentation was part of the networking project run by Birmingham Arts Marketing aimed at developing Black and Asian audiences.

New relationships

In Newcastle upon Tyne, the Laing Art Gallery project worked with 1,506 young people and hosted 46 tailored visits. Out of 28 visits to groups at their bases, 75 per cent of those groups booked subsequent visits to the Laing. They also established a working relationship with more than 50 new youth and community groups in Tyne and Wear, and created a mailing list of over 270 youth and community groups.

Benefits for all

Audiences can benefit enormously from:

- guidance and reassurance from people they trust
- additional information tailored to their needs
- support at the time of their visit, for example 'buddies' who accompany them to the event or special receptions
- social connection
- reduced rates and priority booking
- development of local artists and networks

Arts organisations also gain:

- direct and 'live' targeting
- ambassadors who:
 - speak the language of the target market
 - overcome customer cynicism about marketing messages
 - cut through the barrage of arts and entertainment choices
 - respond in the moment to customer objections or queries
- access to hard-to-reach communication channels and networks
- support in developing databases
- last-minute sale of empty seats
- support in finding and engaging with community networks
- feedback from the target market on service, programming, marketing, etc

'It was lovely to go to the theatre after all these years – I enjoyed every minute.'

Older attender invited by an Art Shape Ambassador

'I love my job! No two days are the same. It is so satisfying providing the link between the community and theatre, arranging group visits, answering questions and seeing people enjoy theatre, often for the first time.'

District Sales Assistant and Training Coordinator, Ambassador Theatre Group

Ambassadors also benefit from participation and not just financially:

- an opportunity for social contribution
- networking and socialising opportunities
- work experience and training in marketing and sales
- enhancing their own role/work in the community
- a deeper engagement with an artform

Challenges

It can be hard to predict what challenges might arise. Below are some examples.

Management time

One of the challenges most frequently pointed out by managers of ambassador initiatives is allocating enough management time:

'We underestimated costs in terms of the amount of staff time needed to run the project and, in particular, to develop and maintain the relationship with ambassadors and partners. In future projects I would plan for a dedicated coordinator role.'

Project Manager, Ambassador Scheme

Sole worker burn-out

As many an outreach or development worker has found, being a sole worker can be tough. Even teams of ambassadors can find the amount of audience contact time required demanding. A sole worker can also feel caught between the different agendas of an arts organisation and a target community. Don't pile on the expectations and avoid promoting them as a focal point. Creating a supportive advisory panel can help.

Accuracy of information

Ambassadors rely on a relationship of trust and respect with your organisation and in turn, when you employ ambassadors, you (and the target audience) entrust them to represent your brand and your programme. Most of the time this works fine for all concerned, but occasionally things can go wrong:

'...half the [first-time] audience [recruited by the ambassador] walked out after the first 20 minutes due to bad language...'

Ambassador Project Targeting South Asian Audiences

In this case, the work of a particular company had changed since its last tour and no one had realised, potentially damaging to both venue and ambassadors.

One venue manager found ambassadors pushing too hard for sales. The ambassadors were so determined to get people through the doors that they misrepresented an event to make it sound more light-hearted. This was an unwise tactic, especially with new audiences.

Ineffective ambassadors

Some of your ambassadors will drop out or be unproductive or unskilled. Resist the temptation to take on people because you are desperate and they happen to represent a particular target audience. Check that they are able to do what you need them to do and be prepared to let them go if they do not match your expectations.

Even if your ambassadors are great, remember you will also occasionally have to deal with last-minute 'no-shows' of audience members.

Audience development schemes

Adopting the audience development approach can present an unpredictable learning curve. Challenges could include:

- difficulties in finding suitable ambassadors
- failing to allocate time for ambassadors to build trust and relationships with new contacts
- not realising how much change would be required by the organisation itself
- resourcing major changes, eg creating and sustaining a programme of appropriate work
- lack of product representative of, or appropriate to, the target community
- a small team of ambassadors who run out of energy over the long term
- inadequate budget to run and sustain the scheme
- difficulty in monitoring

Awareness of the social and political environment

Targeting a new audience or community can involve a great deal of learning. Your ambassadors may need to learn more about 'their' communities since no social groups are homogeneous. Be aware that your ambassadors do not represent or speak for everyone in their community.

You are building relationships and that entails taking time to understand other people's viewpoints. Your volunteers may be selective about what they will support, for example some religious groups may choose to support some artforms and not others.

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Choosing an approach

Top tips

- use the short-term sales approach for quick sales of accessible work to readily available audiences
- use the mid- to long-term audience development approach for organisations prepared to respond flexibly and substantially to new and excluded audiences
- both approaches can work well for large-scale, multi-partner schemes and for single venues or organisations

Caution

- working with ambassadors can throw up challenges. Clarity and agreement around everyone's expectations, time management and communication will help to avoid the more common ones
- ambassadors give you feedback direct from the audience and both have their expectations. Be clear about what you can and can't do in response
- be aware that the audience development approach can often be challenging, costly and take time to show significant results
- it's harder for touring companies to set up ambassador schemes, but not impossible. Good relationships with venues and local promoters are essential to sustain a presence and make it work

Choosing an approach

There are several models of working with arts ambassadors. This guide describes two of the most common approaches:

- 1) the promotion-focused approach – where ambassadors function as a promotional tool. In this model, a team of community promotion and sales workers aims to target new attenders and increase attendance. The ambassador is primarily a sales representative for the arts organisation
- 2) the audience development approach – here the ambassador is an advocate for the arts organisation *and* the target community. They are often situated within a wider development programme where their effect is felt across the whole organisation. In this model, a partnership develops arts organisations, audiences and communities through an integrated range of activities including targeted training, programming and commissioning

In reality the division between the promotion and audience development approach is not a sharp one. Taking more of an audience development approach generally requires that your arts organisation forms a much deeper relationship with the target audience and is able to show a greater degree of responsiveness.

Whatever your approach, an ambassador project sets up a highly personalised and intimate dialogue with your customers. Anyone who has run a 'Friends' scheme will know this approach can bring with it a number of challenges. Your ambassadors may have expectations that question your way of doing things and make working with them a learning experience.

'We saw we were so insular in so many ways. We were just not high up on people's list of things to do... It was a wake-up call.'
Sheffield Galleries' Time Lords Scheme

Always check your assumptions, for example around 'quality' or 'culture'. While being clear about your boundaries, don't be too quick to dismiss new ideas. As one venue manager said, the ambassadors' value is 'that they are not me'.

Preparation is crucial. Before recruiting, spend some time thinking about what you are trying to achieve, what the target market might expect from you and whether you will be able to respond.

A six-month project at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne created tailor-made visits and experiences in the gallery for young people with the aim of testing perceptions and breaking down barriers. The three ambassadors visited targeted youth groups and held 30 meetings with youth workers as well as two youth worker-training seminars. The project used extensive methods of documentation and evaluation including creative consultancy work (participatory workshops in three different youth centres) and interactive video documentation. Responding to requests from the target audience, the project provided 'own turf' familiarisation visits from ambassadors. The gallery developed programming and presentation to appeal to the target audience, such as the 'LATER' events (late night openings), pre-visit tours, weekend drop-in sessions and DJ-ing. The aim was for young people to 'colonise' the gallery.

So how far are you prepared to go? An effective initiative will allow for partnership and understanding of different values right from the start, so that when different perspectives arise there is always space for discussion.

Which model should I choose?

Bear in mind that even if you start out with a *promotion* approach you may find it evolves into an *audience development* approach in order to respond to audience needs. That in turn may oblige you to introduce or increase certain types of arts product. A successful ambassador scheme could have a significant effect on your organisation's future.

The promotion model

This involves a team of community promotion, sales or PR workers aiming to target new attenders and increase attendance.

What it looks like

The Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) runs successful district sales assistants (DSA) initiatives in all ATG regional venues. The DSA teams encourage new groups and schools to visit the theatre, raise the theatre's profile within their catchment area and act as the theatre's ears and voice, providing a vital channel of feedback on a local level. Each team of seven to 10 DSAs lives in key parts of their theatre's catchment area and is employed on a part-time basis for nine hours a week.

The DSAs have been excellent in encouraging groups to cross over from safe products such as musicals to a more demanding artform, such as dance or opera, because their contacts are willing to trust them. DSAs have also provided useful feedback on transport difficulties, print and new competitive venues. An added benefit has been that the targeted groups themselves become advocates.

How it works

- you set attendance targets for new audiences for a particular programme
- your ambassadors promote, encourage and enable attendance
- you develop or change your promotional tools in response to research or ambassador or audience feedback

'This scheme allows me to get a taste of what Edinburgh has to offer in the arts and so is a wonderful aid to my line of work.'
Bus Tour Guide, Frontliners

What your ambassadors do

- spread positive word of mouth
- sell tickets and attend with guests
- distribute flyers and posters and identify new outlets
- identify new sales possibilities
- promote your sponsor's product
- help you to build up a targeted mailing list
- conduct tours and talks for new groups

When to use the promotion model

- ✓ you want to target audiences that match your existing audiences
- ✓ you are offering an accessible and familiar programme
- ✓ you want to encourage 'intender' markets: people interested in what you offer who have not got round to making a visit and need an extra push
- ✓ you need to increase attendance quickly over the short term

When not to use the promotion model

- ✗ if you are promoting a 'hard-to-sell' artform
- ✗ if you are targeting a specific community that has absolutely no relationship with your organisation or partnership, or worse has a negative perception
- ✗ if you are unable to fully back up the product offer. For example, if you are targeting disabled attenders and neglecting to address important access issues
- ✗ if, once you have started using a promotion-based approach, you find you are getting persistent feedback that starts to question the basis of your sales offer, you will need to consider how your organisation can respond and, if practical, move towards an audience development approach

Feedback may suggest that:

- your target audience does not like the programme
- you are using the wrong sort of promotional materials
- you need to develop new partnerships
- your venue isn't accessible

The audience development model

This is a partnership with the target audience itself, to assist the longer-term development of the organisation.

CAUTION: The audience development model is challenging and costly as it takes on audience development in the widest sense possible. Attracting new audiences while transforming an arts environment and infrastructure is an ambitious and long-term goal. It can require considerable partnership and relationship-building skills both within and outside your arts organisation. There are often historical and socio-political contexts to be taken into account, and notions of community and identity may need to be explored and negotiated.

What it looks like

The Networking Project is run by Birmingham Arts Marketing and seven arts organisations. This evolving three-year project targets South Asian, African and Caribbean communities. Currently it focuses on increasing access, building enduring relationships between target communities and arts organisations and effecting real organisational change for long-term integration of Black audiences. The ambassadors, led by a project coordinator, are people of South Asian, African or Caribbean origin themselves with a brief of networking within their community to raise the profile of a specific arts organisation and encouraging active engagement with that organisation.

The paid ambassadors work with a voluntary panel of community representatives and with the arts organisation to facilitate a greater understanding of the needs and aspirations of the target community, and to promote the organisation to their community and encourage attendance at arts events. The volunteer panel members are recruited by the ambassadors who use their networks of community links and personal contacts. Each panel has a different profile, so panel members are targeted differently.

See *Case studies* section for more details on this and other schemes.

How it works

- you plan the scheme with informed representatives of the target market
- you work in partnership with a team of ambassadors
- you consider setting up a supporting panel of advisers or a community forum
- you are prepared to develop or change many aspects of your organisation in response to research and audience feedback
- this approach could have an impact on:
 - the type of programme you present and where you present it
 - the type of services and facilities you offer
 - the type of people you employ and the training they receive
- you set up an evaluation procedure and prepare for mid- to long-term results

What your ambassadors do

Everything a promotion ambassador would do (see above) plus:

- advise your organisation on programming, marketing, front-of-house, customer care, etc
- manage an advisory panel

- promote the ambassador initiative and events to groups, networks, key contacts and artists (thereby developing new partnerships)

When to use the audience development model

- ✓ your arts organisation is responsive and prepared to develop to suit your audiences' needs
- ✓ your organisation has little or no previous relationship with a particular excluded target market
- ✓ you wish to target new audiences and there are cultural or representation-based barriers to attendance
- ✓ you need to gain a greater understanding of the target market through action research
- ✓ you want to build relationships with new contacts, partnerships and networks – this method is particularly effective when undertaken as a group or a consortium of arts organisations, where the impact can be felt across a city or region

Is the audience development model right for my organisation?

- are you ready and able to make significant changes to the way you do things?
- can you ensure that you are able to respond flexibly and appropriately to ambassador ideas and input?
- what might success mean to your programming? Can you sustain the right kind of programme?
- will you be able to sustain this initiative, its achievements and requirements, in the long term?
- can you fund a long-term development process?
- can the market's needs be realistically met without distorting or destabilising your organisation?

When not to use the audience development model

- ✗ your organisation is not prepared or able to respond to the needs of the target market
- ✗ you need to fill unsold seats or satisfy funding conditions. Your target audience may see through your motives and your ambassadors may also feel compromised

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Designing your scheme

Top tips

- a successful ambassador network starts with you. Invest plenty of time in research, planning and development
- make sure all internal staff and external partners understand and support your ambassador scheme: ask them to plan it with you
- ambassadors can be voluntary or paid: they have many motivations and there are many incentives you can offer
- enable creative input from your ambassadors: consider allocating some 'inspiration money' in the budget for putting their ideas into action
- think about who could support your scheme: press, sponsors, other arts organisations?

Caution

- ambassadors can be time-hungry: you must budget for set-up and ongoing management time
- avoid box office overload and confusion: consider how your ambassadors and box office are going to handle ticket sales and distribution

Designing your scheme

This section looks at the planning and practical considerations for starting to work with arts ambassadors: it will help you to check that you have covered all areas.

Research and development

If you are using the audience development model, you will need a period of planning and preparation.

This could include:

- audience research
- community and creative consultation
- ambassador recruitment
- regular reviews of project progress

See *Case studies* section for more information on preparation.

Confirm and brief project partners

Have you confirmed your project partners, those who want to work with you and those who could support your planning? Even if you are planning a simple promotion approach, you may need to think about who will want to work with or even against you.

One consortium scheme targeting students found it a courtesy to build a partnership with a local university who might otherwise have seen them as a competitor to their own programme of events.

Ensure that all staff and partners are aware of, and support, your plans. Clear communication structures are essential, as the work of ambassadors can affect your whole organisation. For example, you will need to ensure that your box office staff respect and welcome your new customers.

Think about who will interact with the ambassadors and what kind of information they will exchange, for example:

Box office and front-of-house

Agree systems for booking and reserving tickets, brief them on the project rationale, the need to make new attendees feel welcome and any new procedures, eg handing out welcome packs.

Education and outreach

Identify potential areas of overlap. Decide how you will avoid duplication of effort or overloading individual community contacts.

Press and PR department

How 'visibly employed' do you want your ambassadors to be? Do you want potential audiences to know ambassadors' enthusiasm is being rewarded? Discuss with press and PR staff whether working with ambassadors presents a press opportunity.

Project sponsors

Discuss opportunities for extra benefits for your ambassadors (such as training, talks, free products) and ways they could promote your sponsor (distribution of 'freebies', promoting awareness of sponsor to target markets). Clear this first with ambassadors and be upfront about it when recruiting.

Other project partners

Don't assume your ambassadors won't be interested in the overview. They will have a better understanding of your aims if they are aware of other partners and have a chance to meet other ambassador teams. They will also feel a greater sense of involvement and 'ownership'.

Finance

Many organisations run the promotion method for a modest sum eked out of an existing marketing budget, using voluntary ambassadors. This can be cost-effective, but it would be a mistake to see the promotion model as a cheap marketing option. The amount of time and effort you will need to invest in managing it effectively will be significant.

If your promotion approach is to be self-financing, then it is important to offer an attractive, accessible programme to a plentiful market and to set clear attendance targets.

The Ambassador Theatre Group's district sales assistant scheme is very successful in this area. The project is cost-effective and almost self-financing. In the larger venues, DSAs generate between £200,000 and £300,000 per venue in group sales every year, and account for over 25 per cent of all group visits across ATG regional venues. Roughly 35,000 visits per regional venue per year are achieved through the DSA network.

Although not always self-financing, working with ambassadors can be an effective way of boosting sales or selling unused capacity. A look at the case studies shows that the range of costs spans £0–£500 per audience head and often the stated cost is exclusive of staff time. However, it is worth weighing up all the costs against the potential lifetime value of a new customer or the knock-on benefits of developing new connections within a community. As the figures below show, annual expenditure varies enormously.

Cost of promotion schemes

An ongoing, multi-partner, agency-led scheme with more than 300 ambassadors: £2,500

An agency/venue scheme with six ambassadors: £18,000

A five-venue partnership with more than 100 ambassadors: £18,000

Cost of audience development schemes

Adopting an audience development approach demands sensible long-term budgets. Targeting small market segments will hardly ever result in a financial return on investment.

Large-scale, three-year project with numerous partner arts organisations, plus project managers and between six and 10 paid ambassadors: approximately £72,000–£90,000 per year

Single-venue-based project with allocation for new programming: £23,000

Ongoing, two-year-old, venue-led project, two partners with 10 ambassadors: zero budget (eg conducted on agency staff time worth £7,500)

Sponsorship

Consider whether there is an opportunity to link your ambassadors to a business sponsor. This is a great way to gain extra benefits for your ambassadors, your organisation or partnership and your sponsor. Think ahead as sponsorship can be withdrawn suddenly. Also, be clear about what your ambassadors can and can't be expected to do.

Donmar Warehouse Theatre worked in partnership with e-business specialist organisation SAP during 2002. As the Donmar student rep scheme relies on email, SAP created a database to allow the Donmar to facilitate correspondence, track attendance and manage the overall student programme. SAP also hosted open days for the reps to give them a unique insight into the world of marketing for business on a global scale. While SAP no longer underwrites the scheme, it is helping to set up an SMS text system so that the Donmar can send students texts from a specially devised database. It is also providing the Donmar a company mobile phone from which to send the messages – allowing the theatre to attract young attenders with last-minute ticket offers and news about upcoming events.

Paid or voluntary?

If you are running a large-scale, multi-partner, audience development scheme with a team of ambassadors, you will find it hard to get by without a project manager. You will probably employ your ambassadors on a formal, paid basis, although some schemes are successful in engaging large numbers of ambassadors on a voluntary basis. Some schemes pay an hourly rate, while others pay a set fee in return for a specified number of days.

Even if your ambassadors are volunteers, allow for some expenses. Offer them a nominal sum towards travel and basic administration costs. If you are targeting an excluded or disadvantaged community, think about how a request for free time will be interpreted. If relations have been non-existent or poor in the past, a request for unrewarded support for your arts organisation is inappropriate.

With voluntary ambassadors, consider how formal you want your relationship to be. Will you offer them a basic contract or set performance targets? This is unusual for voluntary schemes and is considered by many to be inappropriate. However, without a clear agreement or targets, some schemes find it difficult to manage and monitor the actions of their voluntary teams.

'I've got quite a few friends on council estates, who have never done anything besides go to the cinema... I want to take them to a play or a ballet and them to come out and say, 'Wow! There's life out there, besides sitting in front of a box.'

*Ambassador,
Tipping Point 150,
The Lighthouse
(previously Poole
Arts Centre)*

A particularly energetic and motivated group of ambassadors will enjoy working as a team and setting their own goals and targets: the ambassadors for Tipping Point 150, The Lighthouse, organised a competition among themselves to find the most effective ambassador.

Added incentives

How about...

- free or reduced-rate tickets
- pre/post-show talks, special events, meet the cast, backstage tours, 'behind the scenes' information – the chance to socialise
- free products and other input from your sponsor
- free membership
- discounts for your café, bookshop or merchandise
- work experience, for example writing press reviews or casual work
- training in marketing and sales
- access to advance 'what's on' information
- opportunities to give feedback to arts organisations
- the chance to be part of the cultural life of a city or make a difference
- the chance to make new business connections
- named acknowledgement in print

Budget

Your budget headings will depend on your project type. Look through the following list compiled from existing schemes to check that you have considered likely headings.

Checklist

- recruitment:
 - targeted advertising
- office facilities for ambassadors:
 - office telephone
 - mobile phone
 - meeting space
- project costs:
 - room hire
 - postage
 - subsidised tickets
 - special social events
- programming:
 - new work commissions
 - underwriting new programming
 - artist development
- promotion:
 - new website page
 - print
 - photocopying
 - vouchers
- expenses:
 - travel
 - hospitality and refreshments
- employment:
 - salaries
 - expenses
 - NI and pensions
 - management fee

- training:
 - buying in training
- monitoring and evaluation:
 - focus or discussion groups
 - independent evaluator
 - production and distribution of report
- contingency:
 - allow a small percentage of the overall budget for any unforeseen costs

Managing ambassadors

How many ambassadors do you need? Weigh up all the factors: your attendance targets, the energy of your ambassadors, the type of networks within which they operate and your available time and budget.

If you are planning to engage your ambassadors on a voluntary basis, allow for fluctuations in commitment and for a drop-out rate. Many schemes find that Pareto's Law rings true, in that 80 per cent of their results come from a core 20 per cent of the ambassadors. This is often par for the course when employing *volunteers*, but is also due to the character of ambassadors. As one project manager put it, 'the best ambassadors are very busy people' and they tend to have varied interests and commitments.

How long do you expect your ambassadors to stay with you? Some schemes are working with faithful ambassadors that have stayed with them for years. Accept that in a voluntary scheme, people drop out as they find full-time jobs and interest may wane over time. Planning how you are going to deal with this now will save you headaches later.

Think about how much time you will need to allocate to manage your ambassadors. Many schemes vastly underestimated how much support their ambassadors, particularly new ones, required. See it as effectively managing an additional department. Volunteers in particular require a good deal of managers' time – briefing, training, guidance, support, encouragement, friendship, reward and thanks. Every ambassador you engage will expect you to acknowledge their contribution. This *must* be personal.

Checklist:

- allow for briefing and update meetings
- expect and encourage regular update calls
- always acknowledge your ambassadors' suggestions and be clear about what you can and can't act upon
- be open to drop-in visits and unscheduled calls and be clear about when you are not available
- delegate – depending on the size and responsibilities of your team, one of your ambassadors may be able to manage the others

Providing a base

If you are running a long-term scheme of an audience development nature, consider providing an office base for your ambassadors. They will require a central hub to operate from and access to office facilities such as a desk, telephone, PC and email, photocopier, fax, etc.

Ticket distribution

Unless you are already operating a group sales system or community sales outlets, you will have to consider how your ambassadors will handle bookings. This is best worked out with your box office, but here is a brief outline of what works for some existing schemes:

- ambassadors bring their guests with them and pay on the night
Be careful with this one, as large groups could cause box office overload at their busiest time
- ambassadors collect payment from their guests and then book in bulk via the arts organisation by calling in advance with a credit card
- the scheme manager buys tickets from box office and passes them on to ambassadors. Ambassadors keep marketing and box office departments informed of no-sales. This approach needs lots of checking and updating
- an allocation of tickets made available via community outlets

Recruitment and training

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Recruitment and training

Top tips

- recruit those who can communicate most effectively with their peer group
- for best results set up a selection process, however informal
- don't expect your ambassadors to start work unsupported: brief them thoroughly, encourage teamwork and offer training if you can afford it
- give your ambassadors adequate tools for the job out in the field, eg provide them with contacts, promotional materials, special events
- if you need more information about your audiences or want to generate new ideas, consider setting up an advisory panel for your ambassadors to work with

Caution

- be clear about your terms of engagement: you may need to tell applicants why they are unsuitable or ask ineffective ambassadors to leave
- be specific about what you want your ambassadors to do: a simple set of notes or a signed agreement makes things clear

Recruitment and training

What type of ambassadors do you need?

Most arts ambassador schemes employ ambassadors who are in some way representative of the target market. This is because they need to trust that their ambassadors know, understand and communicate well with the target market.

Think about *who* your ambassadors can connect with as well as *how many* people they know. Some ambassadors work only within their immediate circle of friends and family. Others – 'connectors' – are able to tap into other people who can access large-scale networks, for example, *someone who connects you with* a social events organiser for a large business. Both types of contact are important, but connectors have the potential to speed up the progress of a project significantly.

Does it matter to you if your ambassadors represent other products or work for other arts organisations who are your competitors? If you have a sponsor, check there are no promotional clashes.

CAUTION: Students can change their addresses and their interests a great deal. If you are engaging students, it's likely you will need to review your ambassador team on a regular basis.

Supporting panels

Several organisations use an advisory panel to support their ambassadors. The panel has a number of functions:

- extra support for the ambassador and the project
- a customer circle giving feedback on attendance or participation experiences
- a test group responding to publicity and programming options
- a think-tank for new ideas

If you have several ambassadors, say more than five, you could ask them to act also as an advisory panel or if you require wider consultation, set up an additional panel or a community forum.

Interact in Milton Keynes worked with their local community carnival. They employed one ambassador but also set up a panel of advisers. Councillors and local people worked together on this panel.

What makes a good arts ambassador?

Who to recruit depends on your objectives. You may want to consider targeting people with a number of the following qualities.

Checklist:

- passionate about the arts
- supportive of your organisation and its core values
- an 'innovator' or 'early adopter'
- enthusiastic personality

- able to commit to your scheme for a period of time
- well networked in work or social life, for example belongs to lots of groups, has a history of volunteering or goes out a lot
- good communicators with good listening skills
- sales or marketing background or experience in community promotions

See the Appendix for a sample ambassador person specification from The Lighthouse, Poole.

CAUTION: Recruitment

Students: remember you could encourage applications from student press officers or those with an interest in journalism

Networks: don't assume that an ambassador will automatically network or socialise with similar people, eg a disabled ambassador may not socialise with other disabled people, an African Caribbean ambassador may not be well networked within an African Caribbean community

Job description

Whether your ambassadors are contracted or not, you should be clear about what you actually want them to do. There is a range of potential responsibilities:

- distribute promotional materials and identify new outlets
- stimulate positive word of mouth and carry out general PR
- secure bookings from individual guests or groups
- attend performances with first-time attenders
- conduct action research
- recruit and train new ambassadors

- advise on programming, marketing, customer care and audience development
- set up an advisory panel or community forum
- source artists and practitioners from the targeted community
- develop new partnerships with targeted groups and networks
- attend and assess potential performances at other venues
- conduct tours and talks for new groups
- support development of mailing lists
- promote sponsor's product
- identify new sales possibilities
- follow-up visits to gain feedback
- follow-up promotional activity

The recruitment process

Finding the right ambassadors may be as new to you as targeting the audiences which they represent. There are many ways in which you can source the right people.

Checklist:

- advertisements or editorial in local press, targeted press and newsletters
- distribution of a scheme brochure
- flyers
- targeted events, eg student fresher fairs and local community meetings
- your own staff contacts in the community
- via community, local authority and other networks and groups
- emailings

- website advertisement with a general note or a downloadable application form
- via your existing attenders
- via existing ambassadors, arts organisation staff, word of mouth

Consider how formal you want the recruitment process to be. This depends on both your needs and the expectations of the ambassadors. Volunteers may be put off by too formal an approach.

Briefing and training

Once you have recruited your ambassadors, think about fully engaging them in the project.

Checklist:

- creating a shared vision or briefing them on an existing one
- provision of sales or basic marketing training
- provision of supporting materials: information packs, flyers, posters, scripts, membership packs, sponsor's promotional materials
- scheduling regular briefing and feedback meetings
- scheduling time for socialising and networking between the ambassadors
- provision of special introductory events
- allocating time to keep in touch regularly by telephone, text messaging, email, flyers or newsletters
- familiarisation visits to venues
- planning special research events such as trips to see other venues and ambassadors

Examples of ambassador training

- Birmingham Arts Marketing's Network Scheme offers regular supervisory meetings and brainstorming workshops
- the Arts Ambassadors Unit in Manchester offered a comprehensive training package: 40 ambassadors were given a range of free training experiences, a five-day seminar in arts marketing, a hands-on marketing placement in a Manchester arts organisation and the opportunity to attend arts events and national conferences

Monitoring and evaluation

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Monitoring and evaluation

Top tips

- agree clear objectives and targets at the start
- start by compiling baseline information on 'where we are now'
- remember to ask your staff, ambassadors and audiences for their point of view
- look for qualitative as well as quantitative evidence that your ambassadors have made a difference
- decide how you are going to monitor new audiences: vouchers, code word on booking, discounts, accompanying ambassadors, new customer data, surveys?

Caution

- evaluation at the end of a project is possible but it's much easier and faster if you set up a system at the beginning
- monitoring attendees by faith, culture or income is difficult. Be sensitive to how your customers want to be perceived: no one wants to be treated as a 'market segment'

Monitoring and evaluation

Keeping track of your progress and assessing whether your strategies have been effective is an integral part of marketing, and working with ambassadors is no different in this respect. *What* you evaluate will depend on the aims and objectives of your individual scheme.

Even a small amount of time spent at the beginning of a project can make evaluation a simple and valuable process instead of a last-minute headache. If you are planning evaluation, it is recommended that you look at Felicity Woolf's *Partnerships for Learning*. This is a quick and helpful read with some tips on basic research. There are also many guides available on conducting basic audience research.

Things to consider at the start

Set clear objectives and targets, and be clear about where you are starting from, otherwise, once you are ready to look back, how will you know if you have achieved or learned anything?

Plan for a mixture of qualitative (eg interviews) and quantitative (eg box office data) monitoring. Even if your main focus is sales, you can gain useful information through qualitative feedback. If you are taking an audience development approach you will be evaluating results other than an increase in sales, such as audience experiences and perceptions, relationships and the ambassador process itself.

Ask yourself *when* you can realistically expect results and plan for long-term evaluation if required. Some ambassador projects take a long time to show results.

See the *Continuation strategies* section for more details about evaluation.

Make sure everyone in your organisation knows what they can do to support the monitoring, for example:

- box office – capturing as much attender data as possible
- front-of-house staff – looking out for newcomers, handing out welcome packs that contain questionnaires or mailing list slips

Ask your ambassadors or advisory panel how they would evaluate the scheme. They may come up with new ideas and they will be more interested in supporting the monitoring process if they are involved from the start.

Partnerships of one sort or another are at the core of ambassador schemes. Consequently there are a number of different perspectives worth considering when planning evaluation input.

The ambassadors' point of view

Clearly, it makes sense to include your ambassadors. After all, they are at the heart of the scheme, they are customers themselves and they have access to a wealth of information. Don't assume they will remember to tell you everything. Invite them to tell you what they think of all aspects of the scheme and make it clear you are open to constructive criticism and all suggestions, however unusual.

Ways to encourage input from your ambassadors include:

Reviews and feedback

Informal feedback on a one-to-one basis is useful, but it is worth running regular formal project reviews. Ambassador observations are invaluable. If they work as a team it is vital for them to assess their progress together and for you to acknowledge their achievements.

Research

For more in-depth feedback on audience development projects, focus groups or evaluation discussions with ambassadors can be useful. Ideally, these are led by an independent researcher. If your project is long term and multi-partner, consider hiring an evaluator for the entire process.

Creative consultancy

Some people find traditional methods of evaluation uninspiring, so consider trying a creative consultation session. For example, a practical workshop, utilising visual, aural or other prompts, or creative discussions offer the added bonus of fun, learning and relationship building.

The arts organisation's point of view

Audit and research

Start by establishing baseline data about the area you wish to work on. This could involve an internal audit of programming or research into the target audience, giving you something against which you can compare your progress.

The Corn Exchange in Newbury looked at census data in order to compare the percentage of its young audiences to the percentage of young people in their catchment area.

There are some situations where you might find you have so many ambassadors, they are virtually an entire segment in themselves. With such a readily available chunk of your market to hand, don't miss this opportunity for research.

Box office

Computerised box office records are a familiar mechanism for monitoring attendance at events. Beyond monitoring ticket sales there are a few

challenges to think about. The first is how to identify which audience members have been attracted by your ambassadors.

It is useful to identify which audience members have been brought in by your ambassador scheme (or even by which ambassadors) for a number of reasons: you need to know how your ambassadors are doing, which ambassadors are most effective, where they are getting results and who is losing interest or needing more support.

Equally important, you need to capture data on your new audiences so you can communicate with them again in future. Apart from capturing their names and addresses you can ensure they have a great first-time welcome to your arts organisation.

In theory, the best way to measure word of mouth is to engineer its start and conclusion. However it is not always that simple. It is unlikely your ambassadors will know how far their word travels. You may not run ticketed events, don't always want to offer a discount or your discount may be one you already offer (such as a student discount), so people that are not directly connected to your ambassadors will turn up to your event and consequently may not end up on your database.

Another area of challenge is the ability to monitor your audiences by type, essential if you are aiming to develop specific targets. Although your target audience exists as a demographic type in marketing terms, it won't want to feel singled out. Many arts organisations rely on simple observation in this situation. This has its uses, but is unreliable.

Categorising your audiences through self-completion questionnaires or surveys can be difficult to carry out without being intrusive. It all depends on the nature of your target audience and it must be handled carefully. Your audiences want to feel at home and you want them to come back. If you are using a questionnaire, at least explain clearly why you are asking for this information as audiences welcome action to meet their needs. If your ambassadors will be at the event, ask them to support this process and plan it with them.

Evaluation: the audience's point of view

Finally you've got your audience in. Have you really made a connection and will they come back? Why did they choose to attend in the first place? Ambassadors may be able to answer some of these questions, but consider using the usual audience research methods including:

Questionnaires

A tried and tested method if handled well by your ambassadors.

Vox pops and video booths

Vox pops are like mini recorded interviews or spontaneous soundbites. Video booths are becoming more common and are popular with young people.

Continuation strategies

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Continuation strategies

Top tips

- think about 'the end' at the start. Are you aiming for completion, integration, expansion?
- keep your exit or continuation plans relevant: be prepared to revise and update them periodically
- support the development of your ambassadors: it's a good way to reward their service and you may be their first step into an arts career
- remember to plan the next step for your new audiences too. How are you going to encourage them to return?

Caution

- don't use your ambassadors to develop an 'arms-length' approach to target audiences. It's important for you and other staff to 'mingle' and get to know them too
- don't burn your bridges: your ambassadors may go on to a job that could impact positively on your organisation

Continuation strategies

A continuation strategy is a plan that allows for the gains and benefits of your project to continue to expand and have a life after it (or its development phase) has officially finished. Audience development projects run by agencies are more likely to require both an exit and a continuation strategy as partners prepare to progress on their own. What your strategy looks like will depend on what you want to achieve and you will need to revise it as you learn through running the project.

Checklist:

- continue to use the skills and knowledge of your team of ambassadors. They have a 'live' relationship with your target audience
- integrate project practices into the everyday operations of partner organisations, eg an ongoing programme of targeted work, use of new databases or marketing methods
- implement changes and new practices, eg new programming, appointment of representative board members or staff training
- appoint a designated worker to continue the work
- disseminate research findings to a wider constituency
- conduct more detailed research to build on broad findings
- continue the evaluation process in order to assess the long-term impact
- plan to fund the continuation of the project with existing or new partners
- ascertain new possibilities for the future and how to fund them

If you employ a sole ambassador and they are your only link to a new target audience, think carefully about how you can maintain a relationship with their contacts once the individual has left your organisation.

Checklist:

- ensure that they regularly give you details of new contacts
- plan ahead for handing over to a new ambassador

Ensure that you and other staff get the chance to meet key contacts occasionally.

Maintaining a relationship with your ambassadors

Some ambassadors find their way into an arts career through ambassador schemes. At the Royal National Theatre, three previous student reps have been employed in marketing, house management and public affairs.

Checklist:

- support your ambassadors in finding full-time work in the arts (can you consider them for vacancies in your organisation?)
- stay in touch: they may go on to be employed in an organisation that you need to build a relationship with
- suggest that you act as a referee and help them write CVs to reflect their work to other employers
- provide them with contacts and encourage them to join trade organisations such as the Arts Marketing Association
- help them to obtain training bursaries or to attend seminars and conferences

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Case studies

Audience development models

Case studies

Audience development models

Arts About Manchester: Arts Ambassadors Unit

A pioneering example of a large-scale consortium targeting new Black and Asian audiences

Artform

Dance, theatre, comedy, poetry, festivals, visual arts, music, fashion, broadcast multimedia and new technology

Target audience

African, Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese people

Project funds

Arts Council England, New Audiences programme, Arts for Everyone

Partners

Arts About Manchester (an audience development agency) and arts venues across Greater Manchester

Project history and aim

The Arts Ambassadors Unit (AAU) was a three-year project that sought to develop audiences for creative events from the African, Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese communities of Greater Manchester and to build audiences generally for work produced by artists and cultural practitioners from these communities. At the start of the project in 1998, research showed there was a very low take-up of mainstream provision by Black, Asian and Chinese audiences.

Working methods

The AAU offered unprecedented project support and resources to venues, agencies and creative practitioners alike, pioneering innovative ways of working practice:

- sharing cultural intelligence on issues relating to Black target markets including needs of cultural groups and strategic print distribution points
- investing in training initiatives for current and future cultural workers
- establishing significant creative networks and partnerships across the local creative industries
- investing in the development of local product to stimulate new programming opportunities
- developing new media methods of showcasing and promoting Black creative product
- encouraging participation in arts activity wherever possible
- undertaking intensive Black audience database development

A key element of the project was its focus on supporting the emergence of local Black creative practice, helping artists to establish a more significant stance within the current regional arts, cultural and technological industries.

Practitioners and cultural workers were given the opportunity to promote their activities via AAU projects such as the *bamBOO!* cultural magazine, listings and the cutting-edge radio programme *Divergence*.

Costs

The project cost was approximately £274,000 over three years, plus a further £5,000 towards research and evaluation.

Achievements

Between summer 1998 and spring 2001, the AAU:

- employed 42 ambassadors and workers on 1,698 working days
- supported the development of 11 new arts projects and commissions, and a major season of Black dance
- involved 33 venues and agencies in a variety of ways in the marketing of 112 different Black arts events, including 44 participative projects
- trained 40 young Black people in arts marketing and facilitated their placements in arts organisations
- captured 7,774 names and addresses for a database of people interested in Black arts events
- produced 62,000 listings brochures
- compiled four issues of a new cultural magazine profiling no less than 83 (mainly local) artists
- produced eight hours of radio broadcast

A recorded 31,000 people attended and participated in AAU-supported projects.

An audience survey in 2000 demonstrated that overall representation of Black audiences had increased from 3 per cent to 5 per cent, with certain venues achieving up to 30 per cent representation at that time. Research showed that 43 per cent of attenders cited ambassadors as their primary influence.

Challenges

Inevitably, with a project this size, there were challenges. These included:

- recruiting ambassadors with appropriate knowledge of specific artforms. This was overcome by working with emerging Black and Asian artists, who were interested in building marketing skills to benefit their own work

- there were issues early on about lack of available product for programming. This was overcome by allocating some AAU resources to develop product by local artists and by providing resources for marketing materials, which enabled greater confidence about under-resourced activities recouping money through ticket sales
- retaining ambassadors – the good ones often got jobs in the sector. This was eased by creating longer-term opportunities where possible, usually within a venue, and providing the best-possible training opportunities

Legacy and continuation

The work of the AAU was about informing wider audience development practices and ‘joining-up’ with other strategies and programmes, so that it ceased to be seen as the ‘Black initiative’ within Arts About Manchester (AAM) and took its place as part of their core programme of audience development activity.

The AAU made a significant difference to the development of Black audiences and audiences for Black work. The project was especially successful in reaching young people and generated goodwill and credibility with key partners. The work of the unit created a detailed body of knowledge, insight and expertise about how to target and reach communities.

There is now a much improved partnership infrastructure and an explosion of provision for arts and young Black people at key venues. New resources, both knowledge-based and practical, are now available to support venues and partners, as is a network of trained workers to support outreach and marketing programmes.

AAM has created a new part-time post of cultural diversity project manager, which has so far focused on working with large-scale providers and building more detailed audience information that moves beyond analysing Black and Asian audiences as a homogeneous group. Such research has been undertaken by ambassadors and data collectors at supported events.

AAM is now focusing on working with mainstream venues to use the *learning* from AAU in planning, programming and marketing, and to establish structures for communicating with attendee panels and user advisory groups.

Arts Council England, North West has also allocated funding from the Arts Council’s New Audiences programme towards definition of the legacy for AAU in Greater Manchester and has tested the transferability and sustainability of ambassador activity in Merseyside and East Lancashire.

Contact for further information

www.aam.org.uk

Birmingham Arts Marketing: Networking Project

An example of a large-scale consortium targeting new Black and Asian audiences

Artform

Visual arts, museums, theatre

Target audience

People of South Asian, African or Caribbean origin

Partners

Birmingham Arts Marketing (BAM) and seven arts organisations, ranging from mainstream classical music venues to multi-artform arts centres and from a non-venue-based South Asian arts development agency to regional museums and galleries

Project funds

Arts Council England, West Midlands, New Audiences programme

Project history and aim

This three-year networking project began in November 1999 and initially sought to test the effectiveness of network marketing and word-of-mouth approaches within specific communities. It also aimed to increase audience attendances among the identified communities. However, early on, it was agreed that in order for this project to benefit arts organisations on a long-term basis, it was important to focus on recruitment and establishing and developing relationships.

Objectives were modified in keeping with emerging findings and there were changes in the number and type of partner over the course of the project's duration. Objectives now also focus on increasing access, building enduring relationships between communities and arts organisations, and effecting real organisational change for long-term integration of Black audiences.

Working methods

The ambassadors, led by a project coordinator, are people of South Asian, African or Caribbean origin with a brief of networking within their community to raise the profile of a specific arts organisation and encourage an active engagement of South Asian, African or Caribbean communities with that arts organisation.

The ambassadors work with a voluntary panel of community representatives and with the arts organisation to facilitate greater understanding of the needs and aspirations of the target community, to promote the arts organisation to their community and to encourage attendance at arts events.

Set-up

The project took seven months to set up: two months for recruitment of project coordinator and six arts ambassadors, and five months for selection of arts venues and organisations, creation of panels and development of arts ambassador relationships.

Costs

The annual project budget is £72,282.

Achievements

The project has:

- successfully built relationships between nine arts organisations and specific Black and ethnic minority communities
- extended to involve three regional galleries and museums
- involved more than 200 individual community volunteers at more than 100 arts events
- initiated several dedicated cultural diversity events
- increased the involvement of Black artists and audiences in mainstream programming and mainstream arts organisations in culturally specific events such as Black History Month
- brought cultural diversity issues to local, regional and national attention through involvement in conferences, seminars and debates
- appointed two panel members to the board of directors of Sampad (one of the participating arts organisations)

In addition, a mini-survey for the targeted family weekend, *Through the Door*, which accompanied the Dayanita Singh exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, indicated that the event had been successful in attracting 56 per cent first-time attenders and 43 per cent South Asian visitors. A family day at Symphony Hall attracted 26 per cent first-time visitors and around 17 per cent Black and Asian attenders.

Legacy and continuation

Birmingham Arts Marketing is now developing a database of all the community organisations that have been contacted as a result of the networking project. This is seen as a positive legacy which strengthens the 'network'.

The impact on partner organisations is difficult to measure in the short term and there is still much work to be done. It is hoped that as organisations become more experienced, they will rely less on BAM's support to continue the work with African, Caribbean and Asian communities and will incorporate the project's techniques as part of their core audience development work.

If significant long-term resources and continued commitment from participating organisations can be secured for the future, the potential for positive impact is enormous.

Contact for further information

www.artsnet.org.uk/pages/birminghamartsmarketing.html/

Tyne & Wear Museums – Laing Art Gallery: Arts Ambassadors

An example of a single visual arts gallery targeting disadvantaged young people

Artform

Visual arts

Target audience

Disadvantaged young people aged 16–25 years

Project funds

Laing Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Museums, Arts Council England, North East, New Audiences programme, Tyne & Wear Museums Corporate Club, North East Museums, Sir James Knott Trust

Partners

Laing Art Gallery and youth information services and drop-in facilities

Project history and aim

This six-month project (1998) aimed to:

- break down barriers between disadvantaged young people and the visual arts experience
- build confidence about the gallery
- test perceptions about reasons for non-attendance and various methods of communication with new audiences
- establish methodologies for feedback and evaluation

Working methods

The project created tailor-made visits and experiences of the Laing Art Gallery for young people. It used extensive methods of documentation and evaluation, including creative consultancy work (participatory workshops in three different youth centres) and interactive video documentation.

Achievements

- 28 visits to groups at their bases with 75 per cent of those groups booking subsequent visits to the Laing
- two 'LATER at the Laing' events attended by 637 people
- working with 1,506 young people
- hosting 46 tailored visits to the gallery
- hosting regular weekend 'drop-in' sessions (attended by 151 visitors)
- developing programming and presentation to appeal to the target audience, for example, the LATER events (late night openings), pre-visit tours, weekend drop-in sessions, opportunities to try out DJ-ing or mehndi painting. The aim was for young people to 'colonise' the gallery
- responding to requests from the target audience, for example, providing 'own turf' familiarisation visits from ambassadors

- establishing a working relationship with more than 50 youth and community groups in Tyne & Wear
- creating a mailing list of more than 270 youth and community groups
- the tailored visits were successful in building confidence in participating in the visual arts and engaging with the gallery
- the project also encouraged return visits: 16 groups made repeat visits

Challenges

There was not enough lead-in time to develop links with key contacts before the project had to start, so pre-visits to potential groups were introduced as a warm-up/taster.

Legacy and continuation

At the time, the project impacted in several ways: the work of the project contributed to the Front-of-House review while the outreach programme was adapted

- a) to incorporate increased personal contact between gallery staff and groups and
- b) to seek ways to build the flexibility and responsiveness of the ambassadors' approach into the ongoing programme of work with young people and other target groups.

However, while many contacts were maintained and developed, ultimately there was a lack of sufficient budget to follow up on the new opportunities that the scheme had created.

Contact for further information

www.twmuseums.org.uk/laing

Sheffield Galleries and Museums: Time Out

An example of a mid-scale galleries and museum project that targeted 'time-poor' young people

Artform

Visual arts

Target audience

'Time-poor' 20 to 34-year-olds

Project funds

Arts Council England, Yorkshire, New Audiences programme

Partners

Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust, Millennium Galleries, Graves Art Gallery and Mappin Art Gallery, local businesses

Project history and aim

The project aimed to develop and effectively promote the Millennium Galleries, Graves Art Gallery and Mappin Art Gallery as places to visit for 'time-poor', young working people living or working in Sheffield. It also aimed to achieve first-time visits and repeat attendance through identifying barriers to attendance and developing a programming and marketing approach.

Working methods

The 20 ambassadors ('Time Lords') were recruited from the target age group. The galleries ran a series of 17 events and the Time Lords were part of a steering group on events and communication methods. They also encouraged attendance and met once a month to evaluate past events informally and to comment on forthcoming ones. It is estimated that they contributed around 10–15 hours per month.

The project grew organically with the galleries reviewing opening hours, testing and developing effective communication methods, establishing partnerships with other arts organisations, and developing a targeted programme of events and activities.

Set-up

There were two key phases to the project. The first focused on developing partnerships and ambassadors. The project approached four businesses to devise effective communication channels to reach the potential audience through the workplace. A special cultivation event was held with each partner business for their staff, and from these events personal contact was established and 20 Time Lords were recruited who represented both the organisations and the target market that Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust (SGMT) wanted to reach. The Time Lords played an essential role in honing SGMT's events and communication strategy. They acted as advocates for the project and helped spread word of mouth.

The second phase worked on 'connecting through lifestyle'. It was perceived that the target audience would be more interested in informal, social learning experiences. Focus groups with non-attenders from the partner organisations supported this approach. Consequently a programme of events ran from March to November 2002, which combined other leisure activities and exhibitions with creative partners in the city. These events offered a social introduction to the galleries and exhibitions.

The events added a fresh dimension to the main programme of events that the trust offers the public. They were targeted at previous attenders to 'Time Out' events as well as a broader audience; however the ambition was still to appeal to the target age range of 20 to 34-year-olds. This period was also used to test product in terms of pricing and timing, with late night openings at the Millennium Galleries, which were important to establish the demand for similar product in the future.

Costs

The budget was £24,000 (of which the New Audiences funding contribution was £20,000).

Achievements

- identifying barriers to attendance
- encouraging first-time and repeat attendance – visitors to events were counted by signing in and a total of 1,330 visitors attended across the programme, an estimated 41 per cent of which were first-time attenders
- exploring ways to enhance the visitor's experience
- testing and developing communication methods

Challenges

The amount of time it would take to set up such a project was underestimated and with hindsight, roles and responsibilities should have been made clearer:

'I think it is important to stress the amount of time and skills needed to nurture relationships with partners and ambassadors – we are all time poor!'

Margot Williams, Project Manager

For future projects, it will be recommended that a member of staff be seconded internally to coordinate these relationships and report to the project team. It was recognised that a cross-departmental approach is essential to develop audiences strategically and the 'Time Out' model should be repeated in the future.

In future, a 12-month ambassador scheme would be recommended and superiors would be encouraged to nominate and support staff to take part. It is felt that stronger relationships with partner organisations and ambassadors would have been developed with a dedicated internal project-based worker. However, one of the main benefits was the interface with the Time Lords and the project team that grounded and steered the project.

One interesting finding was that many of the Time Lords moved on or changed jobs within the time-scale of the project, indicating another reason why it is so hard to attract and retain this audience.

Legacy and continuation

The use of ambassadors was seen as a valuable tool for organisational growth. The project impacted on the galleries in several ways. They developed new communication methods, a programme of activities to appeal to this market and reviewed their opening hours in relation to the lifestyle demands of the target market, opening the galleries at a later hour. They established partnerships with other arts organisations in the region, building up a contact list of 100 potential business partners. In addition, three of the Time Lords were able to further their own careers and some are now working for the scheme.

The research findings will be used for future decision making and currently new business partnerships are being developed.

Contact for further information

www.sheffieldgalleries.org.uk

Team, Liverpool: Arts Ambassadors

An example of a large-scale audience development approach in Liverpool

Artform

Various across the city

Target audience

African, Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese people

Project funds

Arts Council England, North West, New Audiences programme

Partners

Team and various arts organisations in Liverpool

Project history and aim

Team is the marketing and audience development agency for Merseyside. This project was set up in 2002 as a direct result of the Arts Ambassadors Unit in Manchester, to test if it could work elsewhere. The project functioned as an action research pilot, in order to create a subsequent longer-term plan.

The project aimed to test how African, Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese audiences could be increased at venues. The intention was to reach and interest audiences that would not have attended previously, either because they were unaware of a venue, did not feel comfortable attending or felt that the venue did not cater for their needs.

Working methods

The ambassadors (8–11) plus a project manager were representative of the target communities. They researched campaigns, advised on publicity mail-outs and were available on performance dates to network with audiences and capture data. They developed strategies to increase audiences in the long term and change the way venues programme events.

They also got in touch with relevant contacts (such as community and youth groups, businesses and students) and identified alternative locations and suitable events for publicity and hand-to-hand distribution. Their regular meetings, planning for Black History Month, were open to anyone who wished to attend.

Costs

The project cost was £54,500.

Achievements

The project was successful in:

- bringing together communities across the city of Liverpool (in particular Black communities)
- developing communication links between those communities and the city council
- attracting new and first-time audiences for Black History Month events from the Liverpool-born Black community
- encouraging and enabling community groups to work with each other and links made far exceeded expectations
- developing awareness of Team by organisations that would not otherwise have known of its existence

Legacy and continuation

The project is currently completing its evaluation process. However, it is clear that the links made between communities have been positive, to be built on in future.

Contact for further information

www.team-uk.org

National Rural Touring Forum: Local Promoters

An example of an ambassador scheme aiming to bring about 'infrastructural change' and empowering rural ambassadors and their communities

Artform

Performing arts: drama, dance, music

Target audience

People living in rural areas

Project funds

Arts Council England, Arts for Everyone and Regional Arts Lottery Programme funds

Partners

Varies according to individual regional schemes

Project history and aim

The National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF), founded in 1997, is an umbrella body which supports its members (currently 37 individual Local Promoter schemes) to work with more than 1,200 local promoters to put on events in community venues such as village halls, churches and schools.

The Local Promoter schemes are one example of how a centrally organised ambassador network can impact on an arts infrastructure – in this case touring – and empower ambassadors to operate almost independently around programming and promotion.

Working methods

NRTF enables a network of rural touring that would otherwise not exist. They do so by providing access to high-quality work, addressing the imbalance of incoming tours in rural areas and supporting local communities in developing their own 'sense of self'. Only 4 per cent of events take place in equipped venues such as arts centres or small theatres, as village halls are the main venues used.

NRTF provides services to its members, organises an annual conference and commissions reports. NRTF has produced two handbooks: *The Promoters' Don't Panic Pack* and *The Touring Scheme Toolkit*.

The individual member schemes offer support with items such as contracts, tickets, posters and press releases. The voluntary promoters themselves are responsible for the choice of touring programme, venue, audience, the artists and any complementary events such as workshops.

It is estimated that local promoters commit around four to five days to promote each event in their village. Promoters may self-nominate after seeing a show or reading press coverage, or are found via community councils.

Take Art!, based in Somerset, is just one example of an *individual* NRTF member scheme. The scheme works with around 60 promoters. Each Easter, they launch the next season's programme and hold promoter evenings, discussing venues and talking through the new programme.

Set-up

It took approximately six months to set up the national body, NRTF. It also took around six months to set up Take Art! in 1987.

Costs

The budgets for the individual schemes range from £6,756 to £124,529 per year, with an average of £64,846.

Achievements

Overall, more than 1,000 community groups promoted events throughout rural Britain in 2001/02. These events attracted well over 179,000 people, many of whom rarely visit established arts venues. Average capacity was 70 per cent. In 2001/02 the touring schemes generated over £410,340 from box office and other receipts.

The power of local networking is demonstrated by the following anecdote from individual Local Promoter scheme, Take Art! One local village promoter called to say she was worried she had sold only four tickets, just days before the event. In the end, her children knocked on every door in the village and they achieved a 70-strong audience.

Challenges

Sometimes the pre-publicity is mismatched with the actual event and occasionally promoters lack confidence in selling tickets.

Legacy and continuation

The schemes are ongoing. François Matarasso from Comedia is about to conduct an 18-month study, *Understanding Rural Touring*.

Contact for further information

www.nrtf.org.uk

Newbury Corn Exchange: On Demand

An example of a single venue developing young audiences using the audience development approach

Artform

Theatre and music

Target audience

Young people

Project funds

Southern and South East Arts (now Arts Council England, South East)

Partners

The Corn Exchange and local young people

Project history and aim

The Corn Exchange in Newbury, West Berkshire, runs *On Demand*, a form of ambassador project, as part of its three-year youth audience development programme. *On Demand* began in 1999 and is ongoing.

Working methods

A casual forum of around ten 15 to 24-year-olds meets on a monthly basis. In return for free tickets and socialising, they review programming and style of presentation and make occasional trips to visit other theatres to see companies either prior to their arrival at Newbury or before they are programmed. They also promote events to friends, distribute printed materials, and so on.

The informality of the scheme makes it difficult to say exactly how much time the ambassadors contribute – approximately two hours per event for the informal gathering and then around another two hours texting, putting up posters at college, etc.

Director Michael Bewick comments:

'The planning formed part of the development of our programming and audience development work for 15 to 24-year-olds and so was a natural part of our strategic planning process – I think it is essential that initiatives like this form part of the overall organisational strategy rather than being a *scheme*.'

Costs

The work costs £20,000 per annum for programming 'risk' and ticket subsidy and £3,500 towards ambassador costs (bus trips, staff time and basic refreshments).

Achievements

Monitoring of the scheme is done through the box office (take-up of special ticket deals), observation and a 'vox pops' booth. Overall the project has seen the proportion of the audience aged 15–24 rise from 6 per cent to around 12 per cent over the last three years. This is above the percentage (9 per cent) of 15 to 24-year-olds in the catchment area. A monthly music event aimed at this audience now always sells out and is used for promotion and sales of other events.

In terms of organisational change, all commissioning funds have been diverted into working with companies that appeal to this target and they have installed sofas in the bar area!

Challenges

The project has developed in response to the needs of the young people. At first, Michael Bewick said he hadn't realised how much change would be required or how conservative young people can be: initially they wanted to see *Blood Brothers*.

Now, through external theatre visits, potential audiences are more informed about what's available and the fact that they have a say in what is programmed means they feel confident about recommending it to their friends.

There were attempts to make the scheme more formal with 'proper meetings' but it didn't really work. They have found that the more informal and organic it is the better it works; it is more interesting for all involved and brings in more 'non-committee types'.

Legacy and continuation

The project is ongoing and integrated into the venue's programme of work.

Contact for further information

www.cornexchangenew.com

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Case studies

Promotion models

Case studies

Promotion models

Ambassador Theatre Group: District Sales Assistants

A pioneering example of a highly successful field promotion and sales team

Artform

Performing arts

Target audience

New groups (people who are in groups of 10 or more) and schools and audiences who are new to a particular artform

Project funds

Commercially earned income

Project history and aim

The Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) pioneered one of the first ambassador schemes some 10 years ago in its first regional venue, the New Victoria Theatre, Woking, Surrey, under the title of District Sales Assistant scheme. It was then a new theatre and a need was recognised for workers out in the field: district sales assistants (DSAs). Since then, the scheme has gone from strength to strength, and forms a key part of the ATG's audience development strategy.

Now all ATG regional venues have successful DSA schemes in place. This initiative plays a crucial role in enabling the ATG to develop audiences, particularly in areas where no professional theatre has existed before, or where there is a need to cultivate audiences from areas currently fallow.

The DSA teams are effectively a field sales force, with set monthly targets and a remit to encourage new groups and schools to visit the theatre, raise the theatre's profile within their catchment and act as the theatre's ears and voice, providing a vital channel of feedback at a local level.

Working methods

Each theatre has a team of seven to 10 DSAs, who live in key areas of the theatre's catchment. The DSAs are employed for nine hours per week. Their profile tends to be women returning to work, with previous experience in sales, marketing, PR or customer services and a strong interest in theatre.

The DSAs contact new groups for theatre visits by phone and email, facilitated by tools such as first-visit discounts, personally escorted tours backstage or 'money-can't-buy' opportunities such as meeting the stars. They act as theatre sales ambassadors in their area and offer a personal service to their group contacts.

The DSAs attend monthly meetings with the marketing manager and the rest of the marketing team to review activity, exchange information and ideas, and present their monthly reports to ensure clear and informed lines of communication and performance monitoring. The ATG also employs a DSA training coordinator, whose remit includes training new DSA teams in new venues, a mentoring role and updating the DSAs' training.

DSAs feed into education and outreach projects as well as generating corporate leads for development. They are also used, where possible, for longer stints of telesales activity for children's shows, musicals, pantos, etc and for following up direct mail campaigns. This provides the marketing department with a valuable and flexible resource.

It is important for the DSAs to have a good support network within the venue, ie a group coordinator at the box office, to process their sales and deal with any routine queries they may have.

Achievements

The DSAs have been very useful in taking the ATG strategy further. The project is cost-effective and almost self-financing. In the larger venues, DSAs generate between £200,000 and £300,000 per venue in group sales every year, and account for over 25 per cent of all group visits across ATG regional venues. Approximately 35,000 visits per regional venue per year are achieved through the DSA network.

The DSAs have been excellent in encouraging groups to cross over from 'safe' product like musicals to a more demanding artform, such as dance or opera, because their contacts are willing to trust them.

DSAs have also provided useful feedback on transport difficulties, printed materials and new venues which are competing for attenders. An added benefit has been that the targeted groups themselves become advocates.

Legacy and continuation

The ATG has recently launched a West End sales ambassadors scheme across its 10 London venues to pilot the scheme in London and test if the successful regional model can be adapted successfully to generate increased theatre audiences in the capital.

Donmar Warehouse: Student Reps

An example of a single venue working with a sponsor to target students

Artform

Theatre

Target audience

Students aged 15–26 years

Project funds

Internal budget, sponsorship

Partners

For 2002, the scheme was sponsored by principal sponsor SAP, a global software company and a 'New Partners' award from Arts & Business. For 2003, the scheme is now supported by a private sponsor

Project history and aim

This initiative was started in January 2002 to encourage and enable students to visit the Donmar Warehouse, London, on a regular basis and therefore develop a theatre-going habit. Students are invited to become a Donmar representative at their university/college and to promote the Donmar to fellow students.

Working methods

The 20 volunteer reps are responsible for selling tickets to their peers for specially designated performances at the Donmar (target sales: 150 seats per production). In return they receive free or affordable tickets, plus a number of additional membership-type and CV-enhancing benefits.

The project is evaluated by discussions with students at events, feedback forms completed by students and guest questionnaires.

Ambassadors give the marketing director one hour per six weeks, attend a dress rehearsal and then spend some time putting up posters and promoting shows to their friends and peers.

Set-up

The scheme began in autumn 2000 with three months of audience analysis to discover who wasn't coming to the Donmar. There followed two months in which theatre staff talked with people coming to get standing tickets for sold-out shows. This showed that students couldn't get access because a) they left it too late and b) they couldn't afford the tickets.

The timetable slipped partly because the theatre could not find money to subsidise the scheme. In autumn 2001, the theatre shared a stall – with the Royal Court Theatre – at college 'freshers' fairs', to build a database of students and help publicise the scheme.

The fairs yielded 500 names, put into a new database provided by SAP, and students interested in being reps were contacted. By November the theatre was ready to email student reps about the first date, *Privates on Parade*, in January 2002.

Sarah Hunt, Marketing Director, said:

'Once set up, the scheme runs very smoothly and doesn't take too much time because it is email-dependent.'

Costs

Ticket prices vary between £5 and £10, and so the lower the ticket price to the students, the greater the ticket subsidy to find. A typical cost for six productions would be £9,600, which includes lost income of £10 x 150 seats, pre- or post-performance hospitality, marketing, recruitment and freshers' fairs. This excludes the cost of administrative time.

Achievements

- sale of otherwise empty seats
- students write reviews in student press
- returning attenders have said it was a very positive experience

Challenges

- don't underestimate the time needed for processing tickets and payment
- it is important to get box office and front-of-house 'on side' and to explain why it's important to run the scheme
- ensure long-term funding is in place

Legacy and continuation

The scheme is ongoing

Contact for further information

www.donmarwarehouse.com

London Philharmonic Orchestra: NOISE

An example of a sponsored student scheme targeting young audiences for classical music

Artform

Classical music

Target audience

Students

Project funds

Internal budget and Cobra Beer

Partners

Cobra Beer

Project history and aim

The London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) created NOISE in 2001. It is an ongoing discount ticket scheme aimed at increasing ticket sales to students in London and is sponsored by Cobra Beer, a partnership reflected by the cobranded NOISE beer mats.

Working methods

The number of voluntary student reps has gradually grown from 20 to 30. In return for free tickets, the reps promote discounts and the LPO in general, distribute posters and flyers, help on concert nights by selling programmes and assist with mail-outs and developing the mailing list.

The majority of reps are found through an advertisement on the LPO website, while freshers' fairs are another effective means of recruiting reps and generating interest in the scheme.

It is estimated that the reps spend a couple of hours per week on their promotion.

Set-up

Setting up the project took about four months, allowing for preparation such as booking into freshers' fairs, finding sponsorship and design/print of the beer mats.

Costs

The budget is roughly £1,500, including print, advertising and freshers' fairs. Membership scheme costs are extra. The time taken to set up and run the scheme is also considered a critical resource factor.

Achievements

- the reps sold 1,000 tickets in 2002
- a greater number of advance bookings have been observed
- students now sometimes make up 10 per cent of the audience
- the student mailing list doubled between the 2001/02 and 2002/03 season
- door sales are easier to manage (compared to previous standby scheme)

Challenges

One difficulty has been keeping in contact with all the reps and keeping the database up to date – some check their email infrequently and students tend to move around a lot.

Legacy and continuation

It is expected that more than 2,000 student tickets will be sold in the 2002/03 season, double the number of the previous year. Many of the reps have expressed interest in undertaking work experience. A membership scheme (NOISE membership) has now been launched for graduates and non-students.

Contact for further information

www.lpo.co.uk

The Lighthouse (previously Poole Arts Centre): Tipping Point 150

An example of a consortia project using a large team of ambassadors to target first-time local attenders

Artform

Performing arts, various

Target audience

Friends, family and colleagues of the ambassadors (also targets)

Project funds

Participating organisations, Arts Council England, South West, New Audiences programme, Poole Borough Council

Partners

Partners were the participating venues: The Study Gallery, The Lighthouse (previously Poole Arts Centre), Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Borough of Poole Arts Development Unit, Purbeck Film Festival

Project history and aim

The 14-month project, inspired by the book *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, aimed to build enthusiasm and new local audiences for the arts. It ran from 2001–03 and aimed to: raise the profile of the range, quality and value of the arts; communicate with the community about cultural activity available; engage with new audiences on every level; increase awareness and critical understanding; build customer loyalty; increase local audiences; share information on performances, events and projects; review shows and projects in appropriate publications; and to consult local people on arts programmes and activities.

Working methods

The project engaged 100 voluntary ambassadors (aged 18–45) from a variety of backgrounds (70 per cent were women). The project aimed to target 50 per cent of the ambassadors from Poole and 50 per cent from the surrounding conurbation and rural South East Dorset. They comprised a mixture of new audiences, lapsed attenders, irregular attenders and intenders.

In return for free tickets and money-off vouchers, the ambassadors were to represent the interests of the organisations by promoting these organisations through their own informal networks and to provide feedback on the scheme and the way that the organisations were perceived.

Focus groups were held with the ambassadors to see if their attitudes towards venues had changed and take-up of special offers was monitored, as was attendance at workshops and events.

Set-up

Project Consultant Miranda Jacobs outlined what the ambassadors were asked to do:

'Disseminating information to their contacts, three workshops a year and attendance at lots of events. The rest was talking to people as they went about their day-to-day lives.'

It took the two lead organisations about two months to come up with an outline for the project and to recruit the other three organisations, and to confirm the external funding. Recruiting a project manager took one month (all this took place prior to the 14 months of the actual project). Once the project manager was in place, two months were spent planning the campaign, developing contact lists, and getting advertising and editorial coverage. Recruitment took six weeks, followed by briefing sessions one month later.

Costs

The project budget was £18,000.

Achievements

2,210 people were attracted to events by the ambassadors as evidenced by special offers and a further 677 people were brought along by the ambassadors in person. Approximately half of these were new attenders, and 19 per cent were occasional attenders.

Ten per cent of the ambassadors created 53 per cent of ticket sales. Ambassadors reported changes in attitudes amongst their contacts over the course of the project. Surprisingly, 80 per cent of the ambassadors were new attenders (no sales history) and only 20 per cent were regulars (three-plus visits in the last year). It appears that people who put themselves forward to be ambassadors under this scheme were 'intenders' themselves. The journey that the ambassadors went on during the course of the project was vital; most have shown themselves to be keen to be 'unofficial ambassadors' in the future and 20 per cent have already volunteered in other capacities.

Challenges

Deciding what to do with an abundance of still-eager ambassadors at the end of the scheme was one issue; having to say 'no' to some suggestions was another. Time was also needed to align all box office staff with the scheme so they saw it in a positive light. They also needed to deal with the less-effective ambassadors – some required lots of 'TLC' – as well as the really over-eager ones who wanted to do more than their brief.

Legacy and continuation

In terms of audiences, the venues now have contact details for the new audiences and will undertake relationship-building work with them.

Although the project had a sales orientation, the venues learned a lot about each other's different approaches. They have since looked at developing their volunteer schemes.

The venues are currently looking at how to continue to work with a still very enthusiastic team and have run focus groups with the ambassadors to look at the possibilities. They are reviewing the scheme with a view to continuing it in the long term.

Contact for further information

www.pooleartscentre.co.uk

The Audience Business, Edinburgh: Frontliners

An example of a large team of ambassadors functioning as audiences and direct PR agents

Artform

Various across the city

Target audience

People employed in the 'talking business' (eg taxi drivers, tourist guides, hairdressers) and their clients

Project funds

Internal marketing budget

Partners

Thirty arts organisations in Edinburgh

Project history and aims

The Audience Business project, Frontliners, works collaboratively with 30 arts organisations in Edinburgh. Its aim is to help develop audiences for the arts, for the mutual benefit and enjoyment of local communities, visitors and arts organisations.

This ongoing project started in April 1999 and aims to encourage the target groups (Frontliners) to act as advocates for the arts in Edinburgh, by informing them and giving them the opportunity to experiment with the arts for themselves. On a minimal budget, The Audience Business (TAB) offers arts organisations in Edinburgh an excellent PR tool and the opportunity to access people who can talk about their programmes to residents and visitors.

The Frontliners scheme is designed to give taxi drivers, hotel concierges, tourist guides and hairdressers the opportunity to discover a wide range of Edinburgh arts venues. They are then able to help their own customers with first-hand information and to encourage them to visit.

In order to set up the scheme, research was carried out with taxi drivers and hotel concierges. Frontliners were then identified through mail-outs via trade mailing lists and invitations were sent encouraging enrolment in the scheme.

Working methods

Each month, the Frontliners – there are around 350 – are invited with a guest to an art event free of charge. They also receive a monthly calendar listing for every arts event in Edinburgh. This is particularly valuable for tourist guides and hotel concierges.

When Frontliners visit a venue for the first time they receive a welcome pack with letter, questionnaire and brochure. All Frontliners also receive an annual questionnaire aimed at evaluating the success of the scheme in general.

Frontliners are reminded of the purpose of the scheme at every occasion, and their attitude towards TAB is positive and supportive (for example, informing TAB if they can't make an event, advising them of change of address and glowing comments in the questionnaire).

Set-up

The time taken to create the scheme was as follows:

Research – interviewing a few taxi drivers and hotel concierges: one month

Creation of database – getting lists from city councils for taxi drivers, inputting information from yellow pages for hairdressers, etc: two months

Once the scheme is in place, time is spent on:

- planning each event with arts organisations and chasing information: one day
- compiling the calendar of events (optional): two days
- sending invitations out to 350 Frontliners (including merge, fulfilment): one day
- confirmation and preparation for event: one day
- writing post-event report: one day

Time is also spent updating and building the database on a regular basis, making sure events are planned every month and writing an annual report.

Costs

Frontliners costs £2,500 per year plus staff costs.

Achievements

Since the scheme began 51 events have taken place. In total, 6,219 Frontliners plus guests have attended an event (an average of 69 per cent of those on the mailing list).

Surveys show that the Frontliners have discovered new venues and organisations through the scheme (25 per cent) have become advocates for the arts (73 per cent), encourage visitors to go to the organisations they visited (91 per cent) and find the events useful for their jobs (84 per cent).

Challenges

Monitoring is the main challenge of the scheme. This is carried out through questionnaires direct to Frontliners. Results are always very positive, but it is impossible to say whether Frontliners do talk to their customers and whether customers then act upon the recommendations.

Anecdotal evidence (from people who have received advice on the arts from taxi drivers) shows that some Frontliners do indeed talk to their customers about the events. Also, certain venues have offered Frontliners discount vouchers to distribute to their clients and these have generally been used. The scheme is therefore based on the trust that has been established between Frontliners and TAB.

Legacy and continuation strategy

The scheme is deemed useful by both the arts organisations (who use it as a PR tool and a way of creating word of mouth) and the Frontliners themselves, and so, despite the lack of hard evidence at the box offices, it will continue until further review.

Contact for further information

www.tab.org.uk

Art Shape

An example of a pilot action research project targeting older audiences

Artform

Visual arts, film, theatre, music

Target audience

Older people and local arts providers

Project funds

Arts Council England, South West, New Audiences programme

Partners

South West Arts Marketing: Gloucester audience; Arts Council England, South West; Gloucestershire Arts Framework (a consortium of arts providers in the county) including Dean Arts, The Roses Theatre, Everyman Theatre, Equata, Gloucestershire Drama Association, Black Elders Group, The Chinese Women's Group, Guildhall Arts Centre, among others

Project history and aim

Based in Gloucestershire, Art Shape is a countywide arts organisation specialising in equal opportunity development. It aims to develop projects through empowerment not imposition. Recognising that initiatives need to be owned by local people, all projects are devised in response to the needs and wishes of participants and through in-depth research to identify gaps in provision.

Initially, Art Shape ran an 11-month action research project starting in February 2002. Six older volunteers researched arts promoters and older people, with a view to developing good practice in relation to this audience in the future.

Working methods

The volunteers were found through promotion via Women's Institutes, posters in libraries, community networks, parish councils and word of mouth. They worked around 15 days each over the nine-month period. As part of their preparation the volunteers went on a visit to Dublin to meet older people involved in a supported art class at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

The volunteer researchers devised a questionnaire to ask 19 arts organisations in the county what their approaches to developing an older audience were. They then targeted 101 older people (aged 55-plus) before devising a second questionnaire to be used with both individuals and groups to see what kind of arts older people attended and what hindered them from trying out new things and new places.

The volunteers then set up as ambassadors to test the findings. They actively promoted attendance at five events taking place in four venues in Gloucestershire. The volunteers were able to support attenders simply by offering transport, which was essential for many.

The ambassadors' part of the project was directly informed by knowledge of the arts venues, enhanced by the points that the older audiences had raised.

Set-up

The whole programme ran over a nine-month period, which included an extended summer break. Planning the programme and recruiting was done over a two-month period and culminated in 10 interested people coming to the initial meeting, six of whom joined the project. The initial questionnaire development and arts-provider meetings with the Dublin trip were accomplished over a two-month period. A further six weeks were spent devising the second questionnaire and meeting with the groups of older people. The ambassadors' phase was run over one month with a month's notice of the events. In addition, Art Shape held three meetings with its Arts Council England external evaluator.

Costs

The project cost around £18,000.

Achievements

From interviews with 101 older people, 35 visits were achieved. It is too early to say whether the project has impacted on the arts organisations beyond sales. One knock-on effect was that two of the volunteers who live in a village are now setting up a group of 14 keen, older arts-goers.

Art Shape found that older people are very busy, yet this research was squeezed into their lives with great relish and enthusiasm. An important part of the success of the New Audiences research was that the group are older people working with older people – this peer group work was very effective.

Challenges

The ambassador effort versus ticket cost ratio was found to be high.

Legacy and continuation

Art Shape is now fundraising for a new scheme with a part-time coordinator and will aim to test whether the investment can be of continued value and whether project costs can be recuperated in ticket sales in the future.

Contact for further information

www.art-shape.co.uk

Smart Audiences, Surrey: Culture Vultures

An example of a consortia pilot scheme targeting students in Surrey

Artform

Various: visual and performing arts

Target audience

Students

Project funds

No budget, just staff time

Partners

Eleven Smart Audiences member venues

Project history and aims

This seven-month student pilot scheme was set up in October 2001 and was part of a long-term audience development plan for students. The scheme aimed to test whether students were a viable market segment and to develop students as an audience group and encourage regular attendance. The scheme was trialed at two local universities, testing the e-flyer method of communication. Two hundred and twenty students signed up to receive the monthly e-flyer and were encouraged to fill in a short survey. From this, 16 were recruited as ambassadors. The participating venues made promotional offers available monthly.

Working methods

In return for free tickets and CV-enhancing experiences, students distributed flyers on campus, spread positive word of mouth, attended and promoted one event per month during term time and encouraged at least three friends to attend.

Ambassadors' voluntary time given averaged 15 days per ambassador during the project period.

Set-up

The actual time spent on each stage was spread over the project period:

- research and development: five days
- planning: 10 days
- recruitment: four days

- training: two days
- running it: 30 days
- evaluation: 10 days

Costs

The contribution from fixed costs (ie staff time, phone calls, emails, stationery) was £7,500.

Achievements

Evaluation of the project was difficult for a number of reasons and lessons have been learned about formalising evaluation and offering greater support to both students and venues in monitoring progress. However, a number of gains were made: a database of 220 new names was created and good contacts and relationships were developed with two universities. Also, with Smart Audiences' permission, a non-participating venue outside the area requested support from the ambassadors with encouraging results, demonstrating that networks could be broadened.

Challenges

The project experienced a number of challenges, not least the lack of a designated budget which had an impact on time available to manage and support the ambassadors. Of the 16 ambassadors recruited at the start of the academic year, just two remained with the scheme until the end. Engagement with the ambassador scheme and student take-up of other offers dropped off during exam times.

Legacy and continuation

The project achieved its objectives of working with arts venues to test the viability of the local student market, and gathering information on what appeals in the local context, which can be built on in following phases. Although there wasn't an immediate take-up, the first year was expected to be about building awareness. No one was expecting an immediate return on investment as it was the first systematic approach to this market.

The participating venues now want to develop this work, directly targeting arts and humanities students, and extending outwards from post-18 students. Sixth-form students, most probably still living at home and attending certain cultural events with parents, may be a receptive target group. Programming and promotion of more events appropriate to this age group, and direct marketing via ambassadors and text messaging, are being explored.

Contact for further information

info@smartaudiences.co.uk or www.smartaudiences.co.uk

Case studies

Related models

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Case studies

Related models

Case studies

Related models

This section looks at a couple of projects that are not ambassador schemes in the sense used by this guide, but which use methods that are still likely to be of interest.

MAX: Targeting the 'Now' Generation

Major research project looking at needs of young people

Artform

All

Target audience

Young people

Project funds

Arts Council England, Arts for Everyone

Partners

MAX (an audience development agency) led the project, which was supported by 10 Oxfordshire arts organisations

Project history and aim

Running from 1997 to 2000, this was a three-year integrated research and audience development campaign that introduced and evaluated a range of initiatives aimed at 15 to 19-year-olds.

Although not designed as an ambassador scheme, the project adopted the principles of ambassadorial work, using young people to communicate to their peers across a range of marketing initiatives.

Working methods

Over the three years, MAX employed two young trainees who worked alongside the MAX team to implement the project plan. They were given the opportunity to study for a formal marketing qualification while gaining marketing experience at work. The trainees enabled MAX and the consortium to learn more about the youth market by acting as a communication bridge between MAX and its target audience.

Catalyst magazine (conceived and written for and by the target market) became the vehicle for the main youth campaign and over the three years was supported by around twenty 15 to 19-year-olds as part of the editorial team. The magazine offered discount vouchers (£10 and £5) that could be redeemed against any arts event. It reached an estimated 7,000 readers and had a mailing list of 3,000.

The team acted as ambassadors for the arts within the editorial coverage and offered essential feedback to both arts organisations and attenders in terms of reviews and previews of arts events.

Costs

£240,000.

Achievements

- evaluation of the trainees was undertaken as part of the MAX staff appraisal system
- in terms of the editorial team, the only measure of success was the take-up of the discount vouchers. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the ambassadors' work was responsible for all the 'sales', as the project as a whole involved a wide range of promotional activities
- evaluation research concluded the following:
 - 90 per cent of those on the *Catalyst* mailing list were aware of the discounts that had been available through the magazine
 - 43 per cent of those on the mailing list claimed to have used the vouchers
- in total 2,504 vouchers were redeemed

- more than 90 per cent said that the vouchers had some influence on their decision to attend the arts event in question
- the feedback from the bursary scheme was highly positive: one trainee has gone on to a degree in marketing and the other is in full-time employment as a sales manager
- the bursary students and editorial team created a two-way information system. From the arts perspective they represented a credible voice for promoting specific events and activities, one which other young people would listen to. In addition they offered feedback on their experiences to programmers and marketing staff
- one of the main factors of success was the indirect approach the ambassadors were asked to take. As the young people were not required to 'sell' an event or activity, they attracted a wider range of young people. Their main interest was in writing and seeing their work in print and this enthusiasm helped promote arts events, with the added bonus of a ticket subsidy

Challenges

One of the project's greatest challenges was to interest the editorial team in arts-related subjects. It became clear that the average 15 to 19-year-old did not connect with the arts and it was a challenge to make the Oxfordshire arts programme relevant and of interest, in order for them to write about the arts and recommend it to their readers.

Legacy and exit

The MAX initiative showed that it is possible to interest young people in attending arts events. However, the key conclusion drawn from the project is that the complex methods that would be required to attract mass audiences of young people to the arts are very expensive and difficult to sustain.

The project was summarised in a publication – *Targeting the Now Generation* – a case study on marketing the arts to 15 to 19-year-olds, and was the focus of a 2001 conference.

The Mousetrap Foundation: C145

Young People Theatre

Artform

Theatre

Target audience

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

Project funds

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Arts Council England, London

Project history and aim

The Mousetrap Foundation is a theatre education charity committed to creating opportunities for young people with limited resources, support or access to attend theatre productions in London's West End.

C145 ('See One for £5') began in 2002 and was designed to enable 16 to 19-year-olds to overcome the barriers of independent theatre-going by offering a selection of challenging and relevant theatre productions with informative and exciting 'behind the scenes' events recommended by peer mentors.

Working methods

The pilot grew out of two focus groups with young people aged 15 to 20, some of whom were avid theatre-goers and others who took part in drama at school, but did not attend theatre productions in their free time. The groups identified perceived barriers to attendance and suggested the scheme look at 'mentoring'. Mentors chosen for the first year were slightly older than the target age group of 16 to 19-year-olds and were dedicated and regular theatre-goers.

Following the initial research, the C145 scheme was promoted using posters and freepost reply postcards distributed through all London state secondary schools and selected youth clubs. Seven hundred young people returned postcards and 300 submitted an application to join.

In the second year, active C145 participants volunteered to take on the role of 'reps'. Ten reps now advise The Mousetrap Foundation on which shows would be of most interest to young people and attend the events. The reps are active in recruiting other students from their school and act as a go-between to remind them about the theatre events, the need to send in their forms for the productions – and generally serve as a point of contact. They act as 'buddies' for newcomers, eg meeting them at tube stations and accompanying them to the theatre. C145 membership is free to participants and all theatre events cost £5.

Costs

The budget for C145 is approximately £15,000 annually. Costs include subsidising the theatre tickets, developing, producing and distributing promotional materials, and communicating with members (eg cost of text messaging, free post and developing a new C145 page on the website).

Set-up

Director Susan Whiddington outlined the development process:

'We researched the programme and hosted two focus groups (attenders and non-attenders) between September and December 2000. We hosted several meetings with the mentors during 2001 and they suggested that we rename the programme (from Second Stage to C145) and use text messaging to communicate with members. C145 was officially launched in February 2002. We then offered six theatre productions and events between March and June 2002 with two added events in the summer months in partnership with the National Theatre's Playmates Scheme.'

In February 2003, we hosted a planning meeting with C145 participants who indicated that they were interested in being reps. It was at that meeting that they officially changed their name from 'mentor' to 'rep'. They also expressed a strong interest in extending the parameters of the C145 theatre productions to include opera and dance.'

The amount of time that reps give to this programme varies greatly. Some reps are more active in recruiting fellow students and take on added responsibilities such as giving in-school presentations on C145.

Achievements

Of the 700 young people who returned the initial promotional postcards, 300 completed application forms and in the first year, 99 subsequently attended the launch dinner and/or one or more of the six theatre productions, some attending all events.

At the first C145 event in spring 2003, 97 young people came to see *Chicago* and participated in a pre-show slide show/presentation on how a long-running show is marketed by the Dewynters marketing and advertising team.

Challenges

One of the most difficult aspects of C145 is communicating effectively with its members. A mass text message to all 700-plus who had expressed some interest in C145 did not get a very good response. Emails do work, but young people change their email addresses often! Telephone communication has proved time-consuming.

Another difficulty is finding the right balance between encouraging young people's independence and the need to be somewhat parental by reminding them to send in their booking forms and so on. It is hoped that the reps will undertake this task.

Some teachers and schools are much more supportive than others in promoting C145 to students and suggesting students to serve as reps. This means that the strength of C145 is somewhat dependent on the involvement of active teachers.

Legacy and continuation

The Foundation is developing a core group of young people who are now experienced in attending theatre independently and it is hoped this programme will encourage them to pursue their interest in theatre and the performing arts. As long as funding is available, C145 will continue, as it has served its constituents very well and there continues to be a growing interest in the programme from young people (and their teachers).

There are a number of ways in which C145 can grow: encouraging Society of London Theatre members to accept the C145 membership card as eligibility for student ticket prices; developing an interactive website where C145ers can get information about C145 events and other shows that offer C145 discounts; encouraging members to write their own reviews of shows and commissioning a longitudinal study of the theatre-going habits of C145 members over a few years.

Contact for further information

www.mousetrap.org.uk

Appendix

Recruitment – a sample person specification from The Lighthouse (previously Poole Arts Centre): Tipping Point 150

- hugely enthusiastic about at least one artform/organisation with the potential to become enthused about others
- confident and outgoing, comfortable talking to strangers
- a good listener, sympathetic to the real and perceived barriers to attendance
- persuasive and supportive, someone who will engage people's trust easily
- mindful of the responsibility not to let down trust and/or expectations
- articulate and capable of communicating at a range of levels
- motivated and able to filter audience feedback, problems they encounter and recommendations for the future
- staying power – the commitment to see the project through
- interested in the arts and committed to the value of getting people involved
- reasonable awareness of what's going on in the local arts scene and in the community

Further reading and other useful information

Arts Ambassadors Unit: Final Report, Arts About Manchester, 2001

Gladwell, Malcolm, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Little, Brown, 2000

Hill, Liz/MAX, *Targeting the Now Generation*, MAX (Marketing the Arts in Oxfordshire), 2001

Maitland, Heather, *A Guide to Audience Development*, Arts Council of England, 2000

Rosen, Emanuel, *The Anatomy of Buzz: creating word-of-mouth marketing*, HarperCollins Business, 2001

Woolf, Felicity, *Partnerships for Learning*, Regional Arts Boards and Arts Council of England, 1999 (available as a downloadable pdf from www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Marketing and Audience Development Agencies

Network is the association of arts marketing agencies dedicated to collaborative audience development and arts marketing. www.audiencedevelopment.org

Arts Marketing Association

The professional development body for those promoting the arts and cultural industries. For details see www.a-m-a.co.uk

Arts Council England's New Audiences programme

New Audiences was a programme of action research designed to bring new art to audiences and new audiences to the arts, which ran between 1998 and 2003. The programme helped to establish several ambassador schemes. Details of projects supported and lessons learned can be found at www.newaudiences.org.uk

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A practical guide to working with arts ambassadors

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