



An audience-led  
approach to  
programming and  
marketing

**Tips and approaches  
from East Durham  
Creates**

# An audience-led approach to programming and marketing



**Creative People and Places (CPP) was at the Arts Marketing Association's conference in Belfast in July 2017 with East Durham Creates, one of our 21 projects.**

Presenting a session in partnership with [The Audience Agency](#), Nikki Locke, Head of [East Durham Creates](#), talked through practical examples of how they've tested different approaches and put the needs of their audiences first.

Nikki shared case studies from the first three years East Durham Creates' work and outlined how they took an audience-led approach by doing the following:

1. Embedding action learning in all our work
2. Marketing the experience
3. Creating relevant work
4. Developing shared ownership of projects

## **About East Durham Creates**

East Durham Creates is a programme set up to try out new ways of getting more local people involved in something creative. We're trying new things, building on what's already happening, learning what works – and what doesn't – and pulling together to bring about long term change.

We have three delivery strands: New commissions; Communities taking the lead; Talent development.

We're in an area of former mining towns and villages with no cultural venues. 94,000 people live here and 73% of our population fall into the low arts engagement segments (Audience Spectrum). It's a beautiful place full of warm, funny, talented, kind and down-to-earth people, who through no fault of their own, face socio-economic challenges and high indices of deprivation. We want to give everyone who lives here opportunities and choices around taking part in creative and cultural activities.

We are managed by Beamish and East Durham Trust working in partnership and supported by Durham County Council via East Durham Area Action Partnership and Culture and Sport Services.

*Photos: Richard Kenworthy*

# 1: Using action learning

## Case study: 2014 launch festival

To kick start our programme in 2014 we delivered a festival with over 40 events, in 40 venues, in 30 days. It taught us a great deal, leading us to take the decision to pause, reflect and review before continuing with our programme.

Through studying our audience data, getting feedback and carefully considering our next steps we were able to develop a much more informed programme. This has undoubtedly paved the way in helping us to reach people with low levels of engagement with the arts.

### Top tips when reviewing activity

- Think about what it is you want to know and develop a set of questions.
- Have conversations with everyone – don't leave anyone out and consider all feedback in equal value.
- Use what you hear and learn to build the foundations to rethink, adjust or help reaffirm what you do and why.
- Keep the people who have given their time updated – don't be afraid to pick up the phone to run an idea by someone local.
- Once you've made changes take the time to thank those who have helped and show how their comments have been responded to.
- Trust in the process and it'll lead to great results although be mindful it does take time.



## 2. Marketing the experience

### Case study: Pirates of Crimdon Dene

In order to reach local families we created a new event to help us develop our understanding of this audience. From concept to completion we put ourselves in the shoes of who we were trying to engage, looking at other local successful events and most of all, putting their experience first. Over 2500 people attended which we are very proud of!

#### Top tips

- Think about how you can fit into people's lives and why they would want to attend, how can you make it a really special day to remember?
- Look after the detail and it'll look after you – think the audience journey through from the moment they leave the house to when they get home at the end of the day.
- Make it easy for people to get involved: consider pricing of food; what facilities they'll need; test out the public transport route; and tell people exactly what to expect.
- Create the right atmosphere with your staff, decorations and artists, put on something that's familiar as a hook to engage and make a masterpiece of their experience.
- More information about the event: <http://eastdurhamcreates.co.uk/pirates/>



## 3. Creating relevant work

### Case study: From Out A Darker Sea, So Percussion

New commissions can be challenging if you want to create something with and for your audiences and the artists you are working with don't live nearby. We worked with So Percussion from Brooklyn, USA and learnt the first visit is absolutely key. To authentically develop a new piece with and for people, it is essential to focus on embedding the artists in the area as quickly as possible. This led to things beyond our wildest dreams and a completely sold out performance which people felt proud of.

#### Top tips for a first visit:

- Let the artists get to know who they are trying to reach before they try to reach them. Plan in lots of time to get involved in local activities.
- Meet people where they are as people, without any agenda – let them get to know them as people as well to help build trust.
- Invest time for your artists to have conversations, understand challenges and test assumptions.
- Put on performances or workshops which help to inform the artist what people would respond to best.
- More information about the event <http://eastdurhamcreates.co.uk/sopercussion/>



## 4: Developing shared ownership

### Case study: Neon and That by Stuart Langley, Mick Stephenson and Dawdon

Bringing something new to audiences takes a different approach. In 2016 we turned a local community centre into an art gallery, displaying an exhibition of neon art works. We involved local young people in creating work, designing a night of *Neon and That* and interpreting the works. This helped us to create a genuine shared ownership of the project between our artists and community.

#### Top tips

- Start with what you know – use a theme or idea you know will appeal easily.
- Take a small risk in the early stages then be bold and try something new.
- Take time to reflect, review and get feedback along the way.
- Encourage everyone to step out of their comfort zone.
- Allow your audience to say what they think it's all about and celebrate it.
- More about the project: <http://eastdurhamcreates.co.uk/neonandthat/>

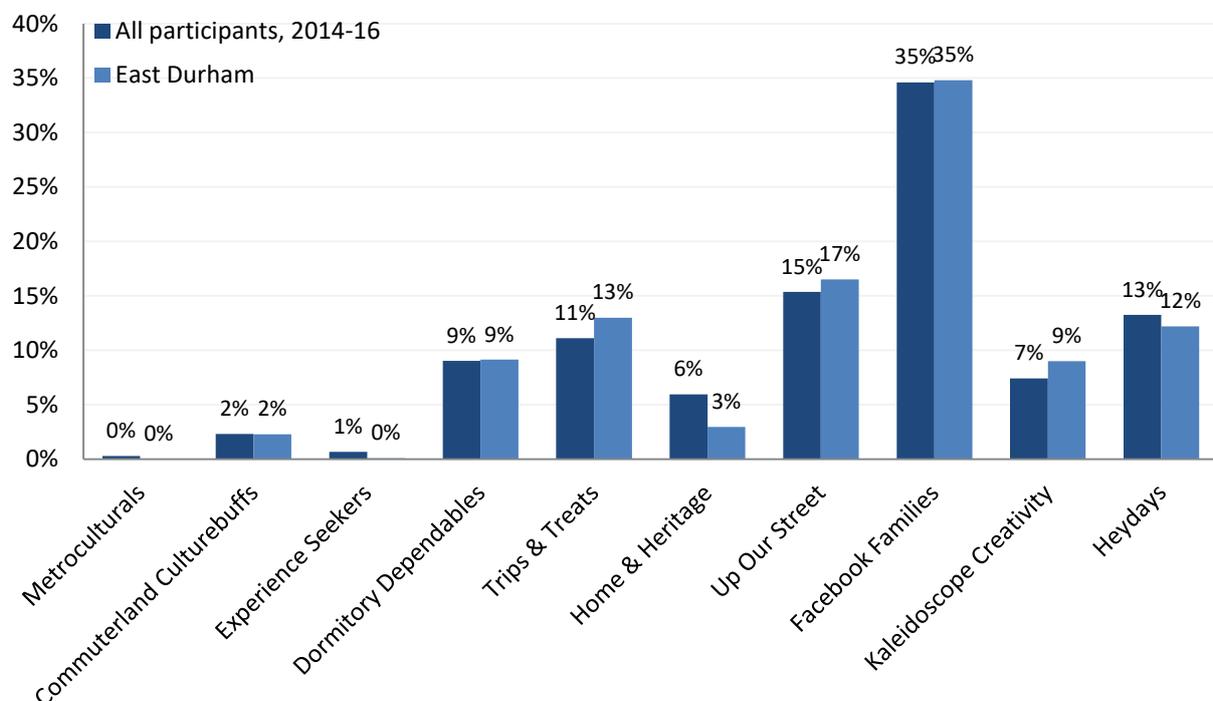


# What were the results of working in this way?

At our October 2014 launch festival we surveyed audience members and found that only 16.5% of 362 people surveyed hadn't engaged in the arts over the past 12 months. As we describe in the first case study, we paused and reviewed our programme and developed a people-first, collaborative approach to all our work. It looks something like this:

1. Audience insight – really listening to people and putting ourselves in their shoes
2. Design a project or activity that responds to local people, working 'with' them not 'on' them
3. Test something new
4. Evaluate what worked and what didn't
5. Use this knowledge to feed into the next activity
6. Repeat

Our audience data (based on Audience Spectrum) for the first three years of our programme shows how we now reach the low and medium arts engagement segments more in less in line with their distribution in East Durham's population.



# What is Creative People and Places?

**Creative People and Places is about more people choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences in the places where they live.**

Creative People and Places takes place in areas where evidence shows that people are less involved in arts and cultural activities than elsewhere in England.

As an action research programme, we take risks, reflect on what worked and what didn't, gather evidence and share our learning widely.

Developed by Arts Council England with an initial investment of £37m from the National Lottery, the first phase of the programme ran between 2013 and 2016. The second phase will run until 2019.

There are now 21 independent Creative People and Places projects in areas where people have traditionally had fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts.

By talking to people about what they want to see happen locally, each project has created a distinctive programme that's unique to the people and places that have shaped it.

Local people are involved with Creative People and Places projects in a myriad of ways – as participants, decision-makers, artists, producers, volunteers and of course audiences.

Projects are developed with a diverse range of partners including health authorities, local businesses, schools, transport companies, community and voluntary groups, sports clubs, housing associations, local authorities and many more.

**21 places**

**Over 1.45 million people engaged in 4000 events\***

**91% of participants from low/medium engagement categories\***

**10 year vision**

## **Find out more**

[www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk)

[www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning)

<http://culturehive.co.uk/tags/creative-people-and-places>

\*between 2013 - 2016