

Rethinking Relationships

A response to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Consultation on phase one of its Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) has invited responses to its consultation paper *Rethinking Relationships*. The paper marks the end of the first phase of the Foundation's Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations. It sets out, in broad brush, how CGF would like to develop work on the theme including by developing a place-based funding programme in collaboration with other funders and by building the capacity of arts organisations to work in and with their local communities. Our response to the consultation:

- introduces the work of Big Local and explains how it resonates with the Inquiry's concerns;
- discusses the value and importance of arts and creativity within Big Local areas, providing examples;
- suggests how Big Local and CGF might work together during phase 2 of the Inquiry.

The Big Local programme and its relationship to the CGF Inquiry

Big Local is a 15-year Big Lottery Fund endowment to support community development and civic engagement across 150 neighbourhoods in England. It is administered by Local Trust and is a third of the way through its planned delivery programme.

Each Big Local area has been awarded £1 million to spend over a 10-15 year period. The areas, typically neighbourhoods of 1500-4500 homes, were selected on the basis that they had 'missed out' on their share of lottery and other funding. Often this was because they were communities with relatively low levels of civic engagement and, as a consequence, they lacked a critical mass of active and engaged citizens and community-based organisations accessing grant funding.

The communities in most Big Local areas tend to feel peripheral or cut off. Even those Big local areas in major cities are generally some way out from the centre and are often poorly served by public transport. In some of the Big Local areas there are high levels of unemployment,

low paid work and ill health. This creates a context in which access to mainstream arts and culture may be limited.

The ethos of Big Local is that it is community-led. Communities set their own priorities, agree the activities they want to engage in and organise themselves as appropriate to their area. The programme aspires to achieve a few broad outcomes:

- Communities are better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.
- People have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community makes a difference to the needs it prioritises.
- People feel that their area is an even better place to live.

The defining characteristics of the programme are that it:

- **Resources communities:** Big Local has provided £1m to local communities (as opposed to investing in voluntary or community organisations). £1m per area, whilst small compared to the investment in most regeneration programmes, is not an insignificant sum of money and can help to lever other resources into the area.
- It is **placed based** providing a basis for community engagement across a range of activities. Residents have multiple opportunities to get involved and can engage on the issues in their areas that are important to them.
- It is **resident-led and non-prescriptive:** Residents make decisions about how the money is spent. There are very few restrictions on what it can be spent on.
- It invests **over a significant period of time:** With each area having at least ten years to spend the money, there is time for networks to develop, residents to grow in confidence and skills, as well as the opportunity to create lasting change.
- It provides **light touch support:** Big Local areas are supported by local reps to develop and review their plans and to implement them. A number of support partners contracted to Big Local provide assistance with particular issues for example, developing and supporting local enterprise.

As the Third Sector Research Centre note: ‘...Big Local is in stark contrast with previous neighbourhood change and regeneration programmes in that areas are not driven by top down targets, annual spend and externally imposed goals and outcomes (see for example New Deal for Communities... and the Single Regeneration Budget).’

The CGF Inquiry is concerned with publicly funded arts organisations and the extent to which they engage with their local communities and give expression to their concerns and interests. *Rethinking Relationships* characterises version 3.0 arts organisations (as opposed to versions 1.0 and 2.0) as those that produce content with their users based on co-production principles. One arts organisation quoted in the report refers to working with a community as they would work with an artist, supporting it to realise its vision. This resonates with the approach of Big Local in which residents are in the lead but receive support, as appropriate, to consult, plan and deliver their vision for their community. Early learning is that there is great potential for communities in Big Local areas to take responsibility for commissioning solutions to the problems they face.

Rethinking Relationships emphasises the importance of place and the artists commissions delivered during phase one of the Inquiry stress the value of working at a hyper local level if the objective is to reach communities who have typically lacked access to the arts and culture. Big Local provides a supported means of accessing and working with such communities, identifying those with a strong appetite to engage with the arts and creativity – see the next section for examples.

The arts and creativity in Big Local areas

The arts and creativity are supporting delivery of the Big Local programme by for example, enabling areas to:

- provide more engaging and enjoyable needs assessment and planning sessions for local people (in which for example, they are encouraged to draw or make a model of their vision for their community);
- illustrate their work and the difference they are making (for example, by making short films or taking photographs).

In one particular instance an arts organisations is acting as the 'locally trusted organisation' that administers the funds and reports on their use (**More Music for West End Million** in Morecambe). Another area has an arts and culture sub group, a group of local artists, musicians and dramatists and those generally interested in the arts, who meet regularly to share ideas and work together (**Dover Big Local**).

The arts and creativity are enabling Big Local areas to achieve the objectives in their plans in a variety of ways, including:

- bringing people together and encouraging community spirit (for example, free open access arts and crafts sessions for young and old);
- asserting a positive identity for their area and expressing their pride in it (for example, by commissioning murals and public art);
- providing activities for community members who might otherwise lack access (partnering with local arts organisations to offer cheap tickets and bring activities to the community);
- celebrating key milestones or achievements (for example, by organising a festival);
- tackling particular social or environmental issues (for example, engaging disengaged young people or addressing loneliness and isolation);
- supporting the development of local enterprise and the local economy (for example, through small grants for new creative enterprises);
- providing combined community and arts spaces.

See the box overleaf for specific examples:

The arts and creativity - enabling Big Local areas to achieve their objectives

Bringing people together and encouraging community spirit

Leigh Neighbours produced *Our Arts Neighbourhood*. Children and other members of the local community took part in more than 300 hours of creative workshops, including urban graffiti art, digital photography and textile sculpture. Susan Gredecki, joint chair of Leigh Neighbours said that the project summed up 'what Leigh Neighbours is all about: people coming together, sharing experiences, celebrating local community spirit'. See <https://youtu.be/YxEez1ph7pc>. The project was a partnership with **Arts Council England**.

Asserting a positive identity for their area and expressing their pride in it.

To celebrate their local area and its creativity and culture **West End Million** in Morecambe presented its second West End Weekend festival this year in partnership with **More Music** (a community music and education charity), **The Exchange Creative CIC** (a creative hub that 'uses art and creativity as a means to grow community well being, aspiration and enterprise') and **Morecambe Artist's Colony** (a not-for-profit collective of artists and creatives working in Morecambe). The 2 day celebration featured street markets, local crafts and an art trail, a community sculpture, street performers presenting story telling, theatre and dance, a fun palace and community music stage.

Goldthorpe in Barnsley commissioned a local artist who worked with local schools to mobilise over 100 people of all ages to design and paint a mural in a local underpass capturing, amongst other things, their mining heritage. This was followed up over the summer with an arts festival showcasing local talent which is set to become an annual event. **Winterton** in North Lincolnshire also commissioned a large scale mural in their town centre involving residents in the design. It has commissioned two large scale sculptures; 'Sycamore Leaf' and Wallace Sargent (Wallace Sargent was an astronomer brought up in Winterton).

Providing activities for community members who might otherwise lack access

Devonshire West in Eastbourne provided a small grant to a local pottery studio to enable members of the local community to take pottery classes (Eastbourne Pottery Studio).

Celebrating key milestones or achievements

Greatfield in Hull organised "Greatfield 60" to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Estate through arts and culture. The programme received funding from the Hull 2017 Creative Communities Programme. Artists worked with residents on a variety of creative projects including TV, digital

media, dance and photography. Activities included pop-up galleries in community venues with volunteers curating exhibitions of photography, visual arts, crafts and jewellery making. One exhibit was of photography, film and sound created by residents on the themes of wildlife and another, Greatfield Brides and Grooms, comprised a collection of wedding dresses and photographs of weddings on the estate spanning six decades.

Tackling particular social or environmental issues

The Friends of Fishwick and St Matthews in Lancashire has partnered with Artful (a participatory and community arts group) to produce work particularly with older people and parents and toddler groups and to bring community members together to showcase local talent. The chair of the Big Local Martyn Rawlinson said that it funded the project because of concerns about the number of people with mental health issues in the area because it believes that 'creative outlets... really help people with mental health problems'.

See also the **Welsh House Farm** example below of a Big Local area that has partnered with arts organisations to engage young people who do not normally engage.

Supporting the development of local enterprise and the local economy

A number of Big Local areas have developed community chests or small grants schemes and these are providing small grants to arts organisations and creative enterprises. Jess Holmes has received support from **West End Million** in Morecambe for Castaway Crochet to turn her hobby, crocheting, into a business. In addition to marketing her work commercially, she will be providing workshops for the community designed to inspire them to develop their creative hobbies into income generating ventures.

Dover Big Local is supporting a one year pilot project developed by **Dover Arts Development** (DAD). DAD seeks to inspire a cultural approach to building community resilience. The pilot project called *CHALKUP21* aims to stimulate cultural tourism. It is an architectural coastal trail which aspires to raise awareness and appreciation of contemporary coastal art and architecture along the Strait of Dover. In the last 17 years, some fine examples have been built along the Strait, many of which have received prestigious industry awards. *CHALKUP21* links together 9 of these examples into a 17-mile Coastal Trail between Folkestone and Deal.

Provision of combined arts and community centres

Devonshire West in Eastbourne, is supporting **The Royal Hippodrome**, a combined community venue and a professional theatre, with a £50,000 grant which has been matched by a local trust, to renovate its façade and foyer.

Some Big Local areas are also developing partnerships with or commissioning organisations with a relevant track record and expertise to provide activities in their area. The focus for the CGF Inquiry is arts organisations in receipt of some public funds (as opposed to unfunded organisations and individual artists). Some Big Local areas have developed partnerships with, or are commissioning, funded arts organisations. Here are some examples:

Heston West in Hounslow has worked with **Bounce Theatre** on a number of projects. Bounce offers creative clubs, theatre based projects and research based residencies. It says that 'each piece of work is co-created with participants to make creativity a realistic and sustainable part of their lives'. Bounce is delivering a creative club for children in Heston West. The club is exploring the power of kindness to celebrate and transform communities. Bounce also curated an event this Autumn celebrating the achievements of Heston West Big Local.

Newington Big Local in Ramsgate Kent has developed a significant programme of work with **People United**. People United are a CGF Inquiry case study organisation.

Newington Big Local asked **People United** to develop a large scale participatory arts project in their area. The two year project, *The Best of Us*, used film, photography, dance, visual art, sound, song and urban art to explore the best characteristics and strengths of local people and shared their capacity for kindness and creativity. It gathered stories of 'bravery, citizenship, hope, zest and persistence'. See: <http://peopleunited.org.uk/2017/06/the-best-of-us-film/>

The project has resulted in a large number of local residents engaging in or developing arts activities. These include an intergenerational singing group called Sing Your Heart Out and the Big History project where residents researched and recorded Newington histories and honoured local unsung heroes with four permanent plaques.

With the support of People United and working with an artist in residence, Nova Marshall, a group of residents, of all ages, have become Creative Champions for the area. They make work, create exhibitions and events and programme an annual arts festival called *Best Fest*. Nova Marshall has received Arts Council England funding to develop her work in the area. With her support the Creative Champions continue to meet and to create work. She has also helped Newington Big Local to start a youth club curated by young people.

St Matthews in Leicester has partnered with **Phoenix Arts** the local art house cinema and digital media hub. Phoenix shows films in a sports hall and in sheltered housing on the estate. It is running a monthly digital workshop in the community hub for children and young people. It also provides cheap cinema tickets to families from the estate. Also, a new art gallery called **studionAme** has just opened in the area. It is running community workshops and a more significant partnership with St Matthews is being discussed.

Welsh House Farm is one of five areas in Birmingham and the Black Country which have been chosen to take part in **Birmingham Repertory Theatre's *Furnace Project***. Furnace is The REP's pioneering engagement programme. It gives local communities the opportunity to learn about making theatre and to create something new that celebrates their area. A theatre maker specially commissioned by The REP will spend time in the community and will create a brand new piece of theatre with, for and about Welsh House Farm. In addition, The REP will be offering opportunities for local people to see shows and enjoy other activities such as backstage tours.

As part of its *Energise Festival* this summer Welsh House Farm partnered with arts organisations to engage children and young people who do not normally participate in organised activities.

Streetstra helped under 25s to develop their skills in performance or dance; this work culminated in an outdoor community performance. **Kurlys Poetry** helped children to develop literacy skills through hip hop poetry. **On the Edge** provided music and dance workshops for under 25s. **Play in a Day** supported children and young people to build a concept, write a script and practice the group's design.

The area has also developed a project called *Milk and Honey* which aspires to be a long-term project based on story telling involving hundreds of community members. It uses shared memories to link people across different generations and communities. It focuses on food, cooking and culture. The plan is to produce a book of stories about the lives of people living in the area with food as the linking theme, its preparation, its sharing, its role in families and its role in bringing people together.

Suggestions for Joint Work

This section considers how Local Trust and CGF might work together.

1. We would be interested in working with CGF to explore the role of the arts and creativity in Big Local areas and its contribution to making them even better places to live.

2. We would also like to work with CGF to:

- develop a pilot providing funding and support to 5-10 Big Local areas commissioning or otherwise working with arts organisations and artists in their communities;
- connect Big Local areas with a strong interest in the arts and creativity to arts organisations with a strong commitment to their civic role. We understand that CGF is convening and hopes to develop, or support the development of, a network of such organisations

We would like to work up a pilot partnership offer for Big Local areas providing them with access to support from a specialist partner on funding and commissioning arts organisations and artists.

Local Trust develops partnerships with organisations with specialist knowledge and skills who provide support to Big Local areas. We will shortly announce pilot partnerships with a range of new providers. Partner organisations are commissioned by the areas and paid by them to provide

support. In some instances Local Trust meets a proportion of the cost of this support. Local Trust will match fund the support provided on working with arts organisations and artists, making it an attractive option for Big Local areas.

We hope that CGF might work with us on this initiative, part funding the development and delivery of partnerships between arts organisations and Big Local areas. The objective would be to provide high quality arts and creative activity in areas that have traditionally had scant access to them.

Because Big Local areas will be required to invest in the support provided, they will have both a commitment to artistic and creative work and a belief in its value to their local community. Also, as a result of Big Local funding most areas now have some community infrastructure and a basis for community organising on which such activity can build.

3. We would like to develop guidance on community led commissioning for Big Local areas based on the learning from the support offered on working with arts organisations and artists. Our hope is that this guidance would have relevance beyond Big Local and would be used more widely.