Guide to Audience Development Planning

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Introduction

This guide to audience development planning reflects the views and experience of The Audience Agency team and is based on a combination of documented theory and our observations and experience of what helps organisations to develop thriving, sustainable audiences.

It is vital to note that there is no single, right way to create an audience plan. Organisations play different roles in the "cultural eco-system", and any audience development plan should reflect the scale, resources, personality and purpose of each. Organisations try to reach different audiences for different reasons and do so in different ways. This diversity is the sign of a healthy, creative and audience-focused eco-system.

What this guide suggests is a flexible process that can help organisations surface and test its ambitions for developing audiences and then take realistic steps towards achieving them with a good chance of success. The framework for building a plan is a simple one, suitable for all sorts of experiences, artforms and types of organisations, regardless of scale, resources or mission.

The audience plan – and phases of the planning process - can be more or less integrated into other plans, as long as it is commonly understood and used. This process is embedded in our online audience development planner. The tool offers a simplified 6-step process (as detailed in this article) guiding users through the process of creating their plan. Plans can be saved and downloaded as word/pdf documents in Audience Finder www.audiencefinder.org/plan/

What is Audience Development?

Audience development is broad in scope and covers a large number of activities, approaches and philosophies, but is a term used to describe the way in which relationships between audiences and cultural organisations are managed.

The Audience Agency definition: *…a planned, organisation-wide approach to extending the range and nature of relationships with the public, it helps a cultural organisation to achieve its mission, balancing social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambitions.*

What is an audience development plan?

We consider that an audience development plan is an explicit, suitably detailed plan for achieving a range of audience aims. These might be social, financial, creative and/or educational; most cultural organisations have the demanding task of managing all sorts of competing priorities, and a plan can therefore help them to balance these. Actions listed in the plan might combine programming, marketing and communications, educational and environmental activities. However, such a plan requires collaboration between those responsible for all these areas.

An audience development plan is therefore *not* a marketing or campaign plan for a specific event, activity or season, nor is it a programme of special activities, nor an outreach initiative but could set the context for such activities and inform a delivery plan.

Why have a plan?

We place a strong emphasis on a clearly articulated plan, communicated consistently across the organisation. Few cultural organisations have a long-term audience plan which spans a period of years in the same way they have a long-term financial one. As a result this can hamper genuine progress in growing and diversifying audiences. The process of collaborating in a plan's creation is a useful exercise in itself for an organisation to undertake as it helps to:

- Define a well-framed purpose
- Create shared understanding of audience potential and what success looks like
- Provide a route-map for where an organisation wants to go
- Create a framework for collaboration between everyone planning and delivering aspects of the audience offer, from programming to customer welcome
- Determine resources – budgets, people and skills.

Use of evidence

One of the defining features of an audience plan is that it is based on real evidence, rather than untested assumptions. All planning benefits from evidence, but in the case of audience strategy, it is particularly important to understand the world from outside in.

Without evidence - that the audiences we hope to reach are really within our reach - without listening to their opinions, or tracking their habits, our efforts to reach them are at best a shot in the dark, at worst a waste of our limited resources.

Different organisations however need different kinds of evidence, and there is a great diversity in the level of resources and skill organisations are able to invest in this area. Broadly speaking, the higher the stakes are, the greater the need for evidence. So large organisations with high revenue targets and social expectations will need plenty, but a small organisation planning a radical change will also need to think about investing at the right level.

At each stage of the planning process that follows, we have suggested what kinds of evidence would be helpful. There is further information at the end of this document on the use of evidence for audience development planning and where that is located.

Planning process overview

Our planning process can be applied more or less explicitly and every organisation can answer the questions in different ways. Many organisations will carry out aspects of this process as part of their overall strategic planning and will not necessarily complete each step, or necessarily in this order.

Mission	**What you want to achieve** Agreeing where audiences sit in your mission and strategy - articulating ambitions.
Analysis	**What is your potential, what are the limitations?** Using evidence to assess situations, audience potential and to understand audience barriers and needs.
Strategies	**How will you achieve success?** Choosing the main approaches likely to meet aims, capitalise on opportunities and mitigate risks.
Objectives	**What will success look like? How will you measure it?** Refining ambitions into SMART objectives for chosen strategies
Action	**What will you do, when?** Timetabled, budgeted and resourced range of activities designed to meet objectives.
Review	**Is it working? What do you need to change?** Approach for monitoring success, regular review of progress and adaptation of action plans.
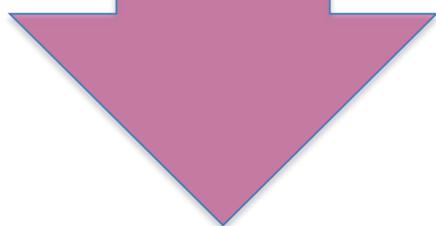
Your audience development plan: step-by-step

1. Mission: setting audience goals

The starting point is to identify the audience goals - implicit or explicit - in your organisation's overall mission and other strategic plans. At this level, though rooted in reality, goals might also be aspirational and ambitious.

Your goals will probably be a mix of:

- Financial – income from ticket sales, secondary spend, membership, donations

- Social – involving specific communities, increasing less engaged audiences, overcoming barriers, contributions to civic life or community-building, instrumental impacts on communities, advocacy with stakeholders

- Educational or experiential – developing the range and depth of audience engagement, the quality of their experiences, learning opportunities, instrumental outcomes

- Reputational/creative – building audiences for specific types of work, gaining recognition, collaborative ventures

Evidence to use:

Previous track record; key trends over time; headlines from audience feedback; internal review

2. Analysis: understanding your situation and potential

| Mission | **Analysis** | Strategies | Objectives | Action | Review |

With aspirations in mind, you will need to assess the real potential for audience development in your organisation. Which audiences do you need to engage and how to meet those initial goals? Analysis should explore the opportunities and barriers you might encounter, and test out the achievability of ambitions. Carrying out analysis requires real evidence, more so here than in any other phase.

Useful analysis combines internal and external exploration:

- Internal: your organisation's current activities and their success
- Current audiences: overall trends, patterns of engagement, knowledge of needs
- External: who does similar things, opportunities and threats, changing environment
- Potential audiences: location, profiles, preferences and barriers/motivations

One of the most powerful ways of analysing target audiences is to create a clear 'segmentation' which identifies distinct groups who will respond to different treatment.

Having a working segmentation as the basis for your cultural offerings for a range of people is critical to successful audience development.

Evidence to use:
Current audiences: box office data analysis; survey data; qualitative research; postcode analysis (available through Audience Finder)

Potential: catchment area analysis population profile (Area Profile Reports); secondary research; Audience Spectrum profiles; primary research or consultation with target groups

Comparative benchmarks for area/artform (available through Audience Finder)

3. Choosing your strategies

Mission	Analysis	**Strategies**	Objectives	Action	Review

Having identified your audience potential, you can choose what approaches it will take to engage those audiences and in so doing, reach your goals.

Essentially, these are likely to combine developing new and existing audiences by developing new and existing programme offers.

It can be considered risky to focus too heavily on building new audiences for new activities, so a measured approach is recommended, informed by a realistic assessment of the resource implications of your chosen strategies.

The Ansoff matrix is an example of a tool that can aid planning for what your organisation will do to retain and grow its core audience, while attracting new target audiences. When thinking about strategies, consider the relationship between audiences and products or cultural offers, particularly with regard to whether they are: familiar or unfamiliar with your organisation's work. The completed matrix can then be used to develop objectives from your proposed strategies that seem most meaningful to your organisation's current issues and needs.

A template and examples are provided in our audience development planner
www.audiencefinder.org/plan/

Evidence to use:

Examples of effectiveness of strategies selected; cost-benefit analysis / ROI; evidence of audience needs, interests or preferences; evidence of interest among potential audiences.

4. Setting clear objectives
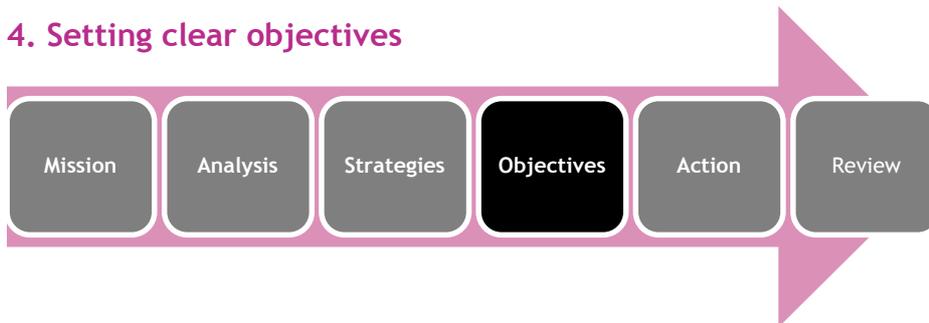
Once you are clear about your strategic options, specific objectives can then be set for your chosen strategies, indicating expectations to engage new and existing audiences.

Objectives can also reflect the organisation's higher goals, translating them to quantifiable, SMART targets for financial, social, experiential or creative achievements.

SMART objectives make action planning and monitoring easier and will enable your organisation to clearly identify what you want to achieve from your strategies. Some examples of SMART audience objectives and measures for monitoring the progress of each one can be found here.

Useful framework: SMART

S pecific - The goal is clearly defined and unambiguous

M easurable - The goal uses concrete evidence to measure achievement, e.g. through box office data, audience survey

A chievable - The goal must be something that may be challenging but isn't out of reach
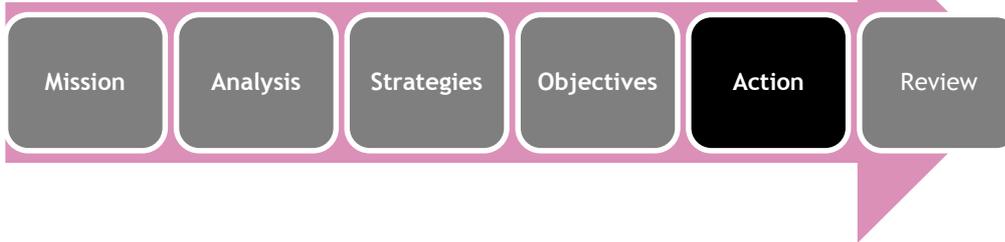
R elevant - The goal must matter to your organisation and relate to its mission

T imetabled - Goals need grounding within a time frame, incorporating a delivery date

Evidence to use:

Trends, track-record and regional/national benchmarks

5. Putting it into action

The action plan translates your thinking into every day, tactical practice. We often recommend following a template that indicates how you will adapt the full "mix" (commonly referred to as 4Ps) to suit the needs of each target audience. This includes noting aspects of your programme which match directly to particular audience needs.

Importantly, your action plan should make clear:

- Budget (based on real costings)
- People responsible for actions / strands.
- Partners and collaborators
- Staff with relevant skills and capacity
- Timelines

Useful framework: The Mix – '4Ps'

Programme/ product - the key elements of your programme offer for different audiences e.g. Live / Digital, types of programming, participation

Place – Environment where your intended programme/product takes place, at what times, how people access it, booking facilities, social space etc.

**Price** – What the value proposition is, paid vs free. Whether the target audience responds to premium/discounts/offers

Promotion – Channels and methods to communicate messages to your intended target audience

Evidence to use:

Evidence of success of previous tactics; evidence of audience preferences (reference 4Ps); pricing analysis

6. Review, evaluate and adapt your plan
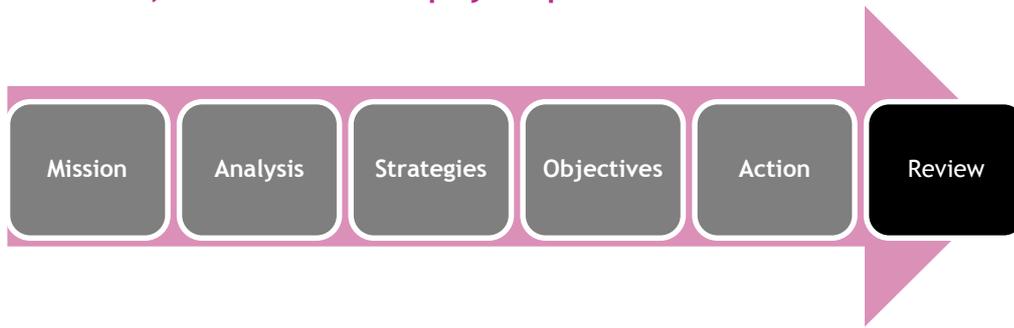
The final step is to measure your progress towards objectives, with a view to adapting approaches, or the goals themselves.

It is helpful to decide at the outset what constitutes suitable evidence, how to collect it, and where and how to debate and review its significance.

We would encourage you to measure what you value (not value what you measure), matching metrics to their original objectives.

Return on Investment (ROI) can be used to measure and evaluate the relative performance of different projects or activities. Monitoring the difference between spend and return as a regular metric can be helpful – e.g. marketing spend per £1 ticket revenue earned.

Evidence to use:

Evidence from progress monitoring (metrics should reflect objectives set), e.g. Financial – required revenue, margins; Social - specified communities (location or interest) and Creative - achievements in creating particular kinds of quality experiences.

Glossary

Audience Finder

Delivered by The Audience Agency, *Audience Finder* has the aim of supporting cultural organisations to reach more people, new audiences with greater efficiency. It is a collaborative data-sharing and capacity development programme. Analysis combines customer and behavioural data fed from box office systems, online interactions and a primary research survey exploring motivations and opinions. www.audiencefinder.org

Audience Spectrum

Audience Spectrum is a new segmentation of the English population with 10 segments that categorise people first and foremost by how they engage with culture in a way that is geographically locatable. Replacing Arts Audiences Insight, new developments include profiles being as relevant to museums as they are to the arts, and accurately targetable to postcodes.

One of Audience Spectrum's primary uses is to enable cultural organisations to think about working with less engaged audiences and to inform strategies to help build these relationships. www.audiencefinder.org/spectrum

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

Customer Relationship Management is the management process that uses individual customer data to enable a tailored and mutually trusting and valuable proposition.
In all but the smallest of organisations, CRM is characterised by the IT enabled integration of customer data from multiple sources.

This term is used as a description for seeking customers and developing relationships with them. CRM also relates to the nature of systems that organisations put in place to capture data and manage audience relationships.

Data Sharing

Audience data is not inherently useful and only becomes so once it is put to a purpose and organised, analysed or processed to that end. We tend to think of data as information from a box office system, or increasingly from online or social media, but it includes any recorded information e.g. mailing lists, names in a CRM database, comments in a visitor's book or emails/data collected through surveys.

There are two main purposes which data serves, and any plan to share data should be clearly geared to one or both www.audiencefinder.org/articles/data-sharing

 a) to provide actionable **insight** about audiences and non-attenders

 b) to enable **communication** directly with audiences or participants

Least engaged / Lower engaged

This term refers to sections of the population least likely to engage with arts and culture, as identified through population studies such as the DCMS' annual *Taking Part* survey. Analysis suggests that not being engaged with culture (and indeed with many other public services and aspects of leisure) is linked to other indices of deprivation, in particular lower levels of educational attainment, a more significant factor than lack of wealth and certainly than ethnicity or disability. Tools like Audience Spectrum are helpful in identifying less engaged people.

Market Testing

A form of audience or consumer research which invites feedback on *proposed* activities before they go to market. This is usually done through qualitative methodologies. http://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-research-and-insight/research-consultancy/

Segmentation

'Segmentation' happens when a given audience or market is broken down into distinct groups that behave in similar ways or have similar needs. Segmentation can help organisations to understand their audiences, identify a big enough group of people that are locatable, and develop a cultural offer and tailored communications that are based on needs. Population segmentation systems – like Audience Spectrum, Mosaic, Acorn or Culture Segments can add depth to an organisation's segmentation of its audience, and enable organisations to identify a new, untapped audience for their work. http://audiencefinder.org/articles/segmentation-made-simple

For other definitions, the Audience Finder has an extensive glossary of audience development terminology:

http://audiencefinder.org/explanations/

Key resources include:

www.audiencefinder.org   for advice on collecting data, tools and applying evidence in practice

www.culturehive.co.uk   for case studies, articles, toolkits and a range of good practice audience development strategies including key resources such as Thinking Big http://culturehive.co.uk/resources/thinking-big

What's in Audience Finder?

Audience Finder resources	Purpose
Dashboard metrics (Login required for participating organisations)	Audience profiles, behaviour, location and attitudes from data banked with Audience Finder http://audiencefinder.org/my-profile/register
Sector / artform reporting benchmarks	http://audiencefinder.org/audience/
Geographic cluster trends and benchmarks	http://audiencefinder.org/audience/#location
FAQs exploring audience norms	Autumn 2014
How to guidance online	http://audiencefinder.org/apply/
Audience Development Planner	http://audiencefinder.org/plan/
Segmentation Toolkit	http://audiencefinder.org/articles/segmentation-made-simple
Area Profile reports	http://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-research-and-insight/area-profile-reports/
Audience Spectrum profiling	http://audiencefinder.org/spectrum
Audience development terminology and definitions	http://audiencefinder.org/explanations/