



New Ways of Working

Co-producing research with young cultural leaders

Royal Opera House Bridge | Lucie Fitton, Head of Learning and Participation

What arts and cultural activities do young people do? What would they like to do? What motivates them? What might stop them... and how do they hear about creative opportunities?

These were some of the questions Royal Opera House Bridge asked The Audience Agency when commissioned to co-produce new research on young peoples' views of arts and cultural opportunities in the region and explore how young people could become active cultural ambassadors.

Staff at The Royal Opera House Bridge were determined that young people's voices be reflected as much as possible. Their ambition was for young people to be involved throughout; in decision-making, about what to ask, how to ask it and how to share the results - not just as passive participants. For many arts practitioners the concept of co-production or co-curation is a familiar one. However co-produced research is a new methodology, and with it the team had to find ways of overcoming the challenges which occur when developing new research approaches.

Building Relationships

The Royal Opera House Bridge had very clear research aims and from these one of the greatest challenges was how to answer a number of complex questions through a small qualitative research project. The brief also required representation of young people from across a large geographic area which included both rural and urban areas, and who felt confident to engage in a new model of working as co-producers rather than passive agents.

The Audience Agency brought together 30 young people from across the area for two training and development days. Early investment in building relationships with arts and youth organisations in the region was a key success factor ensuring that the research sample group was fairly represented in order to shape the rest of the project.

Co-producing a Research Festival

Over two days of training and development activity The Audience Agency team, alongside with the group of young people developed the research aims into specific questions.

From this it was agreed that further conversations should take place with other young people at regional events. The Audience Agency provided training on interview techniques and using social media tools to capture wider information about arts events. With the events taking place at a number of festivals, the group chose to name the project 'Bridgefest'. Perhaps the first time research activities had been called a festival.

Digital Communications

A core group of young people - Bridgefest Ambassadors - took part in delivering the research across events ranging from music festivals, youth parliament meetings and college open days. Using the hashtag '#bridgefest' the project was able to capture all activity and compile it using Storify. The stories created proved to be a powerful way of communicating 'Bridgefest' to the Royal Opera House Bridge, and their key stakeholders (storify.com/Bridgefest).

Creative Interpretations and Debate

The young people felt that they could add to the report even more by helping to explain the findings and process to other organisations in person. With some additional support from the Royal Opera House Bridge, The Audience Agency developed the idea into 'You Ask, We Answer'.

Working with the Bridgefest Ambassadors, an event was held at the Royal Opera House to share the findings of the research and to create a space for young people and arts organisations to meet in person to discuss. Over 70 adults and young people were brought together on the day (storify.com/ROHBridge/you-ask-we-answer).

The event included provocative speeches by established young artists, commissioned creative interpretations of the research by emerging artists, as well as debates, discussions and musical performances to capture and share the many ideas.

Co-producing and Legacy

'You Ask, We Answer' was successful because it put into action the research findings quickly while it also enabled a more extensive debate and the opportunity to build on the initial report through creative approaches.

Since the initial programme, Royal Opera House Bridge have continued their research through partner organisations and have since developed a simple guide for those wishing to develop their own young cultural leaders' activities.

Another positive legacy of the project was the establishment of a group of young adults who continue to be strong advocates for arts and culture across the region. One of the Bridge Ambassadors has gone on to be featured in a regional newspaper and others have written blogs for the Royal Opera House website. One of the young artists commissioned for 'You Ask, We Answer', Esther Burns, was featured at the 'Ahead for Culture' Conference where she discussed her work with journalist and broadcaster Kirsty Wark, which led to a number of mentoring opportunities with galleries and arts agencies in the region.

Impact

Significantly for The Audience Agency the project had three key outcomes in the way research could be delivered.

- 1) That more consideration should be given for how projects need to factor in more time to support relationship building between participants and the commissioning organisation.
- 2) That the inclusion of creative events and artist interpretation can add a lot of value to traditional research approaches.
- 3) Finally, that co-produced research over traditional consultation can be an effective way of creating a lasting audience led impact.

Report

The full report by the Audience Agency and Bridgefest Ambassadors is now available to download from the Royal Opera House website. www.roh.org.uk

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