

WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY PROJECTS SUCCESSFUL?

1. Make the community the centre of your project

- Make sure you know your community and understand their aspirations.
- Ensure the values, beliefs and principles of the community underpin the project.
- Engage the community so they can feel empowered and help shape the project.
- Build strong, supportive, and authentic relationships with the community and other stakeholders – this will take time.
- Let the intentions and aspirations of the community guide the allocation of roles and responsibilities – and make sure everyone knows these from the start.
- Communicate clearly, recognising that learning and communication flows both ways.
- Be clear about why the community is involved and aware that people have different motivations.
- Be curious and ask questions.
- Create leadership opportunities for community members.

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2. Create strong artistic leadership

- An artist will encourage and challenge people to explore new ways of thinking, feeling, doing and being, leading the community project with skill, compassion, curiosity, and flexibility.
- They will have a wide range of skills and tools they can adapt as needed to support the learning and creativity of participants.
- The lead artist should have teaching and facilitation skills and should know the community and their own role in the engagement.
- An authentic, high quality creative process will produce the best artistic results.
- Consideration needs to be given to the community's needs, skill levels, and formats/ processes that will help express the community's identity and important issues.
- Know when to lead and when to let the community lead.
- Consider what is possible within the resources and timeframe available – make sure you plan and pace the project.
- Manage the varied needs, skill levels and expectations of participants and celebrate the creativity of their contribution.
- Think about how to present the work in a cohesive way and how to maintain it if it is a permanent or semi-permanent feature.

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3. Grow strong partnerships

- A well-developed partnership will often take a project well beyond the initial expectations.
- Partners can provide insights into a community, access to existing relationships, resources, knowledge and skills to support the artist, and project management expertise. They can also continue to engage with the community after the project finishes.
- Partnerships should be explored at the beginning of the project. Think about who is already engaging with the community, are there potential partners external to the community, do their aspirations align, would they add value to the project, what can the project offer them in return?
- Aligning everyone's intentions builds a solid base for the project. They may have different intentions, but they need to align.
- Ensure all partners are clear about what the project is and its goals, create opportunities to meet and have input into making the project relevant and accessible to participants.
- Check that relationships and expectations are clear and well managed as the project progresses. This includes setting up clear, consistent and regular communication.
- Look after your partners – create opportunities for them to engage in the process and make sure you thank them!

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4. Create a strong concept and project plan

- A well-developed concept and fully planned project help identify areas of potential and weakness.
- Consider what sort of project and artform are needed to achieve the aims of the community.
- Planning includes research, identifying and establishing relationships, concept development, agreeing aims and outcomes, engaging the artist and others who will deliver the project, setting budgets, and securing funding and other resources.
- When working out the timeline, always allow more time than you think you will need and work back from the end point just to check.
 - If you don't get the resources you need, are you able to scale back and still deliver a good project?
 - Is there an opportunity to establish a steering or reference group to support decision making?
- Projects can change as they are implemented, so ensure there is room for flexibility and the capacity to respond to new ideas and challenges.

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5. Establish strong project management and communications functions

- Good project management provides clarity for all involved, increases effectiveness and efficiency, supports relationships, artistic processes and outcomes, and allows for flexibility and responsiveness when opportunities or challenges arise.
- Project management involves managing timelines, budgets & resources, relationships, risks, health & safety, contractors & stakeholders, communications, creating documentation and evaluation.
- Ensure decision making processes are clear, record decisions at meetings and circulate to confirm, address any issues that arise quickly and use project intentions to guide you.
- Effectively manage relationships and communications, including with community participants, arts practitioners, funders, stakeholders, audiences and contractors.
- Most importantly, communicate the successes of the project as they happen.
- If you are planning a public event, develop a marketing plan which includes the different groups you will be communicating with, when you will communicate with them, and the communications channels you will use.
- Have clear timelines of what needs to happen, who will do it and in what order. Include wrap up time for report writing and sharing information with the community and partners.
- Maintain space for the creative process – don't let it get swamped with practicalities.
- Make sure budgets are well developed and closely managed.

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6. Keep your project and people safe

- Health & safety is about the physical wellbeing of participants, but also includes ethics, privacy & confidentiality, and emotional safety.
- Characteristics of a safe project include clarity around responsibilities, having the skills to work with individuals and groups, being well prepared and organised, having the appropriate artistic skills involved, undertaking safe practice and knowing what your health & safety requirements are.
- If your project is complex, consider writing a health & safety plan or ring Worksafe on 0800 030 040 to discuss what you need to do.
- Make a list of all the possible needs participants might have, eg physical, refreshments, toilet facilities, safe transport, emotional needs such as consistency and opening and closing sessions, and the support needed for vulnerable or high-need communities.
- Make sure the ethics underpinning the project are clear – these are the rules for working together.
- The scale of the project will determine how formal the code of conduct needs to be – it could be a 10-minute discussion at the start of the project or a formal agreement that all participants sign.
- Ensure confidentiality and privacy are maintained if you gather personal information about participants.
- Make sure copyright and intellectual property issues are clear and ownership of art and creativity is protected for the creator.
- Ensure the artist or co/leader takes care of themselves – working with communities can take a lot of time and energy and can sometimes be emotionally draining.

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7. Create effective documentation and evaluation/ reporting process

- This will help you reflect on whether your project has achieved its goals, improve processes for future projects, demonstrate outcomes to funders/future funders and help participants reflect their own progress.
- Process: how the participants engaged, how the project was managed, how the community was involved.
- Impact: what happened to the participants through the project, what happens because of the project, what is the impact on the community of the project.
- Outcome: what happens to/for the participants in the long term because of the project, what is the impact of the project overall in the long term, what happens to/for the community in the long term.
- Evaluation needs to be built in at the start of the project – identifying specific outcomes to measure against. You can reflect on these measures to help assess and improve the project while it's underway and at the end. Involve the community in setting measures of success and use quantitative and qualitative measures.
- It's important to tell the story of your project – the successes and learnings along the way. You can do this by using reports, celebratory events, social media and other platforms. Be honest – you can learn more from mistakes than successes.

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These notes comprise a summary of a series of in-depth tip sheets developed by Creative New Zealand to support community arts projects.

To view the information in its entirety, visit <https://www.creativenz.govt.nz/development-and-resources/community-arts-toolkit/what-makes-a-strong-community-arts-project>.