

Event report

CULTURAL COMMISSIONING

Learning from Funders

22.09.2015

HOSTED BY BUZZACOTT LLP

Buzzacott
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

VENUE

Buzzacott LLP
130 Wood Street
London
EC2V 6DL

The Learning from Funders meetings give an opportunity to get together to look at good and innovative practice in supporting the sector with each meeting exploring a particular aspect of the funder relationship with funded groups.

This Learning from Funders event provided funders with an opportunity to discuss the Cultural Commissioning Programme - supporting arts and cultural organisations to engage in public sector commissioning. The Cultural Commissioning Programme is helping the arts and cultural sector to engage in public sector commissioning and enabling public service commissioners to increase their awareness of the potential for arts and cultural organisations to deliver their outcomes.

David Warner, London Funders, Chair, emphasized that the discussion would be an opportunity for people to be open and honest, emphasizing that the Learning from Funders meetings follow the Chatham House Rule to encourage discussion and learning. London Funders is a place based organisation and place could well become an increasingly important determinant in the voluntary and community sector.

Jessica Harris, NCVO, gave an introduction to the Cultural Commissioning Programme – a 3 year programme funded by Arts Council England, and being delivered by a partnership of NCVO (lead partner), New Economics Foundation and New Philanthropy Capital.

[Jessica's powerpoint presentation is available here.](#)

The objectives of the programme are:

- For arts and cultural organisations to be better able to engage with public sector commissioning
- For public service commissioners to be more aware of the potential for arts and cultural organisations to deliver outcomes

The programme focuses on 3 areas: mental health and wellbeing; older people; and place based commissioning.

The programme was underpinned by NPC research '[Opportunities for Alignment](#)' (June 2014) - the report maps the arts and cultural sector's experiences of public sector commissioning to date, examines the public service commissioning landscape and highlights opportunities for relationships between the sector and commissioners to be strengthened in the future. Jessica highlighted some important areas from the research, including where it provides a fuller understanding of what the evidence base looks like and what the value delivered by the arts, museums and libraries is:

Arts activities can be a good way to

- Encourage sustained participation.
- Support effective working in preventative agendas
- Address inclusivity and difference
- Use existing community assets

Though these benefits do need to be balanced with an awareness of the challenges for commissioners:

- Balance immediate and acute need with long term strategy
- Preventative approaches are difficult to evidence
- Voice of arts and cultural sector in public policy weak
- Commissioning approaches vary which can limit shared learning.

Jessica also gave an outline of the challenges for cultural organisations:

- Social outcomes can be hard to show direct attribution
- Health commissioners may expect statistically evidenced impacts
- Concern of mission creep
- Realigning business model
- Capacity to deliver in a commissioning environment.

Jessica then shared the learning that is emerging from CCP's two Commissioning Partners pilots – in these, commissioners in Kent County Council and Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group are being supported to develop their approaches to commissioning, to enable more arts and cultural organisations to bid for contracts to deliver outcomes for people and communities.

- Being outcomes focussed: looking at developing appropriate measurement frameworks and using local needs assessments and corporate priorities as a basis for outcomes based planning. Also ensuring that tender documents focus on outcomes.
- Influencing peers
- Structural changes to commissioning: breaking down contracts to smaller lots and encouraging larger contractors to subcontract and engage with local communities.
- Working with LA arts and culture team: and communicating and drawing on local expertise.
- Engaging with arts and cultural providers: inviting to consultation events and using their knowledge
- Using the arts and cultural providers to engage people: to help communities express wants and needs and work with them on service design.
- Securing social value: including this in position statements and tender documentation
- Managing procurement: ensuring its outcomes focussed and help to manage risk. A balanced approach.

Following on from this process, there will be a learning report and a seminar programme in order to share learning. A programme to embed support for cultural commissioning in the work on national stakeholders will also take place.

Discussion

- The group noted how effective videos can be to help people to understand outcomes and therapeutic value of some of these activities
- Can be difficult to measure outcomes where they are not concrete, and a lot of confusion about what the impact of the work is. It's important to recognise that there are many steps along the way to achieving an impact (part of a journey) – therefore a member of the group commented that it is essential not to over-claim – focus on contribution rather than attribution.
- The work often needs to link in with other agendas and services e.g. housing – then can have a more positive impact
- There is a focus on working in partnership and consortia, therefore there is a lot of work taking place with voluntary sector partners or other cultural organisations in this area
- The group discussed using social finance and whether the entrepreneurial and commercial skills required. Some work is needed to educate and discuss these options with groups to see whether it could be a possibility for some organisations.
- There is an increasing move to commissioning in this area rather than grants.

David thanked Jessica for sharing her knowledge and the audience for attending.

Participants

Gillian	Goode	Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Carolyn	Defrin	Hammersmith United Charities
Elena	Pippou	London Borough of Haringey
Matthew	Couper	London Borough of Southwark
Jessica	Harris	NCVO (Presenter)
Lynn	Simmonds	New Philanthropy Capital
Alice	Millest	Social Finance Ltd
Mahvish	Inayat	The Mercers' Company

In attendance

Becky Green	London Funders
David Warner	London Funders (Chair)

With thanks to Buzzacott LLP for their support in hosting this meeting.