

VAE Briefing



The voice of the Voluntary Arts

National Indicator 11 - Engagement in the Arts

How the voluntary arts link to local government targets

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' published in October 2006 by the Department of Communities and Local Government, committed to creating a new, streamlined set of targets for Local Authorities. The aim was to allow councils and their partners more flexibility to work together in tackling local problems. As a result a set of 198 'National Indicators' (later reduced to 188) were announced in 2007. These National Indicators are the only set of indicators that Central Government uses to monitor the performance of local authorities.

Four of these National Indicators (NIs) relate to culture or volunteering and one, NI 11, specifically looks at participation in the arts and crafts;

- **NI 6:** Participation in regular volunteering
- **NI 9:** Use of public libraries
- **NI 10:** Visits to museums and galleries
- **NI 11:** Engagement in the arts

NI 11 - Engagement in the arts measures the percentage of the adult population (16 years and above) in a local area that have either attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity at least three times in the past 12 months. There is no geographical restriction placed on where the activity occurs, and all arts activities and events are included, not only those funded by local authorities.

Within the 'National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions' the rationale offered for

having an indicator that looks at engagement in the arts states that;

"Participation in the arts is an important part of a full and fulfilling life and provides unique personal and intrinsic benefits. It can also have a range of local impacts, including promoting health, education and well-being."

The cultural NIs also relate to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) broad strategic objective to encourage more widespread enjoyment of culture and sport, and support talent and excellence.

In June 2008, all Local Authorities across England agreed Local Area Agreements (LAAs) with the Government. Local Authorities chose up to 35 targets from the pool of NIs to include within their agreements. Where a local authority chose NI 11 as one of their 35 improvement targets then by October 2010 they will be expected to have improved engagement in the arts from an agreed baseline figure by at least 3%.

Measuring Success

Measuring whether these Local Authorities hit their NI 11 target is the job of Sport England's Active People Survey, set up in October 2007. The survey measures involvement in cultural activities where the purpose is for recreation or leisure, including informal learning and studying or research for personal interests. It excludes involvement in activities where the prime motivation is formal education or formal volunteering. Paid work is excluded where it is part of a person's main job or where the primary motivation is to receive payment for doing the activity.

Paid work is included where a person's primary motivation is pleasure i.e. the person would have done it regardless of whether they were to be paid or not.

The questionnaire is also designed to enable analysis of information, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, household structure, age and disability as evidence shows that there are inequities in levels of participation amongst some groups - lower socio-economic groups, older people, black and other ethnic minority populations, and people with a disability have particularly low levels of participation.

The Active People Survey targets random people from all over the country including at least 1,000 telephone based interviews in each local authority area (boosted in areas that have chosen NI 11 as a target to give a statistically reliable figure), thus requiring more than 354,000 members of the public to take part. The questions that are asked to inform NI 11 are;

- Have you attended any creative, artistic, theatrical or musical events in the last 12 months?
- How many events have you attended? (Only those people who have attended 3 or more arts events will count)
- Have you spent time actually doing any creative, artistic, theatrical or musical activities, or any crafts in the last 12 months?
- How many times have you done any of these activities? (Only those people who have participated in 3 or more arts activities will count)

It is the answers that the general public give to these four questions that will determine whether or not a local authority has increased engagement in the arts by 3%.

The role of the voluntary arts

According to the 2008 research 'Our Creative Talent: the Voluntary and Amateur Arts in England', commissioned by DCMS and Arts Council England, "formally organised voluntary and amateur arts groups account for almost one fifth of all arts participation in England, although in some regions it is much higher than that – rising to 36% in the South West.

In 2006/07 groups put on 710,000 performances or exhibitions which attracted 159 million attendances. On average a voluntary and amateur group attracts 220 people to each performance or exhibition."

The voluntary arts sector play an essential role in encouraging people to access and participate in the arts and as a consequence, in enabling Local Authorities to hit their NI 11 target to increase attendance and participation by 3%. On average, voluntary arts groups receive 4% of their income from Local Authorities.

According to Our Creative Talent "although most Local Authorities have cultural and arts development strategies, voluntary arts are often unrepresented in these strategies. There is also concern that Local Authorities which overlook the voluntary arts sector and do not recognise the contribution it makes or provide the necessary support services are seriously missing a significant opportunity to support the growth of truly community-driven arts participation."

What this means to you

The existence of NI 11 is a hugely positive step forward. It recognises that there are discreet differences between passive consumption and active participation. That is why the indicator is not just about audiences, important though they are. This shows a tidal shift in thinking, understanding and awareness of the ways in which people 'engage' with the arts. It also shows that collecting evidence about participation is now accepted as being a vital component in presenting a balanced case for arts investment at central government.

National Indicator 11 presents us with the opportunity not only to help reach the target of increasing engagement in the arts by 3% but also to encourage closer and stronger links between the voluntary arts and Local Authorities. This in turn would enable groups to;

- access better support and resources such as money and venues,
- inspire local people,
- help gain new opportunities by showcasing their potential and the excellence that is prevalent in voluntary arts practice,

- build relationships with employers in the creative industries
- generally offer pathways for progressing people-centric endeavours.

Most of the Local Authorities that chose NI 11 as their target are now running significant awareness raising campaigns and it is important that voluntary arts groups participate in these. Additionally there is no prompting during the Active People survey interview as to what qualifies as an artistic activity and the qualifying list is very long - it is important therefore that voluntary arts organisations raise awareness of the validity of their art form to their membership.

Further reading

- The Local Government White Paper Strong and Prosperous Communities - www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous
- National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions - www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/indicatorsdefinitions
- Further information on NI 11 qualifying arts activities and events can be found at www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/Communities_local_government
- Guidance on the Active People Survey - www.sportengland.org/active_people
- Details of Local Authorities that had signed up to NI 11 as of December 2008 along with their baseline figures - www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/National_Indicators.pdf

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Acknowledgment: Thanks to Mike Hoskin of Dorset County Council for his input into this Briefing.

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Voluntary Arts England is a national body of the Voluntary Arts Network (VAN). We gratefully acknowledge current financial support from Arts Council England, and all the assistance given to the organisation since 1988. VAN is registered in Scotland (Registered Office: 2nd Floor, 54 Manor Place, Edinburgh, EH3 7EH) as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC 020345

BRIEFING FROM VOLUNTARY ARTS ENGLAND – AUGUST 2009