

SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY



A View from the Edge by 'Owdyado Theatre Company

CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING UP A RURAL TOURING AGENCY

TAKE ART EXPLAINED

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

- STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
- AIMS & OBJECTIVES
- KEY TARGETS
- FUNDING
- ARTISTIC POLICY
- RECRUITING LOCAL PROMOTERS/VOLUNTEERS
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This next two chapters will use Take Art's methodology to gives a step-by-step guide in setting up a rural touring agency and then 'making it happen'. But first some background to Take Art.

TAKE ART EXPLAINED

Set up as a rural touring agency in 1987, Take Art is a pioneering arts organisation based in the county of Somerset in SW England. We are a registered charity (not for profit) and a limited company.

Take Art doesn't live in a theatre, a dance studio or an arts centre but in the villages, towns and rural communities of Somerset. We are part of ACE's national portfolio of organisations, with a remit to deliver a wide range of arts opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to experience, participate and work in the arts.

Our theatre, dance, music and early years activity as well as our rural touring programme is often targeted at the most disadvantaged in society, including people living in rural areas and those who don't access the arts for economic, social or psychological reasons.

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"Above all else Take Art answers the one question central to the philosophy of life in rural Somerset, namely 'What do you do when you can't stand watching TV any more?'

The answer is easy. You pick up the phone and contact Take Art.

The telephone will be answered by someone who is about to help you fulfil all your dreams. Then you set off on an adventure of arts promotion which you never thought was even possible. Eventually you are having such a good time in your village hall that even your children will stop watching the TV!

Long may it continue. I have a feeling we cannot manage without Take Art"

Mike Hoskin, an original village hall promoter, writing in 1987

Since 1987, we have coordinated tours by over 750 companies and brought high quality performances to well over 150,000 people and have the reputation of being one of the most celebrated UK rural touring agencies. Promoting work across all art forms, our programme reaches a wide network of village halls, schools, churches and community spaces. We develop new audiences in new spaces and ensure our programme is accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. We play a valuable part in supporting the presentation of a high quality performing arts programme that is geographically accessible to all Somerset residents.

We carefully research, and bring, great local, regional, national and international touring work into the county. We connect audiences and artists closer together by developing projects where companies rehearse and share work-in-progress; we arrange overnight hospitality to companies with volunteer hosts, run workshops in schools and offer post show discussions.

"I feel that our whole community has been fortunate throughout the past years to have this chance to experience the arts with such diversity. I wonder now what we did before Take Art."

Adult Education Community Tutor,
Avishayes School

Take Art currently works in partnership with over 30 volunteer promoting groups, supporting the presentation of 60 exciting, diverse and ambitious theatre, dance, music and puppetry performances, reaching an audience of over 5,000 each year.

"The standard of artistry has been consistently high, and the support with publicity and liaison second to none. Take Art is one of the most exciting developments in Somerset and our arts programme has been enhanced as a result of this initiative."

Avril Silk, Community Arts Organiser,
Ashbottle Arts

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A short paragraph on why you would like to start a rural touring agency in your area. For example, Take Art's statement of purpose is:

To raise the awareness, profile and understanding of the arts in Somerset and to increase access to the arts across the county, particularly for those disadvantaged geographically, culturally, economically, socially and physically. Through our rural touring programme, we will work in partnership with local volunteers to bring professional live arts events into rural communities of Somerset, providing quality arts provision to those places where there is little accessibility to these kind of events.

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AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Set some simple, clear aims 'what you want to do' and your objectives 'how are you going to do this'.

Take Art's aims and objectives are:

Aims

- To bring memorable high quality professional performances, across all art forms, to rural communities in Somerset;
- To create a local network of volunteer promoters and venues.

Objectives

- We will offer a diverse range of touring dance, theatre and music companies to volunteer promoting groups across Somerset;
- We will promote work that appeals to a wide range and mix of audiences;
- We will support a programme of cultural diversity in its widest sense;
- We will offer a balanced programme of local, national and international work;
- We will ensure there is a good balance of female to male artists offered;
- We will develop the confidence of volunteers to become local arts promoters.

KEY TARGETS

What do you want to do and what difference do you want to make. For example each year, Take Art:

- Will offer tours from up to 20 diverse touring companies;
- Will work with at least 30 different volunteer promoting groups;
- Over 45 shows will be promoted annually;
- Will aim for an average 65 audience members per show;
- Companies and artists will have the opportunity to tour into Somerset;
- Audiences will experience live performances in rural Somerset;
- Volunteers' capacity building will improve.

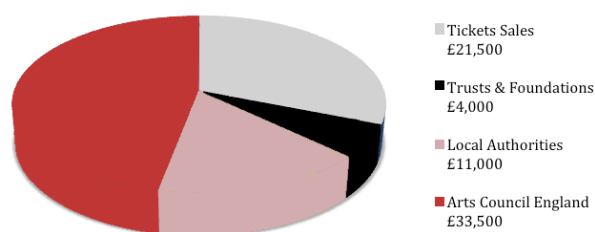
FUNDING

There are a number of possible funding streams in UK. Take Art receives funding from a number of sources, for example:

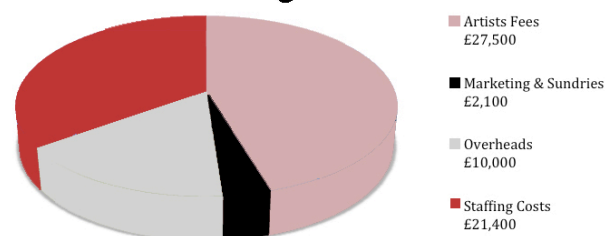
- Arts Council England
- Local Authorities in Somerset
- Earned income from ticket sales
- Trusts & Foundations

Broadly speaking, Take Art allocates a proportion of the annual grant from ACE and local authorities to support its staffing and overhead costs as well as a small amount to support the artistic programme. Any money raised from Trusts and Foundations is specifically for additional rural touring projects. The chart below shows the average annual income and expenditure. It is also interesting to note that ticket sales almost equate to the costs of the artist fees.

Income Take Art Rural Touring in 2018



Expenditure Take Art Rural Touring in 2018



Income

Arts Council England

Take Art is part of ACE's national portfolio of arts organisations and as such has a partnership agreement to deliver an agreed programme of work for each four-year period.

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Take Art offices, Somerset, UK



Local Authorities

Since 2011, the prevailing economic uncertainty and 'austerity' in UK has badly affected local authority funding for the arts. In Somerset, we no longer have service level agreements and only one out of six authorities continues to fund us on an ongoing basis. There are small arts development streams that we can apply to annually but this does not allow for a stable base for our work in rural areas.

Ticket Sales

Since the demise of local authority funding, earned income (ticket sales) has become an extremely important element for the survival of a rural touring programme in Somerset. We work with each volunteer promoting group to find the right level of ticket prices and to maximise the return of funds to Take Art. Without this the programme would simply not be possible.

Tickets for each performance are sold to audience members by the local promoter who in turn sends the rural touring agency a percentage of their box office receipts. In Somerset we request a return of 80% of all tickets sold.

Trusts & Foundations

Take Art is part of a regional SW England group of rural touring organisations who collaborate on specific rural touring projects which bring in an element of project income.

Expenditure

Typical areas of expenditure to run a rural touring programme include:

- Artistic Fees: the money to pay the performers;
- Marketing Costs: for publicising both the rural touring organisation and each performance;
- Running Costs: postage, telephone, stationery, general office overheads;
- Staffing: the coordinator's fee: with bigger agencies this may be a full time salary plus an administrator and marketing member of staff;
- Training: capacity building programmes for promoters;
- Some agencies would also invest in purchase of equipment such as sound and lighting.

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The Head Wrap Diaries by Uchenna Dance. Photo credit fotoinichristoflopoulou



ARTISTIC POLICY

Your artistic policy will be an extension of your aims and objectives. It should be central to your organisation. The quality of the touring work offered is one of the most important elements of running a programme. Your artistic policy should be a 'live' document, not one that sits on a shelf in the office. It should guide, shape and develop your programme.

Take Art's artistic policy is:

Take Art is committed to offering rural promoters the highest quality of performances available for touring into Somerset. The work will cover a wide range of art forms including theatre, dance, film, music, puppetry and combined arts. It will be selected and offered to promoters on the basis of quality, appropriateness, availability and price. Together the balance of companies on the programme should offer a variety of work that is enjoyable, memorable, involving, ambitious, well-performed, affordable and entertaining. The work will aim to have general appeal to a wide range and mix of audiences, many will be

family-friendly shows, will reflect the needs, wishes and tastes of local people and be drawn from a pool of international, national, regional and local performance companies.

Throughout the year artists and companies are encouraged to submit information on the productions that they have available for forthcoming touring in order to be considered for inclusion on the Take Art rural touring programme. In February/March a short list of productions, available for promoting between the following September to June, is drawn up from the information submitted, using the criteria described above.

Every submission is given equal consideration. Artists and companies are contacted to establish availability, technical requirements, target audiences, to negotiate a block of dates and agree fees. A brochure containing a list of 20-40 different productions is produced and mailed to all village promoters who have registered their interest. The promoters then make their

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choices and submit a booking request form. Take Art juggles the dates and organises tours which are generally confirmed during June and July when each presenting company is sent a formal contract.

Take Art aims to support cultural diversity in its broadest form: to offer performances that reflect the different cultures of communities throughout the country, as well as outside the UK and to offer experiences for people from diverse backgrounds and with different cultural values to come together.

Take Art also aims to assist performers, companies and promoters to bring an element of new and challenging work, through contemporary writing and/or presentation styles as well as new commissions, to rural venues. The network of rural promoters will be offered advice and support in order to develop confidence in the promotion of the arts in their venues and to create new audiences for arts activities. Promoters will be encouraged to share the workload between a team of local volunteers. Take Art will ensure that good equal opportunities practice is part of programming, performing, marketing and management.

RECRUITING LOCAL PROMOTERS

The local volunteer promoter is absolutely essential to making rural touring a success. Good recruitment is key. The best promoters are those who are well linked in to their own local networks, who know many people in their village and who are good at 'spreading the word'. They also need to be people who are well liked and respected in their community.

Promoters may just be one person taking on all the work themselves or they could be a small group of people sharing the roles between them.

They could be committee members of their village hall (or community venue) or they could be people connected with community groups such as the local priest or schoolteacher. Or they could simply be individuals with a personal

interest in bringing live performance to their own local communities.

Recruitment of promoters may have started to take place during your audit and local consultation process, when you may have been able to establish a short list of motivated local individuals. If not, the best way to recruit is either by holding a meeting in each community to gather interest or to put up posters advertising recruitment. Most villages in UK have parish or church newsletters or noticeboards where this sort of advertising can take place. Local parish councils or community groups can also help direct you to the people in their village most likely to be interested in becoming a volunteer promoter.

OTHER POLICIES

Take Art has a number of other policies that can be made available on request;

- Child Protection & Safeguarding (including vulnerable adults)
- Customer Service
- Equality
- Environmental Sustainability
- Health & Safety
- Public Liability

"Recruitment of these enthusiastic individuals will be the key to successfully setting up a rural touring model in Hungary and Romania. Uniting people around a desire to keep their villages 'vibrant, alive and kicking' through building their volunteering capacity and developing skills in arts promotion will make all the difference. Without these key and committed people rural touring simply would not happen."

Sarah Peterkin, Take Art