

# Addressing the Dynamic

## A report of the findings

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# Contents

Introduction	3
Experiences of the project manager/artist relationship	6
‘Supportive champion’ WLTM ‘visionary artist’	14
Continuing the conversation	16
Core values	21
Roles and responsibilities	22
Continuing professional development for project managers	25
Conclusions and recommendations	28
Appendix	30

# Introduction

## Background

***ArtWorks: Developing practice in participatory settings*, is a Paul Hamlyn Foundation special initiative that had its genesis in a period of extensive research that began in 2008. The central aim is:**

To support the initial training and continuous professional development of artists working in participatory settings. This will enhance the quality of people's engagement in arts-led activity and the arts, and create a more professional and confident sector whose work is valued and seen as important.

ArtWorks is funding five pathfinder partnerships for three years (2011-2014); one of these pathfinders is *Artworks London*. The Barbican Centre and Guildhall School of Music and Drama are the lead partners but they work with a range of other partners including Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

In April 2013, ArtWorks staged 'Changing the Conversation', a two-day conference that brought together Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) providers, teacher-practitioners and researchers with artists and arts organisations in order to address the needs of artists who work in participatory settings at different stages of their careers. Following the conference, ArtWorks invited proposals for grants of up to £3,500 to support developmental projects exploring new ways of working, cross-sector collaboration and practical ways in which the conversation might be changed. Trinity Laban received one of the seven grants awarded.

## Rationale for *Addressing the Dynamic*

Trinity Laban (Learning and Participation teams) designed *Addressing the Dynamic* as an enquiry-based research project focused on the role and skills of arts project managers (PMs). Personnel from Trinity Laban perceived that the role of project managers in building effective relationships with participatory artists is often overlooked but can be imperative to the success of arts participatory work. *Addressing the Dynamic* therefore asked the question:

*What skills do project managers need and what do artists want from project managers to ensure the facilitation of high quality participatory arts projects?*

The aims of the research project, articulated in a logic model (see appendix p.31), were:

- To better understand the barriers and challenges that currently exist between artists and project managers in terms of management and relationship dynamic.

- To highlight what artists and project managers expect from one another and what approaches, frameworks and models can help establish and support positive working relationships between these two groups.
- To develop a greater understanding of how to facilitate and manage better professional relationships amongst the research project participants.
- To develop a greater understanding of the misconceptions, assumptions and culture that currently exists around the relationship management between artists and project managers working in arts in participatory settings (AIPS) amongst the research project participants.
- To contribute to the debate in the sector around the needs of project managers who are facilitating AIPS with particular focus on their management of relationships with artists.

## Format

*Addressing the Dynamic* recruited two groups of participants who met separately to explore the research question:

- A group of 14 mid-career arts project managers representing a range of art forms, sectors and scale of organisation. The group met for two full-days on 23 September and 6 November 2013.
- A group of ten, freelance participatory artists who work in a range of art forms, contexts and settings at different stages of their career. The group met for a half-day session on 27 September 2013.

All the sessions were facilitated by an external facilitator who devised a range of exercises, activities and discussions to explore the project manager/artist relationship. Although the two groups did not meet, the structure of the project enabled a conversation to develop as the facilitator drew findings, questions and concerns from one group to help determine the content of the session for the partner group.

## The participants

### Project Managers

During the research project and in this report, the title 'Project Manager' is used to refer to individuals whose job titles ranged from 'Associate Director – Participation' to 'Audience Development Manager'. What united the group was their responsibility for arts learning and participation and their regular contact with freelance artists.

All but one of the PMs is employed by a cultural organisation. Most of these organisations offer one-off activity days, short term projects as well as regular activity. This means that many of the PMs work with a pool of artists for different projects and have to manage a myriad of different ‘types’ of relationship with their participatory artists. Artists who have long-standing relationships with an organisation present a different challenge to new artists or those working on one-off projects.

Organisations such as the Globe Theatre and Emergency Exit Arts have a pool of 70-80 artists that they work with on a regular basis. Other organisations represented focus on working with specific target groups (young people with special needs, for example) and these contexts present separate challenges for recruiting and line managing participatory artists.

The group also included a freelance project manager who highlighted the particular challenges she faces when building relationships with artists she may not have personally recruited.

## **Artists**

The artists involved have worked in the participatory arts sector for between one and 25 years. Their experiences vary widely and include work with young offenders, school children and young people, families, homeless people, specific cultural communities and participants who have mental health issues. They are commissioned by a range of organisations (including but not limited to cultural organisations).

A full list of the participants appears in the appendix. (Page 30)

# Experiences of the project manager/artist relationship

## Good experiences

Both groups reflected on their experiences of the project manager/artist relationship. They shared examples of when it went well:

*'I selected an artist from our pool for a new arts and health project. The artist was wonderful to work with because she was always so enthusiastic from the very beginning. She was delighted to be asked to deliver the work and incorporated what was a very complex evaluation framework for the NHS with ease. She was clearly enthusiastic about developing new skills in a new context and this made her easy to work with. She was grateful for the opportunity and was dedicated to always fully understanding the participants and the project.'* (PM)

*'I have a great relationship with the project manager. She is my only point of contact which has been great for developing a relationship and makes things easier from my end. She's very keen and focussed on the project. It feels simple to deal with because she agreed that she would do all the administration so I could just concentrate on the art works. We can really talk honestly together and she supports me – not only on the project but as an artist as well. She sees the bigger picture – values me as an artist outside the project as well as on it and she'll send me external opportunities that she thinks I'd be interested in. She sees me as a person rather than a tick box.'* (Artist)

The groups went on to analyse the factors and approaches that contribute to a positive relationship. There was a high level of agreement between the two groups on these factors although the PMs produced a more detailed list. In Table 1, quotes from the artists are used to illustrate the factors identified by the PMs. Table 1 could be used by organisations as a starting point to develop their own framework for positive working relationships.

**Table 1**

Factors for a successful relationship highlighted by PMs	Quotes from artists
<b>A nurturing relationship</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual trust, respect and honesty</li> <li>• Loyalty</li> <li>• Compassion and empathy in the relationship</li> </ul>	<p><i>'I worked on a schools project which was a challenging context with many difficulties that arose. The project manager had such a great can-do attitude and they really empowered me; they really had faith in me.'</i></p> <p><i>'A manager should be there to bounce ideas off without it jeopardising your artistic integrity.'</i></p>
<b>Finding the 'right' artist</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair recruitment/quality assurance</li> <li>• Personal philosophy and belief in the work (artist and PM)</li> <li>• Going the 'extra mile' (artist and PM)</li> <li>• Understanding and experience of participatory context</li> </ul>	<p><i>'This project manager understood that the process was just as important as the final piece and she allowed the creative process to be open ended. It wasn't formulaic.'</i></p>
<b>Clarity of vision, roles and responsibilities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared understanding of project structure</li> <li>• Shared understanding of organisational ethos and values</li> <li>• Discussion around what constitutes quality</li> <li>• Clear brief</li> <li>• Clear roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Managing expectations</li> </ul>	<p><i>'I knew where my responsibilities were and our roles were clear. The organisation was superb and I received all the information I needed to do the work well.'</i></p> <p><i>'They didn't impinge on the methodology of my work. As long as you achieved the agreed outcomes they didn't mind what you developed with the participants. There was mutual respect on both sides and a wish to keep the project open.'</i></p>
<b>Professional development</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and support/artist development - new skills and knowledge especially in new settings</li> <li>• Space for innovation/room to grow (for artist and PM)</li> </ul>	<p><i>'There was a degree of hand-holding, moving into new terrain (working with special needs children) which made it possible.'</i></p>
<b>Communication</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree an approach to communication</li> <li>• Two-way communication</li> <li>• Honest dialogue</li> <li>• Communicating value (of the artist, of the project)</li> </ul>	<p><i>'Managers should ask me how I like to communicate and share how they work in this respect too.'</i></p> <p><i>'Face to face or phone chats are much better than long emails.'</i></p>

A joint approach to feedback	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-going reflection and feedback</li> <li>• Expectations (of artist, participants, partners) managed and revisited</li> </ul>	<p><i>'The project manager always made a point of sending me feedback from the participants even if it wasn't directly linked to my workshop session. It was really nice to hear the positive and negative impact that my workshops were having on the wider context.'</i></p> <p><i>'I talk about everything with this project manager even things that are difficult – that was the rule set out at the start of the project.'</i></p>
Efficient and effective project management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organised</li> <li>• Thorough research and planning</li> <li>• Good use of available time</li> <li>• Maintaining enthusiasm</li> <li>• Being open-minded and flexible to change (aims being reinterpreted by artist, projects changing direction in response to participants' needs and interests)</li> </ul>	<p><i>'The producer working with me was really organised and knew the project really well. She participated in the development of the art and she was very professional.'</i></p> <p><i>'The manager wasn't constrained by funding specifications.'</i></p>

## Bad experiences

The groups also shared examples of poor relationships and analysed the factors that contributed to these negative experiences. There were areas of overlap such as unprofessional behaviour on the part of project manager or artist and competing agendas in partnership projects leading to unclear aims. Other factors, such as managing change, were raised by both groups but viewed differently: artists talked about the need to revisit aims, roles and responsibilities with a new project manager whilst project managers highlighted the need for artists to adapt to cultural shift in organisations and the challenge of inheriting someone else's choice of artist.

Other factors were identified by only one of the parties. The blurring of the personal and professional was raised by several project managers as a problem when they employed friends (although examples were also cited when this contributed to a productive working relationship). Virtually all project managers also cited cases where relationships were strained as the artist was not well matched to the project or their practice was of poor quality. Examples included partners insisting on working with a high profile artist who was ill-suited to working in the project context; artists seeing participatory work as 'easy money' and delivering the same content repeatedly; and artists with big egos. These examples raised a related area of difficulty for many project managers, finding appropriate ways to share feedback with artists.

By contrast, artists identified poor support and communication as significant factors in the breakdown of relationships. It was apparent from artists' comments that the 'right' amount,

type and form of communication is predominantly personal and therefore often difficult for a project manager to judge accurately. The majority of artists however, felt that PMs tended to rely too heavily on email and often failed to extract relevant information from lengthy documents.

A number of artists also shared stories of feeling abandoned by project managers when problems arose in a project. In some cases, this may coincide with experiences described by project managers when they feel caught between championing the artist, representing their organisation and meeting the expectations of funders.

The various factors identified and corresponding evidence is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Challenges and barriers to effective relationships	Evidence/Quotes from PMs	Evidence/Quotes from artists
<b>Breakdown of trust/unprofessional behaviour</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defaulting on contract (budgets, outcomes, agreed sessions)</li> <li>• Not respecting boundaries</li> </ul>	<p><i>'Great artist; match with school perfect. Dropped out of second day at last minute. I expressed displeasure but the artist said the assistant leader had it covered. I went into school on the third day and the artist wasn't there. Couldn't get in touch with artist for a couple of days. The artist couldn't understand why it was a problem.'</i></p> <p><i>'He kept ringing me at home instead of the office; I don't even know how he got my number!'</i></p>	<p><i>'PM didn't like what was coming from the participants and so became defensive and difficult to work with.'</i></p> <p><i>'PMs sometimes need to filter the stress going on behind a project. I sometimes feel they allow the stress of their jobs to inhibit the relationships and the project and this can be difficult to deal with.'</i></p>
<b>Lack of clarity of vision, roles and responsibilities</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Layering of aims/demands in partnership projects</li> <li>• Unclear project brief</li> <li>• Lack of understanding about each other's' capacity</li> </ul>		<p><i>'The brief was very open and so I designed my own parameters which were then instantly scrapped by the PM. They couldn't express their vision to me at all and I was being sent emails that I really didn't need to see or know about. There was complete confusion over my role.'</i></p>
<b>Blurring of personal/professional boundaries</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employing artists that are friends (or who become friends) compromising professional relationship</li> <li>• Artists becoming too familiar</li> </ul>	<p><i>'The artist began to breach their contract and felt it was acceptable to arrange cover for sessions without discussing it with me first. Communication began to break down and it was difficult to manage expectations that were of a professional nature with an artist who you have a strong personal relationship with.'</i></p>	
<b>Poor match between artist and project</b>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor quality practice: stale, safe, fixed</li> <li>• High profile artists imposed on a project (for kudos)</li> <li>• Viewing participatory work as inferior to personal arts practice</li> <li>• Power relations - managing artist's ego and ownership of creative ideas</li> </ul>	<p><i>'The artist was an experienced and long-standing participatory artist but she was delivering the same project content over and over again. I felt there needed to be a sense of progression for the project. We had a conversation and I tried to stress my point of view and give feedback but it was really difficult because she really didn't understand where I was coming from. As a result I just haven't ever asked her back to deliver anything else.'</i></p>	
<p><b>Issues with giving and receiving feedback</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not planning in time for reflection and feedback</li> <li>• Artist not open to constructive criticism</li> <li>• PM lacking confidence to give feedback</li> <li>• Offering feedback at an inappropriate time or place</li> </ul>	<p><i>'I inherited an artist (from my predecessor) who was a wonderful artist but not a 'natural' participatory practitioner. Communication was very poor and the artist wasn't following the project brief. I was keen to establish a quality framework for all our artists and so tried to conduct an informal 'feedback session' about this artist's delivery. This was met with resentment and anger.'</i></p>	<p><i>'I'm just starting out in this area of work and sometimes it feels that the organisation that I work with often gives too much feedback! There are moments when I need time to step back and reflect myself and I'm not given this.'</i></p>
<p><b>Managing change</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational shift in culture</li> <li>• An inherited relationship/changing personnel</li> </ul>	<p><i>'I inherited a practitioner who had worked for the organisation for a long time but I didn't feel they were as effective as my predecessor did.'</i></p> <p><i>'Significant cultural shift in the organisation was happening. The organisation was growing and developing different and more structured ways of working. Our long standing participatory artists found this shift very difficult. There was lots more paper work and suddenly they were being asked to think more carefully about educational outcomes. I felt I was 'shielding' them from a lot of the admin that we needed them to do but couldn't do it all myself. There was a sense of "I don't do forms" which was frustrating because it was a stressful time for me.'</i></p>	<p><i>'If there's a change in the PM personnel then time needs to be given to re-evaluate and clarify the roles and responsibilities again. Then there's no room for misunderstanding.'</i></p> <p><i>'It was a large organisation and a new PM was brought in at the last minute. She was bossy, disrespectful and undermining. I chose to deal with other people rather than her. Project did work but the tension filtered through to participants.'</i></p>

## Supporting the artist

- Poor communication
- PM with divided loyalties - championing artist, organisational imperatives, accountability to funder and participants etc.
- Not seeing the benefits of CPD opportunities

*'It's frustrating when artists won't take up the CPD you're offering, especially as it's free.'*

*'Problems arose with the school and the PM and organisation ran scared. They should have been more courageous in backing me up and supporting my point of view. They also didn't communicate things that had gone wrong between my sessions so I was often unprepared for changes when I got to the next workshop session.'*

*'Succinctness is really important. I often get long emails which are almost a series of self-reminders for the project manager rather than any useful information for me as the artist!'*

*'Professional language of PMs can be rather prohibiting; they often use verbose and 'fussy' language.'*

The factors identified above act as barriers to successful relationships. It is clear that in many cases, differences are neither aired nor resolved, with PMs simply opting not to offer further employment to the artist in question or the artist working around the PM. If difficulties are ignored however, it can not only damage the relationship but potentially the project and the outcomes for participants. It seems vital therefore to establish ground rules at the start of the relationship that encourage an honest dialogue about all aspects of the project including relationship management.

## Protocols and strategies

Following this exercise, the project managers considered what they or their organisations have put in place to mitigate failure and promote success. Examples included the following:

- Artists working with the organisation to re-design artists' contracts and debate quality.
- Reciprocal contract - 'I will give this in return for that'.
- Intermediaries employed to oversee projects and provide feedback. These 'Learning Consultants' are themselves practitioners which makes their feedback more acceptable to artists. Artists also seem happier to accept negative feedback from someone who is not the purse-holder.
- Providing a financial incentive to complete paperwork.
- Providing time and funds for planning and preparation and clarifying what planning is required.
- Providing free tickets and food for freelancers.
- Conducting an annual review (on the telephone) where artist and PM share feedback.
- Offering a nine month graduate internship (50% admin; 50% delivery) thus developing a pool of practitioners who are trained in the values and ethos of the organisation.

## 'Supportive Champion' WLTM 'Visionary Artist'

Both groups undertook exercises to identify the skills, qualities, experience and knowledge of their perfect artist or project manager. They also identified what they brought to the relationship that made them effective in their role. After ranking these factors, a composite list of the essential characteristics was produced. The views of PMs and artists are illustrated below, with similar characteristics aligned.

### Perfect participatory artist - qualities, skills, knowledge and experience

The perfect artist - view from PMs	The perfect artist - view from artists
A good communicator	
Organised and well prepared / reliable	Professional - reliable, punctual, responsive to communication
Good with people	Passionate about the people in the project and their development
A team player	
Trustworthy	
	Determined
Highly skilled in their arts practice with skills to share	Artistic experience (own practice and setting) Knowledge of the context
Innovative and original	<i>Je ne sais quo</i> / a 'blankcanvas' Vision and passion Risk-taker
Key skills in reflective practice	
Committed to the project, the organisation and its aims	Belief in the project and its values
Able to receive constructive criticism	
Respectful of the project manager and their skills	

### Perfect project manager - qualities, skills, knowledge and experience

The perfect project manager - view from PMs	The perfect project manager - view from artists
A good communicator (clear expectations, relevant information in good time, responsive, willing to revisit conversations)	Good (open) communicator
A supportive champion (bridging the organisation, artist and setting)	Instils calm, strength and provides back up
Organised	Awesome admin skills
Realistic	
	Trustworthy
Creative problem solver/adaptable	
Challenging and provocative	Collaborative and dynamic
Reflective (2-way constructive criticism)	
People skills	
Empathy and understanding of the freelancer	Good with people

A good line manager (pastoral care and accountability)	Emotional intelligence
Trust in the artist	Belief in the artist - 'a fan of my work'
Has knowledge of the setting/context	Belief in and shared vision for the project
Financial skills	

There are many areas of agreement including the need for artists to be highly skilled in their arts practice, reliable, punctual and innovative. Similarly, there was consensus on the need for PMs to trust the artist, be good communicators and have 'awesome admin skills'. The PMs' description of themselves as 'supportive champions' seemed apposite and found resonance with the artists.

In some areas, the groups had differing emphasises: with respect to the project manager's relationship with the artist, for example, PMs prioritised their ability to be 'challenging and provocative' whilst artists sought a 'collaborative and dynamic' project manager. These areas are clearly not mutually exclusive but the contrast in emphasis is striking. Both groups highlighted the need for their partners to be trustworthy although neither chose to prioritise this specific quality for themselves. Project managers did highlight the need for them to have trust in the artist although the reverse (artists trusting or having trust in PMs) was not mentioned by the artists.

There were some notable differences and omissions. There was no mention from artists of reflective practice either for themselves or PMs whilst the latter included this as an essential quality for both parties. Both groups prioritised the need for a shared belief in, and vision for, the project. Project Managers went further however, seeking artists that were also committed to the cultural organisation and its aims. (This is discussed further in the section below).

Asked about common weaknesses of project managers, artists cited:

- Respect for and trust in the artist
- Understanding the artist's relationship with participants
- Treating the artist as a delivery tool whilst the artist sees themselves as a 'blank canvas'
- The soft skills of relationship management
- Ensuring everyone is 'on the same page' at the initial project meeting.

## Continuing the conversation

By the end of the first session, a number of themes and concerns had been identified by the project managers and facilitator; these informed the content of the artists' session. Some were used directly as provocations for a carousel of small-group discussions. In some cases, the artists' responses were surprising and these, together with other issues raised by the artists, were relayed back to the project managers in a similar carousel activity. The areas of commonality and contrast are summarised below.

### Feedback

**How best can project managers and artists give and receive feedback?  
Should project managers give constructive criticism if they cannot offer training/support to address areas for improvement?**

The artists were positive about the importance of feedback and there was a unanimous view that feedback should be given even if the organisations cannot offer follow-up support. Artists went on to define the conditions for constructive feedback:

- Both parties know it's going to be part of the project
- It takes place in a dedicated space (away from the project space)
- Face to face, open debate, reflective, with sufficient time...combined with written reflections
- At the right time (views differ between 'continuously' and 'shortly after the project has ended')
- Being sympathetic to timing - 'artist is likely to be emotionally charged after a workshop'
- Constructive criticism should be combined with celebration
- It needs to be shared in the right spirit - always constructively
- It is a two-way process for artist and PM/organisation

*'Try to create an open, non-defensive, constructive space for this to happen'. (Artist)*

PMs found artists' positive attitude to feedback encouraging and agreed that the focus and timing of feedback should be discussed at the outset of the project. Their comments demonstrate common ground with artists and a similar plea to find 'non-defensive', reflective language.

*'We need a safe space, previously defined through dialogue with artist and PM. Specific research questions posed by the artist about their practice may be useful.' (PM)*

*'We need to develop confidence in the vocabulary for 'non-defensive, constructive feedback'. What is sub-conscious protectionism/territorialism and what is made obvious.' (PM)*

A number of PMs felt unable to highlight negative aspects of the artist's practice if they were unable to offer CPD. They were therefore pleased to hear artists' positive response to the question on feedback.

*'Yes. Constructive criticism is always good. If help cannot be offered then it is a shared problem and discussion opens the possibility of a solution.'* (Artist)

Project managers did not agree, however, with the artists' feeling that PMs' feedback is only valid if based on personal observation of a number of project sessions. The project managers observed that:

- PMs rarely have time to make repeat visits to a project.
- PMs have a role in reflecting participant/host feedback to the artist.

However, PMs did conclude:

*'It is vital to observe the artist in action to then be able to understand, filter and/or offer support around feedback from participant/host setting.'* (PM)

## Quality

### Where does the responsibility for quality (process and outcomes) lie in a project?

Nine of the ten artists stated that this should be a shared responsibility (artist, PM and other partners). A number of comments stressed the importance that this needs to be discussed at the outset and throughout. This view was shared by the project managers, as one said:

*'Both PM and artist are responsible for quality. They are responsible for different elements and so quality ultimately depends on the communication and relationship between the PM and artist.'* (PM)

In conversations, PMs stressed the need for a common understanding of what quality looks like for the project. This needs to be established at the beginning during recruitment with an agreement about the shared accountability for quality (sharing in a vision). Some elements of quality fall more on the shoulders of the PM (e.g. good scheduling and project framework, right participants, good communication and monitoring) and some on the artist (quality of facilitating artistic work, quality of their skills in their art form, quality of care and safety of participants) but ultimately it is important that conversations about quality continue throughout the project.

## Communication

### Communication - quality rather than quantity

Project managers generally agreed with the key messages from artists that PMs need to find

out how individual artists prefer to communicate and how much information is the 'right' amount. However, PMs do not have unlimited time and sometimes need to communicate with a wide range of project partners through a single medium. Other considerations raised by PMs included:

- The need to pay artists for face-to-face meetings (does the budget accommodate this?)
- Agreeing a mutually convenient time for a phone call
- *'Be careful not to become the artist's therapist. It's essentially a working relationship!'* (PM)
- *'If possible, follow up phone call or meeting with a short recap email with key points...verbal communication can be misremembered by both parties.'* (PM)

## Expertise in pedagogy

### Should artists or project managers be the experts in arts pedagogy?

There were a range of responses to this question from artists but no majority view. A number of artists queried the terminology (*expert, pedagogy*) in this question, for example:

*'By definition, an artist thinks beyond pedagogy. They should have some base knowledge but experience is more important than knowledge of pedagogy.'* (Artist)

*'I think passion and experience are vital. Expertise can sometimes be limiting.'* (Artist)

Project managers were divided in their response to this question and the reaction of artists. Some questioned whether artists need pedagogical knowledge or to be *'burdened with learning objectives in a school-y way.'* Others questioned why learning objectives were thought to be 'school-y'. One project manager was astounded that an *'artist is beyond pedagogy'* or that *'expertise can be limiting'*. For this project manager, pedagogy encompasses an awareness of practice, process, reflection and exploration; fundamentals of arts participatory practice. Perhaps the last word should go to another project manager who warned:

*'Considering what is an artist's pedagogy - is the concept/word understood? I worry we are losing ourselves in terminology.'* (PM)

## Respect and trust

Artists identified lack of trust and respect as an issue for them:

*'Respect needs to be shown even before you start working with the artist – this is often overlooked because as a freelancer you don't have any employment rights and it would be great if PMs could be more considerate of this.'* (Artist)

*'PMs can often underfund projects (and I understand why this happens) but it's frustrating when they know that they are allocating insufficient funds for your*

*involvement in the project.'* (Artist)

Project managers had varied responses to these concerns. The majority felt that respect and trust needed to be mutual and developed as a relationship matured. The question of appropriate rates of pay seemed more troubling to project managers. Many referred to the importance of dialogue about what is possible within a given budget and ensuring transparency in contractual agreements. Others suggested greater transparency in the sector about rates of pay for freelancers would be helpful. Finally, a small number of project managers asked questions about the value placed on artists' time:

*'Are artists getting anything else out of it e.g. inspiration/ideas for their own practice?'*  
(PM)

*'Is their work comparable to what others in the setting are doing e.g. teachers?'* (PM)

## Values and vision

### Is it important for you to understand and share the commissioner's values and vision?

The majority view from artists was 'understand: yes; share: not necessarily.'

*'Yes, understanding is important but perhaps an artist brings something more to the idea of 'sharing' the same values. It might be that the artist questions and slightly revisits the values to achieve something new, unique/specific.'* (Artist)

Discussion amongst project managers identified the importance of recruiting artists that shared an institution's values and the assertion, therefore, that:

*'We should be able to communicate and articulate the core values of the organisation and the project so artists can choose not to work with us.'* (PM)

In relation to the vision for a project, a number of PMs highlighted the benefits of developing this in collaboration with artists (where the timescale and size of project allow),

*'The way I plan my projects with both the artist and participants enables us to create a shared value and vision. This also leads to shared ownership of the project. The project would include regular dialogue with the artist and key-stakeholders to ensure that we are all on the same page with regards to the visions of the project.'* (PM)

One group of PMs discussed the variance that sometimes exists between their own values and those of the organisation they work for.

## Representation

### Do artists represent the commissioner in the participatory setting?

The majority view from artists was 'perhaps' but responses ranged from 'to a degree' to 'absolutely not!' The majority believed that the artist is representing their own practice.

The majority of project managers found the artists' response to this question 'worrying'. As one stated,

*'If I recruit an artist to work with me on a project and they are working under our name I expect the values set out by the project and the organisation to be manifest in their work.'* (PM)

It became clear in discussion however, that the answer to this question varied between organisations and the way in which projects are developed.

*'I agree with the artist when they say that they are representing their own practice – this is why I have chosen to work with them in the first place. Projects are deliberately artist-led, and artists bring their skills in art-making and enquiry to the project.'* (PM)

As with values and vision, PMs recognised their responsibility in articulating a project's aims and context to allow all partners to reach an informed decision about involvement.

*'I see an artist working for the gallery as a representative of the project yes - but not as representative of the organisation. When approaching an artist to work with I will outline the project and the context within which it sits in the organisation and they can make a decision whether or not to work with us.'* (PM)

## Core values

Drawing on the views highlighted above by the artists and the emphasis placed on clarity of vision by both parties when considering successful relationships, the facilitator designed an exercise around core values for the final session. The project managers were asked to read Anna Cutler's provocation<sup>1</sup> written for the Artworks conference as preparation for the session and this was debated during the session. One passage resonated with our discussions:

*'In all instances, it seems important that we communicate our values so that artists and participants can choose to work with us, or not. These values are about creating agency for all of us (including artists, participants and the institution), to learn, opening up a wide and divergent understanding of art that participants are supported to construct for themselves. I expect artists and the public we work with to generate and imagine divergent views of the world. Indeed this is why we want to work with artists - to bring in new perspectives - but we do seek to share values in doing so, which is why the commissioner's responsibility to make them explicit seems essential.'* (Anna Cutler)

Working in pairs, the project managers identified the core values of their own organisation (the partner's role was to challenge thinking, ask 'why?'). They were then asked to consider what this core value might look like in practice. What might we expect to see happening in a workshop space that exemplified this value?

Time was limited and the ideas developed were personal rather than corporate and are therefore not shared in this report. The project managers found the exercise useful however, not least because they found it hard to articulate these core values. Some mentioned lengthy organisational vision documents that were rarely read or shared; others questioned whether other members of their team would come up with the same list. Importantly, many went away convinced of the need to take this work further. As one PM said:

*'Policy, strategy and vision of the organisation have to be communicated well. They have to be live and be embedded at all levels right down to the artists working at ground level. This is the responsibility of the management and leadership of the organisation to communicate the vision well. It can't be just a piece of paper or document that nobody knows exists or uses when constructing their work. It should also be developed by ALL not just a select few.'* (PM)

PMs also recognised that the ability to articulate core values (and how these are manifest) was central to conversations about quality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Changing the Conversation*: A provocation by Anna Cutler, Director of Learning, Tate  
<http://www.artworksphf.org.uk/page/provocations>

## Roles and responsibilities

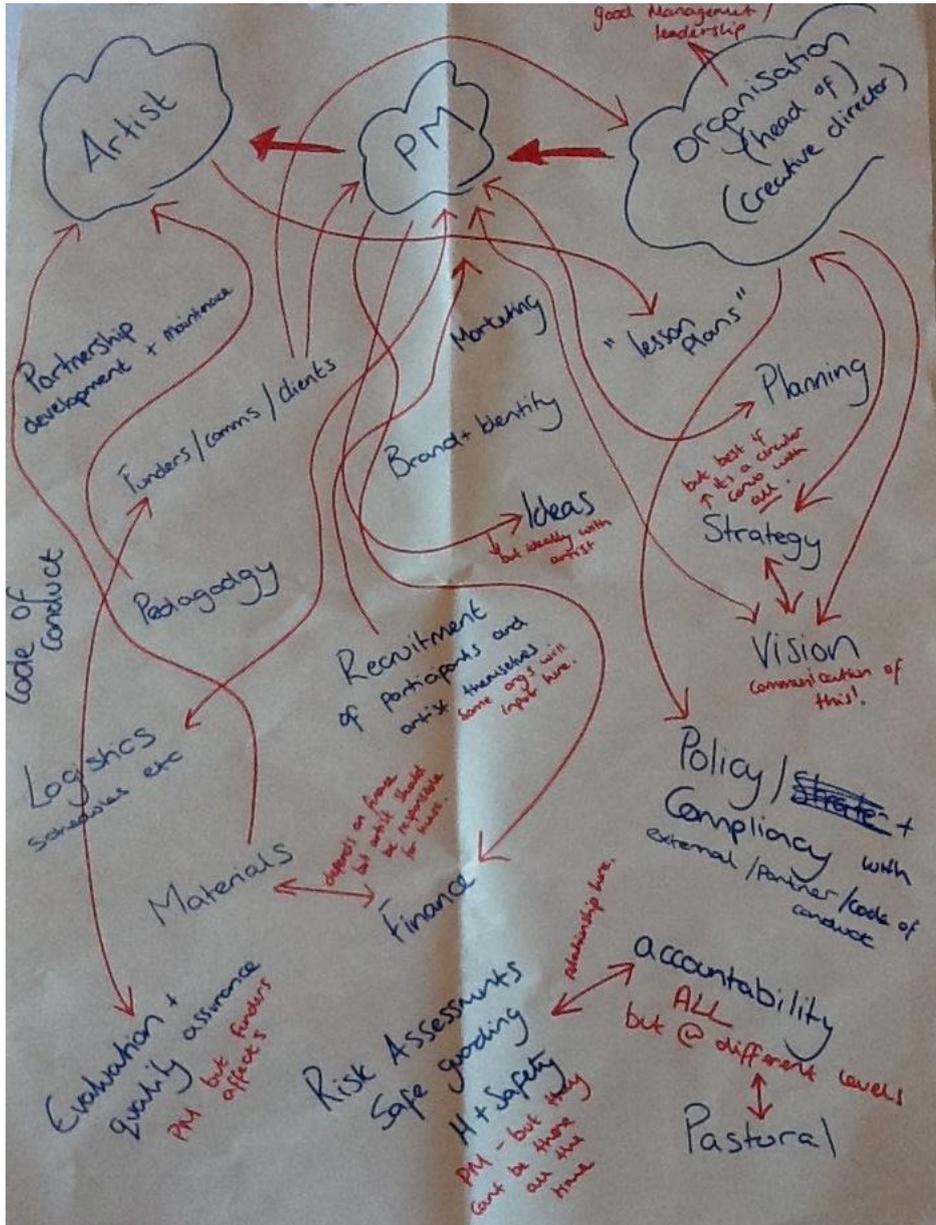
The clarity of roles and responsibilities was identified by both project managers and artists as central to the success (or failure) of a relationship. In the final session, therefore, project managers explored their responsibilities in relation to a project and also those of the artists and their line manager.

There were considerable areas of overlap and joint responsibility; project managers recognised that the relationships were subtle, varied and often complex:

*'Arts organisations aren't a feudal system – they are constantly in flux and so roles and responsibilities may change according to each project.'* (PM)

This complexity and flux is evident in the diagram produced by one group below:

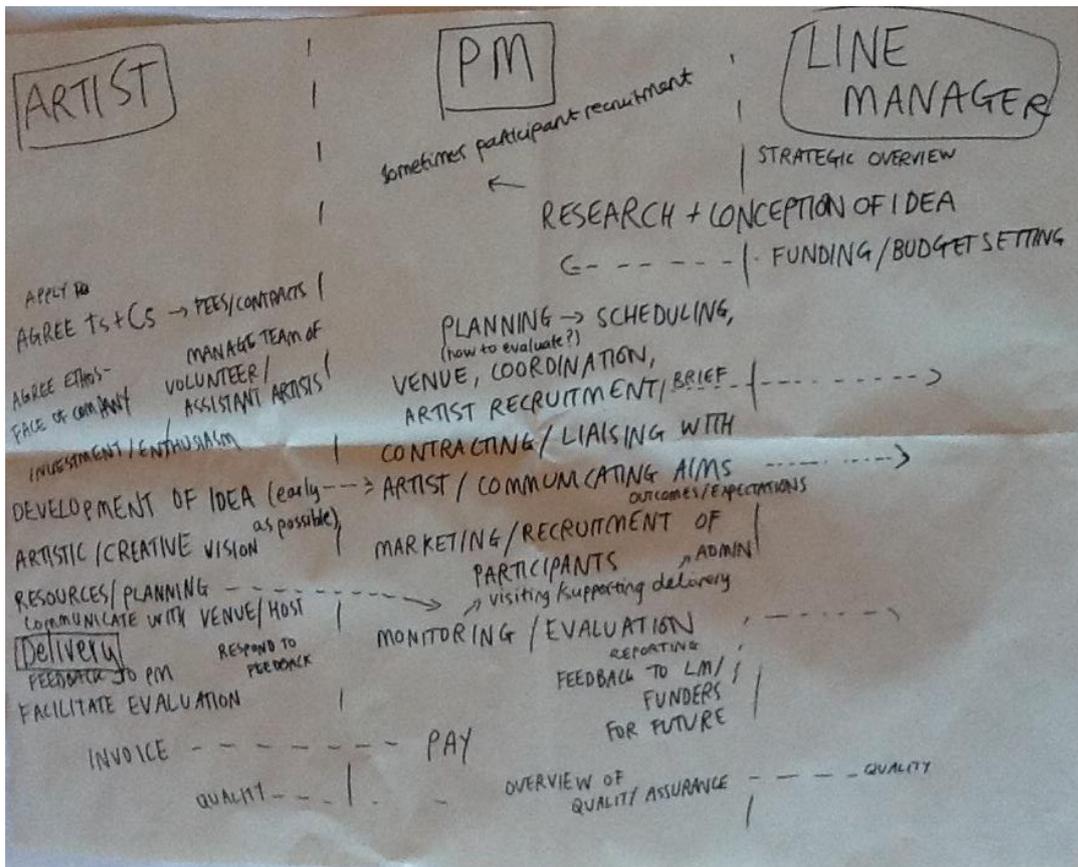
## Roles and responsibilities of project managers, artists and line managers



The project managers discussed their role as a broker between a range of people and partners; they referred to the challenges of having to establish and manage key relationships, a range of expectations, pressures and opinions and how this can affect relationships.

Project managers found the exercise illuminating for a number of reasons:

- It helped PMs clarify respective roles and responsibilities
- It illustrated how many areas of joint responsibility exist and therefore how important it is to keep communication levels high to avoid duplication, competing agendas or failure to act (assuming the other party is taking responsibility)
- Through conversation, project managers realised how they and their organisations differed in their approach to working with artists. One group, for example, set out to map roles and responsibilities sequentially across the development and delivery of a project (see illustration below). It became apparent however, that one organisation involved artists in early conversations to develop the project concept whilst others brought artists in at a later stage. One organisation developed a project and then recruited participants, whilst another developed a project in response to specific participants' needs. One important result of these discussions was the realisation that as freelancers, artists work for a range of organisations, each with its own idiosyncratic way of working, complete with expectations and assumptions. The need, therefore, to discuss and document respective roles and responsibilities is vital



## Continuing professional development for project managers

Project managers took part in a facilitated discussion about their careers and experiences of training and professional development. One participant had gained an MA in Museums and Galleries in Education. Although this was mostly theoretical rather than vocational, the participant emphasised how this had significantly influenced her career development.

Two participants had studied at Southbank University to gain an Arts Management degree; one found it very useful, the other 'abhorred' the academic study. No one else has undertaken any formal training linked to their current career although several wished that such opportunities existed:

*'There is much to be said for learning on the job but also much to be said for being given the time to take a step back. Being given the time to fail is very important too.'* (PM)

*'It would be nice to have formal training that truly validated my career and skill set. To feel that not everyone could do what I do – that it's not just a case of being organised – that there's real skill involved.'* (PM)

Another PM commented on the positive consequences of the lack of formal training and career paths:

*'What's great about the arts world is that it often allows you to make your own opportunities. Spotting your own opportunities and making them happen.'* (PM)

Project managers had experienced a wide range of informal training opportunities however, including:

- Internal, on-the-job induction and training from line managers
- Watching and listening to others
- Mentoring and peer/mentoring- providing new ideas and energy; challenging norms
- Coaching - providing confidence at an early stage of career
- Action learning sets
- Sector networks

Project managers also reflected how negative experiences had helped to shape their own practice as the following example illustrates:

*'I had a terrible experience of management. They would micro-manage everything in the team to the point where it suffocated everyone and everything in it. Although this was a bad experience for me I have definitely taken huge learning from what not to do from this.'* (PM)

Project managers valued opportunities where the content of professional development was generated (at least in part) by the participants rather than by a trainer's pre-determined agenda.

They also identified features of successful training they had experienced:

- Cross-sector groups - promotes cross-sector learning and gives greater scope for honesty if organisations are not all competing for the same pots of money
- Learning from peers
- Breaking out of a London-centric view
- Being given time to put ideas into practice 'back at base'
- New and valuable content e.g. evaluation.

Project managers believed there is a gap in opportunities for mid-career professionals, *'there's nothing for us as we're not 'emerging' or senior managers.'*

## Areas of need

The PMs worked in groups to identify where they believe they need more support or professional development. They also discussed how these needs could be best addressed. Their responses are summarised below.

Training needs	Possible delivery mechanism
Statutory requirements – Health and Safety, safeguarding etc.	Formal training <u>but</u> highlighting what is relevant to project managers in AIPS
Line management/relationship management	Peer to peer learning Formal training course
Improving our understanding of the life of a freelance artist	A focus group - A day in the life of a freelance artist; how artists see themselves
Mediation/ negotiation/ decision-making	This would work best in small groups of people who meet occasionally over a long period of time; building trust. E.g. action learning sets
How to have difficult conversations	How to frame feedback; developing a feedback framework. Could be an interactive workshop using forum theatre
General administration and areas of interest for AIPS	Free access to lectures delivered by HE partners - e.g. finance, law, child development, other arts disciplines
IT and social media	Formal training on e.g. databases and how to 'exploit' social media
Evaluation + fundraising (and other topics that can appear dull!)	A mini-series of training delivered by different, inspiring evaluators (or fundraisers) with surgeries afterwards
Bite-size summary of pertinent research and legislation	Email digest of headlines with links. An expanded version of Cultural Learning Alliance
Maintaining inspiration and insight	'Go and See' - get out and see new work. Could have a network of organisations who do swaps
	Sharing practice – this should be part of the job rather than for personal enjoyment. Reminding ourselves there are other ways of doing things
	Experiential learning - gaining perspective as participant in another discipline
Interrogating practice	e.g. Organisational away day (internal) or mentor/peer mentor (external)

Opportunities for PMs, commissioners, funders, artists, participants and academics to meet and share.	e.g. Symposium with workshops, key note speeches, performances etc.
Learning from international practice	A fund for PMs to engage with international arts community (similar to ACE artists' professional development fund)

## Conclusions and recommendations

*Addressing the Dynamic* fulfilled its aims by illuminating the unique nature of the relationship between project manager and participatory artist. This report explores the many areas of agreement and highlights areas where assumptions or misunderstandings can lead, at best, to confusion and at worst, to the breakdown of the relationship and poor outcomes for participants. The need for project managers to clearly and succinctly articulate the core values of their organisation and of the project are central to minimising these misunderstandings. The majority of project managers recognised the need to do more work within their organisations to develop such clarity.

Project managers also highlighted the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities, as well as the need to develop frameworks to support effective communication, facilitate reciprocal feedback and help frame conversations around quality, impact and representation.

Although not necessarily setting out to do so, the research project had a direct impact on project managers' working practices (a separate evaluation report has been written by Trinity Laban). At the start of their second session, the project managers were asked to recount a good, bad or surprising experience in their work with artists during the preceding month. Half chose to share ways in which they had put learning from the first session into practice. Examples included:

*'As a result of my participation in this project my team within my organisation has dedicated some time together to really talk how we currently work with our artists and how we can develop and better this. My involvement in Addressing the Dynamic will most certainly feed into this conversation.'* (PM)

*'I have been more honest about what an artist can expect from me and been clearer on defining roles and responsibilities from the outset.'* (PM)

*'Thinking and asking about the communication shift that works for the artist. Recently me and an artist were emailing back and forth and she was getting confused and stressed. I rang her and within 5 minutes the situation was cleared up. It was much quicker and a much better way of communicating than an on-going email conversation.'* (PM)

*'I've tried to check-in with artists more regularly and pop into projects more. Also tried to support two artists to address a disciplinary issue by meeting with them and the parent. I think they really appreciated me being there and backing up their points of view.'* (PM)

Despite these gains, project managers clearly felt they would benefit from further opportunities for professional development and that these opportunities could improve their ability to work effectively with participatory artists. Several of these areas, such as training in evaluation and social media, would contribute generally to project managers' effectiveness.

Others pertain more directly to their relationships with artists. Opportunities such as those afforded by this project have been shown to support professional development through the sharing of practice and ideas with colleagues. For certain needs, however, external inputs may be required. How to give and receive feedback was a particular concern for project managers and they developed a proposal for a short course to address this and other aspects of relationship management. They suggested the use of role play or forum theatre as appropriate tools to develop skills and experience in this field.

This research project affirmed Trinity Laban's premise that the relationship between project managers and artists can be imperative to the success of arts participatory work. It would be a mistake to ignore the importance of this relationship and the professional development needs of project managers to maximise their effective support for artists. Whilst *Addressing the Dynamic* focussed on how project managers can facilitate effective relationships, it became clear to those involved that as with any relationship, both parties are responsible for making it work. For example, in her evaluation of the project, one artist reflected:

*'I realised the responsibility and power I have in clearly stating what I would like from commissioners or the way I would like our communication to happen to be efficient and avoid misunderstandings. It made me realise I can be more proactive by anticipating some of the questions or in a simple way, establish my own pre-requisites more formally to make sure I work in conditions that I know will enable optimal work and relationships with the participants.'* (Artist)

Finally, although this research project explored challenges and highlighted areas for improvement, it also identified many examples of good practice and accord:

*'One thought: as you grow with experience you realise that managers make things happen and they are your greatest strength.'* (Artist)

## Addressing the Dynamic participant list

### Project Managers

Organisation	Name	Job title
Trinity Laban	Louisa Pestell	Projects Manager
Trinity Laban	Helen Hendry	Projects Manager
Spread the Word	Laura Kenwright	Audience Development Manager
Lewisham Education Arts Network	Jane Hendrie	Manager
Stratford Circus	Becky Lees	Education Officer
British Film Institute	Joanna van der Meer	Family Learning Programmer
The Globe Theatre	John Murray	Learning Projects Coordinator
Freelance Project Manager	Lynne Brackley	Freelance
Little Angel Theatre	Slavka Jovanovic	Education and Participation Manager
Freshwater Theatre Company	Sara Coffey	General Manager
Emergency Exit Arts	Chloe Osborne	Associate Director – Participation
Whitechapel Gallery	Vicky Carmichael	Curator: Schools and Teachers
Squeaky Gate & Dancers' Career Development	Ellen Chambers	Education and Partnerships Manager  Grants and Careers Officer
Chisenhale Gallery	Laura Wilson	Offsite and Education Organiser

### Artists

Name	Art Form
Neil Valentine	Music
Susan Stockwell	Visual Arts
Stephanie Singer	Music
Ansuman Biswas	Cross arts
Gemma Rowan	Theatre
Sylvan Baker	Theatre
Josh Solnick	Spoken word
Judith Hope	Puppetry and arts and craft
Yolanda de los bueis	Media/Performance
Anne-Gaëlle Thiriot	Dance

## Addressing the Dynamic Logic Model

Aims	Context	Inputs (resources)	Mechanisms	Participants	Outputs	Outcomes	Contribution to ArtWorks' Aims
<p>To invite ten artists working in arts in participatory settings (AIPS) to explore how they can be better supported by arts managers.</p> <p>To invite 15 arts project managers working in participatory settings to explore their CPD needs so that they can better support their freelance artists.</p> <p>To better understand the barriers and challenges that currently exist between artists and project managers in terms of management and relationship dynamic.</p> <p>To highlight what artists and project managers expect from one another and what approaches, frameworks, models and/or CPD can help establish and support positive working relationships between these two groups.</p>	<p>ArtWorks has yet to explore the relationship between arts managers and artists or discuss the CPD needs of arts project managers working in AIPS.</p> <p>There is little formal research undertaken in this area of enquiry.</p> <p>Often artists can feel disconnected and unsupported from the organisation they are working for and the strategic aims of the projects that they are delivering.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence collected through consultation with various project managers has highlighted that they can feel uncertain about how best to build proactive relationships with their freelance participatory artists.</p> <p>There are few training opportunities for arts project managers to develop skills in this area and organisations often overlook this professional development need.</p>	<p>Knowledge and experience of the participating artists and project managers. Wide cross section of AIPS sector.</p> <p>The knowledge and experience of the facilitator. The ability to listen, collate, reflect and write up findings.</p> <p>Skills and resources of Trinity Laban staff and spaces.</p> <p>Support from Paul Hamlyn Foundation staff and evaluator.</p>	<p>Fair recruitment of participants – ensuring diverse cross section of sector and representation from various art forms and organisations.</p> <p>Clear contact and managing of expectations with participants.</p> <p>Facilitating appropriate confidentiality and an environment where honest discussions can be had.</p> <p>Planning and reflection sessions with external facilitator before, between and after action enquiry days.</p> <p>Full day with 15 project managers and facilitator.</p> <p>Half day with ten artists and facilitator.</p> <p>Second full day with project managers and facilitator to discuss initial findings and develop body of knowledge and collate learning further.</p>	<p>Various artists working in AIPS.</p> <p>Various arts managers working in AIPS.</p> <p>Diverse selection of art forms, context and settings and types of organisation represented.</p>	<p>Evaluation case study/evaluation report to PHF.</p> <p>Report for wider dissemination with a degree of 'recommendations' and/or case studies of best practice for the sector.</p>	<p>Develop a greater understanding of how to facilitate and manage better professional relationships amongst the research project participants.</p> <p>Develop a greater understanding of the misconceptions, assumptions and culture that currently exists around the relationship management between artist and project managers working in AIPS amongst the research project participants.</p> <p>Documentation of the challenges and barriers that currently exists between artists and project managers working in AIPS in terms of management and relationship dynamic.</p> <p>Contribute to the debate in the sector around the needs of project managers who are facilitating AIPS with particular focus on their managing relationships with artists.</p>	<p>An exploration of new ways of working.</p> <p>New learning and knowledge exchange across art forms.</p> <p>Contribution to the body of research and sector recommendations collated by ArtWorks.</p> <p>Exploration of the management relationship between artist and arts managers and how this affects quality issues.</p>