



Co-Creating Change: Where we're at right now (Feb 2019)

Notes, ideas and principles collated from the first meeting of the Co-Creating Change network on 13th September 2018. See also [What we're doing next](#).

What is Co-Creating Change?

Co-Creating Change is a network and programme which explores the role which artists, cultural organisations and communities can play to co-create change together around the UK and beyond.

What is the aim of Co-Creating Change?

Co-Creating Change aims to work together as a network to advocate for a better understanding and appreciation of co-created practice both in the arts sector and beyond.

We want to move the arts and cultural sector beyond a narrow model of arts participation that has dominated how the sector has worked with people over the last 30 years ("come and join in with what we do"), towards a wider, more inclusive model of co-creation ("come and create"), as we believe this is a much more effective way to increase the social impact of our work.

There is much brilliant and varied co-created practice happening all over the UK. Some of it has been happening for a long time, and this network will build on that legacy and continuation of brilliant, innovative, thoughtful practice. However, this work is often isolated, poorly understood by those outside of its immediate delivery, and lacks visibility. We want to 'mainstream' co-created practice by making this way of working more widely understood, practiced, championed and funded.

We want to develop models for better sharing, commissioning, showcasing, and distributing this work, both to increase the reach and impact of this practice, and also to help us as a sector to get better at learning from each other in this field.

What do we mean by co-creation?

Creating a definition of "co-creation" is daunting. We know that it means different things to different people, and given its broad grammatical meaning, one interpretation is no less legitimate than another. But in terms of the territory that this network focuses on, our **working** definition of co-creation is the following:

Co-creation is a co-operative process in which people with diverse experiences, skills and knowledge come together and work in non-hierarchical ways to address a common issue.

Another useful starting point, taken from Calouste Gulbenkian's Inquiry into the [Civic Role of Arts Organisations Phase 1 Report](#), is this distinction between "co-creation" and "participation":

Throughout the twentieth century, the major preoccupation was access and participation but largely in support of a 'high art' agenda. Over the years the emphasis has gradually shifted from providing access to the arts, to enabling people to participate in education and community projects, to one now in which the community is more actively engaged in creating content which reflects current social, environmental and economic issues.

Alistair Hudson eloquently describes this progression in terms of the different historical phases of museum development:

Version 1.0 is where people come along and see the luxury artefacts and become better human beings for the experience.

Version 2.0 is one of participation, people participating in art and participating in the museum, in education and community projects and cafes and shops, but all these things work in support of that primary high-art agenda.

Version 3.0 is the user-generated version... so it's not about people trying to join in the art and museum, it's more about the museum trying to join in with what's going on out there (locally)... and what's happening in the world, and demonstrating how art can contribute to some of the main significant social problems that we have.

What are our working principles?

While this is not an exhaustive list, the principles below are those which came through in conversation about the way co-creation is practised at the Co-Creating Change network meeting in September 2018. This is the beginning of a bigger piece of work we would like to do around the principles which underpin co-created practice, but we wanted to share where the conversation has got to so far, as we think this is a useful guide for the way the network can work together.

- **Time:** Our work takes time. It takes time to build trusting relationships and find common purpose. This work can't be rushed.
- **Care:** Our work is based on human relationships, and often takes place in complex settings, with people facing multiple challenges, and usually with limited resources. Care for each other, ourselves and the process are paramount.
- **Trust:** Honesty is key for us building trusting relationships in which we can learn, share and grow together. Within the environments we create, everyone involved should feel listened to and heard, and comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas.
- **Respect:** We respect the difference of experiences, knowledge and opinions of everyone in the room equally.
- **Process:** Our work focusses on the process of co-creation. This is not to say the product (when there is one) that a co-created process leads to is not often of equal importance. But our primary focus is on the process of co-creation and the impacts this process has on the people involved, as well as the resulting products made.
- **Risk:** We celebrate risk and failure. Sharing our failures and what hasn't worked is the best way for us to learn more about our own work and to help others to learn as well.
- **Reflection:** We work iteratively, incorporating critical thinking and reflection into our practice, and making sure to continually capture and evaluate what we are doing. We test ideas, share our process with others and encourage dialogue and feedback. This open way of working improves our own work as well as that of others. We recognise the importance of reflection time so we can constantly learn and improve what we do.
- **Generosity:** Openness and generosity with others is key to our work. There is a strong desire from the network to find common purpose and to be part of a wider movement in which we are all learning and progressing together.



Who is in the Co-Creating Change network?

Our initial callout for network members was responded to by people working in the arts and cultural sector. Battersea Arts Centre (the network chair) chose 90 individuals and representatives of organisations to work with at this initial stage. In the future we may decide to grow. Network members range from those who have 30 years of experience in co-created practice, and some who are just starting out in this field but are keen to learn. You can see a full list of participating individuals and organisations on the BAC website [here](#).

Additionally, as detailed in the [Co-Creating Change user guide](#), there is a Core Group of 12 individuals and organisations who lead the strategic direction of the network. Each core member also invites to the network one of their community partners – eg a young board member, a community leader, a collaborator from another sector, etc. This helps to ensure that voices from outside the arts and cultural sector are part of these strategic conversations, and the work of the network is co-created from the start.