

Case study

Raising awareness of a participatory cultural project



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The Cultural Spring



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The Cultural Spring is a three-year project aiming to increase participation and engagement in the arts in ten wards in Sunderland and South Tyneside. It is funded through the Arts Council's Creative People and Places Fund.

Objectives

The objectives of the PR campaign around the Cultural Spring were to:

- Raise the profile of The Cultural Spring locally, regionally and nationally
- Increase the number of people attending Cultural Spring events through publicity generated
- Brief local and regional news outlets/journalists to win media buy-in of the project's aims
- Work with the Cultural Spring team to create an agreed narrative that would help shape PR output
- Help shift attitudes towards the arts in our communities – the arts is not just for 'them'
- Positive PR could also help attract higher-profile artists and possibly help longevity through legacy funders
- Tackle any negative publicity should it arise (it hasn't to date!)
- Raise the profile of the individuals and groups we're working with.

Target audiences

Local audience

Locally, we targeted people living within our wards in Sunderland and South Tyneside, plus other Wearsiders and South Tynesiders who don't live in the wards, but might attend events or activities.

We also targeted a wider audience of north-easterners who might want to attend the larger Cultural Spring events, like the Great North Passion (our launch event organised in collaboration with BBC, and broadcast live on Good Friday on BBC One).



Regional and national audience

In addition to our local audience, we intend that publicity about the range and depth of Cultural Spring events and activities will change perceptions of Sunderland and South Tyneside, to reinforce the view that that they are areas rich in the arts and culture.

Artists

We targeted practitioners who were interested in working on or leading Cultural Spring projects and/or commissions. Generating publicity also helped to ensure those we'd like to work with heard of us.

Funders

Funders were another target audience; those who fund our work deserve publicity for doing so, and need to see evidence of our activity.

Partners

Our three partners, the University of Sunderland; Sunderland Music, Arts and Music Trust and the Customs House, South Shields, also deserve recognition for their support and practical help and we needed to be able to show evidence of our activities.

Process

First, we identified our key target media outlets. Our Project Director, Rebecca Ball and PR consultant Rob Lawson created a plan, which was then honed by the wider Cultural Spring team at a narrative session.

Rebecca and Rob then visited each of the major news organisations in the region and briefed them on the project, trying to get buy-in from each of them. This ensured we had a named reporter to work with at each outlet.

Our launch event, the Great North Passion, was a collaboration with BBC One and involved a live broadcast on Good Friday. This was ideal from a PR viewpoint, raising our profile locally, regionally and nationally, but we had to ensure we maximised the benefit and that The Cultural Spring's involvement was not lost.

We created bespoke plans for each media outlet. Separate plans were devised for local and regional newspapers, radio stations, magazines and TV. Plans were also made for local and national websites, and we discussed strategies to attract coverage in national publications.

To encourage and increase participation at our local events, the concentration of our PR efforts was on the local press, mainly the Sunderland Echo, Shields Gazette and The Journal (a regional paper based in Newcastle). All three of these titles are well-regarded and widely-read in our communities. As well as providing stories for publication, we've also provided listing information for local and regional publications.

Our campaign made great use of Twitter ([@Cultural Spring](#)) and [Facebook](#), using both to publicise events, activities and workshops. An updated website (theculturalspring.org.uk) gave us a further opportunity to publicise what we were doing, our aims and objectives and who our partners are. It also let us gain valuable feedback from our participants.

Outcomes

Thanks to the publicity campaign, there is a general awareness of The Cultural Spring and its aims in our communities. The publicity succeeded in driving people to our activities, events and workshops; we've had dozens of positive stories in the Sunderland Echo and Shields Gazette and several articles in The Journal.

Coverage

We also achieved coverage in a broad range of other local and national publications, including The Guardian, Daily Express, Daily Mirror, Northern Echo, Hartlepool Mail, Spark (University of Sunderland publication), The Crack (North East arts magazine), NARC (North East music and culture magazine), Bunker (Sunderland music magazine) and Sunderland Vibe (free magazine delivered free to 114,000 homes in Sunderland).

In terms of broadcast coverage, we were featured on BBC Look North and Tyne Tees News, as well as BBC One (for the Great North Passion). We had radio coverage on Sun FM, Metro Radio, Radio Newcastle, Spark Radio (University of Sunderland) and BBC Radio Four and Five for the Great North Passion.



Online, we were featured on the Daily Mail website and The Telegraph, as well as the sites of local media organisations (The Northern Lights) and other national websites such as The British Theatre Guide.

Our coverage reassured our funders and partners that the project's aims and objectives are being achieved. Thanks, in part, to the publicity generated, we are getting enquiries from artists keen to engage with us.

Key points for effective practice

- Ensure buy-in from local media.
- Arrange a narrative session so there is an agreed 'story' and internal buy-in to what the key messages are.
- Try to deal with one person at each media organisation, so you can build up a good working relationship.
- Ensure that stories are localised – that the local papers have a reason for running the story, for example a local artist involved in the project, or local residents participating in a project or scheme.

- If you have a big event coming, tell the media organisation well in advance, and find an opportunity to brief the reporter/journalist – not just a press release and photo.
- Be persistent and persuasive – don't always accept 'no'.
- Think visually – always provide media outlets with photographs as well as copy. Give them a choice of an portrait or landscape photo.
- Ensure each story is tailored for a local audience. Find a different angle on the same story to make the story localised for each news outlet.
- Make sure there is steady flow of interesting tweets and that the website and Facebook page are regularly updated.
- Try to plan well in advance – have a calendar of stories/articles planned.

Additional links

Some of our press releases can be found at <http://theculturalspring.org.uk/news/>

Coverage

- Daily Mail: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2769440/It-s-Chew-louse-Lautrec-Street-artist-uses-tiny-pieces-discarded-gum-pavements-canvas-create-intricate-miniature-paintings.html>
- Daily Mail: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2538023/BBCs-spectacular-Easter-set-feature-80-shipping-containers-represent-Stations-Cross.html>
- The Telegraph: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/10565473/BBC-plans-Easter-spectacle-for-the-non-religious.html>
- Sunderland Vibe: <http://sunderlandvibe.com/news/the-culture-spring/>
- The Crack: <http://www.thecrackmagazine.com/view-editorial/1630>
- Sunderland Echo: <http://www.sunderlandecho.com/what-s-on/free-creative-classes-with-sunderland-s-cultural-spring-1-6714677>
- The Shields Gazette: <http://www.shieldsgazette.com/what-s-on/artists-stay-on-the-move-with-pop-up-shed-1-6804945>
- The Shields Gazette: <http://www.shieldsgazette.com/what-s-on/brazilian-street-artist-inspires-pupils-1-6866601>
- The Journal: <http://www.thejournal.co.uk/culture/arts-culture-news/top-orchestra-perform-sunderland-school-6863860>
- The Bunker: <http://bunkeruk.com/blog/exciting-summer-streets-line-up-confirmed/>
- The Northern Lights: <http://www.northernlightsuk.co.uk/summer-streets-the-cultural-spring-team-up-with-ross-millard-for-south-tynesides-newest-music-festival/>
- The British Theatre Guide: <http://britishtheatreguide.info/news/the-north-east-cultural-spring-2763>