Engaging with communities

TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES:

* Research and reflect: understand yourself and the people you would like to engage with.
* Make connections: connect with community members through community organisations, contacts and representatives.
* Maintain partnerships: develop your initial connections into partnerships for achieving shared goals.
* Make art together: work in a way that allows the organisation and the community to express creative and artistic aspirations.
* Learn and leave well: plan for the end of the project from the outset. Ask the community members and your organisation for their views, evaluate the outcomes and change created through the project.

For more information contact:
Australia Council for the Arts
372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010
PO Box 388, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
T +61 9215 9000
Toll free 1800 226 912
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Read more about engaged communities at www.australiacouncil.gov.au/engagedcommunities

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Community engagement covers all the ways that artists and arts organisations can connect with communities. Engaging with a community is about creating a healthy and committed relationship between equals, based on mutual respect and reciprocity.

Engaging with communities is a fluid activity which requires ongoing maintenance, communication and respect for the ‘process’ of working together.

Image: The Pizzicato Effect, Image courtesy of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Credit: Matt Irwin
TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

Involving a community in making decisions around processes makes both the organisation and the community accountable for the project’s outcomes.

- **Access programs**
  - Pricing, distribution and venue policies to make existing work more accessible. This could be through regional touring, AUSLAN translators, relaxed performances or low-cost tickets.

- **Public programs**
  - Holding artistic programs for the public from seminars and workshops, to participatory activities.

- **Learning programs**
  - Creating programs for specific communities or groups to build leadership skills and artistic practice.

- **Community consultative programs**
  - Talking with community members and groups about how to make the organisation more relevant to the community.

- **Arts programming**
  - The artistic program of work and activity is tailored to be relevant to the local community or to target communities.

- **Community collaboration**
  - Organisations work closely with communities to develop and deliver a project.

- **Community co-creation**
  - Co-creation projects have a commitment to community connection and equitable sharing of control over artistic outcomes.

- **Community involvement in organisational decision making**
  - Involving a community in making decisions around processes makes both the organisation and the community accountable for the project’s outcomes.

TRACKS DANCE COMPANY

Tracks Dance Company has collaborated with the Layarum Community to create Mijirm Festival for the past 20 years. The company and the community invested their time, finances and resources to create opportunities for empowerment, identity and social inclusion through arts and culture.

Image: Last Light, Image Courtesy of Tracks Dance Company. Credit: Peter Gue

CIRCUS OZ

BLAMip created by Circus OZ provides internships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to perform with the ensemble. The masterclass program resulted in the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional adult circus performance to be programmed in the company’s 2014 season.

Image: Circus Oz, BLAMip, created by Circus Oz provides internships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to perform with the ensemble. The masterclass program resulted in the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional adult circus performance to be programmed in the company’s 2014 season.

CORKED UP!

Performers: Ally Humphris (top), Baykali Ganambarr (bottom).

Credit: Rob Blackburn

HOW TO MAKE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORK

- **Commitment**
  - Be committed to project goals, undertake meaningful self-reflection and take action when circumstances change or problems arise.

- **Shared vision**
  - Agree on a common purpose for the engagement and set realistic goals.

- **Resourcing**
  - Commit the time, skills, people and resources to achieve goals.

- **Relationships**
  - Give relationships the time and space to grow, and develop ways of listening and resolving conflict.

- **Respect**
  - Respect knowledge, history and diversity and be open to changing usual work approaches.

- **Power**
  - Be aware of a community’s power. This power can include cultural knowledge, financial resources, information or social status. Agree on a way to use this power for mutual benefit rather than trying to impose a way of doing things.

- **Responsibility**
  - Agree on roles and responsibilities, and where significant resources are involved, agree to accountability and transparency processes.

- **Legacy**
  - Agree on how to manage the end of the collaboration, to ensure a positive legacy for all parties.

- **Leadership**
  - Have strong leaders who champion the project, share learnings and build commitment throughout their organisations.