

Information Sheet: Developing your audience

There are lots of reasons for needing or wanting to expand the numbers and kinds of people who attend your event:

- You may need greater numbers for your event or club to survive
- You may be aware that your audience is not particularly broad and maybe some kinds of people are just never represented – older people for example
- You may want to appeal to people who would otherwise feel that a particular art form or heritage activity has no relevance to them
- You may want to attract people from further away – from outside your village or immediate area
- You may, conversely, have an event which is well attended by people who live further away but hardly anyone who is local ever attends
- You may want to reach more of the kinds of people who you know will buy your work or your service

This is when an Audience Development plan can help – this could also be seen as a marketing plan, so don't be put off by the grand terminology.

The plan you produce should help you in lots of ways, but one of the main ones is to help you to see your activity or work from the perspective of the audience – this will help you understand why certain types of people come, why others don't and how you can appeal to a much broader range.

An Audience Development plan will help you:

- Focus on who you want to reach
- Understand how you may go about reaching them
- Identify how much it will cost to put your plan into action

But it doesn't have to be complicated or lengthy.

You may find that the best way to start is to ask yourself some questions:

- What service or activity do you provide?
- Who are the people who presently attend or participate? Are they mostly from a particular kind of background? Young? Older? Female? Local? If you can't answer this question because you don't, for example, know where people come from, is this information important? If it is, how could you go about getting it?
- Do you have new activities you want to do? Who do you want to reach with these new activities? What do you think the potential demand is?
- Have you already asked for the views of your current audience? If so what did you find out? Do you have a way of contacting your potential audience and asking why they do not attend?
- What marketing and audience development work have you already undertaken in the past? Was it successful? If not, are you clear about the reasons for this?
- What ideas do you already have for new audience development and marketing? Have you asked all the members of your group or organisation about their ideas?
- Have you carried out any evaluation work that could help with your plan?
- Are there other people you could learn from, for example people who have experience of doing similar things?
- If you have financial targets, are you meeting them? If you sell tickets, how many are you selling and to who? What are your prices? How have they changed over the last few years?
- Do you have a marketing or audience development budget? Is it adequate?
- What additional money will you need to put your new ideas into place? Where will the money come from?
- Who are your main competitors and how do they compare with you?
- What influences might affect your project, such as social or economic issues nationally or locally? In a recession, for example, people are less likely to spend money on evenings out, or they may wait until the very last minute before they commit to buying a ticket
- What are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats? (This is known as a SWOT analysis.)

After you have answered these questions (or as many as you can and are relevant to you) you will be able to start considering your plan. Some basic headings may help you lay this out more effectively and you can include lots of different areas depending on your own work and the nature of your organisation – a theatre company may include quite different things to a drama group which meets in the village hall, for example, but many of the headings could still be the same.

You need to include:

1. Some background information on your organisation or group and your current activities. This needs to cover what you do, why you do it and why you feel it is important. You also need to explain here what you would like to do as your “next step”. You don’t need to be flowery and wordy about this “We would like to attract more young people to our group”, for example.
2. Set out your objectives and think about including some specific targets. If you do set targets i.e. we would like to have 3 new members of our group who are under 25 within the next 6 months, make sure your targets follow the SMART rule. This is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.
3. Describe the details for your new activity and be as specific as you can. Explain the benefits and how you think it would appeal. Even better if you *know* it would appeal because you have asked and you have proof in the form of a survey etc. Think about what is unique or different about your group and what you will be offering – the only provision in your local area, for example.
4. Make the demand for your activity clear.
5. Think about the methods you could use. These can be really wide and are only limited by your imagination and the group’s resources. Lots of activities are free and just involve effort on your behalf. For example, if you feel that young people may not come to your activity or group because they may not feel it is relevant to them, it is your job to show them that they are wrong! Take your activity into schools or to your local youth group. Find a young ambassador who can speak on your behalf – preferably someone who is enthused and can also enthuse others.
6. Create a workable timetable for the work you need to do. Again, be as specific as you can: “I will contact three youth groups within the next two weeks. I will arrange to visit them to talk about our work. I will have completed these visits within 2 months.”
7. Think about the additional expenditure you will incur and work out a budget. If your funds are limited you may need to spread your activity out over a longer period of time. If your funds are *extremely* limited then it is well worth concentrating on all the free activity you can think of – if this works well you won’t need to spend any money to achieve your goals.
8. You will need to know how you can measure your success. There are many different kinds of evaluation and some are extremely obvious – for example, you will know you have reached your goal of young members when they have begun attending sessions and been members of the group for a period of time. A separate information sheet on Evaluation is available.

You may also find it very useful to have a look at the detailed arts audience segmentation work that the Audience Agency has developed, as well as to use their toolkits. You’ll find lots more information here:

<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/>