

Start Thurrock

Evaluation Report - Phase 1 Year 3 (2024-25)

Appendix 5: 2023/24 Recommendations Review

Start Thurrock has shown a learning culture.

	Recommendation	Action taken
Governance	Look at the Consortium and review membership and ensure members fully understand their role.	This area still needs development. CC members are feeling more confident to challenge Lead Organisation and clearer on their role, evidenced by ACE risk reduction. However, further work needed as no new members have been recruited. To focus on for 2025/26 extension year.
	Make space to review and plan as a Consortium on a regular basis – particularly as challenges arise e.g. around governance and the status of the lead organisation. Ensure this is externally facilitated.	Away Day in September 2024 and review session in February 2025 which provided additional focussed meetings beyond the main Core Consortium meetings. To focus on for 2025/26 to explore further opportunities to achieve this.
	Consider having an independent chair to bring an external view; create additional capacity and provide strategic support	Job spec for role was prepared, however funding pressures prevented the Core Consortium for making it a remunerated role. It is felt that this was needed to attract experience given the Consortium's shared experiences with sourcing such volunteers locally. This will be revisited in 2025/26 on the basis of a purely volunteer role.
	Recognise the amount of work required to run a CPP and the number of different challenges this brings, ensuring the directors have enough support and capacity to do it, and that the lead organisation is adequately resourced to provide that support – or that it is shared with other organisations.	Tilbury on the Thames has moved line management of the directors to Lucy, with Scott remaining to support on strategy and planning. The oversight and management budget is no used by Tilbury on the Thames more flexibly in response to organisational need when hosting Start Thurrock, with Lucy's time entirely covered by the Port and Scott's time entirely covered by the Heritage Fund investment.
	Review staffing support and expectations placed on staff. This could include delegating areas of the 'back office'	There has been a shift towards a more flexible freelance model to manage changing needs around capacity and capability. There has been little progress in seeking

	work – particularly finance, monitoring and funder reporting – to ensure that directors have time to further develop strategic work. This may require seeking additional funding for more staff, or potentially could be delivered through partnership with another organisation.	additional funding for more staff. Delivery of providing support through the partnership has not progressed although this will be kept under review.
Programming	Continue to seek to commission diverse artists to broaden expectation and understanding of what is available and what is possible, as well as to encourage diverse audiences to get engaged.	Activity to commission diverse artists and companies: ○ Southbank trip / Apples and Snakes ○ More diverse artists in Green Light ○ Partnership with TP ○ Partnership with U-Turnships for Bradford ○ Creative Community Support has seen a significant proportion of commissions with diverse artists such as supporting British Asian artists, an all-female Black-led group, Polish Heritage Day and Black History event ○ Teatro Vivo Comments about the Green Light programme evidenced a greater need to not only ensure inclusion but to programme work that encourages integration. Diverse artists were programmed at Green Light but audiences were at times fragmented. This occurred less at Big Lunches which would prove a good opportunity for integration. However with the circus programme last year and the lack of diverse artists working in that field it has been difficult to do both to date. This feels possible at Big Lunches 25 with the inclusion of dance work.
	Continue to share plans with other arts partners and therefore be able to schedule and programme activities in Thurrock to give communities more of a year-round offer.	Quarterly meeting with Thurrock arts orgs and with SERFA (South Essex Regularly Funded Arts) organisations. This has given the team an opportunity for them to share learning as well as programming for a more joined up approach. There is still work to be done as offerings grow, although it is not always possible to avoid clashes in times anymore but, so far, this has been possible in terms of location, ensuring there is more on offer in more places across Thurrock.

		Going forward, this will be strengthened through Cultural Strategy work
	Continue to build in time to rest and reflect, to enable learning to be embedded and for the team to recuperate, especially after busy delivery periods. This could include taking the opportunity at the start of the new delivery year to reflect, refocus and look forward, considering resources and the impact of any expected changes.	The team built this in following the summer programme and Teatro Vivo in October but unfortunately with two members of staff leaving during this period it increased pressure to plug gaps and recruit for spring delivery. Freelancers filling posts proved a positive solution but onboarding required capacity and the team led straight into delivery whilst working to submit the 26-29 bid. Moving into the extension year, delivery now continues alongside end of year reporting and end of grant reporting for 22-25 and 26-29 requirements . The need to recruit on top of this means there is very little time to rest and recuperate. Reflection is less problematic as it is embedded throughout. As a result we have agreed to build in a pause to delivery from October 25 to take stock and build mechanisms to ensure we are set up to effectively deliver our plans for Mar 26.
	For better inclusion of those who may be Neurodivergent or likewise feel uncomfortable with very loud music, future events could consider setting up designated 'Quiet Zones', providing spaces for audiences to feel included away from potential sensory overwhelm.	Specific sensory programming in Green Light were provided alongside smaller group activities to prevent overwhelm. Quiet zones are being planned for Big Lunches 2025.
	Continue the good practice, and evidently successful approach, of community-led decision making and expanding it further so the panel members are involved in the full cycle. For example, building on the commitment of the panels to programme activities and events, attend them, review them and input into the evaluation. The R&D process could have a second stage decision-making element on commissions situated in hyperlocal area to continue the good practice of decision-led practice.	Second stage decision making built in ahead of Teatro Vivo's second project in Purfleet-on-Thames, sense checking vote outcomes from creative spring with Purfleet-on-Thames residents at their Christmas light event. Panel progression moving from CCS decision to Green Light programming. Updates and invitations have been provided about CCS outcomes to panel, but more could be done to encourage participation at events and reflection on them to progress programming and decision making skills.
	Consider adjusting target groups to more explicitly include 'Frontline Families' which is a group who tend to engage less in the arts and are well represented in Thurrock. This group also tends to have younger families	Actioned in terms of Frontline Families, and this is supported by data. Also invested more resource to explicitly target Trips and Treats in preparation for RPC.

	and respond well to open fun focussed programming – well suited to Start's offer.	Frontline Families are well catered for, especially with Big Lunches and Green Light. There is large population of Trips and Treats and the team are reaching very few so Revel Puck (in 25/26) is a test to reach this group, who are also a target in their 26-29 proposal.
Evaluation	Review the way evaluation is approached and work with creatives to develop arts-based data collection to enhance buy-in by creatives and partners, and make it more accessible, fun and embedded.	Attempted with Autin Dance but not successful. Pots and Pebbles idea adopted by other CPPs. This could have been tested with the circus workshops, and the team are considering including for next Teatro Vivo project. The quant / Illuminate data collection continues to take precedence but with Super Fans taking some of the more onerous elements away, there may be room for more creative approaches.
	Identify opportunities and methods to further embed evaluation planning into the event planning stage, linking with RMR.	This is ongoing. We think about what we want to learn and who we want to target and this informs engagement strategies and informal conversations with the public at events.
	Work with partners to look at opportunities to develop community-led data gathering, for example through developing a community researcher team and for opportunities to further embed evaluation skills through the area in partnership with RMR as part of this evaluation.	Developed a Community Researcher team. This remains disjointed, although not through lack of trying. Partners now recognising the benefit of Start Thurrock's data and evaluation and it has been shared with Thurrock Council and Active Essex to use to secure further funding. Yet no efforts are being made by Active Essex to ensure a more joined up approach moving forward. Thurrock Council approached us for a potential future project that could be carried out by Community Researchers. The 3 recommendations about evaluation could be unpacked and planned for in the Extension Year with RMR, but we also want to be mindful that the evaluation task is big and broad as it stands and, as the team feels on top of it now, any new additions and approaches would need to be fully bottomed out before the team try something else.