

A group of people are gathered in a room, possibly a workshop or meeting. In the foreground, a woman with long blonde hair tied back is looking towards a man with curly blonde hair who is looking at the camera. To the right, a man with a beard and a grey hoodie is sitting and looking down. In the background, several other people are standing and talking. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent teal overlay.

THE REALLY

USEFUL GUIDE

For Artists Touring
To Libraries



"We believe that England's network of public libraries provides a vital resource for the development of creativity and the promotion of culture across this country. They are the country's most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy. They will be central to our delivery of this Strategy, and over the next 10 years we will increase our investment in them."

- Let's Create. Strategy 2020-2030.
Arts Council England (2020).

Introduction

This guide is designed to help artists and touring companies to successfully tour their work to libraries. Whether your work is a live theatre show, a dance performance, digital workshop, or visual art exhibition, this guide will help you share your work with new audiences in unique library settings. We will cover every aspect from initial contact with libraries right through to evaluation.



"Libraries are a place where users can experience vibrant and diverse cultural events, reaching communities who do not normally take part in the arts."

(Libraries Connected, 2018)

WHY TOUR WORK TO LIBRARIES?

Library users make up some of the most diverse audiences of any public venue. People from a wide range of backgrounds use the library for numerous reasons besides borrowing books. Libraries are inclusive and welcoming spaces in the heart of local communities which are used and trusted by all social groups. This makes them ideal places for arts, culture and creativity to happen.

Reaching new audiences can be a challenge, but libraries provide a reach to groups who may not ordinarily see your work because of cultural, financial, geographic or other barriers. Libraries can be an ideal space for somebody to have their first cultural experience – it is a familiar setting where different audience groups, who might feel there are barriers going to a traditional arts venue, will feel more comfortable.

WHY DO LIBRARIES WANT TO WORK WITH YOU?

Many libraries want to work with artists - arts can provide several benefits for library service users and their surrounding communities.

Libraries up and down the country are now encouraged to provide four 'Universal Offers' including:

- Reading
- Health & Wellbeing
- Information & Digital
- Culture & Creativity (*possibly the most relevant to you!*)



To find out more about the aims of Libraries Connected's 'Universal Offers', take a look at their webpage by clicking [here](#). ←

Libraries are looking for new ways to offer Culture & Creativity to their audiences - library staff often seek new opportunities to work with professional artists to support their aims, as well as those of local authority strategic outcomes too.

These include supporting the local cultural economy, increasing access to and engagement with culture, supporting wellbeing, and other objectives.

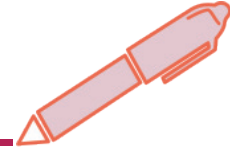


DON'T FORGET...



Touring to libraries can provide you with the opportunity to add another circuit of potential venues to your touring, reaching new and diverse audiences and, as highlighted, reaching those who wouldn't see your work at a traditional arts venue. Libraries can also offer more intimate experiences, as well as the benefits that come with community arts venues; a friendly, curious audience, unique spaces to work with, and a new community and network to be welcomed into.

PLANNING



Whilst library touring has great potential as a new touring circuit, it is important to ensure that your work and library spaces are the right fit to ensure the best experience for you, the library and their audiences.

Some things to consider are below. You might find these headings useful to put together a touring pack for libraries:

WHY LIBRARIES?: Why do you think it is right for your work to be presented in a library – how does a library space support what you are trying to achieve?

LIBRARY SPACES: No library is the same – so don't assume anything. To be really sure about what to expect it might pay off to visit a few and talk to the staff about what can be done in the space. This will help you to work around bookshelves, doorways, staffed desks etc. Your backdrop could be anything; a wall of artwork, shelves of books or a window.

TECHNICAL: Most libraries will not have access to any technical equipment, and certainly no technician, so be prepared to be very self-sufficient with lights and sound and also consider how easily you can connect to a power supply.

PERFORMANCE FEES: Make sure you work out the show costs on an all-inclusive basis (travel, VAT, etc.) as library services may prefer to offer a flat fee with no box office deals. Consider if you might need **project funding** to make the tour viable.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS: Ensure you have all the relevant licences, insurances, risk assessments and "trigger warnings" or information about content that could offend, ready so you can produce them when needed.

WORKLOAD: For the staff at the library you tour to, remember that your work is an additional responsibility for them, on top of their regular daily tasks – be mindful of this and try to make all aspects of the tour as easy for them as possible.

PROGRAMMING

When you get in touch with a library / library service about your work – the more succinctly and clearly you can convey why your work is a good fit, the better.



Some questions you might want to consider trying to answer in your tour pack are as follows*:

What is your work about and who is it for?

Can you do anything additional to make a broader offer, such as workshops, wrap-around or audience engagement activities?

When are you available to tour?

How can you help reach these audiences?

What will the show cost to the library?

How might this show fit into an existing programme of activity?

Quality assurance:

It will be helpful to provide things to help the library assess the quality of your work. What additional information can you send? Consider videos, trailers, reviews, recommendations from other libraries, marketing images or production shots. Send the best you have, make it easy to access them and double check they communicate well about your work and its quality.

*A downloadable company information form template that you can use to contact libraries is available via the links on page 12.

TIMINGS



Top Tips:

- ✓ Find out what the lead-in times are for the library service you want to tour to – allow around 12 weeks to promote, but remember that often libraries could be programming up to a year in advance to ensure an event fits around all their other activities.
- ✓ Libraries Connected has a useful calendar of key dates, such as Make Music Day and Women's History Month - see the link on page 12
- ✓ If your work aligns with any important national dates this could be an extra incentive for libraries to be involved and make promotion easier for them.
- ✓ Flexibility with dates and times is helpful. Be understanding of the other events and activities that might be running in that space and help library staff to work around these.
- ✓ Make sure the library are aware at an early stage what time you need for the

The timing of the event itself is of course important:

Is the event during library opening hours?

What would you need to consider about other users in the space at the same time?

If the event is taking place when the library is closed to the public, or during open access hours, there might be limited staff available for support. Will set up be whilst the library is open? If so, how disruptive will this be to users?

Other activities might take place in the space beforehand - have a contingency plan if these over-run. Think about what preparations need to have taken place to make the performance space available.

COMMUNICATION

Library staff can sometimes have misapprehensions about offering arts events in their space. They may believe they *'can't offer what a proper arts venue can'* or that the space and facilities *'aren't up to standard'* so they might need some encouragement that your work will go down well in their venue!

Word your first email or call in a way that's clear to a library – you could make a link between programming your work and meeting library objectives, and make it obvious what is and isn't needed from them to take your work. **Use clear language and avoid theatre or arts jargon and acronyms.**

Think about who the best contact is in your company and at the library – the best projects happen when you can build a relationship with someone. Nurture relationships and get to understand each other and how you both work, so you can both adapt accordingly.

Some handy tips for communicating with libraries:

- Where possible, conduct face to face meetings, or phone calls followed up by emails. It's much easier to understand someone's needs via a conversation than a thread of messages.
- Don't assume prior knowledge, for example phrases like 'set up time' may not be commonly used by library staff so be clear about what that involves. Library staff won't necessarily know what artists need: when or where to eat, rehearse, prepare etc. so make sure to flag this.
- Regular communication is key. Consider checking in, even if you don't have anything in particular to ask. If the library has any questions that have arisen during the lead up to an event, they will be able to ask you. They might not have had time to email or perhaps don't want to bother you.
- Invoicing systems – you may need to be set up as a 'supplier' if a library is part of a local authority so checking this beforehand could help avoid delays with payment.
- Ensure the whole touring team are aware of these considerations, so everyone has the same flexible approach.

SPACE & REQUIREMENTS

All venues are different, even within one library service, so don't make assumptions about the facilities available at libraries – find out the reality of what you're dealing with. This will include tech and space availability at a library, as well as space to change / loading / accessibility – so just ask your library contact about this as soon as possible!

Some library staff may imagine complicated tech is inevitable, while some may not even realise there are any tech needs – ensure you get your requirements across, but also think about which aspects you can be flexible on. Mutual respect is so important - library staff work hard for their spaces and communities – and what they may not know about tech for a theatre show, they more than make up for in knowledge about their space and their users (*your potential new audiences!*)

Be guided by the following tips to avoid any unexpected situations!

- Keep things simple and help library staff out where you can – what else can you offer that might make their job easier?
- Self-sufficiency is key here. You should expect to set up everything yourself as often the staff or volunteers will not have time to assist. If they do, it's a plus. Be clear about what tasks it is best for them to help with.
- Prepare for all possibilities but hope for the best: imagine you have a room of 4 walls and some standard plug sockets...nothing more! Anything else is a bonus!
- Access to the space could be a single door or even upstairs so it's best to check this in advance and make it clear what you would need to be getting into the space so they can offer best advice.
- It's worth having plenty of spare cables and extension leads.
- When asking libraries for dimensions of rooms, photos or floorplans (*these may sometimes be available, but don't rely on this!*) also think about ceiling height (*which is often low in libraries*), black out possibilities (*often libraries have a lot of natural light*), door heights, stairs etc.
- Sight lines – most spaces (*but not all*) will have seating on the flat. If your performance involves a lot of floor work, most people beyond the first two rows won't be able to see you. Can you bring your own stage or have a plan B for how you choreograph that scene to ensure everyone can see well?
- Libraries may have other needs above and beyond those of other venues – i.e. DBS checks, risk assessments, health and safety etc. Stay in touch with your contact about this and clarify what you do and don't offer.



Libraries may want to start promoting your show much earlier than a traditional arts venue, so make sure they have everything they need, covering a range of different marketing materials, in plenty of time.

Find out where to send the marketing material and importantly, who to put it to the attention of.

What do the library really **NEED** to sell the show and what marketing support can you offer? Does your current offer speak to library audiences? Ask the library for more information about their users so you know who you're talking to.

It may be that you can provide templates for press releases or social media. You know your show the best – **BUT** don't be offended if they tweak this and put their spin on it – they know their audiences best!

Libraries will usually lead on setting ticket prices, as they have a good sense of what is affordable and achievable in the communities they serve. But it's worth them knowing previous ticket price ranges for your show in similar areas, for both traditional and non-traditional arts venues, so they can make an informed decision.

If you can help with social media, let the libraries know how to set things up so you can help them.

Share anything you know about groups for the target audience with the library, even better if you can share contacts!

MARKETING TOP TIPS

- ✓ Eye-catching image that reflects what will happen and demands attention
- ✓ A vibrant, clear font
- ✓ A short, interesting description that attracts
- ✓ Clear language, not confusing lingo!
- ✓ A call to action - e.g. 'Book Here!'
- ✓ Make sure it's clear who the event is for, for example families and children

DON'T FORGET...

If you need the venue to over print their details, please leave enough space for...

- ➔ Place
- ➔ Time
- ➔ Ticket price
- ➔ Logos
- ➔ Box office info



PRE / POST SHOW

Before you get ready to launch into your event (pre-show) or take your well-deserved rest (post-show) there are still a few things to complete so your efforts are successful and sustainable!

- ➔ You may consider an introduction or post-show speech. Liaise with the staff at the venue as to what is appropriate for them and for your show, to tell the audience who you are, housekeeping, encouraging audiences to complete feedback questionnaires, running times, intervals and so on.

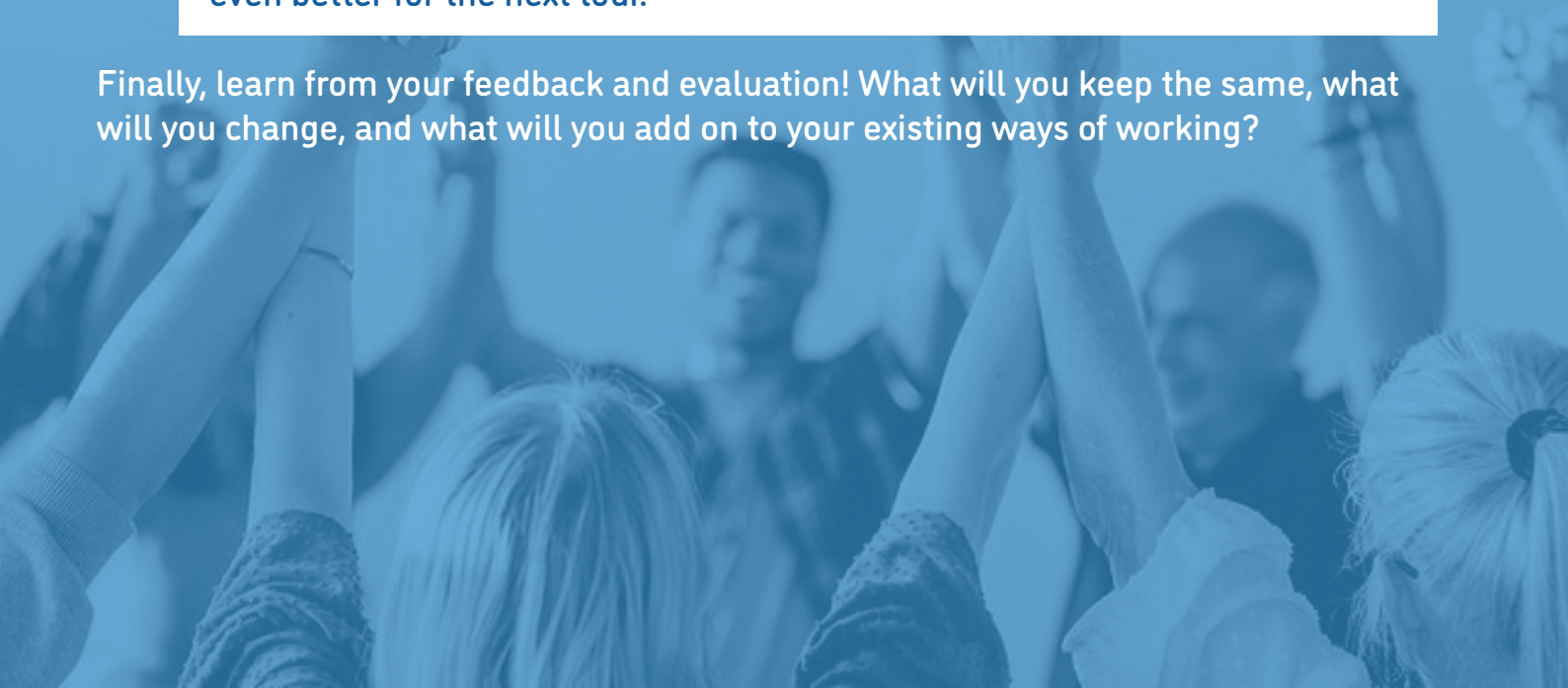
- ➔ Post-show/event conversations: These are common, and people love to find out more about your show – this is a compliment! Allow time to speak to library staff and the audience, rather than just focusing on getting out as quickly as possible. The library is more likely to want you back if you stay to chat!

- ➔ More formally, post-show Q&A's are often popular - especially with issue-based work – think about whether this is an option for you.

- ➔ Audience feedback: We all know this is key, but you should check if the library already has their own method of collecting feedback. Is it possible you can both share the details and adapt to have just one feedback form, so audiences don't have several to complete? That way everyone gets what they need with minimum hassle.

- ➔ You might consider asking the library staff to give you feedback on how it felt putting on your show, are there other things they would have liked to have known, did any problems arise from their perspective? This will help you plan even better for the next tour.

Finally, learn from your feedback and evaluation! What will you keep the same, what will you change, and what will you add on to your existing ways of working?



FURTHER READING

Arts Council England.

'Let's Create. Strategy 2020-2030.'

www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/our-strategy-2020-2030

Artist guide and libraries information resource at AMACultureHive:

www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/touring-arts-to-libraries

Creative Arts East Libraries Touring blog and videos:

www.creativeartseast.co.uk/news

Libraries Connected Culture and Creativity:

www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/culture-creativity

Red Ladder Theatre Company.

'Top Tips for Touring Theatre to Non-Traditional Venues.'

www.redladder.co.uk/about/who-we-are/

Scary Little Girls Association.

'Shows Among the Shelves - A resource and guide to presenting performances in libraries.'

www.scarylittlegirls.co.uk/community/shows-among-the-shelves/

Libraries Connected Key Dates Calendar:

www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/universal-library-offers-calendar-2020