COURTYARD
HEREFORD
CREATIVE AGEING

Paper Works:

The how & why of successful project paperwork

In partnership with

Herefordshire Council

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

BACKGROUND

Creative Ageing at The Courtyard has been running participatory arts activities for seven years. Established in 2010 Creative Ageing has run 115 projects in care homes & community settings, with nearly 36000 attendances from older people. During this time, we have learnt huge amounts about the best way to engage care staff & volunteers in our work. We have gone from hastily thrown together feedback forms, to a considered process that works for us and our projects.

Making of Me was a mentor led project which ran from 2014-2017. This project worked with expert mentors and artists to develop their creative practice within residential care environments. This multi-disciplinary project saw each care home work with three artists across a 30-week period, running creative sessions with residents and staff.

Making of Me was kindly funded by ACE and The Baring Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Making of Me project many lessons were learnt, but the biggest was the importance of well-designed paperwork. Not the most glamorous subject, but well thought-out paperwork stood out as one of the most important foundations of this ambitious project. In this guide we will share how a well-designed paperwork process can not only make your project simpler to manage but also increase your return rate, and make tackling that end of project report much easier! This guide looks at running projects in care homes, but you can translate a lot of the lessons to other environments.

In 2014 we overhauled our evaluation & paperwork strategy to ensure that all projects were being managed in the same way, therefore allowing us to aggregate our information to see our project as a whole. We started with the principle that our paperwork should be **creative**, **embedded** and **relevant**.

Creative – as an arts organisation we understand the value of using creativity to support communication in all aspects of our project not just the delivery! Not all forms have to be boring, and not all processes need to be frustrating ones that get in the way of creating art and special moments with participants. Embracing your creativity and applying it to your processes is the starting point to increasing your participation rate.

Embedded – trying to retrospectively collect evaluation data once a project has started is very complicated. By establishing your evaluation collection methods when you are designing your project you will be able to collect vital information to evidence your impact to funders and other stakeholders.

Relevant – making sure that you only collect information that you are going to use, and that information will help you evidence your outcomes. It is very easy to slip into a 'just in case' mind-set when collecting information, but lengthy questionnaires are often off putting. Define what information you need, and only collect that.

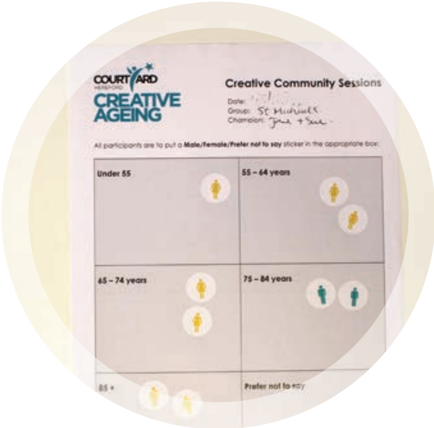
AIMS **are the changes your project is trying to bring about.** When setting our aims, we use phrase like: to enable, to improve, to increase, to reduce.

OBJECTIVES **are the way that you will achieve your aims and may describe your planned activity.** When planning objectives, we use phrases like: to facilitate, to support, to stimulate, to run.

OUTPUTS **are thing things that are created during your project.** These might be a book of poetry, or an exhibition of paintings.

OUTCOMES**, or the effectiveness of your project, are the way to assess how successfully you met your aims.** When evaluating project outcomes, we use phrases like 75% of participants reported an improvement in their wellbeing.

WORK HARD FOR THE MONEY



Often when collecting data to support monitoring and evaluation there is a tendency to collect a lot of information just in case you need it later, more often than not to never refer back to the reams of data collected. For Creative Ageing this meant that we were spending time collecting and recording data with no purpose.

We now commit to use every bit of information we collect, and to collect information in the smartest way possible. Often our data collection methods allow us to collect multiple pieces of information in one go. In this example we need to know how many people came to a project session, was it their first time doing something like this, and what gender did they identify as. We are able to get this one question to collect 3 pieces of data, the sticker choice indicates gender, the placement of the sticker tells us if it's their first time, and the total number of stickers tells us how many people attended. By asking people a few really hard working questions rather than 10 individual open ended questions we have seen a huge increase in our return rate, which helps us collect more statistically significant data.

If your project is funded externally discuss with your funders what evaluation they are going to want at the end of the project, and make sure you are going to be able to provide this using the information you have collected.

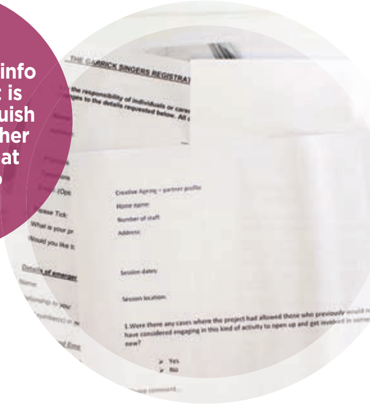
TOP TIP:
When deciding on data collection methods have your aims, objectives & targets to hand, this will keep you on track and minimise duplication of data.

THE FIRST BITE IS WITH YOUR EYES

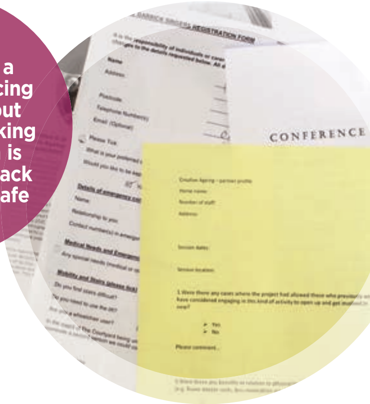
Making sure your paperwork is nicely designed as well as being well thought out makes it a more enticing thing to engage with. We have found simply printing on coloured paper can increase the return rate. But to really increase your return rate, creating a whole suite of coordinating forms for the project can help. Taking the time to include logos & project names on each sheet ensures that when a piece of paper goes walkabout it can be easily identified and replaced. This attention to detail in making easy to complete, attractive forms reassures the home of your professionalism and is more fun to complete!

The creation of forms like this can feel labour intensive at the beginning, but you should be able to easily adapt them for future projects.

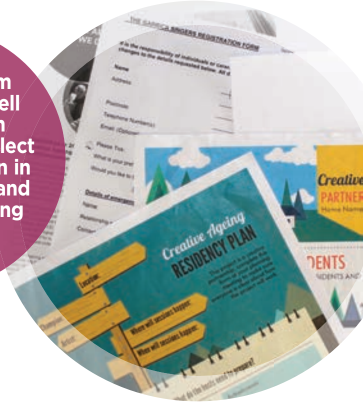
TOP TIP:
If you can, include freepost or a pre-paid envelope with your paperwork, this will encourage people to return it.



This form collects all the info you need, but is hard to distinguish from all the other paperwork that you have to complete.



A bright colour makes a form more enticing to complete, but be aware of picking a colour which is hard to read. Black on yellow is a safe choice.



This form stands out from the crowd! A well designed form allows you to collect more information in a smaller space and makes completing it much more appealing.

THE RIGHT THING, FOR THE RIGHT PEOPLE, AT THE RIGHT TIME

The bedrock of our project administration is the mantra that we need the **right thing**, **for the right people**, **at the right time**. This means making sure we know all the data we are going to need at the very beginning of the project planning process and choosing what will help us evaluate the impact against the aims and objectives of each project.

The Right Thing means making sure our data collection and evaluation method is right for the audience we are working with. For us this means not asking care home residents to complete a long feedback questionnaire a week after the end of a project, rather we collected their feedback over tea, biscuits & post-its at the end of each session. For staff this means making a very short feedback book that can be completed along with their care plan logs after a great creative session.

The Right People When trying to work out who are the *right people* to collect data from we first start with trying to identify who knows the facts we want. Our artists do not know much about residents' biographical data, and for those residents with cognitive impairment they might not know their own anymore. Care staff will have access to the residents D.O.B and gender information, so we contact the home at the end of the project with a full list of everyone who attended and they provide the biographical data we need.

The Right Time Not only do we want a suitable data collection method we also need to be mindful of *when* we collect data. Tea time is a touchstone for residents and staff in a care home. Including this social time in a creative session allows an opportunity to end the session gently, encouraging staff to come and hear about all the great things that have happened during a session, and support people to leave in a relaxed manner.

For our artists, tea time provides a key opportunity to collect feedback from residents and staff about how a creative session has gone. Often they will work their way round the group asking for feedback and adding it to our comment book. These comments, captured in the moment are incredibly valuable to us as a brilliant way to illustrate the impact of creative activities much more eloquently than a stack of half completed questionnaires.

TOP TIP:
Get care staff to use post-its to capture comments about the project throughout the week. Add these to your comment book at the next session.

Project Paperwork life cycle

1

Project Agreement

WHAT: A written agreement between the care home and arts organisation outlining what the project is and what needs to be done. Also includes dates of sessions and meetings.

WHEN: Sent as soon as project is agreed verbally

2

Project Pack Sent

WHAT: Artists and care homes are sent a personalised pack containing information about the project, any pre-project paperwork, information about care homes / artists

WHEN: 2-4 weeks before project starts

3

Project Planning Documents

WHAT: At the planning meeting the artist and care home complete these forms, then return any pre-project forms

WHEN: Week 1 of project

4

Weekly Paperwork

WHAT: During the project, the artist writes a weekly reflective journal, an attendance register and completes the comment book with participants

WHEN: Weekly during the project

5

Project Ends

WHAT: Artists return the register, comment book and weekly journals for recording

WHEN: Sent as soon as the project is finished

6

Post-Project Evaluation

WHAT: Post-project questionnaire sent to artist. Post project feedback & biographical data form sent to care home

WHEN: Sent as soon as project is finished & register received

7

Evaluation Summary Created

WHAT: A 1 page evaluation summary is created using the evaluation data and sent to both care home and artist.

WHEN: 3 months after the project completes

HOWDY PARTNER

The success of our projects is always dependent on three things; artists, residents, and care staff. Without one of these groups engaging the projects instantly become much more of a struggle. To build strong foundations for a project we rely on a joint planning meeting as an opportunity for our artists to build a good working relationship with care staff.

Years of experience have helped us develop a successful framework for these meetings. Consisting of two documents, the artist works through these with the staff before any creative activity takes place in the home. One focuses on the needs of the artist to run a session e.g. what room will we use, who will bring the residents in. The second focuses on information about the home, how many staff work there, what time is shift change, what arts activities do you currently do? By developing two separate forms we give each person at the meeting the time to lead and share their expertise. This simple technique reinforces the equal contribution of each group to the success of the project and we have found it has a hugely positive impact on the project.

TOP TIP:
A quick phone call with your care home partner to discuss logistics of getting to the home or parking can be a great ice breaker especially if you've done all your previous arrangements via email.

THE PURPLE FOLDER

Printing and providing folders can feel like an unnecessary step in the 21st century when staff often have access to mobile technology for tracking resident info but care homes are fast paced environments with a high turnover of staff.

During *Making of Me* we found that often the people we had initially made arrangements with had moved on by the time the project started, and along with them went all of the knowledge about the project, or people simply didn't have time to check their emails regularly throughout the week. To mitigate this, we ensure that all relevant information about a project is available in hardcopy, in a folder that can be easily identified by staff. Staff have reported to us that having all the information at the start of the project helps them explain what is going to happen to residents and colleagues alike. At the end of the project these folders become a repository for information about the impact of the project.

TOP TIP:
Make sure the folder is a really bright colour so you can identify it easily in a sea of paperwork.

Likewise, freelance artists need a folder with everything in that they can easily bring to sessions.

In the project folder you could include:

- Contact details for artists, project managers and care home
- Project overview
- Session timetable
- Key project dates
- Forms to be completed
- Partner profiles

DATA INTO INFORMATION

You've designed your evaluation, you've sent out the folders, you've got a pile of completed forms, now what do you do with it all? Transforming data into information is all about translating the numbers, feedback quotes and outcomes into usable pertinent points. You are looking to communicate the impact and success of your project, and offer some insight into these outcomes.

We always begin with our aims and objectives, how did we perform against these targets? We collate all of the data on a spreadsheet to help us assess how well the project did against our aims. We then ask ourselves: Did anything unexpected happen – if so do you know why? One of the most satisfying parts of this process is reflecting on the comments received. These really help us tell the story of the outcome and impact of our project. As we run multiple projects we've found it can be very useful to start a 'lovely quotes' document as a place to collect these gems as you are going along for future use.

TOP TIP:
Talking to someone about how your project went, or the feedback you got can be a very effective way of teasing out the interesting themes and creating a coherent narrative.

SHOUTING INTO THE VOID

We are constantly asked for feedback, often when you click on a website a pop-up will ask you to share your valuable feedback, book a hotel and you can expect to be contacted for reviews when you return. All of these bits of feedback take up our time, and usually give us nothing in return, completing it can feel like shouting into a void. Along with collecting the right information we also make sure to share our information with the people who provide it.

3 months after the conclusion of a project we send care homes a summary of the project including the summarised data that we collected from them across the life of the project. This summary can then be used by the home to evidence the impact and value of working with professional arts organisations for CQC, residents' families, or potential new residents. We also share these summaries with our artists and funders. Sharing data in this way lets our project partners see the purpose of completing our paperwork not only for us, but also for them.

TOP TIP:
Ask you partners what information they would find useful and base your summary on that.

Funders reports are not only about reporting the numbers of people reached, amount of money spent or lists of feedback gathered. They should tell the story of a project, the unexpected 'magic moments' and the impact the work has had on people and their lives. We try to include as many images and quotes as we can.

This toolkit was created by Creative Ageing to support our project 'Making of Me'.

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This toolkit was made possible by the kind funding from Big Lottery Reaching Communities fund, The Baring Foundation, and Arts Council England.