



The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is at the heart of the venture. It goes right through the process. The committee is responsible for overseeing the entire project and makes the major decisions especially concerning finance, legal issues, professional contracts, production budgets and artistic policy in collaboration with the artistic director. They are also responsible for communication between themselves and the other teams. They should adopt aims and objectives for the project and ensure it stays as close as possible to its intentions.

Being a member of the Steering Committee is a commitment from the time a decision to do a play is made to some three months after the play production ends. It will be busy in the early and middle stages but the professional team will lift the weight off the committee during the rehearsal period. The Steering Committee is the centre of a team structure designed to encourage involvement and responsibility from as many people as possible - the more volunteers the more the work load is shared.

The Steering Committee can set up other teams such as Events, Access or Marketing. Whilst having overall responsibility the Steering Committee must allow the other teams to operate freely and trust them to see their tasks through. Whilst you may monitor their activities I'd suggest minimum interference.

The Steering Committees Main Duties and Responsibilities

Make sure everyone who volunteers understand the duties and responsibilities they are taking on. There is no need to frighten people, each person is only taking a proportion of the responsibilities and on average the commitment to meetings is about one and sometimes two evenings a month.

The Steering Committee needs to meet at least once a month. Members report to and from their various teams and are set tasks to reach by the next meeting. The main responsibilities are -

- Overseeing the project from the outset until the close or handing over to a subsequent project
- Incorporation, legal framework, contracts and employment
- Finance and budgets and the completion of the final accounts
- Sponsorship and major grant funding
- Delegating responsibilities to teams, monitoring their progress and facilitating communication between them
- Supporting events

Everyone working as part of the Steering Committee should be constantly drawing in more people to join the various teams and delegating responsibility. Remember to spread the load as quickly as possible. The play belongs to the community and as many people as possible should be encouraged to have an input. Constant delegation - 'letting go' is the task of the Steering Committee, but as anyone who's ever organised anything will know, ensuring others do things can sometimes take as long as doing it yourself. Doing it yourself, however, is not the point of the exercise.

Roles of Individual Committee Members

Each member of the Committee should have specific responsibility that *might* include the following roles and titles. Some roles can be shared between two people but the following would be the basis of an ideal team of between ten and twelve people.

- *Chairperson* - To keep meetings focused and to delegate tasks. The Chair, as head of the project, will be required to be a signatory on cheques, sign letters to funders and be available for hospitality, press and project representative. They are the projects figureheads.

- *Co- Chairperson or Vice Chair*- Shares the responsibilities of the chair and stands in during absenteeism.
- *Treasurer* - Responsible for the financial book keeping, budgeting, setting fundraising targets, maintaining the bank account, collating box office and other income, paying fees and project expenses keeping a clear cash flow record.
- *Secretary*- Keeping records of meetings, dissemination of information, distributing information between Teams, Committees and individuals.
- *Grants & Sponsorship Secretary*- Frame sponsorship packages, making grant applications to potential funding bodies.
- *Publicity and Marketing Secretary* - Dealing with the media, writing press releases, arranging interviews, all publicity relating to the performance and project. Most certainly also a member of the Events and Marketing Team.
- *Volunteer Coordinator* - Taking charge of recruitment, encouraging involvement and keeping records of people and skills- the co-ordinator could also be a member of the events team.
- *Equal Opportunities, Disability and Accessibility Representative* - Someone who could work with the Volunteer Coordinator but responsible for focusing on the needs of minority groups and individuals in the community.
- *Events and Marketing Team Representative*- Head or representative of the Events and Marketing Team which is working to meet an agreed funding target, organise one off or on-going events. Tie in with other local events and organisations. Run a draw and be responsible for marketing.
- *Script Team Representative*- Head or representative of the Research & Script development Team who work with the writer gathering material past and present to help formulate the script.
- *Ordinary or Floating Members* - Usually far from ordinary, but individuals who sit on committee without any specific role but offer advice and support wherever its needed

The Process

A Community Play usually brings together a small professional theatre team who work inclusively with large numbers of people, for no less than eighteen months, to create a total theatre experience that both celebrates and challenges. Through those months leading up to the production an abundance of activities, committees, workshops and rehearsals develop friendships and support between people that represent the major rewards of the work. The process, carefully prepared with local consultation, aims to respond to the specific needs and expectations of the particular community. The process, like the plays themselves, are unique to the town they serve. The result, properly executed, is a thrilling climax of achievement. A testament to the creativity and co-operation of people is that the work is always of a high artistic standard; communities are never less than surprised by what they achieve.

It all starts with a short pilot project, which includes a feasibility study. This process establishes contacts in the area, researches potential venues, help in kind, funding, themes for the play and the general support. It seeks opinions and expectations from as wide a section of the population as possible and it runs a series of creative workshops to demonstrate the value of community arts. From this a report of the findings together with recommendations is presented to a public meeting for a vote. Communities who don't want a play are not obliged

The cost of the project is determined by the feasibility study. The first thing is assessing what monies are available, when and from where. Most money usually comes from outside the community through Trusts, Regional Arts Associations, Business Sponsorship, and Lottery etc. The help in kind is determined along with the size of the venue and the box office potential. Only after a true idea of the scale of the project is understood can anything be planned.

Once its been decided to do a play the Steering Committee is formed. They are usually a voluntary group who take responsibility for the project. Other teams are formed, responsible for different aspects of the programme; these are The Script/Research Team, and The Marketing and Events Team. Professionals can give guidance throughout but the aim is to give ownership where it belongs - with the community. The project should empower people to organise and manage their own project so that skills are left behind to enable future work once the play is over. The Steering Committee and other teams take a few months to prepare for the project ahead. This includes planning a programme of activities suitable for the community, deciding on the objectives of the project, setting up a bank account and agreeing a budget.

A Community arts programme often accompanies this period of work and can take anything up to a year to complete. A Community Arts programme is especially designed to suit the needs and the pockets of the host community. At the same time the play is researched and developed as collaboration between local people and the writer through meetings, workshops or chance encounters. *Soundings* and *Drama Search workshops* use techniques to discover and debate possible ideas and examine their contemporary relevance. Fund raising activities and events raise awareness to the play and process, constantly inviting more and more people to participate. Finally, with the money raised, the play written and read publicly to the town, inclusive casting takes place - an event to which all are invited and no one is turned away.

Usually around ten to twelve weeks before the established performance date a professional theatre team becomes resident in the town. The size of the team and the length of time they are resident depends on budget and needs. The teams more usually consist of a Director, Play Coordinator, Designer, Design Assistant, Production Manager and a Musical Director. Rehearsals begin and the design studio and play office open to the public. People are invited to help build sets, props and costumes with the guidance of theatre designers and the production manager. Workshops are taken into schools and other establishments. The whole town can become involved with a new creativity. The writer often attends rehearsals to oversee and get feed back on the script. The goal is a work of

art that touches the centre of important issues within the community becoming both a challenge and a celebration.

The plays themselves are often presented in the dynamic and visual promenade theatre style with large carried images. The space, be it school, barn, church, castle, warehouse or tent is transformed with a series of stages around the circumference. The action of the play often with casts of over a hundred and twenty swirls all around and through the standing audience.

The professional practitioners may be asked to stay in contact with communities to support them in the setting up of teams for future ventures. What we know from past projects, can happen is that the previous experience of doing a large-scale community plays leads to further activities. The enthusiasm if harnessed can create extraordinary post play happenings. Communities have in the past done other community plays, created arts centres, started festivals, built up choirs, bands, drama societies, politicised and organised themselves in stopping unwanted housing developments. This is made all the more possible when the original concept is one of owners. The Community Play belongs to the people and is at its best when it embraces the idea of being inclusive

The Script Team

The Script Team is responsible for encouraging the community and the writer to work together to search out the themes and subjects for the play. The process should involve an input from as wide a cross section of the community as possible to ensure that the final play script has a relevance to the community. It is important to understand that the script team is there to manage the process and not to undertake the script development themselves.

“There is no true collaboration unless you learn the painful art of letting go. A community play depends on a generous spirit and respecting to others ideas.”
Jon Oram - Eramosa Dramatic Action 1990

The script team exists to animate others and encourage participation through setting up a variety of activities. It is inevitable that people on the script team are interested in research or are of a creative disposition and their enthusiasm means they are going to find it really difficult to ‘let go’. It’s a dilemma, but if team end up doing the research itself it fails as a ‘community’ project. The community will only feel they ‘own’ the project if they are proactively involved and see their contributions having an effect. Everything the Script team does should be geared towards involving other people.

Organise A Programme Of Events

In the Handbook Introduction the process of the Script Development is described briefly. If you’ve not read it read it now.

The Script Team plan and execute a programme of events that supports the process of making the play script and seeing it to fruition in performance. They set up community soundings, research and reminiscence meetings, drama search workshops, exhibitions and anything else they feel stimulates the community’s engagement in the making of the play. This does not mean that team members have to facilitate the events themselves - though they might - but finding people to suit the event. Soundings can be run by anyone who is sensitive and has reasonable leadership qualities; Drama Searches possibly need someone with theatre or educational drama experience - more often than not these are run by the artistic director of the play, with Claque that would be a professional.

The Script Development Process

There are six stages in the process of finding the drama and taking it through to performance

Soundings
Research
Drama Search
Script Development
Rehearsal
Performance

Whilst each stage is distinctive they overlap. You will see, from the timetable below that once the soundings have started research is constant throughout the programme. Researchers would start with an open brief, and then respond to findings within the soundings and drama searches. Later the writer will want specific facts as the script is developed. During rehearsals the designer will be asking for information about visual aspects of the times in which the play is set. The process should allow the greatest number of people with the broadest range of interests to be physically and practically creative in the shaping of the play. Although the common goal is to ‘make theatre’ each stage has a distinctiveness that will attract different groups of people. During the first two stages theatre is hardly, if ever, referred to. Research is about finding local stories, events, historical figures and trends that have brought the community to where it is. Researchers will be gathering information that informs us of where we came from. The Soundings are public events that explore contemporary issues through mostly non-theatre exercises, debates and discussions. It is not until the Drama Search that we start to involve ‘theatre’ and that doesn’t begin until there is sufficient material from the Research and Soundings to inform it.

Although the Drama Search begins to draw on theatre, it doesn't concern itself with performance. It uses improvisation techniques to explore the research material in human terms and tries to find meaning in them so they have significance for the community today. It is based on the premise that we all have something in common with everything that has happened, is happening now, and will happen in the future. The search is for those points where we identify with historic events. The improvisations reach for a qualitative depth within the historic event in a way that expands our understanding.

Throughout the process, (The Research, Soundings and Drama Search) the writer is being fed with information, concerns and responses that should inform the play. The Writer's challenge is to present a script that defines the essence of what the process has revealed. As the writer begins to present written scenes they are explored and tested through further workshops. During this stage design, music, technical and production values as well as the environment in and around where the play will be performed also inform the script.

The first draft of the play is written and given a public reading, which will bring all the contributing groups together with potential community actors and many more interested parties. People are encouraged to comment further. At a public reading the writer often has to be confronted by the broadest audience s/he has possibly yet faced.

'Inclusive casting' follows the reading almost immediately. This means no one is turned away - whoever turns up is in it. This too will have implications for the writer. The play will now undergo further rewrites to reflect the comments from the public reading and respond to the range and numbers of people who have come to casting.

The collaboration continues throughout rehearsals with the director, community actors and production team. The early rehearsals are a process of change and development until finally a performance emerges which comes from the heart of everyone who contributed. If the process has been a generous one, there will be a real sense of ownership.

Marketing

Marketing can be the responsibility of the Steering Committee, overseen by an individual or run by a marketing subcommittee. The main responsibilities are

To encourage as many people as possible to take part and to make the project known and understood within the community and beyond. The team should promote the project to all areas of the community in order to draw in the widest range of people so all sections of society are represented.

To facilitate easy access to the project for every individual.

To keep all known participants and interested parties in touch with the project and its progress.

To keep an updated database of all people who have participated or have expressed an interest in participating.

To liaise with and support other Teams on the project

To run a series of profile and public relations events and promote them

To promote the Community Play itself

To organise the sale of tickets through the community play box office and other outlets.

To work with the Artistic Director and other professional theatre staff to create and print an informative theatre programme

To raise a set amount money through fundraising events from within the community by an agreed date.

Support the Artistic Director in devising and organising a series of 'theatre skills' workshops

Organise cast social events.

Be responsible for the front of house management of the community play.

Why does a Community Play need Marketing?

Many of the rewards and benefits of the play only become apparent in hindsight. The greatest pleasure after the event is to hear people say they have been surprised by what they have achieved but the greatest regret is hearing people say, 'I really wish I'd taken part - I had no idea it was going to be like that.' The marketing has failed when people miss an opportunity because they weren't aware of what was in it for them personally.

One of the greatest rewards of participating in a community play is dealing directly with people. Marketing and running events puts you in direct contact with hundreds of individuals. There is great satisfaction in simply persuading someone to participate in something that could be life enhancing. It's almost a guarantee that people will appreciate your persuasive powers, if not at the time, in hindsight. Believe in your own power as an individual and find the courage to go out and meet people. Even something as simple as handing someone a leaflet can make a difference.

The whole process leads towards producing an ambitious, large scale production of the highest possible standard about the place in which you live - what I call 'a work of art in terms of a community'. This sounds somewhat pompous, but it's simply an acknowledgement that the best is expected of the professional team and that 'ordinary people' are capable of being 'extraordinary'. A community play is a high quality product, so remember that when you market it.

Community Fund Raising

As well as promotion the Marketing and Events Team are responsible for raising an agreed amount of money within community through imaginative fundraising events. Your financial target should be realistic and not be so high that it dominates all your thinking, neither should it be so low that it is too easy. Local fundraising usually accounts for about 5% of the cost of the project; the great bulk of it will be raised by the Steering Committee through sponsorship and grants. The reason of having a community fund raising element is to give people a feeling of ownership for the project. Fund raising events create marketing opportunity and people who commit to raising money are more likely to come and see the play or participate in it. Some of the events will have a fund raising element to them, some will not, but every event should aim to be instructive, enriching and not least fun. The events should encourage people to come back for more.

Parallel Project or Events

The Events Team design and manage a parallel project and gather and organise volunteers.

The parallel project is a series of events and workshops designed and executed to fulfil the following:

- Support the objectives of the community play
- Research themes and subjects to inform the writing of a play unique to the community
- The writing of the community play
- Encourages the greatest number of people from the community to participate in parallel project events and advocates and makes people aware of opportunities to participate in the community play.
- Makes the public more aware of the community, it's heritage.

Further to these basic principles the project is strictly designed to respond to the needs and issues within the community. Heritage is generally a good key ambition to keep in mind but it should significantly find ways of enhancing the contemporary life of the community.