

Local Engagement Specialists Handbook

Working with local people on the ground



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THE RED CHAIR, CLOD ENSEMBLE (PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BETHELL)

Overview

From the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2015 Fuel undertook a research project called **New Theatre in your Neighbourhood** which sought to improve the way contemporary performance tours the UK. **Local Engagement Specialists (LESs)** were employed in each location the research focused on; in Colchester, Malvern, Margate, Poole, Preston and Stockton. A version of the LES role exists in many other guises (local ambassadors or champions for example).

For Fuel they are the local people on the ground with eyes and ears open to local opportunities and with lots of local knowledge. The role arose from a desire to deepen the levels of engagement when we (and ultimately all contemporary performance makers) tour work to venues and to assist often overstretched marketing teams. They are people who understand the local area, have or can develop specific contacts with groups we are aiming to reach, and are really good at talking to people about new theatre.

This booklet is an offer to you to learn from what we have done and use the best bits to adapt for your own practice. We hope you find it useful.



PHENOMENAL PEOPLE (PHOTO: RACHEL FERRIMAN) 3

How does the role work?

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS work with Fuel (or other visiting theatre makers), the venue and where appropriate directly with artists to engage audiences differently with the contemporary performances we make. They are not necessarily or even desirably marketing specialists though may have marketing or audience development experience. They have most impact when they are able to work strategically across a number of shows and/or other contemporary performance work and can take a long term approach. Their focus is more about people and relationships than about traditional tools such as print, press and advertising, though these tools may well be useful to them.

'Seeing people in the theatre, and experiencing something they wouldn't have experienced otherwise. We brought lifelong Margate residents into the Theatre Royal, where they'd never been before, for Feral.'

LES REPORT 2015



THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING TO WORK WITH A LOCAL ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

- Are they needed and why? Some venues already carry out this kind of work, or don't target local audiences in the same way (e.g. inner London venues), some shows might particularly benefit from the role – make sure you know why you are working with the LES and what you want them to achieve
- Who is their key contact / line manager (usually the project manager or marketing consultant of the visiting artist)? This should be one person. As LESs usually have limited time and especially if they are working on a more in-depth project, or a number of shows, with lots of stakeholders involved, you will need very clear lines of communication and to know who signs off decisions/budget
- Who is their key contact at the venue (usually someone in the marketing team)?
- How will they plan their activity and how can it be ensured that this complements existing activity?
- How do you ensure the activity complements the work – what's the line of communication with the lead artist (e.g. some ideas which respond to the show's themes may or may not set up the right expectations for the show itself and need to be considered carefully)

WHAT ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WILL THEY BE OFFERED LOCALLY AND HOW CAN A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL PARTNER/VENUE BE ENSURED?

- Involving the venue in the recruitment process
- Use of a desk in the venue
- Introductions to the venue team and/or other local partners

WHAT RESOURCES WILL THEY HAVE ACCESS TO AND HOW WILL THEY BE PROVIDED?

- Print, other marketing tools, key messages and 'hooks' for the show
- Where possible, can they see the show in advance (time and travel need to be budgeted for)
- What other budget are you allocating for them? This might be as minimal as money for pens for feedback forms or biscuits for hospitality to a larger budget to meet the needs of specific audiences e.g. additional print or travel costs for schools etc

HOW WILL THEY FEED BACK TO YOU ON WHAT THEY'VE DONE AND ON THE SHOW?

- Feedback forms for audiences
- Vox pops
- Collating numbers of those attending workshops
- Sharing contacts and results of key conversations
- Sharing ideas and what worked with you and the venue
- Feedback on the process with you/the venue
- Documenting the process

Recruitment

Recruitment may take place in a number of different ways ranging from word of mouth to an open call out and is best achieved in consultation with local partners (including but not limited to the venue) and primarily through local routes.

Models will vary and there is rarely a 'right' experience – different people will bring different things to the role. During New Theatre in Your Neighbourhood we variously employed ex-students, part time members of the marketing team in venues, the artistic director of an unfunded venue, local artists, local freelance arts managers/producers, and more. Ages and levels of experience varied hugely. We found the most important things are that they:

- Have an understanding of the local area and local contacts
- Can talk to people and build relationships
- Have a passion for contemporary theatre and can pass that on to others
- Are good at listening to what is unique about each show and event and responding to that
- Can work independently and manage their own time

What sort of activity might they undertake?

Working with an LES as part of a marketing campaign has proven consistently important in delivering an audience for experimental work throughout our research project. They have the ability to 'hold peoples hand' through the decision process of buying a ticket. They play a key role in delivering an engaged audience for new work.

Thanks in part to the work of the LESs on New Theatre in Your Neighbourhood; 27% of audiences across the project were new to venues and 74% said they were now going to find out more about theatre in their local area.

"What we really enjoyed was trying to develop that sense of wrap-around - the after-show talks, the very relaxed having a glass of wine, that real need to develop a scene, develop a place where theatre-makers and theatre lovers could actually have a chat afterwards."

PARTNER INTERVIEW 2015

The practicalities

We employed one or two people in each place at a time across a period of three years which was a total of 11 people. Only one LES stayed with us from the beginning until the end of the project in one location. There will be a high turnover of people involved in this role because it is a fleet of foot, freelance position which is not employed by the venue but the visiting company or artist so can work across a range of organisations.

We paid each LES £100 per day for between 4 and 15 days per event (depending on length of project or run). In the final year we offered the LES support to other artists who were visiting the venues we were working with and also worked with a new LES on Fuel shows in different locations. The audience engagement in each place increased as a result of this role.

We allocated them a budget (managed by our marketing specialist) to undertake unusual and relevant additional marketing activity over and above what might ordinarily take place. This might include arranging transport for a specific group, producing a beer mat with show info on or hosting a tea party for local people to talk about the show.

Using Google Docs or Smart Sheet is a great way to share information and avoid a high volume of emails being sent between all the stakeholders.

Regular catch up conversations with the key company contact and the LES and direct contact between the LESs and the artists is essential.

Each year we hosted an event where all the LESs got together. This helped them to feel part of a team but was not regular enough to stop them from feeling like they are working in a silo. Regular contact is key.



HANDING OUT SWEETS FOR KNOWLEDGE EMPORIUM AT LOCAL JAYWICK COMMUNITY FAIR (PHOTO: KERITH RIRIE)

"The most rewarding and effective part of the role was having the time to make strong, personal connections with identified groups."

LES REPORT 2015



LEMONADE TEA PARTY EVENT ORGANIZED BY LES TO SUPPORT PHENOMENAL PEOPLE IN COLCHESTER (PHOTO: JORDAN GOLBOURN)

Example LES work plan

- LES sees the show or event before it is in their location and/or watches documentation of the piece if it is not possible to see it live
- Planning meeting to identify specific target groups. Ideally including, venue marketing staff, producing company, LES
- LES to produce a plan of work which is agreed by all parties ideally in a format which can be viewed and accessed by all parties
- LES works on the plan and provides regular updates to line manager and venue. Keep contact regular, but brief so as not to eat into their 'work time'. The LES should feel supported not stifled
- LES to attend the performances (usually) and conduct evaluations
- LES to submit evaluations and updates contacts for future usage

The LES role is designed to be in addition to a more traditional marketing campaign rather than replacing the role of a marketing team either at the producing company's end or at the venue. They should not usually (and are probably not best placed to) do tasks such as:

- Designing print
- Issuing press releases
- Updating websites
- Operating the producing company's or venue's social media accounts

However they are well placed to feedback and offer advice and suggestions as to how the audiences they are targeting might engage with all the above.

Part of the LESs value is that they will have a better knowledge of the kind of activities which may work best in their local area, so it's important they are given some freedom to plan their own activity. LESs usually work quite autonomously, contacting existing links and seek out new connections with local people and groups, advocates, artists and ambassadors. Other typical activities may include:

- Identifying groups who may be interested in additional engagement such as workshops, post-show talks, Theatre Clubs and/or other activity available such as backstage tours etc, giving them information and/or putting them in touch with the relevant person at the producing company or venue
- Organising Theatre Clubs
- Initiating new ideas for engagement (budget dependent) – competitions, ads, events, that enhance the offering of the performance
- Identifying barriers to engagement for target audiences and coming up with ways to reduce those barriers, whether this be suggestions for targeted ticket deals, assistance with transport, pre-show meetings etc
- Advising on marketing campaigns
- Assisting with local distribution to reach remote areas or expand the standard distribution campaign
- Helping to plan for an end campaign low sales strategy
- Collating feedback – in liaison with venues where needed

Examples of LES Activity for New Theatre in Your Neighbourhood

- Minibus transport for a school to attend a show in Colchester
- A video competition in Margate and Poole for Tortoise in a Nutshell's bespoke local versions of Feral. The show involves live animation, and paper puppets of people and places in the local area were created, so people were asked to make one minute videos about places they loved in the local area, to upload them and share on social media (respectively #mymargate and #mypoole)
- Inviting targeted people to a pre-show meeting either with the artists themselves or someone else connected to the show, engaging them with its themes or lessening the uncertainty factor around an unusual show (eg the lemonade tea party for key women in Colchester prior to Phenomenal People, or the tea party in Margate prior to Red Ladies to meet Clod Ensemble)
- Taking over a local empty shop in Poole, again for Feral, helping people make videos and draw their own illustrations of the area
- Setting up a local Facebook page for arts professionals and contemporary performance attenders in Malvern, 'Fuelled by Theatre'
- After-show parties where everyone is invited to stay for a drink and a real social occasion were created in Malvern
- Inviting audiences to respond to a show through drawing or writing on flipchart paper outside
- Giving complimentary/cheap tickets to people in the community of Margate who talk to a LOT of other people and asking them to spread the word - eg shopkeepers, hairdressers, etc
- Making stickers that can be handed out, with or without a show themed gift
- Visiting an old people's home to chat to the residents about our work and as a result several attended one of our shows at the Tom Thumb Theatre
- Encouraging students to attend a show by offering a slightly cut price ticket deal, plus the LES organised a meal deal with local Chicken restaurant Roost meaning a group of students were able to get dinner and cut price ticket to the show



MARTIN SPIER WINNER OF MY MARGATE COMPETITION ORGANISED BY LES TO SUPPORT FERAL IN MARGATE



DROP IN BOOTH AT SHOPPING CENTRE TO SUPPORT FERAL IN POOLE (PHOTO: HARRIET WEBB)

LES and Theatre Clubs

Some LESs may choose to promote and host a Theatre Club as part of their work.

Theatre Clubs are a concept devised by community and participation specialist Lily Einhorn and developed by Maddy Costa of Dialogue, in which audiences are invited to stick around after the show for a drink and a chat about what they've just seen. It's a flexible model. Maddy's preference is that Theatre Clubs are for audiences only, without any of the show's makers present: like a book group. It gives audiences a chance to interpret the show for each other, to absorb views that might contradict their own, and through that reach a richer understanding of what they've seen - all without asking the theatre-makers to "explain" it for them. However they can also take the form of an informal Meet the Makers conversation, like the traditional post-show Q&A but in the more relaxed environment of the venue's cafe or bar.

All that's really needed for a Theatre Club is someone to host - and the LES is usually a good person to do this - and people in the local community who are interested in talking about theatre - although we also advise providing some refreshments, which tend to help get the conversation started.

Who does what ?

VENUE

Standard marketing campaign for the show encompassing:

- Venue social media
- Venue website
- Distribution and display locally
- Venue brochure – inclusion and distribution
- Solus mails to database and swaps and reciprocal mails with other venues
- Ticket promotions/competitions
- Local media ads
- Local press release and liaison
- Promotion within the venue on plasma screens/café menus etc
- Liaison with Friends of the theatre, other groups inside the venue ie Youth Theatre, OAP groups etc
- Marketing to targeted groups as agreed eg schools, other community contacts
- Plan and enact additional activity needed if show is struggling

PROJECT MANAGER / SHOW MARKETING SPECIALIST

- Usually key contact for the LES
- Work with LES and venue to agree aims and objectives and target audiences
- Agree activity and sign off budget
- Keep the LES well informed and supported
- Produce standard show print and posters
- Produce an eflyer
- Produce a trailer
- Produce a marketing pack or additional show information where possible
- Liaise closely with the venue of their show marketing campaign to make sure it runs smoothly and covers all angles
- Provide round ups of audience quotes/press once show goes on tour
- Plan and enact additional activity needed if show is struggling

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

- Work with the venue and project manager to identify target groups and individuals in the local area to get involved in the project
- Seek out and make new connections with local people
- To build bridges between these groups and co-ordinate workshops/post show/theatre clubs for interested parties
- Talk to advocates, artists and ambassadors in your local area
- Advise and assist in the marketing of shows
- Update social media in the local area about the performances
- Collect vox pops and assist with evaluation forms, in liaison with venues where needed
- Assist with local distribution to reach remote areas or expand the standard distribution campaign
- Initiate new ideas for engagement – competitions, ads, events that enhance the offering of the performance
- Organise workshops with vulnerable groups and/or put other groups in touch with relevant project manager
- Plan for low sales strategy

Last minute campaigns

In the event a show is struggling, the LES can help to do a last minute push in conjunction with the project manager/ venue. It helps if this has been discussed in the initial planning meeting and some ideas have been pre-agreed so they can be activated 1-2 weeks before the show date. The campaign might look like this:

Ticket offers – discounts, 2-4-1s and/or comp tickets

- Identify groups/individuals who might respond to a last minute offer e.g. youth theatre, local arts organisations. Good to use as a reward for those who are already loyal followers/partners/supporters. NOT those who need a long lead in time or regular offers to those who might be encouraged to wait for cheaper tickets/may consequently devalue the work

Promotions / competitions – drinks/ice-cream/promotions or prize draws

- Suggest promotions which might appeal to your target groups

Flying

- Identify beneficial local community events, could be done by LES or other

Social media/web

- Last minute reminders of the show or information about offers
- Last minute competitions

Radio/TV

- Any last minute pushes which can be utilize the company on local radio

Evaluation

LESs can provide invaluable help evaluating the show. The methods you use for this will vary depending on the production.

DURING NEW YOUNG THEATRE IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD WE USED

- Bespoke Survey forms
- Vox pops interview conducted after the show
- In depth interviews conducted after the show

The LESs we worked with collected over 500 feedback forms and did over 30 vox pops and in depth interviews with audiences across two years.

Our challenge to you

We know marketing budgets on small scale shows are small. But an effective LES for your show can cost as little as £400 for four days work. Why not:

- Spend less on posters and leaflets and instead employ an LES
- Speak to the venue about sharing the cost of an LES
- Call us if you are touring to Colchester, Malvern, Margate, Poole, Preston or Stockton and we can give you the names and contact details of the LESs we worked with
- Call us if you are touring to the same place as us in the same season – maybe we can share the cost of the LES between us?
- Build the cost of an LES into your project budgets and funding applications

Thanks and more information

Thanks to all the local engagement specialists we worked with; Katherine Beaumont, Charlotte Berry, Manda Graham, Jordana Golbourn, Suzy Humphries, Michelle Pogmore, Dan Thompson, Catherine Shaw, Patricia Verity, Harriet Webb, Jessica Jordan Wrench for talking about the work we do so passionately, to Georgette Purdey, Bridget Floyer, Hattie Gregory, Ed Errington and Anne Langford for making it all happen and to Arts Council England and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for funding the initial research. And finally to the whole Fuel team for their commitment and enthusiasm.

For more information and to speak to us in more detail about what we learnt call us on 020 7228 6688 or email info@fueltheatre.com

Notes:

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