



Information Sheet

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Community media As a platform for the arts

There is a wealth of arts activity already taking place through community media organisations, but the community media sector still has huge potential to offer the arts – including collaborations between arts groups and community media organisations within the same communities.

A. What is community media?

‘Community media’ describes a kind of not-for-profit broadcasting, owned and run by local people, most of whom are volunteers. Community media projects are editorially independent from government and other institutions and provide a platform for issues and debates important to the communities they serve. This enables communities throughout the country to create opportunities to reach out to local people through radio, television and new technology – providing anything from news and community affairs to teaching and creative expression.

How is it different from commercial and public broadcasting?

Community media, no matter what the platform (radio, television or internet), has key characteristics that differentiates it from commercial and public broadcasting:

- **Independence** – community media organisations are structured as independent bodies (such as companies limited by guarantee, co-operatives or Community Interest Companies), with management committees made up of community representatives. The open, transparent and community-focused nature of the community media sector is very similar to that of the community arts.

- **Rooted in the communities they serve** – community media organisations are often located in the heart of the communities they work in, and aim to meet the needs of particular groups, for instance practicing artists, young people, older people, black and minority ethnic communities, migrant communities, faith communities, people with disabilities and economically disadvantaged groups. They are representative of a particular community – whether geographical (urban or rural) or a ‘community of interest’ (e.g. children, young people or older people).
- **Volunteer-led** – community media organisations are volunteer-led and run. Some organisations do employ staff too, but are still mainly run by volunteers with the staff members facilitating the volunteer activity.

What can community media do for arts groups?

Community media can:

- encourage new participants, members and volunteers to join in;
- help increase attendances at arts and crafts events;
- introduce new and established art and craft work to community media audiences;
- build long-lasting relationships between local communities and arts/crafts groups;
- enable existing participants and volunteers in the community media sector to get involved in creative activity;
- strengthen the programming schedules by providing a cultural element to local coverage.

Where can I hear and see these media organisations?

- **Community radio** – perhaps the most well known form of community media, regulated by Ofcom. Over 200 community stations in the UK are licensed to broadcast on the airwaves – read the list at www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/community-main.html
- **Community internet radio** – there are also many community stations that stream their programmes to their audience over the internet. Most of the FM stations also broadcast on the internet too. Internet radio stations (whether FM or solely internet) also offer listen-again services and podcasting so that the audiences can listen to the programming when it suits them
- **On the TV** – there are two community TV stations on air at the moment – one in Belfast broadcasting across the whole Belfast area and one in Immingham broadcasting across North and North East Lincolnshire. There are plans to develop local and community TV further
- **Internet TV** – many community filmmakers broadcast their films on the internet as well as on individual DVDs and shown at community cinemas

B. How can we get involved?

All community media organisations are different in the way that they programme, but you will find that most will be interested in your input and programme ideas.

Most have a 'get involved' section on their website, detailing how you and your group can join in. It is usually the station manager or production team that you'd need to speak to.

1. Get to know the community media organisations relevant to you – each community media organisation is unique and has its own style. By becoming one of their audience members you can better understand the way that they broadcast. Tune in at different times of the day and week to get a full appreciation of their programming. From this you can get a feel for the ways in which you might work together.

2. Make contact – let them know who you are, where you are from, how you think you can work together and what ideas you have. Be open to their suggestions too – with your knowledge of your art or craft form and their media skills, together you can produce something really spectacular.

3. Use it as a learning opportunity – if you or someone in your group would like to learn broadcasting and editing skills, many community media organisations will be happy to train you to take the microphone, interview others and digitally edit your own work.

4. Create a lasting relationship – once you have had your first taste of community media exposure you might like to consider more long-term projects, such as helping to run a specific 'culture show' – highlighting local cultural events and opportunities, bringing guests into the studio including new bands that can play on air – the possibilities are numerous!

Case study

A youth theatre group made contact with a local community radio station. Through conversations with the station manager, a few potential opportunities were identified.

The group were in rehearsal for one of their annual productions at the time. They came into the studio and explained the rehearsal process and read a part of their production on air.

They were also interviewed and spoke about their group and its members, where, when and why they get together, the upcoming performance and open day.

They were pleased to be able to talk about their work and managed to encourage people to come along to their open day, as well as gaining the experience of performing live on the radio.

Further Resources

- **Community Media Association** – the national community media membership body – www.commedia.org.uk

- **Ofcom community radio** – <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/radio/community>
- **United for Local Television** – more information on local and community TV – www.unitedforlocaltv.com
- **Community Radio Toolkit** – a resource website for community radio – www.communityradiotoolkit.net
- **The Scottish Community Broadcast Network** – email secretary.scbn@gmail.com

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