



7. Stakeholders

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Involving potential stakeholders

The Oxford Dictionary defines the term 'stakeholder' as a person or company that is involved in a particular organization, project, or system, especially because they have invested money in it. In the context of participatory arts projects, it refers to any person or organisation that has invested something, however small, in a project, and has an interest in seeing it thrive. Stakeholders can provide support and resources to a project and can be useful in reaching areas (for example, areas of knowledge, or funding resources) that an artist may not have easy access to. On the other hand, stakeholders also demand time and at-

tention that the artist may feel would be better used on participants and carrying out the project itself. However, just as with sponsors and other supporters, an appropriate amount of time spent communicating with stakeholders will usually bring benefits to the project.

From a strategic point of view, having well-respected stakeholders on board will add credibility to a project, and may make it easier to access certain funds, or to other stakeholders. A successful collaboration with aligned outlooks and aims can leave a positive legacy, with stakeholders continuing to work together on a long-term basis.

Stakeholders can vary from private individuals to large multinational companies. Each comes with its own 'personality', and each will want different things from their involvement, so it's good to be aware of how each potential stakeholder works. Below are some broad examples of the types of stakeholders which may help to see which are best suited to be involved in a project.

- **Individuals** - Individuals may come to be involved in a project in various ways – possibly by helping out on a personal basis, by taking part in the project in the past, or by having family members or friends involved in the project. They can offer genuine and very personal input into the project – sometimes the impromptu loan of a room or a bicycle can be as useful as a larger offer of help.

- **Professional individuals** - Some projects may collaborate with specialists from other fields, such as social workers, researchers, anthropologists, historians etc. Whether these professionals are paid for their involvement or not, they should still be treated as someone with an interest in the project once their work is finished, and should be kept up to date with the project's progress and outcomes.

- **Local NGOs** - Smaller local organisations can provide specialised help or guidance in their field. They can also help with making contacts with potential participants or other stakeholders. NGOs will quite often be over-worked and under-resourced, and may not always be able to provide as much assistance as hoped.

- **Civil society groups** - similar to NGOs, civil society groups are often under-resourced. They are often – but not always – focused on a political or civic mission, and so collaboration can take place only where the project's aims are aligned with theirs.

- **Local authorities** - Local authorities should have the well-being of the community in mind, but are often driven by external pressures and resources. However, they may be able to offer valuable information about their communities and their histories, customs and populations.

- **Arts organisations** - arts and culture organisations can offer advice and sometimes mentoring in carrying out socially-engaged projects. They may also be able to provide networking, which may be of benefit to your

project. Museums may be able to offer their spaces or access to their collections. Depending on their size, arts organisations may collaborate on the project, play a minor role, or provide funding for a project.

- **Well-being organisations** - these include organisations responsible for the well-being of the elderly, or people with mental health needs, whether they are government organisations or smaller institutions. If the project aims to work with vulnerable people, bringing such an organisation on board may be helpful, not only in terms of participants, but also expertise and specialist support. Such organisations are usually quite aware of the benefits that the arts can provide to those they care for.

- **Funding bodies** - funding bodies such as arts councils or larger foundations provide financial resources, usually against an open, competitive call, although some foundations may operate on a more informal basis. Whatever the case, it's important that the aims of the project are well-aligned with the aims of the call or funding body. Don't try to make the project fit the funding call – it will be obvious to the funders and will be very difficult to implement successfully.

The project Släpp loss kulturen (Let Go of Culture) (2016 - 2018) in Malmo in Sweden inspired young people to discover and develop their creativity through workshops in film, dance, music, and visual art. Several smaller pop-up performances, as well as a larger performance, were also held at various locations in

the area. The project organisers could link their cultural work with other social initiatives and collaborated with criminal justice, police, social services, housing companies and the school, in order to provide opportunities for participants. www.flammanhyllie.se/projekt/slapp-loss-kulturen

When seeking to work with a stakeholder, the following questions may be useful to identify the best collaborators;

- What competencies and knowledge will this stakeholder add to the project's team?
- What resources (financial or other) can the stakeholder reasonably contribute?
- Will the collaboration widen the project's network?
- Could it also broaden the project's potential audiences?
- Will the stakeholder be able to allow the project access to potential participants?
- Will the stakeholder be supportive when things don't go as planned?

Before approaching an organisation, research their aims and structure, and try to find out, through a polite phone call, who best to make initial contact with. Make sure that their aims are aligned with those of the project. And be aware of contexts which may be relevant [e.g., contacting a migrant rights organisation when they are over-busy because of an influx of migrants].

NGOs or more formal institutions may best be approached through a formal letter or email of introduction, requesting a meeting, followed up by a phone call. Several attempts may be necessary, particularly if the organisation is busy or under-funded.

Strategies for approaching stakeholders

Potential stakeholders can be approached differently, depending on their knowledge of the project's aims, and of creative work in general.

Individuals are often introduced on a personal basis. As when approaching project participants, their knowledge of socially engaged projects may vary, so a clear explanation of the project's background, its aims, context and participants is best. The relationship can be allowed to develop from there – meeting in person will provide immediate feedback.

Organisations that are not familiar with the arts may need a change in tone or language when contacting them. Potential sponsors, for example, will want to know that their contribution will be given adequate visibility. Local councils may want to know more about how the project will benefit their residents and contribute to the cohesion of their neighbourhoods. Organisations working with vulnerable groups will need to be reassured that these groups will be treated sensitively and with respect. Some organisations may need to be persuaded about the benefits of supporting a creative project and may need reassurance of how the project will develop over time.

Lastly, funding bodies that work with an application system can be approached for advice or feedback on the most suitable funding streams, but ultimately, an application or

proposal will have to be submitted in line with their requirements.

The research-based interdisciplinary project [You Are What You Buy](http://www.kristinaborg.com/youarewhatyoubuy) (2016 - 2018) found an unusual stakeholder in a collaboration with a local supermarket. A team of six researchers and the artist, guided by a social anthropologist, worked in a supermarket, observing the space, branding and marketing strategies of the supermarket, interviewing shoppers and employees, observing shopping patterns and choices, and studying shopping lists and receipts.
www.kristinaborg.com/youarewhatyoubuy