Case Study

Our Creative Talent: the Voluntary and Amateur Arts in England

Client: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Outcomes and value

The first major national study to map the size, structure and characteristics of the voluntary and amateur arts sector in the UK, with a twin focus upon:

- Arts groups
- Informal adult learning in the arts.

This study was commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England (ACE) to improve the knowledge base on the voluntary and amateur arts sector in England.

The study represented a formidable challenge, being the first of its kind on a national scale and the first step towards developing a comprehensive understanding of a very complex sector.

The report enabled our client to access:

1. Detailed, expansive and groundbreaking insight into the voluntary and amateur arts.
2. Barriers and enablers to voluntary participation.
3. Information to inform a report which formed the basis for a major national conference held in London in July 2008. The Culture Minister, Margaret Hodge, described the report as 'a landmark – the first of its kind', and acclaimed its value in representing 'the sheer size and significance of the voluntary and amateur arts sector.'
4. New evidence to formulate strategies and initiatives to support the voluntary and amateur arts sector.

Project Director, Fiona Dodd said:

"This project utilized our skills in accessing difficult to reach data and allowed us to provide the client with groundbreaking insight into the scale and structure of the voluntary and amateur arts in the England. We particularly enjoyed engaging with the sector and providing an in-depth understanding of the sector and its contribution to the economy and society"

Our solution

The study was undertaken by TBR over a period of six months between November 2007 and April 2008 and consisted of a programme of quantitative and qualitative research including:

- Extensive desk research, a programme of 145 in-depth telephone interviews with VA groups and supporting organisations, and a nationwide online survey completed by approximately 2,200 VA groups.
- Accessing and analysing a number of secondary data sources including the National
- Learning Directory, the Learning and Skills Council's Individualised Learner Record for
- Adult Community Learning, and the National Learner Satisfaction Survey.

Headline findings included:

- There are 49,140 groups across the country - ranging from orchestras and book clubs to lace-making and dance - with a total of 5.9 million members
- An additional 3.5 million people volunteer as extras or helpers – for example raising funds or rigging lighting – bringing the total involvement to 9.4 million people
- Voluntary arts generated a total income of £543 million in 2006/07.
- There are 36,800 creative adult learning courses available across England.

The study which was jointly funded by DCMS and Arts Council England is the first ever national research project which provided detailed knowledge on the Voluntary Arts Sector in England and the provision of arts in adult and community learning.

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