

Creative People and Places

Digital Engagement & Opportunities

Research Insights & Recommendations

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 the audience agency

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Innovation for creative and cultural enterprises

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Executive Summary

Mental

health

Neon signs on Blyth beach, representing thoughts on wellbeing, created by young people as part of *Colour to the Grey*, commissioned by Museums Northumberland through the bait programme.

Photo: Jason Thompson

Context

Creative People and Places (CPP) is an action research project which aims to support more of the public to help shape local cultural provision, particularly in areas where there are fewer opportunities to get involved in the arts. Collaborations between arts and non-arts organisations, including voluntary groups, community organisations, museums and libraries, are helping to develop new and different approaches to how cultural programmes are created.

There are currently 21 CPP projects working across England, each with their own unique approach. Collectively they, alongside their communities, are experimenting, exploring and learning what conditions and approaches work most effectively to democratise arts and culture. In doing so they are increasing attendance and participation in excellent art and culture.

As noted by the Culture is Digital report¹, published in 2018, digital tools and technologies provide a potential route to help CPPs to reach a broader audience, develop engaging activities and empower communities. This research was commissioned to identify how CPPs are currently using digital tools and technologies and where the opportunities lie to further develop their approach.

CPPs are at the forefront of a model and practice that is referred to as 'cultural democracy' - which represents the overlap between the cultural sector and wider trends in participatory democracy and citizen-centred co-design of public and other services. Findings on CPPs' digital practice and the further opportunities, may well be applicable to the wider arts and cultural sector in how they shift to being more driven by their communities.

The insights in this report are based on primary research with all CPPs plus some of their beneficiaries and collaborators. It also draws on useful examples of best practice in relation to digital engagement and development from the cultural sector outside CPPs and the wider third sector.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital>

Key Findings

Practical Success & Confidence

When it comes to using digital for practical reasons, such as marketing or evaluation, CPPs are generally implementing good practice and using digital tools and platforms to effectively reach and engage audiences and to help them evaluate the impact of their work. In relation to social media all the CPPs are active on Facebook and Twitter and the majority also have Instagram and YouTube accounts. All except one CPP indicate that they distribute an email newsletter.

There is a spectrum of confidence levels across each area of digital practice, with the highest levels of confidence reported in digital communications and the lowest in revenue generation and fundraising. Confidence levels around the use of digital as part of the artistic programme, in relation to programming, commissioning and creation, are varied, with around a quarter of CPPs reporting that they are only 'somewhat confident' in this area. Amongst those who are less confident or experienced, there was a recognition of the need to continue to develop their knowledge.

Developing Expertise

In other areas, such as the use of digital technologies within the artistic programme or participatory practice, there is an opportunity for development.

CPPs adopt a considered and thoughtful approach that is shaped or driven by the communities with which they collaborate. The benefit of this is that they rarely adopt a 'digital for digital's sake' approach (which can result in unused websites and apps, social media content that fails to resonate and one-dimensional digital experiences). And of course, there are many instances where a cultural experience does not need or benefit from the inclusion of digital technologies.

In their collaborative way of working they are unconsciously adopting a human centred design approach to the development of their programmes. However, sometimes a lack of expertise and experience in digital technologies can result in a situation where digital does not form part of discussions around (in particular) programming. This happens because communities can consider digital to be something that is 'not for me' and CPPs sometimes don't have the experience to be able to 'demystify' digital in a way that the group can see digital as being just one of a number of different mediums, for expression and play. In this scenario digital can be prematurely taken off the table.

Challenges & Barriers

The research uncovered a number of challenges and barriers that are preventing CPPs from working more effectively with digital technologies. Some of these challenges are common to many organisations in the cultural sector, for example, being extremely time pressed, trying to keep up with the fast pace of change in the world of digital and/or having little to no dedicated digital specialists within the team. In addition, CPPs cited issues such as the difficulty in finding good digital artists and digital exclusion issues amongst some of their communities.



Appetite. The Big Feast Site Dressing Workshops 2016.
Photo: Andrew Billington Photography

Mitigating Digital Exclusion

Digital exclusion can be an issue amongst the communities with which CPPs work. While digital exclusion can relate to practical financial issues, for example not having access to a computer or smartphone or not being able to afford broadband or data, digital exclusion can manifest itself in other ways. For example, one of the largest groups of non-users of the internet has been identified as being those in the 'not for me' camp. This may be due to a fear of using it or a sense that it is not relevant to their lives.

CPPs are in an excellent position to mitigate this, embedded, as they are, within their communities and therefore in a prime position to discuss issues that relate to people's day-to-day lives. If they are able to demystify digital and in doing so build confidence in those they are working with, there will be hugely positive societal outcomes as a result. Outside of CPPs there are examples of arts and cultural organisations working this way and there is much to learn about their approach.

To ensure that CPPs can continue to use digital tools and technologies in meaningful and effective ways, and to help them grow and develop their practice, requires a number of practical actions. Digital specialists become so by virtue of time spent immersed in the world of digital, enabling them to hone their approach. CPPs need more support to understand both the possibilities with digital technologists and the different ways of framing those possibilities with their communities. There needs to be more opportunities for exposure, to high quality digital participation, co-creation and engagement experiences and a proactive drive to facilitate connections between CPPs and creative technologists.

Summary

It is clear that CPPs are using various digital tools and technologies in effective ways, to help them reach and engage new and existing audiences. Platforms such as social networks help them to communicate and promote their programmes, digital tools are used in other practical ways, such as for evaluation and many of them have commissioned artistic work that involves a digital element.

However, their collaborative way of working with their communities coupled with a lack of experience in creating participatory digital experiences, can mean that often, digital is not regarded as being appropriate and while this will certainly be the case in many scenarios and with certain communities, there is also an opportunity to reconsider and review the ways in which digital experiences could help to expand the breadth of the programmes and in doing so, build digital confidence within their communities.



Dreaming Tree. Participant from Transported's aerial dance programme.
Photo: Electric Egg

Context & Methodology



Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope in the disused Brierfield Mill.
A collaboration between Suzanne Lacy and arts collective In Situ,
commissioned by Super Slow Way. Photo: Chris Payne

Background

Creative People and Places (CPP) is an Arts Council England funded action research programme that focuses on areas of the country where involvement in arts and culture is significantly below the national average. The vision for CPP is to support the public in shaping local arts and cultural provision and in doing so, increase attendance and participation in excellent art and culture. The programme was established in 2012 and there are currently 21 independent CPP projects operating across England. Evidence has indicated that the programme to date has been effective² in achieving its aims³.

CPP consortia include a wide range of partners working collaboratively to develop new and different approaches to developing cultural programmes, these include local community groups, arts organisations, libraries, the voluntary sector, housing associations, amateur groups and many others.

In March 2018 the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) published a report titled Culture is Digital⁴, this report highlights the opportunities afforded by new technologies, including how they can help cultural organisations to reach and engage audiences. Within this report the CPP programme is highlighted as an example of best practice for its approach

to widening cultural participation and digital tools and technologies are cited as a potential method for further increasing engagement. There is a recommendation that, “in order to further broaden cultural engagement and empower communities to share their voices, views and creative content digitally, Arts Council England will ensure that its Creative People & Places programme makes use of digital communications and platforms and that the analysis and learning from the projects are widely shared.”

This research and consultancy project was commissioned by Arts Council England to help them understand the ways in which CPPs are currently using digital tools and technologies; for communications, evaluation and collaboration purposes, to reach and engage more people and as part of the creative and artistic programme. In addition to identifying how CPPs are currently using digital technologies, the research also aims to identify any digital challenges faced by CPPs and the opportunities to use digital technologies to further engage and empower communities. This report presents the results of the research and includes a set of recommendations, relevant to both CPPs and the wider cultural sector, about how to build upon current practice to make the most effective use of the available technologies.

2 <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/year-3-ecorys-report-impact-outcomes-and-future-end-year-3>

3 <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/audience-profiling-and-mapping-2014-2016>

4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital>

Research Questions:

- In what ways are CPPs using digital technologies?
- Does this enable greater and/or wider reach for the CPP programmes?
- Are there additional opportunities?
- What are the barriers and challenges?
- What conditions need to exist to help CPPs maximise the use of digital technologies?

A note on terminology

In our current society, the word 'digital' is used in many different contexts. Digital has become ubiquitous in our everyday lives, impacting how we work, shop and complete tasks, influencing our home environment and our leisure experiences. Digital technologies are something we *have*, *use* and *experience*, they can help us to be more efficient, to reach and talk to people outside our physical world and they can provide entertainment and enrichment. Digital sometimes operates in the background and we give it little conscious thought (like electricity) and at other times it is more foregrounded. There are many articles that aim to articulate the various different ways in which digital is used and the impact on organisations but this one, <http://tiny.cc/digitalnotes> by Cassie Robinson, Head of Digital Grant Making at The National Lottery Community Fund, is recommended as an excellent jargon free summary.

For the purposes of this report we use the word 'digital' interchangeably to mean: the platforms and channels that CPPs use to communicate, for example, websites, social media or email marketing, the digital tools that support practical tasks, for example collaboration via an app or evaluation using an analytics tool and technologies that are used for creative purposes, for example creating content like digital films, facilitating interactive artwork or encouraging participation through games or other platforms.

Methodology

There were a number of elements to this research project as follows:

- Desk research into the public facing digital communications channels being used by CPPs.
- A workshop held in early March 2019 at a CPP Peer Learning event (attended by representatives from 19 of the 21 CPPs).
- A survey completed by all CPPs to help understand their current use of digital technologies, experiences to date, challenges, community response to digital and future plans.
- Structured one-to-one follow up interviews with a mix of CPPs, collaborators, beneficiaries and artists, lasting between half an hour and 1 hour. Programmes were initially selected based on both their survey responses and their digital strategies, with the aim of speaking to programmes who appeared to demonstrate a range of experience in using digital tools and platforms across both marketing and communications and digital programming. Staff members spoken to were for the most part programme Directors, however we also spoke to both creative and marketing managers.
- Wider consultation with related experts, for example, in the field of digital participation, social tech for good and the use of technology in the arts.

Acknowledgements

In producing this report we have spoken to and consulted with a wide variety of individuals and experts. We would like to thank the representatives of the CPPs and all the partners and collaborators, for being generous with their time and input, their thoughtful and considered responses have provided the foundational insights on which this report has been built.

In addition, we consulted with experts in related areas, for example those undertaking sector leading work, using digital technologies to broaden and increase audience reach, for participation and co-creation. We also spoke to individuals working within the tech for good sector, where organisations aim to use technology to solve a social problem and/or contribute to other positive societal outcomes such as improving the health and wellbeing of communities. A full list is provided in the appendices.

We wanted to understand how these organisations approached digital challenges, what best practice looks like and the opportunities for the arts and culture sector to develop its use of technology in meaningful ways. Again, we would like to thank them for their considered and insightful contributions.

The CPP Approach



Voalá Station by Voalá at Central Forest Park.
Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent. Photo: Clara Lou Photography

Creative People & Places has people at its heart. The programme has the explicit aim of enabling people in areas of low cultural engagement and infrastructure to take the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences in the places where they live.

As such, it offers a new model for the co-creation of a more democratic, locally-determined culture. As the growing body of CPP resources shows, doing things "with not for" their community sits at the core of the approach, though manifest in different ways across the 21 Places.

Creative People & Places is also an action research programme, in which people and Places are learning as they go, in an ongoing process of creative experimentation to find out what excites, inspires and delivers. The principle of "failing better" sits comfortably and Places are accustomed to developing their work through a process of iteration and adaptation, playing with prototypes involving a wide range of people in creative and authentic ways.

In short, CPPs have become skilled, sure-footed innovators, following an innate instinct for user-centred design. It is an interesting paradox then that, despite these synergies, digital platforms, channels, content and art feature relatively little in their work, despite the proven potential of tech to enable more democratic forms of involvement and collaboration. In our research, we aim to understand not just why that should be the case, but to suggest how CPPs might make the most of what could be a natural affinity.



Super Slow Way. Dawinder Bansal's *The Making of a South Asian Wedding for Art in Manufacturing* at the National Festival of Making 2018. Photo: Robin Zahler

An emerging community of practice and purpose

Over the past 5 years, a confident, skilled and distinctive new community of practice with co-creation at its heart has emerged across the network. CPPs have developed their own practice through trial and error, building on a strong tradition of community arts and responding to particularities of place and people. What has emerged through a kind of convergent evolution - and excellent networked learning opportunities - are a set of working practices documented in resources like the *Shared Decision-Making Toolkit* and *Mapping and Analysis of Engagement Approaches, Faster But Slower – Slower But Faster*.⁵ They cover a wide range of hallmark CPP techniques - from facilitation methods, curatorial panels, ambassadors, governance models, collaborative decision-making techniques, creative inspiration workshops, community-specific programming etc, backed by high ethical standards and a commitment to personal relationships. Currently, digital has a very minor role to play here.

CPPs do not slavishly follow a recipe but draw flexibly and pragmatically on a broad range of approaches to achieve an even broader range of outcomes. In fact, the ultimate impact each project aims to have on its community varies greatly by need and mission. Led by their communities, some CPPs focus on widening engagement for generic reasons of social justice and others on particular social impacts as valued by that specific community.

The use of story-of-change style logic models is well embedded and choice of approach - programme, communication, form of shared decision-making - are all shaped and evolved accordingly. Interestingly, the push for digital democracy is one of the few forms of social justice that CPPs have not found creative ways to address.



Made in Corby Field Day festival.
Photo: Adam Balcomb

5 <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning>

A Spectrum of Engagement modes

As The Audience Agency's evaluation and development work with many CPPs suggests, CPP practitioners also work across a number of different engagement *modes* over time to achieve multiple outcomes and serve complex communities in a multi-layered way. We have developed a model to explain this spectrum of modes in response to discussions with practitioners.

The "spectrum of engagement" sees a blended spectrum of five broad categories in which the balance of power and agency shifts between CPPs as provider-organisers and active members of the community.

At one end, the engagement mode is a straight invitation to attend or participate (1. Invite), moving to working on a consultative basis within a community (2. Consult). The next stage sees a shift toward active involvement (3. Co-opt) as people are co-opted as volunteers, curators or ambassadors, while at 4 (Co-design/create), people are encouraged to share responsibility, through creative or management collaboration. The ultimate 5th mode ("Follow") hand over power and the engagement role is to support members of the community to assume full leadership, setting the direction and allocating resources. The idea of a spectrum takes us away from hierarchical models – like the well-known ladder of community engagement – which suggest that only the higher echelons of engagement are legitimate or valued.

Most Places have taken a pragmatic route, building up across these stages over time, taking their communities with them. Some practitioners though are clear that the value of CPP lies in being able to manage a programme which crosses back and forth across the modes, designing different routes for groups and individuals with different needs and aspirations.

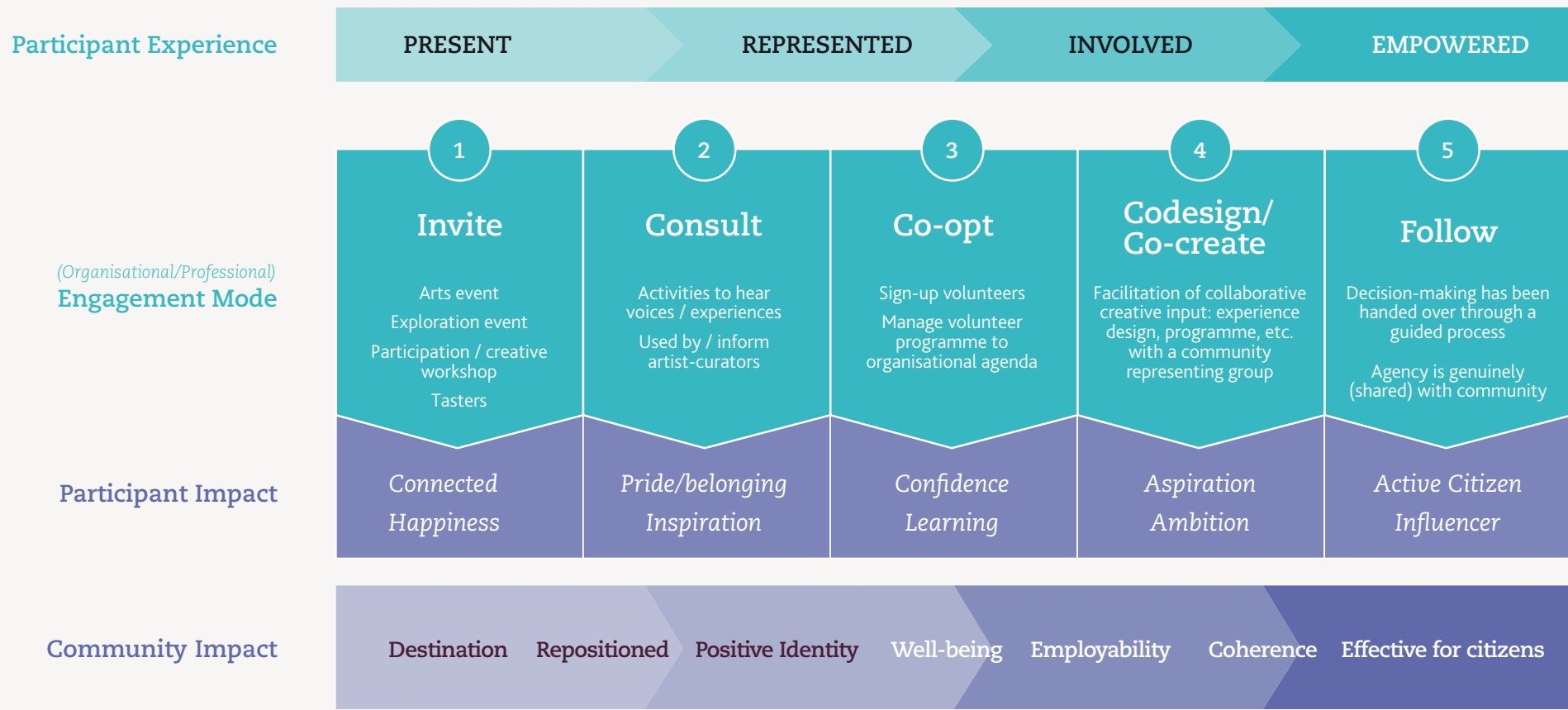
The point of the spectrum in the context of this report is that digital technologies have something to offer in each engagement mode. One way we have thought about our observations and recommendations is to link them to these modes.



Right Up Our Street. DN Festival does Space 2018.

Photo: James Mulkeen

Spectrum of Engagement



Agile process, analogue aesthetics and activities

A number of commentators have noted that the distinctively adaptive, user-centred CPP approach – especially at 2,3 and 4 on the spectrum - has striking parallels with the agile planning and human-centred design processes which have emerged from - and been powered by - the digital revolution. *In other words, CPPs are innately geared towards the kind of innovation and experimentation which digital can enhance.*

There are many memorable examples of great tech-informed ideas and activities among the CPP community and it would be quite wrong to suggest that practitioners are digitally illiterate. Quite rightly, however, CPP practitioners put great store on the personal, on keeping it simple and straight forward – on conversation over cups of tea, on the home-crafted, on doing things which have beauty and meaning without needing a lot a prior knowledge, skill, resource, jargon, preparation etc. Like these hurdles, tech can act as a major barrier. CPP has developed a philosophy in which tech does not sit quite right:

Individual relationships are at the heart of engaging new audiences, and this relationship building is happening gradually, face to face, and in real life rather than digitally.⁶

This is partly in response to legitimate concerns about digital exclusion, but we ask if this is also due to a relatively narrow view of what tech can do, and a perception that digital is inherently at odds with the values and aesthetics of the CPP approach.

In fact, we would argue that CPPs are more “digital ready” than many other arts organisations because of their innately agile and learning-based approach.

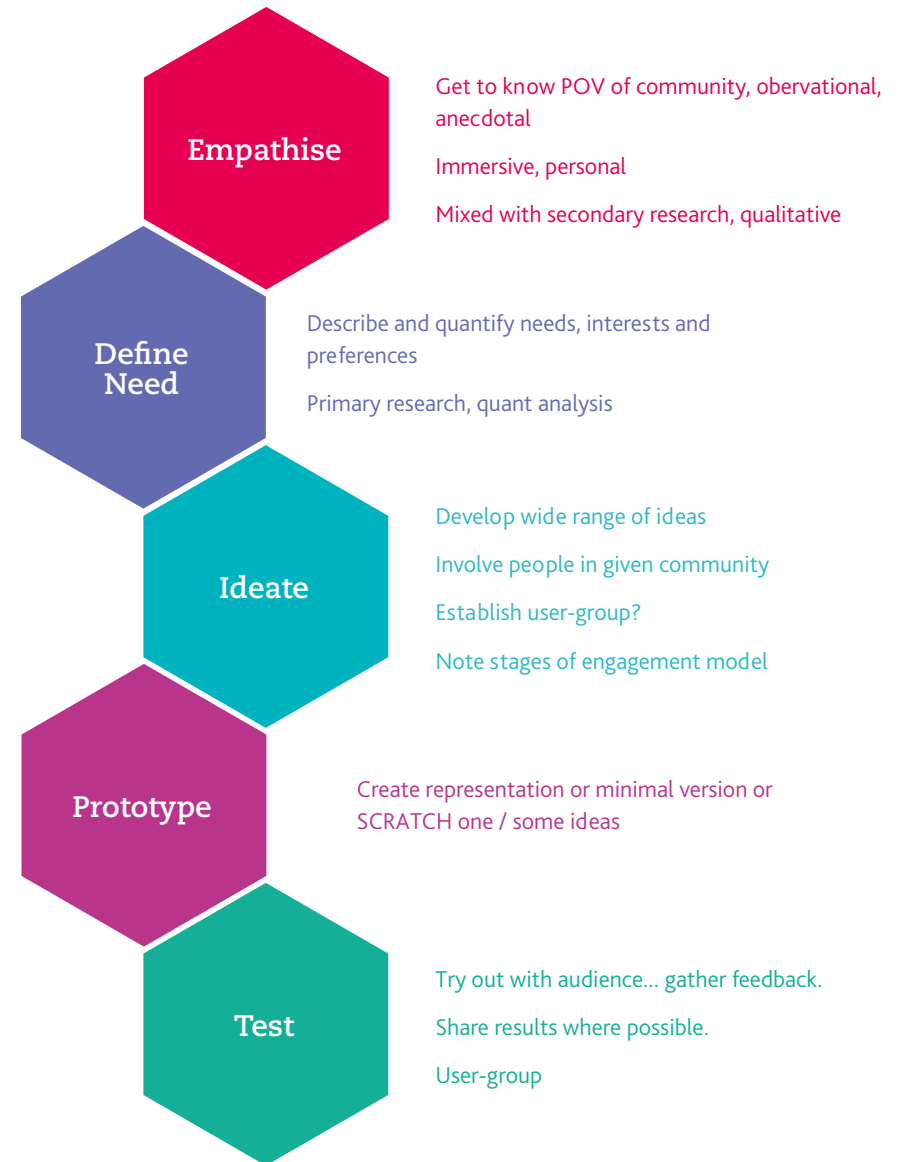


Museums Northumberland bait programme. Participants from the Open Door project in Cramlington working with artist Eva Mileusnic. Photo: Jason Thompson

Developing Human-Centred Design

There is a growing interest in Human Centred Design⁷ (Design Thinking or Social Design) across the cultural sector – with organisations like the Happy Museum, V&A and BAC– explicitly embracing the process as a way of making “with not for” a reality. CPPs have been following this process more or less consciously since the beginning of the programme. Whether or not they explicitly follow the stages of this design model (diagram to the right adapted to an arts experience design context by TAA from the IDEO model⁸) many CPPs are practising it. Note, for example, their heavy investment in the getting-to-know empathy stage, while the practice of generating ideas with lots of people shows practitioners as instinctive “ideators”. CPPs have used a huge variety of prototypes even if they haven’t called them that (tasters, mock-ups, go-see experiences, scratch performances) to collect feedback and test out possibilities.

This process is important in the context of this report, not just because it creates the right kind of culture in which ideas for digital can flourish, but because many of the stages can be greatly enhanced, accelerated and facilitated by use of tech. All cultural organisations interested in building their own resilience, or just in developing audiences, need to learn the habit of human centred design, and CPP could be leading the way. The appropriate integration of tech into their process could strengthen the process and should enhance their leadership.



7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human-centered_design

8 <http://www.designkit.org/human-centered-design>

Working outside the bubble

Another key aspect to many CPPs' work has been to work with non-arts partners, often becoming the glue for local collaboration. Working outside the usual suspect arts bubble has mostly brought advantages, helping to build bridges⁹ and shift perceptions, stimulate new ways of working, and has given a significant boost to capacity-building and knowledge exchange. But this is not the case with digital and tech partners have not featured in any CPP partnerships. The fact that tech start-ups cleave to well-off metropolitan centres with top universities has worked against the hyper-local model which so many other benefits.

In fact, CPPs may be further digitally disadvantaged due to operating structures in which community organisations take the lead, leaving CPPs reliant on the tech set-up of a digitally impoverished lead partner, for example, in relation to CRM systems, email provision and operational software. Some creative adaptation of the CPP partnership model may need to take place.

Places of Digital Exclusion

As identified in the Government's 2014 Digital Inclusion Strategy¹⁰, *"Digital exclusion affects some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society"* including those in social housing, those on lower wages or the unemployed, those with disabilities and older people. In its 2019 report, Exploring the UK's Digital Divide¹¹, the Office for National Statistics states, *"In an increasingly digital age, those who are not engaging effectively with the digital world are at risk of being left behind... The number of adults who have either never used the internet or have not used it in the last three months, described as "internet non-users", has been declining over recent years. Since 2011, this number has almost halved, but in 2018 there were still 5.3 million adults in the UK, or 10.0% of the adult UK population, in this situation."*

Many of the CPPs operate in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and accordingly, often some of the CPP communities experience a level of digital exclusion. For example, using the 2017 Get Digital heatmap¹², produced by the Tech Partnership working with Lloyds Banking Group, the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the Local Government Association, it can be seen that South Holland in Lincolnshire, where CPP Transported operates, has a high likelihood of digital exclusion.

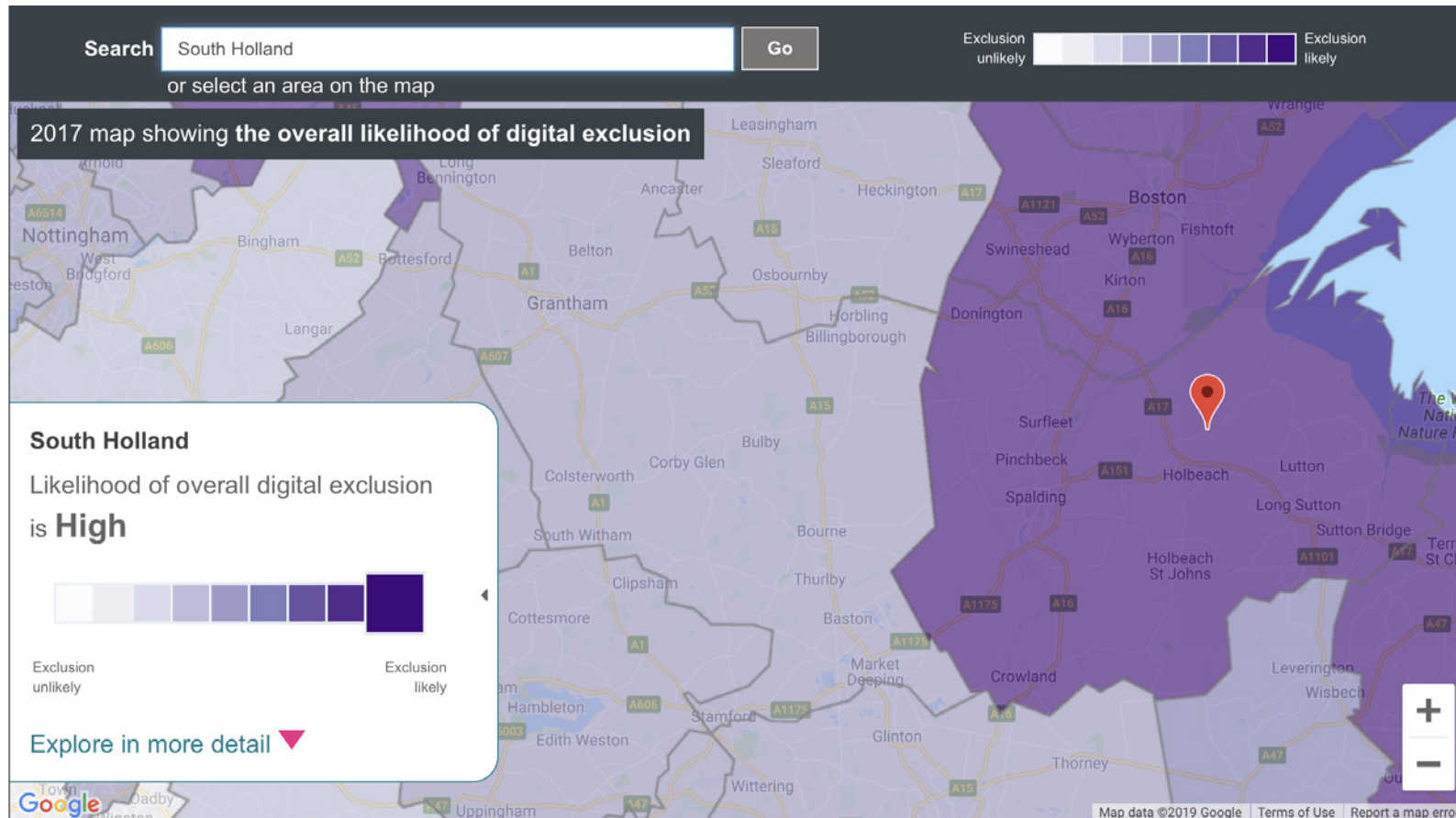
9 <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/building-partnerships-beyond-arts-three-case-studies>

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy>

11 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

12 <http://heatmap.thetechpartnership.com/>

When working with their communities, many CPPs are rightly mindful of digital exclusion issues and sometimes this governs the decisions they make in relation to the use of technology. However, as our research and further consultation indicates there are ways in which CPPs can potentially help to reduce *some* of the issues associated with digital exclusion.





How CPPs Use Digital Platforms, Tools & Technologies

Creative Black Country. 100 Masters
Photo: Dee Patel

Introduction

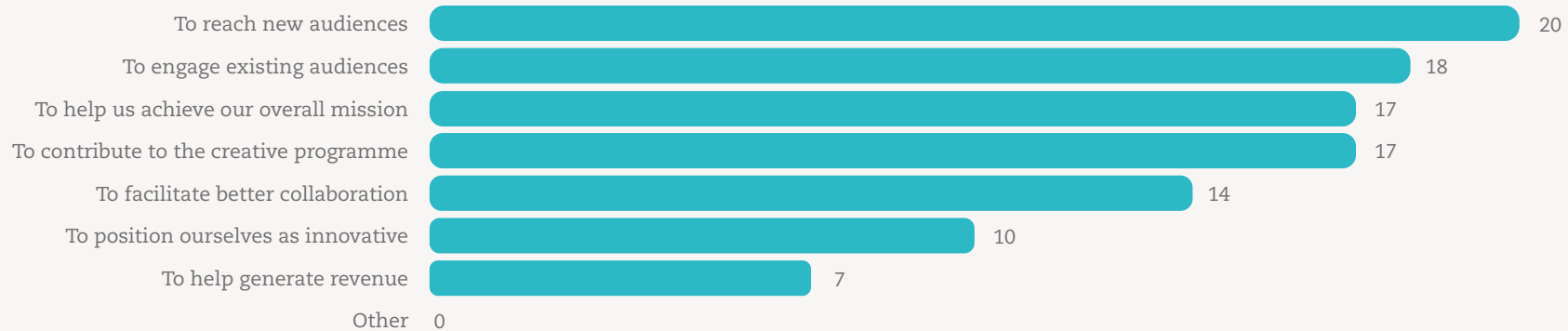
CPPs approach the strategic direction and day-to-day management of digital in different ways, depending on both the function, i.e. whether communications or artistic but also depending on the way in which the CPP is structured. Some CPPs view digital as being embedded across their team:

“Digital is a cross cutting theme across programming and marketing and communications, so it is embedded in the team and our thinking.”

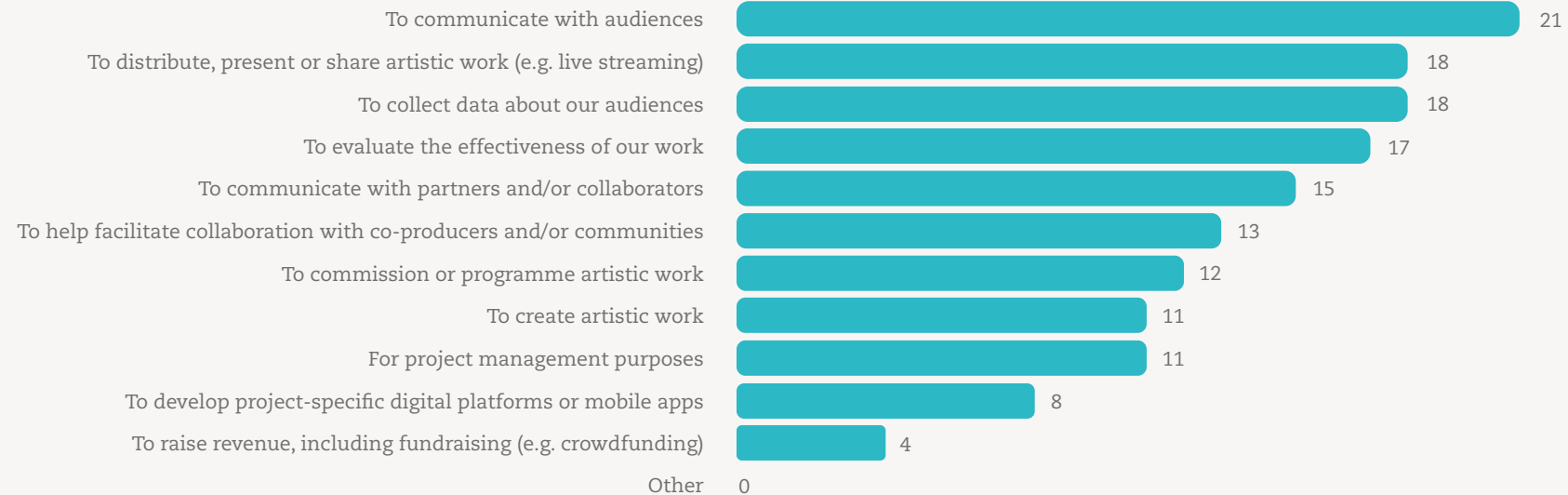
“Overall, the use of digital mediums to make work and the use of digital platforms to engage audiences is tailored to each project and therefore sits within everyone’s roles.”

The survey results indicate that CPPs consider digital technologies to contribute value in a number of areas, including to help them reach new and existing audiences, contribute to the creative programme, facilitate better collaboration and help achieve the overall mission.

What do you see as being the value of digital technologies, within the context of CPP?



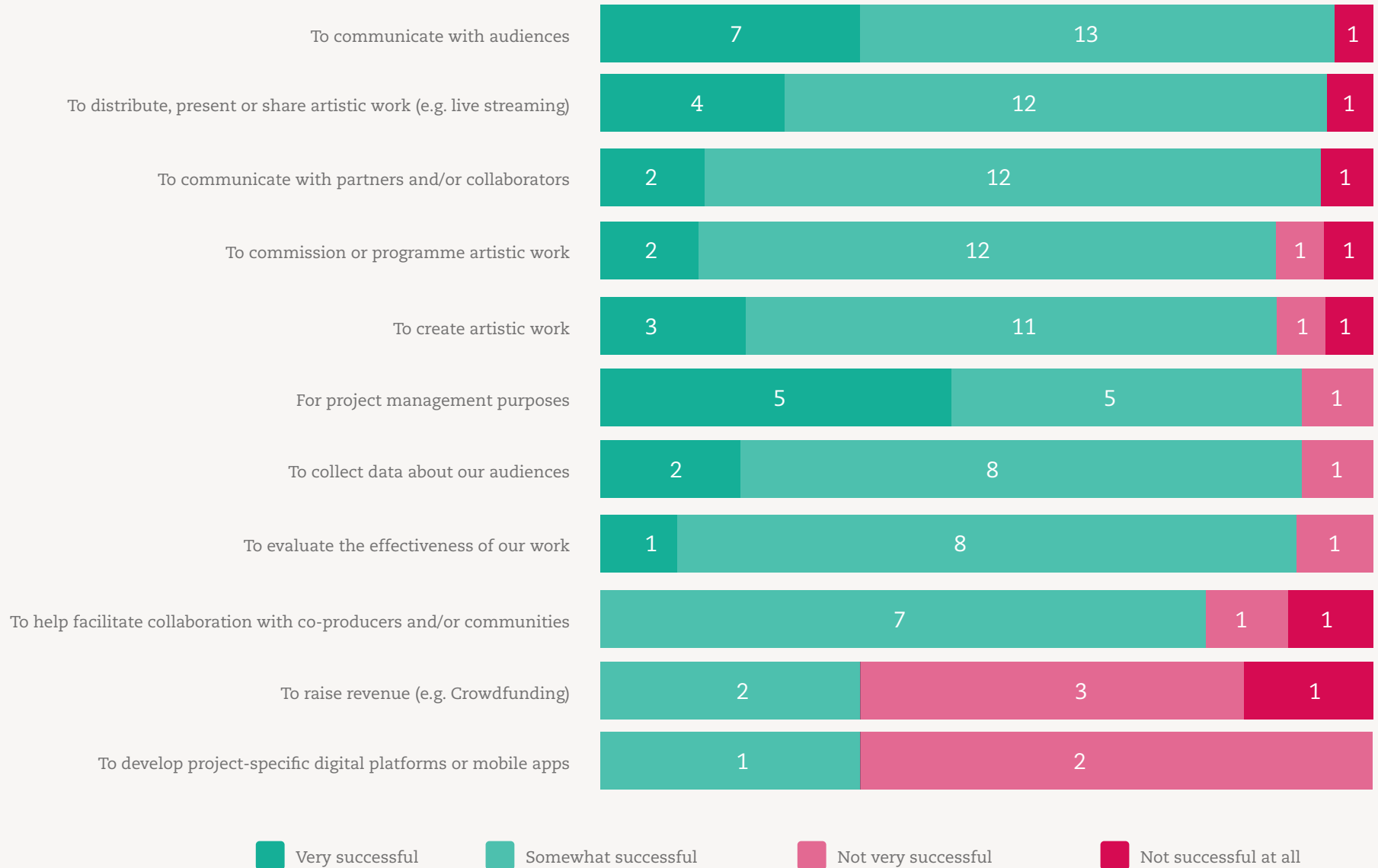
In which of the following ways does your CPP project use digital tools and technologies?



Tactically they use digital tools and platforms in a variety of ways, including to communicate with audiences, distribute or present artistic work, collect data and evaluate effectiveness. The area that has been explored the least is revenue generation, including approaches such as crowdfunding.

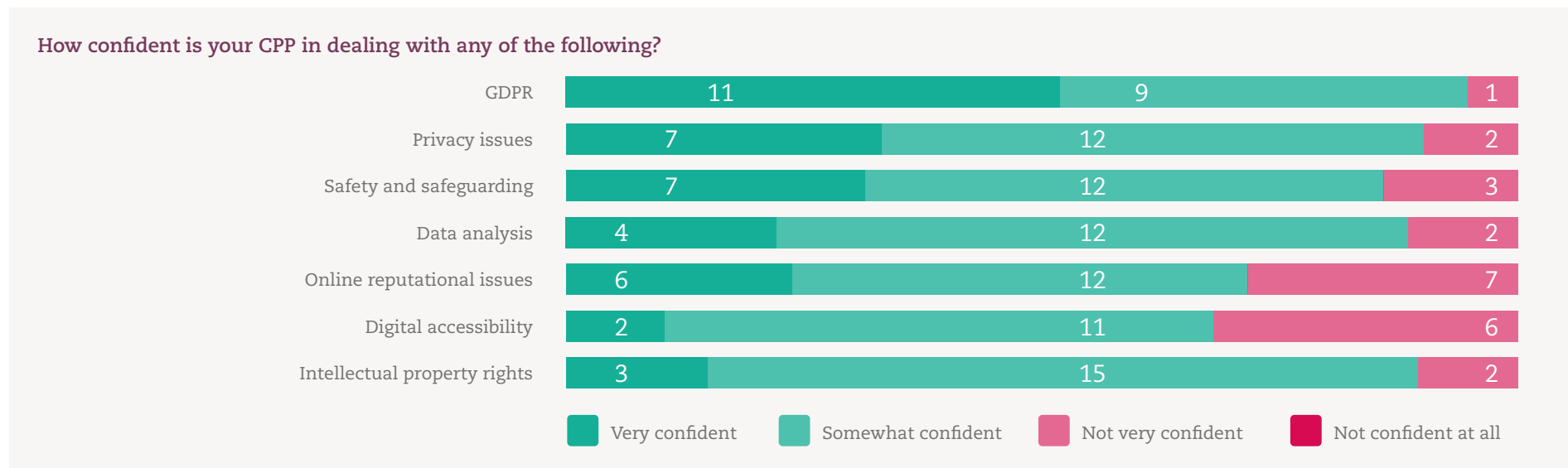
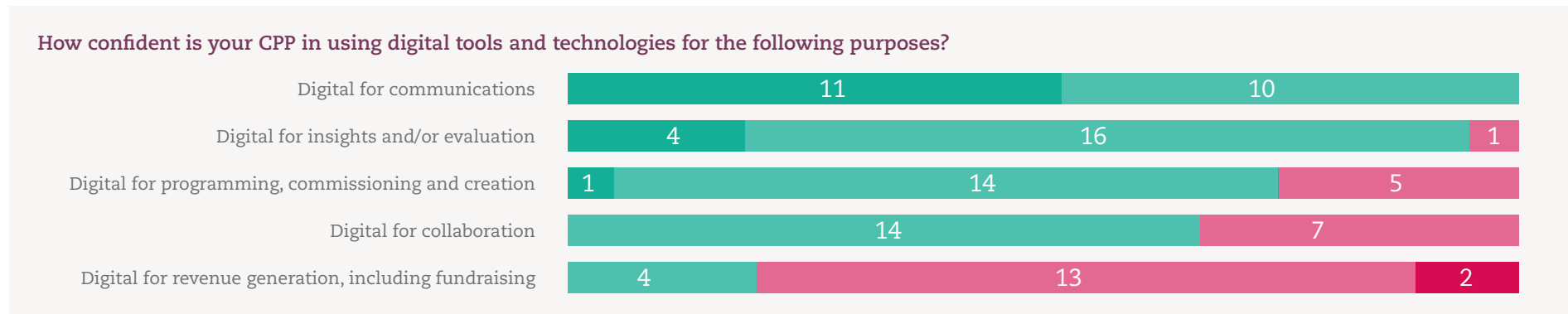
When asked about how successful they perceived their digital activity to have been, in the areas in which they have been active, the majority report being 'Very' or 'Somewhat' successful. The areas that have been least explored, for example revenue generation, are also the areas in which respondents reported the least success.

How successful do you think your digital activity has been?



The levels of reported confidence (in the use of digital technologies) varies dependent upon the purpose, with the highest levels of confidence in the use of digital technologies for communications and the lowest in revenue generation.

The survey also asked CPPs about their level of confidence in some specific practical areas, such as GDPR, intellectual property and web accessibility. The results indicate that there are some areas, such as online reputational issues and accessibility, in which there are medium to low levels of confidence.



Communications & Marketing

Digital communications is the area where CPPs are universally active, particularly as a means to communicate with audiences. All are using social media and the vast majority have a project website and email newsletter.

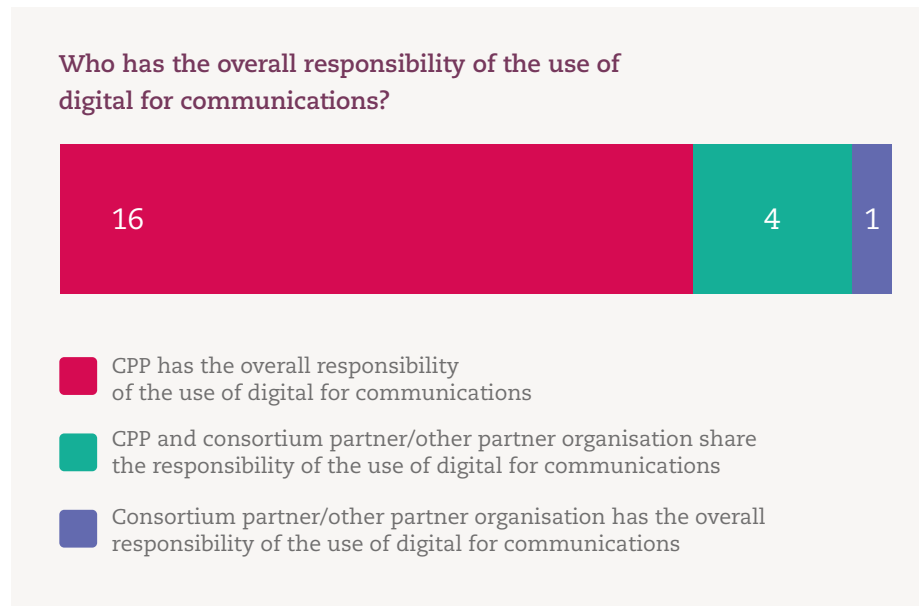
Generally digital communications is managed by the CPPs although some of the CPPs share the responsibility with their partner organisations. One CPP reports that the partner organisation has overall responsibility for digital communications.

CPPs report high confident levels with digital communications, with all CPPs indicating that they feel 'Very' or 'Somewhat' confident in the use of digital tools for communication.

“Digital tools have been central to our marketing from the beginning of CPP, particularly to reach the non-arts engagers who are our target e.g. Facebook Families. Although we still put budget into print and outdoor advertising, we are still increasingly allocating budget to paid Facebook campaigns and our audience data shows this as still the best way of reaching people. We have also increased our marketing through Instagram to reach younger audiences too.”

{We target} “Existing participants and audiences via CRM data. {And use} Targeted Facebook advertising.”

“Facebook really has been very effective at connecting with particular groups. We work with a lot of disability groups. Often, we do the outreach face to face but then we link up as well on Facebook and that’s a way for them to share it more widely than we can ever do. Sometimes it is about reaching out to people on Facebook who we’ve not met before and that can be effective too, but not as effective as when we have that face to face contact.”



The biggest reported challenges to using digital tools for communications is a lack of time, followed by the skills and knowledge to use them effectively and digital inclusion issues.

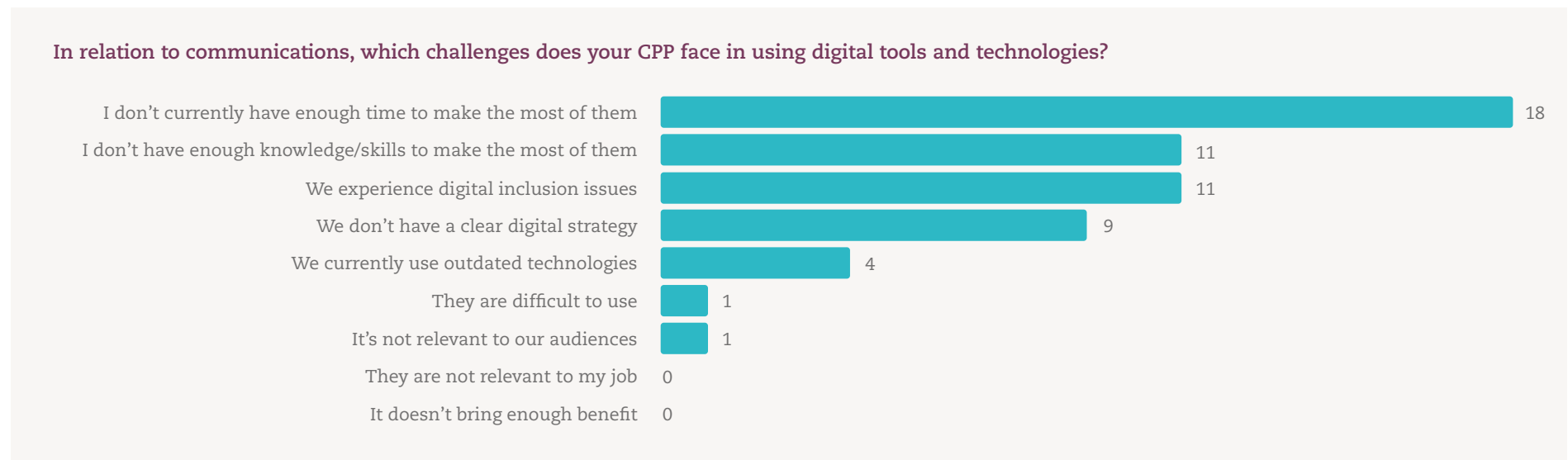
“We have a really great team with relevant skills and experience, so I feel totally confident in our abilities, the time on the other hand is more tricky to manage. We have to prioritise.”

There was a small trend across programmes that staffing had been a problem in ensuring the opportunities offered by social media had been exploited. Several of the programmes were under Directors who had been in post less than a year, while one programme had dwindled down to one staff member for several months in 2018. This had meant that some directors felt they were inheriting programmes in which development was required across the board, as well as an upskilling of staff or an influx of new staff with the

appropriate levels of knowledge in this area, while others were hiring in freelance staff to build and engage audiences online.

“We’re just working on a social media strategy at the moment because it’s not an area where we have a specialist. Lots of CPPs have specialists digital marketing people - we don’t. So none of us could be said to be experts...We have access to [our host organisation], to the marketing director, who can give us support and advice. But as members of the programme team, we don’t have a specialist who can say ‘this is the best way to use it’ or ‘this is what we should be doing’. We’re trying to improve that a bit now. I’m not saying that we’re failing in communications but there’s always ways to improve.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly in today’s culture, social media was the focus of many comments and conversations and several social media specific themes emerged.



Social Media: Differing Approaches

During the interviews it became clear that strategies for the use of social media were often dependent upon the ways in which different programmes had decided to interact with their communities from the inception of their projects, and this in turn was informed by the nature of the area in which their CPP was situated.

At one end of the scale was a CPP based in a city who worked to build their online following from the beginning of the programme, through the consortium they were founded through and used large scale 'wow' events in the city centre to attract attention and build trust from the very beginning. They used a variety of tactics to build what is now a large online following including, cross promotion on social media with the consortium, ensuring social media accounts were visible on all types of marketing, creating Facebook event pages for all their activities, regular and frequent posts and paid marketing.

“Our previous programme manager was really on it with social media, so from the get go Facebook was always built up and built up. We were regularly appearing in people’s feeds and in all our promotion we included sign posting to our Facebook page and anything we do is set up as a Facebook event and that usually gets posted and we always ask our volunteers and partners to share it with their following.”

At the other end of the scale was a CPP based across a large rural area, without a natural centre and with lower digital engagement within the

community and less Wi-Fi coverage in the area. This programme develops small participatory activities through non-arts community organisations wherein each community group decides both the activity and the promotion that may go with it. This programme uses social media less for promotion under their programme name and has a relatively small following.

One of the other key differences to developing online audiences in these two types of situation is, as described by the CPPs, the notion of a shared identity. Those CPPs who work with rural communities spread across large areas find that each area has a distinct character, which cannot be appealed to in the same way, be that a question of what kind of platform to use or what type of content within each platform. Therefore, marketing remains bespoke to each group and in keeping with the CPP ethos, the groups are empowered to make marketing decisions themselves.

“After [community programmers] have selected shows they’re promoted into local venues at which point they start to think about the marketing strategy for that event- it’s multi-channel but by far the most effective is word of mouth, we put it on Facebook, and we market to segments on our CRM system... We’ve found we have to be very bespoke with every project and every demographic group we want to involve, we have to understand all those nuances to use the right communications approach.”

“It’s a question of being responsive. We work with different elements of the community in each town. We might focus on young or old people, or immigrant communities. How we approach digital channels is determined by who we are working with.”

Social Media: Community Empowerment

There are many positives about an approach which allows communities to stretch beyond their usual use of social media, become the voice for a group and develop their digital skills. One downside however is that for at least one CPP this has led to a fragmentation of their story online. This CPP is questioning whether or not this matters:

“What’s good is that people are taking ownership over telling the story of the project, the challenge is how to connect all these projects back to {our CPP}. What we don’t want to do is control everything because the ethos of CPP is giving away power and people feeling they can do things for themselves. The risk is you get lots of social media accounts and websites...what happens to that content when the project finishes, how does that loop back in- does it need to? Has it served its purpose?”

A second challenge some CPPs have had around empowering communities to manage their social media is the level of confidence and skill community members have when they are acting as the voice for their group in a public arena. Some CPPs are looking at which areas their communities feel they need training in order to ‘realise their ambitions’ to make and share high quality content. For one CPP this could be through working with artists, and another has already stated a process of consultation so they can provide support on the right digital skills and topics.

CPPs also describe a need to upskill their communities more generally, in the everyday use of social media.

“Moving from representing themselves in their own personal space to becoming the voice of a project requires a different approach. [We have asked ourselves] would it be helpful to have artists working alongside people to make content? To have digital facilitation to help people realise their ambitions in a high quality way?”

“We’ve tested out the separate account...We’ve had mixed success because the expectation was a bit much for some of the young people...The assumption is that they do it all the time, but their digital confidence is quite low outside of their own circle [of friends]. It all takes a lot of time, the investment in personal relationships, which is underestimated a lot. People are used to representing themselves online but being the voice of something else is quite a huge responsibility.”

In addition to supporting collaborators to represent the CPP programme on social media, some CPPs have been providing training for their collaborators and ambassadors, to help build their confidence and support them in promoting *their own* artistic practices. One writer described this training as being a hugely positive experience:

“They explained each and every platform which I did not know about. They showed how to keep up with what was trending, I was like ‘whoa!’. I did not know anything about hashtags...There’s so much information I just didn’t know. Even though it was only an hour or two but in that hour or two I really walked away with masses and masses of information which gave me a turnaround on my Instagram account, Facebook account and Twitter account.”

Social Media: Word of Mouth

Word of mouth was commonly described as the most effective way of reaching people who had no or low previous arts engagement, and a number of CPPs use social media as a way of digitising this method of marketing. For some this was formalised through their volunteers, arts ambassadors or cultural champions who were requested to repost from CPP accounts to their own or to community groups they are part of (which are often closed groups), or specifically invite people through social media to a particular event. For others there was the sense of an active and interested network throughout the town that leads to the organic sharing of content due to the pride and ownership communities feel about their CPP programme activities.

“What we’ve developed over the last 5 years, we have arts ambassadors who are a range of people who engineer word of mouth marketing through people of representative groups and will come to brochure launches and take fliers to friends. They also invite their friends to our Facebook events, and a local resident posting this event into a local Facebook local organisation page- it’s an independent view. A personal invitation which we think really works. If you’re hesitant to engage in something having someone you trust recommending it to you helps. Digital works as a face to face now in some respects. Small teams in arts orgs can’t do all the social media by themselves.”

Social Media: Facebook

All CPPs are using a range of social media platforms, including Twitter and Instagram. In common with many cultural organisations, Twitter is used more as a tool for relationship building with peers, stakeholders, journalists and other organisations and Instagram is often (although not exclusively) used to reach and engage a younger audience. However it is clear that Facebook dominates and for the majority of CPPs Facebook is an important tool to reach and engage communities and audiences. Following the best practice approach of ‘fish where the fish are’ CPPs feel that potential audience members are far more likely to be on Facebook than to expect them to come to their website. Facebook events are a common way in which people find out about things to do in their area, Facebook groups can lead CPPs to specific types of audience and the advertising offers many useful targeting features.

However, there is a perception among some CPPs that as a result of recent bad publicity, people are moving away from Facebook, or programme staff members no longer trust the platform and are not happy to use it.

“There’s a growing sense of people not doing Facebook anymore. There’s a mental health backlash against social media. But other ways of communicating requires more effort and budget.”

“Facebook is problematic because, well we both know all the issues around Facebook but it’s still used by a lot of people and then you get all the Facebook groups and all that. But not everyone’s comfortable about posting, because it links to your individual profile, people are conscious about doing that...not everyone in the team is happy to be on Facebook.”

Audience Insights & Evaluation

The majority of CPPs (17) indicated that they are using digital tools to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. Of these, 14 felt that they had been 'Very' or 'Somewhat' successful in doing so. It was apparent that there are some questions around whether digital analytics and insights tools provide CPPs with enough clarity around different types of audiences and whether online, they are reaching audiences that are low arts engagers.

“We might know how many people have seen something on Facebook but understanding who they are, you’re not going to get that from your standard analytics...I suppose there’s some cross referencing that can happen where it’s an event where people are inputting their postcodes and then telling you. But it’s further time required to go into that in any depth and we’re all strapped for time and strapped for resource. There might be some things we’re all sitting on that could be very interesting if somebody had the time to look at it.”

A number of CPPs use Facebook Insights effectively to plan when to post and what content to use. And while some demonstrated understanding of how to interpret the interactions with their posts, others were less sure of this. That Facebook often changes and is secretive about the algorithms it uses for displaying posts means that even for those CPPs with a good understanding of how to interpret Facebook insights, results can be patchy.

“We use Facebook insights quite a lot so we track how posts are doing and know when our followers are online...but I think there are

other things going on underneath that we don’t quite understand. Sometimes a post does brilliantly and sometimes we get nothing at all and we’re not quite sure why. Also, we don’t have capacity to try and understand what’s going on down there.”

The fast-moving pace of change across digital channels, coupled with pressures on resource and time has led some CPPs to adopt an agile methodology when it comes to interpreting and acting upon the insights data.

“We’re looking to share content when people are most likely to engage with the content that’s available...Rather than just looking at numbers, we’re looking at engagement - so comments, shares and likes...We take an approach of ‘just try it and see’ to see if it works and then change it really fast if it doesn’t, rather than setting out long strategies where ‘we’re going to do it like this for six months or twelve months.’ We just keeping on trying new things.”

Across the CPP network there are variations in the way in which CPPs manage data collection. Around half of the CPPs are using the tech infrastructure, including any CRM system, of their lead partner organisation and half report that it has been set up specifically for the CPP.

One CPP has developed a system that collects data that is useful for reporting purposes and has shared it with both their lead organisation and with other CPPs.

Another CPP has a large database of contacts which it also makes available to other organisations in their city to help them to access people with low arts engagement.

The benefit of having specialist skills within a team is highlighted by a CPP that has benefitted significantly from employing an intern with a passion for data. As result of the intern's focus on tightening the data collection method, the CPP feels confident that they are collecting data that reflects the real volume of low and non-attenders they have reached. Data on how far and where people will travel to for their programme activities has led to an ability to target a greater number of audiences but within a smaller geographical area as well as the evidence to explain why they have changed the way in which they are working.

“We’re building up our own CRM database and we can use that hopefully intelligently to do targeted promotions when it’s relevant.”

“[Our intern] has used the formulas and changed things around a bit and he can generate reports...about first time engagers, it’s very difficult to know if they’re first time engagers to the arts or to [our programme]. They might go to the play down the road at the community centre but not see that as an arts event but as an everyday thing. We’ve amended [the way we ask the question about arts engagement] and we found our percentages have gone down

around first-time arts engagers but we feel these are the right numbers...The information he has given us has allowed us to explain why we are taking the approaches we are making now in terms of choosing which wards to work in [instead of working in all of them]. It will be more targeted about where the need is.”

Collaboration

The survey results indicate that 13 CPPs use digital tools to help facilitate collaboration with co-producers and/or communities. Generally, this was an aspect of digital that was mentioned less frequently by CPPs than other uses but general comments about communities preferring face-to-face interaction may account for at least part of the reason for this.

There are examples though of projects where digital tools have been used to facilitate collaboration between the participants. For example, Creative Consultant, Claire Newton worked with Museums Northumberland on *Colour To The Grey*¹³ - a young people's project linking live art, craft, installation, digital artforms and social media with young people's mental health and wellbeing. The group used Instagram both to showcase the project and Claire also found it the best way to communicate with the young people, via Instagram direct message. Although an app like WhatsApp may have ostensibly seemed a more efficient way to communicate with the group, Claire found that it didn't really take off as a means of collaborative

communication, Claire explained that in these circumstances it's not possible to dictate the channel and facilitators need to take a flexible approach, *"It's down to where young people prioritise spending their time"*. Some of the young people didn't have WhatsApp and didn't want to download it and have it take up space on their phone. Whereas they all had, and were happy to use, Instagram.

CPP Network Collaboration

The CPP network itself collaborates between themselves using Facebook Workplace¹⁴. This platform was set up in early 2018 following a review of internal network communications by an external consultant Helen Deverell. The Workplace platform enables the CPP network to share ideas and best practice, ask for recommendations and discuss CPP related issues. Previously the group used Basecamp but this platform was not widely adopted because it didn't offer a very satisfactory user experience or the functionality needed once the network had grown. One major benefit of using Workplace is that the interface and user experience is familiar to most people because it mirrors the Facebook interface. It also offers more sophisticated functionality and tools for the type of network wide collaboration the peer learning team want to facilitate.

However, even amongst an engaged and connected network, developing an active online group can be a challenge given the existing demand on people's time. Currently the Workplace group has been sustained by a National Communications Manager working two days a week and managing the online network has to be fitted in around many other tasks, including external communications on behalf of the network. It would be of value, within the peer learning network, to have a central community management function allocated more time. As the external consultant indicates in the report, the CPP network has a large amount of collective knowledge and they're happy to help and support each other but this needs to be continuously nurtured so that it manifests itself more actively within the online platform.

"...there is a supportive culture amongst the network. However, it isn't a consciously sharing culture. By that I mean that if someone picks up the phone for advice, the person at the other end will give it to the best of their ability based on their own experience and knowledge. But that second person wouldn't have thought to share that information with the network more widely without being prompted."

*That's the behaviour that needs to change – it won't happen overnight, but with consistent and targeted communications, community management support and an effective tool, you should start to see a change."*¹⁵

14 <https://www.facebook.com/workplace/faq>

15 Helen Deverell Communications, 2017 internal report to CPP Peer Learning team

Revenue Generation

It was very uncommon for programmes to have used digital tools for fundraising with most raising funds through more traditional bidding routes. In the survey only four CPPs indicated that they used digital tools to raise revenue. And of those two indicated in a further question that this approach had been 'Not Very Successful'. This was also the area that scored the lowest in relation to confidence, with 15 CPPs judging themselves to be 'Not Very Confident' or 'Not Confident At All'.

Only one CPP had experimented with collecting donations via their host organisation's ticketing system during past periods when they had ticketed events, they are also planning on making donating part of the campaign for their free summer event this year. They reported that donations had been healthy in the past and were built through their strong social media marketing and large online following. One CPP would try fundraising through donations online in the future but feels it is not currently a priority, and another felt crowdfunding could be achieved quite easily with the buy in of their community champions.

“We had an option in the ticketing system to also donate. When we first set it up we had a decent buy in, but that has fallen off as well as we’re not planning any ticketed events this year...We could do a donations campaign in the run up to the festival. We could do that online and pick up on that engagement where people aren’t buying tickets...but people can donate online through the website and Facebook.”

“We’ve talked about adding a donation option to Eventbrite which is, again, something I’ve done in the past. We’re sort of open to it but that but doesn’t feel like the biggest priority right now.”

“I think the key is if you’ve got those community champions and those local people really, really engaged in it, you can crowdfund with no problem whatsoever, it just needs to be the right thing at the right time...That’s what I’ve seen work.”

Issues around using digital for fundraising were lack of time and resources, the need for the appropriate project to attach it to and type of community the programme serves. A programme attached to communities spread over a large area and containing groups with differing needs felt any crowdfunding activity would need to be seen to be of benefit to all. However, one CPP also felt they wouldn't be able to raise funds this way as their lead organisation is a university. Some are considering using digital platforms this way in the future.

“Most of our fundraising goes on through bids at the moment. We have been talking about the possibility of a crowdfunder but having run one before myself in a previous job, I know how time consuming they are and so as yet we haven’t found the right project that feels like that opportunity.”

Creative & Artistic

Over the last decade digital tools and technologies have helped to shape and define new artforms and modes of audience engagement. As stated in the Culture is Digital report,

“Digital experiences are transforming how audiences engage with culture and are driving new forms of cultural participation and practice. As technology advances, so do the behaviours of audiences, especially younger audiences. We are no longer passive receivers of culture; increasingly we expect instant access to all forms of digital content, to interact and give rapid feedback. Audiences are creating, adapting, and manipulating, as well as appreciating art and culture.”

Within a creative and artistic context digital technologies have a number of roles to play (spanning the Spectrum of Engagement):

- They can be used to create something for an audience to watch, experience or engage with, for example digital films, websites, apps.
- They can be used to help increase or broaden reach, either because they help to extend the definition of arts and culture, often giving those who traditionally have not engaged with arts and culture to feel a relevancy to their lives, or because they use a technology, such as live streaming, to open access beyond the physical world.
- They can be used as part of a participatory cultural experience and in community workshop settings.

The amorphous nature of digital should be acknowledged and specifically in this context, how different purposes and elements of digital frequently overlap. For example, digital films can be produced both for audiences to watch and enjoy (the 'Invite' part of the Spectrum of Engagement) but can also help to widen access. At Watershed in Bristol, for example, digital filmmaking is a part of a highly successful programme aimed at engaging with young people of colour. This 'non-traditional' artform can often be seen as more accessible and the setting in which these films shown, less intimidating than some traditional arts settings.

And the production of digital films can potentially be part of a participatory experience.

This research has identified a number of specific issues relating to the use of digital tools and technologies with an artistic and creative context, some of these issues are complex and do not have a quick fix.

Digital: ‘Not for me?’

Across the board, CPPs expressed awareness of communities’ potentially low level of readiness to engage with digital. CPPs are at different places in their learning around how to tackle this. Given that collaborative working is a fundamental way in which CPPs approach the development of the artistic programme, issues can arise in a situation where a particular community is unfamiliar and/or has low confidence in the use of digital technologies and considers it’s ‘not for me’.

If they don’t know what is possible and whether or how it may enhance or add value to an analogue experience and without a facilitator who has specific digital skills or experience, this aspect can be taken off the table.

“We haven’t done anything really in the way of commissioning digital artworks, partly because the part of our work that’s co-produced with local communities...it’s not that we’re discounting it, it’s that when it’s driven by the local advisory then, if it’s not something that they’re not expression a great interest in then we won’t pursue it.”

Some CPPs indicated that they are still developing this element of their practice, while others are trying to ensure that digital is considered, along with all other possibilities, within the development phase.

“There are a few things we have learned: projects which start with ‘non-digital’ engagement can successfully incorporate digital elements, adding richness to the experience for both participants and audiences.”

There was also some concern that introducing a digital element may introduce an additional barrier so that audiences who are engaging with the arts perhaps for the first time, are doubly challenged to also then engage with a medium that may be unfamiliar to them. For this reason, a sense of playfulness around digital was seen as important.

“I don’t know whether digital art translates for audiences and it can be a step too far- you not only have to tackle their perceptions of art you also have to tackle their perceptions about the word digital...[I’m interested in] how you create that playfulness, make it fun. It feels quite serious, if communities could play around with digital [that would benefit them].”

Looking at examples from the wider cultural sector, this approach to demystifying digital is supported by organisations like Derby QUAD, who are leading the way in relation to digital participation. John Whall, Digital Participation Curator at Derby QUAD explains their approach as follows:

“Conversation is key {to demystifying digital}, we talk to our communities about digital, what are their fears and worries, what excites them about it? When it comes to getting communities involved, it’s important to consider about how you communicate what the project is. If we say, for example, next week we’re going to do a digital workshop, they {over 50s} probably wouldn’t turn up but if we say we’re doing a creative workshop and part of that will involve using ipads to create art, well there generally wouldn’t be a problem with that.”

Some CPPs have developed solutions to growing community confidence such as through exposure to digital over time, adding digital elements in as community groups' confidence build and a project progresses, or by mixing low and high technologies and traditional materials in the final piece and in this way presenting digital output in a way that is more familiar to people who may have low experience of digital.

“As we work in this way [experimenting with drones and VR for example] a lot more community initiatives are more comfortable in using digital technology. So, after seeing the success of [our AR project] we had an organisation in the local area apply successfully to HLF to put together and AR tour of a town...we consulted with them to help develop that aspect. It's definitely increased the appetite in the local area for using digital technology.”

“[The digital artists we work with] are keen to mix low and hi technologies and haptic technologies are involved in their work, a mixture of traditional materials and digital technologies which means it's very accessible to people that might not be so attuned with the work otherwise.”

There were examples of where working with specific communities resulted in other benefits of using digital technology, for example working with people with special needs. One CPP is planning an installation that will include vibrating gaming technology that is worn on the body offering a physical experience alongside a visual one for their local deaf community. Another CPP described how this desire to have artwork that is accessible to more people is motivating community groups to take the initiative to explore programming digital artistic output themselves.

“We've had disability groups apply to bring in organisations that use haptic technologies for people who have learning difficulties so they're able to experiment through music, lighting or touch based technology.”

And there are other examples of how experiences that involve digital technologies can be relevant to all kinds of different audiences, not only those that are traditionally expected to respond positively e.g. young people.

Immersive Computing Labs – HOME Slough

One of the volunteers working with HOME Slough as a Creative Connector, realised that his work running Immersive Computing Labs was a 'natural fit' with the CPP project. Immersive Computing Labs run VR, AR and XR workshops and training in Slough, and work four days a week in HOME Slough's high street shop location. They've provided equipment and expertise for a variety of CPP projects, ranging from collaborating with local photographers and artists to create Augmented Reality exhibitions of their work, to helping HOME Slough obtain a license for BBC Virtual Reality content - including 'Berlin Blitz' and 'Make Noise', which allow people to experience World War 2 missions or join in with the Suffragettes.



HOME Slough. Virtual Reality Taster.
Photo: David Blood Photography

When the Royal Opera House brought an operatic performance to Slough, it seemed the ideal opportunity to utilise their VR technology. Immersive Computing Labs and HOME Slough recorded the entire concert from a front row seat with a 360 degree camera. This was then loaded into VR headsets and enabled those who could not attend on the day to enjoy the performance. Immersive Computing Labs also took the VR headsets out to local care homes, which gave elderly residents who could not physically attend the performance the opportunity to experience it:

“We have a cross-selection - all age groups. Obviously it attracts young people but we’ve had senior citizens. Recently we did some workshops and we’re about to do some more for Mind Charity. So people who suffer from loneliness or minor mental health illness...We’ve also taken that out to some care homes locally. Care home residents who weren’t able to actually physically visit the venue, were able to experience it using VR headsets. The reactions have been amazing.”

(Jay, Immersive Computing Labs)

Specialist Skills

CPPs reported a challenge related to their own staff's level of confidence and skills in using technology. This related to the technical aspects of digital tools and the assurance of the quality of artistic digital output. CPPs ask themselves how they can be confident investing in hardware, or commissioning an artist when technology moves so quickly. Some felt that to be confident about this they would need to be immersed in technology on a more day to day basis through attendance at conferences and visiting digital art festivals.

“There’s a lack of confidence, a lack of knowledge, in using digital. I went to the [BBC] Space event in Leicester which was a real eye opener, just getting the practical knowledge about how you inform audiences to put on a headset, [getting advice from] people who’ve been working in the field for a long time, it was a really useful event and me experiencing the 360 films VR headsets and that inspired me and reassured me about it being a good investment. Without having that experience I don’t know if I would have been confident [around the VR technology]. If we got the VR headsets I’d need some guidance and expertise in order to use them. Or just some basic training, but it’s just knowing who those people are [who can provide the training].”

“As things are changing all the time I don’t know whether there needs to be more investment in that side.”

“The context [in a previous job] in a situation of having plenty of money, international digital artists and facilitated builds, the right equipment as well as the right budget for artists. So I see that as the biggest problem that we don’t have any of those resources and we’re very limited.”

Programmes affected by the low levels of confidence and a feeling of not having the time or resources to immerse in the digital space, would like to see a database of tried and trusted digital artists for programmes to work with.

“It’s just knowing how those artists are, I’d love to have a database of recommended artists who are doing really cool stuff.”

An alternative way of tackling the challenge of feeling confident of the digital programming output was to partner with other organisations or researchers, such as universities or artists.

“Nottingham Uni have a mixed reality lab- you come with ideas, challenges or problems and they link you up with an academic- I could put the communities problems or ideas on the table and work with people who know the technology.”

A related practical issue around the use of technology as part of a creative and artistic programme is the potential for it to fail and/or need to be fixed. If CPPs are working with skilled creative technologists this issue is mitigated but where digital work is being co-created with communities and the digital skills do not sit within the CPPs, there are practical questions about how to deal with these kinds of problems.

“We learned the hard way the need to factor in a failure tolerance- in one project there was an element of digital projection and it was the 1st time a projector was used. The developers were really confident it would work 100% of the time but it worked 80% of the time. The project had a number of elements; a family trail, an element of theatre and somewhere families could take part in a making activity, and the element of digital projection. And when the whole thing worked, and all the elements came together, the family audiences who it was made for had a fantastic time, when the digital element didn't work it was a little bit disappointing.”



Digital Artists

When engaging artists to work with on digital programming there has been a range of experiences across the CPP network. One of the main determining factors of success appears to be whether or not there are artists working in the local area who use digital as part of their practice.

“Ideally we would want to work with artists with a regional connection but they’re are thin on the ground- we seek people from further afield but that comes down to cost.”

From discussions in the inception workshop to this project and conversations in the research interviews, there appears to be an issue with a general lack of availability of experienced digital artists, especially ones who are also skilled at participation and collaborative ways of working.

Some CPPs suggested that given that they were not immersed in this field day-to-day, it would be useful to have a database of tried and trusted digital artists for programmes to work with.

“It’s just knowing how those artists are, I’d love to have a database of recommended artists who are doing really cool stuff.”

The second factor is whether the programme has the time and resources in place to develop and maintain a network of experts and artists working in the digital space. The development of such a network appears to have the effect of a virtuous circle, with the ability to commission digital artists and find the experts to work with becoming more achievable as the network grows.

“At the moment we’ve got a roster of artists that we’re working with...Certainly a sizeable chunk of the artists we work with, work digitally.”

“We do try as much as possible to explore what is out there, it would be very easy for us to explore working with, say, the spa towns in the neighbouring area but there are smaller digital organisations in [our local area], Urban Hacks is another organisation we’ve worked with who specialise in digital technology. I guess we are fortunate but we do work hard to build our networks so that we’re aware of everyone.”

On the other hand, some programmes face a challenge of geography when attempting to build up their network and describe a situation in which distance and a lack of ‘digital thinking’ in other organisations in the area leads to a need for support.

“It’s to do with networks, which seemed to be a bit siloed, there is the opportunity for connecting in a different way through digital but it relies on everybody subscribing to that way of thinking. It comes down to time, I’m putting the legwork in to build those actual relationships to make the digital thing work so there are layers of things that have to happen.”

Creation and distribution

A common use for digital technologies, within an arts and cultural context, is for the creation or distribution of content.

Filmmaking:

Creating film content was seen by a number of CPPs as a core digital activity that was undertaken for many reasons; for entertainment and promotional purposes, to build a legacy for their programme, as an advocacy tool for funders, and for the community to feel a sense of pride.

Most CPPs were keen to ensure they created high quality films and many had begun planning to ensure artists had the time and budget to create them as part of their overall contract. Others are beginning to build in budgets for films through the core budget and use freelance professionals to create them, and one obtained funding through The Space to work with one of their Digital Guerrillas. This particular partnership with Creative Black Country (CBC) and The Space, resulted in a video that went viral and a project called *100 Masters*.

“89% of those audiences [who saw the video] came from outside the UK. What we’ve now seen is the impact on local creative economy. Caroline has been visited by people from as far away as Africa to do workshops, people who have discovered her online have flown her first class to Australia for workshops, she’s been approached by publications in the USA. This has really contributed to internationalising the work she has done.”

The film made about a particular artist takes the position that art is not about passing an exam but it’s about what you feel. Commenting on the response to the film and impact she said,

“The tone of the emails [I received after the film] was basically ‘you’re speaking to my condition’ or ‘it happened to me’ or even art teachers saying how they hadn’t believed in marking and grading, as well as people saying ‘I was told I was rubbish and it put me off’ - it encouraged people.

[I got emails from] people who wanted to do a workshop at my studio. I used to have 2 workshops a month, from this march onwards I’m only doing 2 days a month again, and they’re all booked up within 3 weeks [of posting the opportunity], and I swear that’s the impact of the film.”

100 Masters – Creative Black Country

*100 Masters*¹⁶ was a campaign launched as a partnership between Creative Black Country and the Express and Star. Aside from producing original video content, a significant part of the campaign was the use of an AR app with details of how to download it alongside colourful artworks featured in the newspaper over a period of four weeks. The Express and Star is a regional newspaper with one of the biggest readerships in the UK, which is [according to Liam Smyth, Creative Director CBC] likely a reflection of the fact that the Black Country is a digital cold spot. The campaign gave the local people living in the Black Country the opportunity to nominate people from an array of disciplines as experts in their field, from cactus breeders to comedians. This project aimed to start a discussion on what it means to be a master.

CBC initially worked with Hewlett Packard on the app but they turned out to be too expensive. A smaller company who offered an existing package (over bespoke AR) were found to be more competitive and just as effective. Access to and analysis of back end data in the app meant CBC could see how many interactions with the app had occurred and when, and therefore track interactions to the newspaper's release date, and interaction numbers did spike every time the newspaper was released amounting to around 230 people each time with a total of around 1,000 people. While this is a small amount compared to the overall readership of the newspaper, the engagement had depth and succeeded in its aim, with the majority of the 800 nominations to 100 Masters coming from the AR campaign.

A number of videos were produced through a fund and assistance from The Space to promote each of the final 100 Masters online. CBC feel this expert assistance from The Space was key to creating quality content that people want to interact with.

“They came in and built our own capacity in house in terms of developing sustainable content that is optimised for online audiences- it was a really fantastic experience to work with really quite skilled individuals.” (Liam Smyth, Creative Director, CBC)

One video went viral (within 72 hours it has reached 1 million views) and the artist who was the subject of the video has seen a huge increase in interest in her work both online and in person. She needed to increase the number of workshops she offered to meet demand and has people attend her workshops taking place in the Black Country from overseas (Australia and America) and has seen her Facebook and Instagram followings increase from 10,000 to 33,000 and 2,000 to 13,000 respectively.

Digital films are also seen as an important way to document a project and to engender pride in the community.

“People are always really interested in the process. There was a lovely commission we did...and there was a beautiful film which managed to showcase the piece. But also, what I loved, there was a big community cast element and it really brought out what it had meant to those individuals, which of course is telling the story - which is the CPP story really.”

“We also do films of our projects, it’s about the legacy.”

It was clear that CPPs recognised the need to work with skilled professionals on film production or to partner with collaborators who can help them to upskill. For example, the team behind the 100 Masters project highlighted the importance of partnering with professionals and organisations with advanced digital expertise.

“We wouldn’t have been able to have done much of this without [the Digital Guerilla]. We’re looking to bring him back in a freelance capacity, as a consultant just to look at the ways of developing our digital and social media.”

Ensuring their films are accessible across their communities was important to some CPPs who ensured subtitles or BSL sign language was included in the editing, despite the high cost associated with this, as they have found that community members who had initially engaged with them in this way has become a core part of their audience

“Making things accessible to people who are blind and deaf... uploading YouTube videos with BSL sign language...there’s a high cost. There’s a company who will put your workshop into CD format but it comes down to time and money and we’re going to look more at how we increase our access budget. We used it up when we had a number of deaf photographers attending the workshops for our project and we have a lot of those people still engaging now.”

“Every video we produce goes out subtitled as standard so that it’s accessible to the deaf but also a much broader range of audiences beyond people who are able to listen with the sound on. We’ve provided audio description for our projects wherever possible, we’ll have an audio describer there. That’s not strictly digital but it’s using digital technology.”

Building Digital Products

Within the context of CPPs, the digital products being developed are websites and apps. These can have multiple uses, sometimes contributing to the artistic programme but also as tools to communicate and engage audiences and participants. Generally, it is evident that CPPs are not always taking a user centred design approach to the development of digital products and, particularly in relation to mobile apps, this could account for some of the difficulties experienced in this area.

Websites

Many CPPs indicated that given their available time and resource they haven't been able to focus on developing their websites and some questioned whether, given the programme objectives, target audiences and available digital platforms, a website is a priority.

This was a particular challenge for the programmes whose websites are placed within their host organisations.

“We have not got a very brilliant track record of [maintaining our website] extremely well and there are issues about maintaining it, what happens to the ownership. We've got issues with our own website. I do think resource around these things is a big issue.”

“We are looking at possible creative approaches at how to best use the channels available to us without getting bogged down with an unwieldy website I don't quite know what to do with.”

“We have a very bad website and we're in the process of relaunching it [it started 6 years ago] our identity wasn't as clear as it is now, so we need to rebuild it. We're going to do it ourselves and take charge of our own destiny- we want to better feature our communities on it. It's cheaper if we do it ourselves, we're using square space.”

Where programmes do see the value of a well presented useable website this is usually because they would like to have a space online in which they can tell the story of their activities and achievements, both the public events and the community consultation that happens behind the scenes, and the impacts of their programme through appealing data visualisations.

When asked about accessibility in their digital practices only one programme spoken to discussed this in relation to their website.

“We will always try to be as accessible as possible and look at WC3 guidance around website accessibility. We did do an accessibility audit of our website before I started last year and it was found to be accessible, which is good.”

When asked in the survey about confidence in relation to accessibility only two indicated that they were 'Very Confident', with 12 indicating they were 'Somewhat Confident' and seven indicated they were 'Not Very Confident'.

Apps

Seven of the CPPs responded to questions about the use of apps and for the most part apps were discussed as possible tools for engaging their current audiences and attracting new audiences. Two of these CPPs had produced apps, two have entertained the possibility of using an app and three have reservations about producing apps.

Of the two CPPs who produced an app, one felt it had achieved its aims while the other did not. For the successful CPP, the production of an (AR) app was part of a larger scheme of activities which offered numerous opportunities for success beyond reaching a high volume of people through the app (although at least 1,000 people were reached).

The CPP who did not feel their app had been a success also used AR technology, but this time with trigger points at physical poster sites in the run up and during a festival. They were inspired to make the app after they had consulted with the community and heard the popularity of a similar trail. This CPP was disappointed with the circa 300 user download rate and the low number of entries to a competition to win an iPad, which stood at around 20 entries. There were a number of interactive elements to the app such as quizzes, trailers, jokes and imagery, and anecdotally a lot of interest in the app. The stumbling block for would be users was that they either did not have enough storage on their phones to download the app, or their operating system was too old to run it.

Some of the country parks around us have those Gruffalo trails- the team spent time visiting community groups and people were really loving those. [The app] had 7 or 8 trigger points hosted on poster sites [which aren't there any more]...It didn't work very well, we had 200 or 300 downloads of the app and 20 entries to the competition...There was a lot of talk about the app but we discovered while there was a lot of interest, when it came to downloading it the pinch point was the quality of peoples phones- they didn't have enough storage to download the app or the OS was too old to run it. It was humbling- I have a decent mobile phone {[it made me see more} the difference between me and the average person in {X}. We're not doing it again. It was a lot of work for not much outcome.

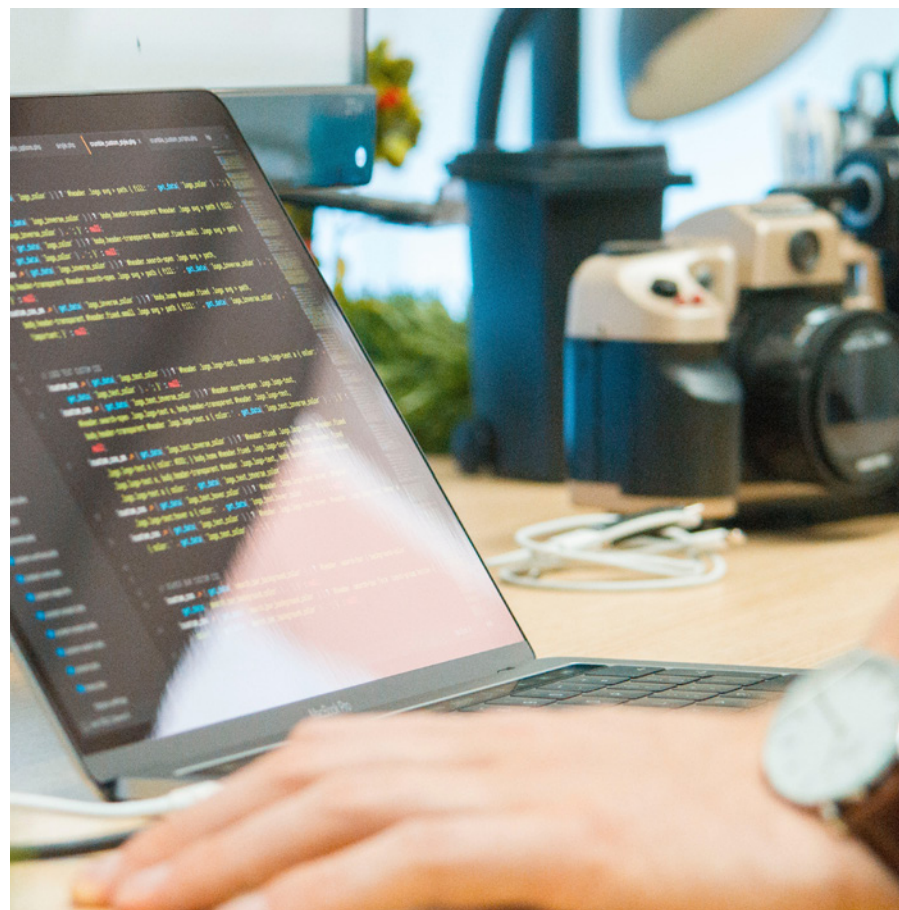
The making of an app feels like a huge undertaking for a number of Programmes who doubt they have the skills to create one, but also doubt the public appetite for it.

Outside of the CPP programme, the use of apps that relate to a particular cultural event, venue or organisation is generally in decline¹⁷ and given the work involved in creating one, it is a potentially high risk undertaking for any CPP.

One CPP has had community interest about making an app but lack of knowledge and skills around how to develop one, coupled with no budget to look into it, has stalled the process. Another CPP also felt that without being immersed in new digital developments regularly it is difficult to discern what constitutes an up to date, high quality experience in an app. This was also coupled with doubt around whether people would be motivated to download an app for a one-off event.

“There’s not enough specialised knowledge. We have, at a local advisory group, discussed about having a particular project which has its own presence via an app but because I don’t have the understanding...and we don’t have the budget to explore how to make that happen. It’s not that there isn’t an interest in it but I guess it’s kind of put in the ‘too hard’ box.”

Another CPP, part of whose business plan revolves around both attracting previous non-attenders to their own events but also deepening engagement across other events had an app in development for some time. The app would fulfil a specific function of signposting people to events for which they would obtain rewards and points for attending, and thereby also gathering data on the frequency and types of events these people attended. Partnering with other companies with the right skills and funding was key to creating this app, and the CPP pursued this with two organisations at different times and both options eventually fell through. A lot of time and effort was put into the developing this project which has since been taken up by the Cultural Destinations programme in the city who were deemed better placed to through their cross-city networks to gather the listings needed for it.



Livestreaming

Overall CPPs were very positive about the usefulness of livestreaming, often through via social media platforms, as a means to reach new audiences, create more and longer lasting value from one off events, reach people outside of their locality and across the world and as a useful advocacy tool for funders. Most CPPs who use this bring in professionals to manage the filming and technical aspects of livestreaming.

One CPP has invested in hardware and accessed training in order that they can create more of their own content. This allows them greater flexibility to create smaller pieces of content as and when they need to.

One CPP, however, has run into intellectual property rights issues when planning for livestreaming; performers she commissioned had strict parameters about how their image is displayed online, such as the angles at which they would allow themselves to be filmed to ensure the best effect.

As with many of the digital processes, time and resource can be a constraint on whether or not a CPP carries out livestreaming, or whether or not they carry it out regularly.

“It’s been useful in helping us to get more value out of our live events, there’s a digital thing online that people can go back and look at and helping us to reach new online audiences who might not be committed enough to come to our events. Maybe they would come to our events next year and we can see what impact it has had then. So much of what we do is here then gone, anything we can do create an online life for it helps to get the message out.”

“We have a strong Facebook following. Often the engagement is up and down with our social media posts, but with the Facebook live we had good engagement...Our production manager has a digital business he runs so we commissioned him to do Facebook streams...the next two days we did them ourselves, that also had really good engagement...Our best Light Night livestreaming got 2,800 views and the ones from the Big Feast got 2,400 views and lots of comments and reaction.”

“We’ve just bought some mic attachments for mobile phones and stands for digital cameras so we can do a bit more ourselves. I think the point that we’d like to get to is where we can create a little bit more content in-house - moving image content in-house - and then also make the most of the filmmaker to do the kind of bigger, more professional looking stuff that we need for certain events in the programme. I went to the Google Garage training the Arts Council has put on and [the Marketing Manager has] been to some film making training recently. We’re trying to up our skills in house but then also realising what we can’t really do and what we don’t necessarily have the time to do as well because it can be quite time-consuming.”

“We haven’t done livestreaming, we’ve found that very difficult especially at an outdoor event...if we’ve commissioned an arts organisation perhaps to do a performance they have editorial say about what was broadcast and how and they didn’t want their performance broadcast in certain angles...it would need a lot of planning and input from someone who was very [informed] and we don’t have the money and resources to do that.”

Challenges & Barriers



Heart of Glass partnered with St Helens Council to organise the *Lost Castles* build in St Helens as part of a Liverpool City Region project. Over 200 community volunteers worked with French artist Olivier Grossetete. Photo: Stephen King

While digital tools and technologies undoubtedly enable new ways of collaborating, creating art and engaging audiences and communities, there are also some challenges and barriers that at times prevent CPPs from using digital more effectively.

The challenges to working more effectively with digital technologies are flagged throughout the research insights section of this report (section 4) but this section summarises the most common and pressing ones.

Time: Operating in similar way to small arts organisations, CPPs are often extremely time pressed and the staff are doing many different roles within the CPP. While this is not a digital specific challenge, it does impact on their ability to ensure that digital is being maximised across all areas of their programme. To become highly effective at social media marketing, online community management, data analysis or digital creation and participation requires a significant investment in time and it is a continuing challenge for CPPs to be able to give it the attention they recognise it needs.

“We have a really great team with relevant skills and experience, so I feel totally confident in our abilities, the time on the other hand is more tricky to manage. We have to prioritise.”

Lack of embedded digital skills: Many of the CPPs are working with external specialists across all areas of digital, whether freelance social media marketers, digital artists or creative consultants with a digital specialism, however there is within some CPPs still a sense that they lack the digital expertise within the team itself and this impacts on their ability to make the

most of digital technologies. In relation to working with communities on the development of an artistic programme, lack of digital expertise may result in facilitators not having the expertise to be able to frame the different options for digital participation in a way that is accessible to the community.

Working with digital artists: Some CPPs are certainly finding it difficult to find digital artists, particularly artists whose work is of high quality and who are also skilled in collaborative and participatory ways of working. This issue was one that was echoed, in wider consultation interviews, by Tom Northey, a consultant working with many arts organisations, who also expressed that there is a lack of artists, who use digital as their medium and whose work can be said to be first-rate.

In the case of CPPs who do struggle to find digital artists and who do not have the internal skillsets to be able to lead discussions around digital engagement, there is a danger that it will become virtually impossible for that CPP to explore and introduce digital elements into their programme. They can be left without the experience to be able to fully understand the possibilities (of digital engagement) and to frame it in a way that makes it accessible to audiences with little to no previous experience of digital experiences (in a cultural context).

New operating structures: CPPs are effectively 'new' organisations and they have to set up systems, platforms and processes from scratch (even if they are being supported by an established lead partner) and in the case of digital, this can lead to teething problems that slow down effective ways of working, for example around the use of CRMs or data collection.

It also means that many of the CPPs are still in their infancy when it comes to exploiting the full potential of digital technologies:

“I think we acknowledge that we are working to develop this area of our work {digital activity} in all categories and that there is enormous potential”

Fast pace of change: This issue was expressed many times, in the workshop, survey and through follow up interviews. Whether in relation to keeping up to date with the latest digital innovations and their use in a cultural setting or being aware of changes around issues such as GDPR or web accessibility, many CPPs expressed that this was an area of challenge for them.

“One of my previous jobs was working with an arts organisation that specialised in digital and I was fully immersed. My job was to go to festivals or a conference and you’d see what’s at the cutting edge of technology and it’s so easy to fall out of that world and not know what’s current, that’s something I would feel quite fearful of- we could engage with digital artists but you don’t know how current, valuable or relevant that approach is. I went to event recently where someone was showing digital parts of his festival... he was showing...an art trail where you scan QR codes and you get an animation through your phone, I don’t know if people really want that? Do they use that? I reflect on my own life, do I have time to download something onto my phone? I want to know that what we’re programming is current and wanted. It would be good to get an insight into what is going on in quality digital programming.”

“The online and digital environment is changing so much it is hard to keep up to date. With regards GDPR and privacy, further research is needed to ensure full compliance and how this effects the way we communicate - the temptation is to stop communicating if in doubt. The Communications Manager is a sole practitioner and relies on her own networks and community of practice to keep updated.”

Digital exclusion: as noted digital exclusion issues are present in many of the communities with which CPPs work and this rightly causes CPPs to be circumspect about introducing digital elements into the work. It also means that on occasion digital channels are not the most appropriate means to communicate with particular groups.

However, some issues relating to digital programming can be mitigated both in the design of the experience or event and in practical ways, such as by offering free Wi-Fi and for example in a workshop setting, providing access to relevant hardware.

Some CPPs are carrying out consultation with their communities to understand where their digital comfort levels end and what training they would like to engage in to develop their digital skills.

“One thing I’d flag immediately is that it’s very easy to make assumptions about digital...What we’re finding, certainly with a lot of older people who are in rural, isolated areas - I’m talking real isolation - it’s either very poor internet connection if there is any at all. Just as that maps onto poor transport infrastructure, and people

who have very low incomes who may not own a laptop, and we assume everybody's got a phone - not everybody does. So, there are underlying assumptions that kind of trouble me that there's some sort of magic bullet and I don't think there is."

"If you can't access the internet, there are some things you can't do and our area is slightly patchy. It means we just can't make any assumptions that putting something into a digital space means it is going to reach everybody, we have to also be doing analogue communications as well."

Digital exclusion issues can also have an impact on aspects such as collaborating with communities. One CPP gave the example of a project working with young people where they needed to communicate with both the young people and the parents through the lifetime of the project. Some of the young people didn't have data on their mobile switched on all the time and some of the parents didn't have email, which meant in those cases, the facilitator relied on text messages or a phone call.

Funding: Some barriers to the CPPs experimenting with more and different digital elements relate to issues around funding. While this was specifically in relation to commissioning and working with digital artist or creative technologists it also has an impact on their tech infrastructure. For example, less than half of CPPs have access to fast Wi-Fi in a work environment or access to software for simple graphic design. And only eight CPPs have digital film cameras that they are able to use as part of their work.



Creative Barking and Dagenham – DAGFEST 2018. Photo: Jimmy Lee Photography

Lessons From The Wider World



HOME Slough. Virtual Reality Taster.
Photo: David Blood Photography

Desk research together with consultations with a range of highly experienced individuals and organisations has provided useful additional insight into existing approaches both to digital engagement and participation and to the development of digital services. The primary research with CPPs has highlighted the fact that these are the two areas that are the most challenging, this is perhaps unsurprising since they require a level of digital knowledge and experience that may not be naturally present in a CPP team.

Digital Engagement, Co-Creation and Participation

John Whall is a Digital Participation Curator at Derby Quad. His role is to work with communities and audiences to develop meaningful workshops, experiences and events that often include a digital element. He works with a variety of different types of audiences, including families, young people and the over 50s. He's also responsible for elements of the programme that relate to health and wellbeing.

In conversation John is clear that digital participation is relevant for all audiences, but that using the right, non-technical, language can be the difference between communities feeling intimidated i.e. it's 'not for me' and them feeling excited and engaged.

He gave the example of workshops that enable communities to create with digital technology and to play with tools such as 3D printers.

“Conversation is key {to demystifying digital}, we talk to our communities about digital, what are their fears and worries, what excites them about it? When it comes to getting communities involved, it's important to consider about how you communicate what the project is. If we say, for example, next week we're going to do a digital workshop, they {over 50s} probably wouldn't turn up but if we say we're doing a creative workshop and part of that will involve using ipads to create art, well there generally wouldn't be a problem with that.”

John also described previous workshops they've run with intergenerational groups which involved creating stories using Minecraft. The young people bring hands on technical ability and confidence using the tools and the older people are able to add context and insight to storytelling. Together they work brilliantly and both groups have a hugely positive experience. For facilitators or non-digital specialists who are looking to understand more about the possibilities of digital participation, he highlights the importance of learning from others and working *alongside* commissioned creative technologists. So in the context of a CPP project some of their knowledge and experience would be passed to the CPP, rather than having a specialist solely deliver a project and when it's finished, the knowledge leaves with them.

Derby QUAD refer to themselves as a hub, in that they act as a conduit for the community, rather than taking a top down approach to creating cultural experiences. The word hub is also a descriptor used by Furtherfield, an arts organisation who has been working with art and technology for over 20 years. Since their inception Furtherfield has been pioneering approaches to digital work that are framed within the notion of cultural democracy. From their website they describe the approach as follows:

“We advocate always for open and playful engagement with people and their technologies, encapsulated in a process of ‘doing it with others’ (DIWO).”

Dr Charlotte Frost, the Executive Director at Furtherfield talks about how throughout their history Furtherfield has been testing out models to give people ownership of their cultural experiences.

“the reason we focus on technology is because it can feel very exclusive and excluding, the average person doesn’t always feel that it’s an area for them”.

Like Derby QUAD when they start working with communities they don't frame the initial conversations around digital, they talk about “being a human”, day to day lives and related concepts. They want the participants to have fun and play and in doing so they remove perceptions of digital as being intimidating or complicated.

There are also sector leading examples of organisations using digital to help broaden reach and build relationships with specific groups, who often are not traditional arts engagers.

LEVEL is an arts centre near Matlock that frequently uses technology as part of its work with people with complex needs, including physical or mental disabilities. Their Director Andrew Williams explains that they have three types of participants; audiences – they come to see or watch something, engagers – those who may interact with artworks and installations, and people who come to create – collaborating with artists and facilitators using a range of (often digital) tools. Some work involves elements of all of these modes.

It is clear that the work being developed by LEVEL requires experienced specialists, many of whom have digital skills. He also highlights that there is a wide range in the quality of digital artists' work, suggesting that with excellent digital experiences, the participant becomes a creator but that often digital can be used “like a toy”, with a participant switching something on or off. For LEVEL's participants, many of whom have profound and multiple disabilities, technology can help to empower them and allows them to engage in a myriad of cultural experiences.

Digital Development

Sometimes digital activity may involve building or creating something, such as a website or an app. CPPs face a particular challenge in that they often do not have someone in their team who has previous experience of building digital products. This is a similar situation to social 'tech for good' sector, where individuals and organisations aim to solve a particular societal problem using technology but frequently the person who has come up with the idea is not from a technical background.

Social tech funders, such as ShareLab and Social Tech Trust, are clear that in a development situation, there needs to be some level of technical expertise within the team. Anne Radl, the Development Manager at Social Tech Trust explains that it is a requirement of their funding that an organisation has in house technical expertise (since without it, they tend to struggle), this can be tricky for smaller organisations and it is an issue they continue to discuss and debate.

Although CPPs are not building complex tools or platforms, building any digital product can be fraught with challenges and the lessons from the social tech sector demonstrate the importance of ensuring there is sufficient technical know-how factored into the budget.

Much of the social tech sector are enthusiastic advocates for adopting a human centred design approach to the development of any digital products.

CAST, who work with non-profits and funders, to help create a “...*more responsive and resilient and digitally-enabled social sector*” developed <https://betterdigital.services> to help non-profits and funders understand the human centred approach and to implement it within their own scenario.

Findings & Conclusions

A Right St Helens Knees Up performed by residents from local sheltered housing associations at Citadel Theatre 2016. Hosted by Eggs Collective and commissioned by Heart of Glass. Photo: Stephen King

It is clear that CPPs are working with their communities to create incredible experiences, change perceptions and reshape cultural provision. Their open, collaborative ways of working ensures that more and different people are experiencing arts and culture than ever before. And there is no doubt that digital tools and technologies are being employed in a variety of ways to help CPPs communicate, collaborate, engage and entertain.

There are though opportunities for CPPs to build on their current use of digital tools and go further. This is particularly evident in the area of the creative and artistic programme. CPPs tend to be aware of this and generally it is practical issues and lack of specialist knowledge that prevent them from doing more, rather than a failure of imagination.

There was concern expressed by CPPs that there is a misguided tendency for digital to be considered as an easy solution to accessing low arts engagers, while they would argue that often, a more traditional face to face approach is far more effective. As outlined in this report, the truth is somewhere in between. There can be no doubt that digital is not always appropriate, as the Culture is Digital report states,

“...not everything is high tech. Or needs to be. We still enjoy reading a book, looking at a painting and watching a play without a mobile phone or a VR headset.”



Museums Northumberland bait. *From the Ashes* radio drama rehearsals.
Photo: Jason Thompson

But equally we should not assume that certain communities or audiences are more or less interested in digital. Or that if they do not suggest it, it should not form part of the programme. Examples demonstrate that it is often only when digital has been demystified or experienced as being not about the technology but about creativity or playfulness, that communities may actively advocate for it.

However, being experienced enough to describe, discuss and frame the possibilities of using digital technologies, to a community who views it as 'other' to them, raises difficult challenges. In addition, digital exclusion presents real and genuine issues for many CPP communities and CPPs are rightfully mindful of this.

Digital exclusion presents itself in many forms including lack of access to technology such as smartphones and the internet. While CPPs are not in a position to be able to solve all digital exclusion issues there is a huge opportunity with those community members who consider digital to be 'not for me'. In research carried out in late 2018 by The Good Things Foundation¹⁸, this group have been identified as being the largest group of non-users of the internet.

CPPs have developed strong and meaningful relationships with communities, some of which include those who would identify in the 'not for me' group. If CPPs can, within a cultural context, become more skilled at introducing digital technologies to this group, the impact could move beyond the cultural with a positive social outcome that contributes to a reduction in digital exclusion within communities and a resulting increase in their confidence and empowerment.

The further point of widely sharing the analysis and learning from this study is critical to achieving impact beyond the CPPs. The current and potential intersection between new participatory ways of developing cultural provision and the use of digital tools and technologies has many applications in the wider arts and cultural sector.

18 <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/blog/digital-motivation-what-who-and-why>

Conclusions

Facilitate connections between CPPs and Creative Technologists¹⁹

The CPP network needs to be more directly connected with experienced experts in the area of digital engagement and participation. By working more regularly with skilled digital practitioners, CPPs can develop their confidence to help them discuss the possibilities of digital technologies with their communities in accessible ways. There are different ways to achieve this, it could follow a model like the Arts Council England tech champions whereby Digital Participation Experts/Creative Technologists are available for CPPs (and others in the sector) to work with or learn from. Or it could involve the development of a funding stream to support specialists to train and mentor others.

Across the wider arts sector there are examples of organisations and individuals who are demonstrating best practice in their approach to digital engagement. A starting point for this strand of work could be to convene a symposium of these experts, to explore and discuss different approaches to developing these skills within CPPs and across the sector.

Longer term it may be of value for CPPs to explore the value of extending their partnership models to include tech partners.

Create 'opportunities for exposure'

Ideally CPP teams should have more exposure to high quality digital practice. This is partly implicit in the aims of the peer learning programme but our recommendation is that this element is foregrounded and accelerated. This could take many forms including attendance at relevant conferences, for example, events like EMPAF's Digital Participation Expedition²⁰, regular guest speakers on the topic of digital (at events and online via filmed webinars), experiential visits to creative studios and round-ups of innovation and best practice examples.

These opportunities for exposure should sit across the Spectrum of Engagement, giving CPPs a deeper understanding of the possibilities for digital technologies whether in 'Invite', 'Co-create' or any other 'mode of engagement'.

19 We have used the term Creative Technologist here but there are a number of different titles that relate to this area, for example, Digital Participation Curator or Creative Producer or Facilitator (with a digital specialism).

20 <https://www.derbyquad.co.uk/whats-on/current-and-upcoming-projects-projects/digital-participation-expedition-empaf>

Join the dots

This piece of work was prompted by the Culture is Digital report, which sought to highlight, and encourage cultural organisations to take advantage of, the opportunities afforded by new technologies. There are other Culture is Digital initiatives which have relevance to this project and from which the CPPs could benefit. These are the Digital Culture Network²¹ and Arts Council England's and the National Lottery Heritage Fund's forthcoming Digital Code and Maturity Index, which will outline principles and provide a self-assessment framework that organisations can use to benchmark and improve their digital maturity. It is important that CPPs are made aware of these initiatives and how they can help CPPs teams to continue to develop their knowledge and understanding of digital tools and technologies – and that internally Arts Council England ensure CPPs' needs and participatory models feed into these.

In addition, the findings relating to digital exclusion, and the potential role that CPPs have in mitigating some of the associated issues, have relevancy to associated government policy agendas and as such, there would be value in sharing with the appropriate government stakeholders.

Finally, CPPs would benefit from taking a similar joined up approach locally. In practice this may mean, where relevant, liaising with Local Authorities and other relevant local bodies, in relation to local digital exclusion or accessibility initiatives.

Support the CPP network with focused CPD

On the survey 100% of CPPs answered 'yes' to whether they'd value more support with digital aspects and of those, 20 indicated that skills development was an area where they would welcome support.

The research indicates that this could usefully cover a large number of different digital areas from tactical issues related to communications, for example, how to maximise the effectiveness of Facebook advertising or how to use Google Analytics for meaningful insights, to topics such as how to commission a digital project, deal with online reputational issues or how to build resilience through digital revenue generation, including crowdfunding and contactless donations.

This will have an added benefit of helping CPPs be more focused in what they prioritise. Given their limited resource, realistically they can't do everything that they may want to but continuous CPD will help them to be both more confident in what they prioritise and ensure that the digital activity they do undertake is more effective.

The Digital Culture Network is well placed to help support much of this CPD but it should be noted that digital practice to support participation and involvement is currently outside of the Network's scope (although it will feature as a core recurring element in the forthcoming Digital Maturity Index relevant to the whole arts and cultural sector). If the Network will not be extended to incorporate digital participation as a subject area, consideration should be given to how else this requirement can be supported.

21 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/digital-culture-network>

Develop a more active knowledge sharing culture within the CPP network

The CPP network already has an online platform for collaboration, discussion and to share best practice but our research indicates that knowledge sharing between the network has room for development. Ideally more time needs to be dedicated to nurturing the Facebook Workplace community in order to help grow a more active knowledge sharing culture. Fundamentally this about CPPs learning from their peers about digital activities that have and haven't worked. An example of a highly effective knowledge sharing community is the Museums Computer Group email list, which acts as a supportive medium for those within the museums sector looking for advice, help and guidance.

Aside from learning from each other it would also be hugely beneficial to develop resources that consolidate the shared knowledge, for example, how-to guides, webinars and 'what we learned' pieces. There is also the future potential for sharing of resources to go a step further. If standalone digital platforms or products are being built, they could be created using open source technologies, with the code shared via repositories like GitHub.

Digital to reach new audiences

Although it is clear that digital platforms and technologies are not the most appropriate way to reach some audiences, it should also be noted that in some circumstances digital can help organisations engage with new audiences.

Certain audiences, due to their personal circumstances, may be physically unable to attend events, and in those instances digital platforms can help reach them. This was the case with HOME Slough's and Immersive Computing Labs recording of a Royal Opera House performance, which was then taken into local care homes in a VR format, giving elderly residents the chance to experience something they would otherwise not have been able to see.

In addition, there are certain sub-sections of the local community for whom digital channels are their preferred medium and while the focus of this piece of research was not into these groups, CPPs should be mindful of rapidly changing behaviours, particularly amongst younger generations. Other research²² can help to provide insight into this area.

22 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-use-and-attitudes>

Champion a human-centred design approach to digital

The human-centred design approach to developing digital services and practice is in complete sync with the collaborative nature of CPPs. Discussions around digital development should always be framed within the context of human-centred design and agile practices and Arts Council England should champion and support this approach.

CPP tech infrastructure

Some CPPs do not have the ideal level of hardware and software to support them in their work, for example digital film cameras, iPads, image editing software or projectors. This is largely a budgetary issue but absent additional funding, CPPs should be encouraged within their overall strategies to consider these costs as a key part of their operational costs.

Accessibility

A third of CPPs indicated that they are 'Not Very Confident' with web accessibility issues, with a further 12 responding that they are 'Somewhat Confident'. This can be partially addressed as part of CPD but it would be of value for Arts Council England to commission a separate piece of work with an accessibility expert, to assess general level of compliance of CPP websites and other digital assets against W3C accessibility standards.

Building Links with Tech For Good

It would be of beneficial, over the longer term, for CPPs to become more closely aligned with the tech for good movement and other citizen participation projects beyond the cultural sector, for example projects like Newspeak House²³ which explores issues around civil society, technology and community empowerment. Engaging with organisations and programmes that are operating at the intersection between active citizenship and the use of technology could help CPPs to embed leading practice within their own Places.

Appendices

Appendix i.

CPPs Digital Competency Framework

Given the wide range of experience and skill levels across the CPPs in relation to each digital area, it is certainly the case that, to be meaningful and useful, any recommendations for the CPPs as to how they improve their digital practice, need to be tailored to ability and confidence level, rather than presented in a one-size-fits-all format.

The conclusions contained in the report identify practical ways that CPPs can be supported to develop their skills across all areas, for example, via the Digital Culture Network, as part of the peer learning programme and by regular exposure to high quality digital practice. The following provides an overview of the areas in which CPPs teams need to be proficient. This digital competency list can be used by both existing and new CPPs, to help them focus on areas where they need to upskill and become more knowledgeable or confident.

Marketing & Communications

- Effective social media marketing including paid advertising
- Tone-of-voice & community management
- Reputation management
- Analytics and insights
- CRM and data collection about customers/ audiences/participants/stakeholders, etc

Digital Development

- Human-centred design approach and methods
- Commissioning digital development projects

Revenue Generation

- Crowdfunding
 - matching platforms to different kinds of fundraising 'ask'
 - ways of running campaigns on them
- Online ticketing
- Fundraising and donations – online tools for payment and tracking of donors

Artistic Practice

- Commissioning digital artists
- Collaborative ways of working (and tools that support them)
- Tools to support audience and community participation

Infrastructure

- Requirements for CRM systems
- Suitable hardware, software and networking (including Wifi)

Appendix ii.

List of External Interviewees

John Whall, Digital Participation Curator, Derby QUAD

Andrew Williams, Director, LEVEL

Clare Reddington, CEO, Watershed

Charlotte Frost, Executive Director, Futherfield

Jenni Lloyd, Programme Manager, Sharelab Fund - Nesta

Anne Radl, Development Manager, Social Tech Trust

Joe Roberson – Independent Tech for Good Consultant

Tom Northey, Director, Con Brio

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