

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

How inclusive are you? A checklist for voluntary arts groups

This briefing is designed to help you to increase the range of people who participate in your group, with a checklist of simple things you can do to achieve this quickly and easily. It is not a comprehensive list, but rather a tool to get you thinking about how you might like to approach the issues.

A. Background

Bringing people together from a variety of backgrounds not only helps cohesion within communities, but it also adds to the richness of everyone's experience, particularly in the context of the arts. Few arts groups intentionally exclude anyone from their activities and services, but bad habits and unintentional exclusion can easily go unnoticed. Careful and systematic thought about the issues surrounding 'being inclusive' will help prevent this.

Despite their comparative lack of resources, it is often smaller organisations that are at the forefront of efforts to increase inclusion, thanks to their ability to respond flexibly to the needs of their local communities. However, these efforts are not always so easily transferred to larger, more bureaucratic organisations. It is important, therefore, that smaller organisations continue to forge ahead with these initiatives, and that larger ones put the structures in place that will allow them to close the gap.

The checklist that follows is divided up into a series of categories. However, it is best to approach the issues of increasing inclusion from a holistic point of view, recognising that many of the barriers that commonly exclude people are related. For example, a single parent on a low income might benefit from a reduced fee structure, baby changing facilities,

Who is at risk of being excluded?

Anyone can be excluded, for any reason, and sometimes for no reason at all. The groups conventionally thought of as being subject to exclusion are often recognised in the law. For example, in certain legislatures and circumstances (such as employment or the supply of goods and services) it is illegal to discriminate against anyone on the basis of:

- sex or gender;
- race or ethnicity;
- religion or belief;
- sexual orientation;
- age;
- disability;
- whether they are pregnant;
- whether they are married or in a civil partnership;
- political opinion;
- whether they have caring responsibilities.

However, this doesn't mean these groups are always or necessarily excluded, or that they are the only ones to be so. A person may feel excluded because they are shy, or unmarried, or have a lower income, or are an ex-offender, or because English is not their first language, or they have special dietary requirements that few facilities cater for. They may just not fit in, for no apparent reason.

and a reciprocal child-minding scheme, but he/she may also be a vegetarian and be put off by the limited fare offered in your canteen. People do not tend to fall into simple categories, so it is important to try to address as many of the issues as you can.

The main equality bodies in the UK and Ireland are listed in the *Further Resources* section at the end of this briefing. They can provide guidance on what is actually covered by the legislation. We would recommend seeking advice from these bodies if the need arises. It is imperative to follow the legal guidelines, but merely ticking the legal boxes is not sufficient if you really want to be more inclusive and increase the variety of people taking part in your activities.



B. The checklist

Your membership

- Are you aware of the social and cultural make-up of your current and potential members? This won't tell you about the needs of individuals, which are invariably more complex than the statistics suggest, but it will help give you a better idea of the context of your local community. Look at statistics of your local area from the national census or local authority publications (see the *Further Resources* section at the end of this briefing for a list of statistical resources).
- Check to see how diverse your group already is. Look at how many are involved, categorise them, and then look more closely at the nature of their involvement. Are traditionally excluded groups relegated to the periphery of your activities while an exclusive group are involved more centrally?
- Some organisations operate a selective membership policy which means by their very nature they are exclusive, e.g. women's or youth groups. If this is the case with your group, is it worth re-evaluating your reasons for this? Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages? If you decide to continue with a selective membership policy, try to think about how the 'end product' still benefits as wide an audience as possible. Explain this in your equal opportunities policy.
- Your organisation may have no members from a particular group in your area, e.g. men over 50 years old. If you have an equal opportunities policy in place and nobody from this group has chosen to join, you cannot be said to have discriminated. But is this enough? Have you done everything you can to try to understand why this is the case and how it might be remedied?

Your organisation

- Is your organisation well-known as one that celebrates and values diversity? If not, why not, and what can you do about it?
- Is your desire to be an inclusive organisation written into your constitution and other governing documents? Do these restrict wider inclusion in any way?
- Do you have an equal opportunities policy? This is a statement of your organisation's commitment to promote equality and inclusion, along with a summary of the practical ways you are doing so. It should be written for your organisation specifically, and not be copied from another organisation whose needs will differ from yours. Your policy should point to areas that need attention, with an action plan of how and when you are going to address them. (for more information on equal opportunities policies, see *VAN Briefing 45*)

- Does your equal opportunities policy outline your process of avoiding and dealing with discrimination in the workplace and during recruitment?
- If the participants and members involved in your group are a diverse mix, it usually makes sense for that mix to be reflected in the make up of your staff, board and management committees, if applicable. If one group is under-represented among your members it might be especially important that this group is well-represented amongst staff and board/committee members, not just as a token gesture, but to give that community a voice. In this way, their needs and the aims and capabilities of your organisation will be more closely aligned.
- Do the people involved in decision-making have experience and understanding of the need to include as wide a variety of people as possible? You may wish to give someone the role of ensuring that these aspects are not overlooked in meetings and other decision-making scenarios.
- If you are a large organisation, have you considered establishing a small group to keep the issues surrounding inclusion in constant review?
- Are you vigilant about informal decision-making outside of the management structure that could lead to exclusion or discrimination? Do you have a policy on this?
- For larger organisations, do you ensure that the issues surrounding inclusion are not left to one department (e.g. marketing, membership or the executive committee), but involve everyone in the organisation?

Knowing where you're going

Monitoring and evaluation, particularly through consultation with current and potential participants, should be the first step in any initiative to increase inclusion in your group, and returned to continually. It is only by knowing where you have been and where you are now that you can decide the best way to improve things for the future.

- Have you consulted a true cross section of your community, including, but not limited to, representatives of traditionally excluded groups?
- Have you asked them what factors affect whether, or how often, they come to your activities, and what would make them feel more comfortable doing so?
- Have you asked your current participants what benefits they get from taking part? Don't just focus on the social benefits, but on the artistic ones too. This information is invaluable in helping others visualise their own potential.
- Have you considered a variety of means of consultation, including focus groups, staff and volunteer meetings, word of mouth, questionnaires and surveys and published



consultation papers? These can be done at your venue and in other parts of the community, including community centres, youth clubs, doctor's waiting rooms, shopping malls, supermarkets, etc. Think about where the people who you want to include in your activities may go, and try and match the method with the person and the location.

- Consultation should not be thought of as a bureaucratic necessity, but a genuine opportunity to connect with people. Do you truly value the input of the individuals you consult? Do you show them how much their input means to your organisation?
- Have you considered an external audit by an accessibility consultant? If so, it is important not to focus all your attention on the physical barriers. Also, don't rely on a single consultant; this inevitably leads to barriers to inclusion being missed.
- Do you keep track of all the things you have done to find out what the situation is, what you have done to improve things, and what effect these actions have had? Keeping records, forms and spreadsheets is vital in assessing the impact of your efforts and moving forward.
- Do you take complaints and suggestions seriously?

Your publicity and information materials

- Information is vital in letting people know what's going on, and it is vital that everyone can access it. Do you provide alternative formats, e.g. Braille, tape, plain wording, large print? The use of plain wording and large print is useful for many people, not just those who are partially sighted. (*for more information on creating clear print, see VAN Briefing 53*)
- There is a growing number of languages used by substantial communities in the UK and Ireland. If any of these are in your area, have you considered arranging the translation of at least your main publications or information leaflets? If you are in an area with a background in languages other than English, do you translate all or relevant parts of your materials into those different languages e.g. Welsh, Gaelic or Scots?
- Is your website fully accessible in accordance with the current standards? (*for more information on web accessibility, see VAN Briefing 86*)
- Does your promotional material show images of a diverse range of people and use inclusive language?
- Do you provide audio/verbal descriptions of visual information? Do you subtitle audio/verbal information?
- Is creating an inclusive message part of the briefing process you use when briefing external designers/marketers?
- The more people you reach with your advertising, the more culturally diverse your audience will be, so be proactive and

get your message out there. Advertise in places where most people are likely to see your adverts.

- What media do your community access? Local television, local newspapers, social networking websites? Try to forge links with the media providers to help get your message across.
- Is information about disabled access at your venue prominent on all of your marketing materials? (*for more information on access and the Disability Discrimination Act, see VAN Briefings 10 and 44, or Admit All – Guidance to Improve Access to Voluntary Arts in Northern Ireland*)

Your activities

- Have you tried to put yourself in someone else's shoes when coming to take part in your activities for the first time? How do you feel coming through the door and socialising with a group of strangers?
- Do you have special sessions for new members in a safe environment, where everyone is new, and where they do not have to make a long-term commitment, to give them a taster of what you do?
- Have you identified potential barriers to your activities such as cost, timing, transport and location of the venue? How can you vary your offering to cater for those who have little money, work unsociable hours, do not have their own transport and live many miles away? Have you consulted the people affected when trying to come up with solutions?
- Do you help people with caring responsibilities for children, or elderly or disabled relatives? Have you considered a childcare subsidy scheme or flexible timetabling to accommodate them?
- Do you cater for vegetarian, vegan and other special diets? What people can eat varies for a number of health, lifestyle and religious reasons. Food allergies and intolerances are also more common nowadays. How well do you meet these needs?
- Do you have a pricing structure that allows people with lower incomes to participate without discrimination? Do you provide block booking discounts for those who wish to pay in advance? Do you offer 'pay as you go' rates for people who cannot commit to regular attendance?
- Do you offer activities both inside and outside of conventional work hours? Do you have provision in the school holidays?
- Do you encourage people to explore and express their own experiences through art, and to share these experiences with others?
- If the barriers are not physical but attitudinal (worries or beliefs that keep people at a distance from a particular 'group' of people), have you sourced equality awareness training to help people overcome their fears and objections?



Your buildings and equipment

- Do you know what you are required to do to comply with the laws on accessibility? (for more information on access and the law, see the Further Resources section)
- Have you considered people with hidden impairments, as well as those with other more visible disabilities such as wheelchair users? Overcoming physical accessibility and sensory barriers benefits everyone, not just disabled, blind and partially sighted people.
- Have you looked into the high and low-tech assistive technology solutions that are available for people with hearing impairments?
- Are your staff trained to help people who may have difficulty accessing your facilities? Are they aware of individual needs?
- Are locations clearly signposted?
- Some building adaptations and equipment are expensive and some are not. Do you know what is required and what you can afford in the short and long term?
- Is your venue close to public transport? Could you provide activities at a different, more easily accessible, venue?
- Have you considered audio description/signing at performances and conferences? You can potentially get funding for this?

Further Resources

Voluntary Arts Network has a range of briefings that relate to inclusion, all of which are available to download or purchase from www.voluntaryarts.org/briefings:

- 10: **Access**
- 24: **Increasing and Maintaining Your Membership**
- 44: **Disability Discrimination Act Part III**
- 45: **How do I create an Equal Opportunities Policy?**
- 53: **Creating Clear Print**
- 58: **Participatory Planning**
- 86: **Making Your Website for Everyone**
- 90: **Young Adults and the Voluntary Arts**
- 94: **Cultural Diversity and the Voluntary Arts**
- 104: **Older People and the Voluntary Arts**
- 110: **Whose Board, Whose Agenda?**

Admit All – Guidance to Improve Access to Voluntary Arts in Northern Ireland – www.vaireland.org

Organisations which provide statistical analysis of communities:

- **National Statistics Neighbourhood database for the UK** – www.statistics.gov.uk, T: 0845 601 3034
- **Neighbourhood Statistics for Northern Ireland** – www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk
- **Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS)** for the Republic of Ireland – from www.cso.ie

Organisations which provide guidance on the laws surrounding unfair discrimination:

- **Equal Opportunities Commission** – www.eoc.org.uk, T: 0845 601 5901
- **Disability Rights Commission** – www.drc-gb.org, T: 0845 7622 633
- **Commission for Racial Equality** – www.cre.gov.uk, T: 020 7939 0000
- **Age Concern** – www.ageconcern.org.uk, T: 0800 00 99 66 – this has separate parts across the UK
- **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** – www.equalityni.org, T: 028 9050 0600
- **Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform** (Republic of Ireland) – www.justice.ie, T: +353 1 602-8202

Information contained here may go out of date and you are therefore advised to check its currency. Updated information may be available on the VAN website: www.voluntaryarts.org

Disclaimer: Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure the information in this document is accurate. However, it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith at the stated date but without accepting liability. We therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.

Do you need this publication in an alternative format?
Contact T: 029 20 395 395 E: info@voluntaryarts.org

VOLUNTARY ARTS NETWORK



The Voluntary Arts Network, 41 Plasturton Gardens, Pontcanna, Cardiff CF11 9HG
T: 029 20 395 395 E: info@voluntaryarts.org W: www.voluntaryarts.org

The Voluntary Arts Network is registered in Scotland as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC 020345.
VAN acknowledges funding from the Arts Councils of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
Registered office: 2nd Floor, 54 Manor Place, Edinburgh EH3 7EH.

Printed onto environmentally friendly paper

