

Building effective partnerships

Heather Maitland has recently been delving into the world of international relationships and offers advice based on what she has found

Anne Roberts and I have been researching consortia for a forthcoming book commissioned by the touring department of Arts Council England. Those we spoke to said that working together across borders can offer myriad benefits to group members both when importing (bringing work from overseas into the UK) or exporting (taking UK work abroad). This is the advice they gave us.

Finding partners

First, consider carefully what you want to achieve by joining a group, both as an individual and on behalf of your organisation.

Find a group that sounds as if it might help you achieve those aims. There are plenty of resources designed to encourage cross-border partnerships but that does not mean that finding partners and building relationships with them is easy. Of the UK consortia or networks we spoke to, each uses several methods, the most important of which are:

- members' existing contacts
- informal networking
- key UK promoters and curators who have expertise in particular geographic areas across several art forms or a world-wide knowledge of a particular art form
- membership of formal networks
- asking others to spread the word.

The advice from both UK and European partners is to get out there and talk to as many people as possible as the starting point for most relationships is personal contact that develops into a mutual desire to collaborate.

Joining a group

Many groups are worried that accepting new members will upset group dynamics. This means first impressions count. Think through how you will describe yourself, your organisation and your individual and organisational aims in that first telephone call or e-mail.

During this first exchange, you need to find out if you have enough in common with



Before joining a group, weigh the benefits you will get from membership against the time, energy and money you will need to invest



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existing members and if their aspirations for the group match yours. Hopefully, they will invite you to meet them when you can discuss what you have in common and whether any differences are complementary. Do their aims match yours or are they at least compatible? Find out what you will be expected to contribute to the group if you do join.

Getting the most out of membership

Get to know your partners well:

- work together in a small way first, perhaps by booking the company to perform before co-commissioning them
- make sure you have the opportunity to meet informally without official stakeholders like funders and embassy staff
- if you can, visit partners on their home turf to get a better understanding of how they normally work
- get to know and be sensitive to cultural differences and always check out your assumptions – although you will find lots of useful information on the websites listed above, you can really only do this by meeting and talking to as many people as possible.

Before joining a group, weigh the benefits you will get from membership against the time, energy and money you will need to invest. International relationships take even more time and money to start, develop and keep going than UK-based relationships.

Greater than the Sum of its Parts will be published in summer 2006 by Arts Council England. ■

For a comprehensive list of sources of information, turn to page 23.



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Resources

Taken from Heather Maitland's research Round-up on page 5

British Council (export)

www.britishcouncil.org/arts-support-and-funding-overview.htm

Helpful advice on exporting, including specific guidance by art form.

Business Link (import and export)

www.businesslink.gov.uk

Includes a basic guide to import and export, sources of information on specific countries and an overview of tax and paperwork issues.

Culture.info (import and export)

www.culture.info/culture2007

Includes essential information on the European Union's funding programme designed to support transnational touring and intercultural dialogue.

Culturebase.net (import)

www.culturebase.net

Contains a searchable database of profiles of over 1,000 individual artists and groups from all over the world.

CUPID (import and export)

www.cupid.culture.info

A searchable online database of cultural organisations and projects supported by the European Union and is a good way of finding a network you might be able to join.

Euclid (import and export)

www.euclid.info

Summaries of European Union funding schemes, guidance on making applications and links to resources to help find European partners.

European Festivals Association (export)

www.efa-aeef.org

A member directory of over 70 major arts festivals.

Informal European Theatre Meeting

(IETM) (import and export)

www.ietm.org

Includes databases of contacts, publications, bulletin boards, calendars of arts events, and more.

Intelligence on Culture (export)

www.intelculture.org

Enquiry service funded by Arts Council England.

LabforCulture (import and export)

www.eurocult.org/lab

A collaborative information resource and hub supporting cultural cooperation across Europe.

On the Move (export) www.on-the-move.org

This IETM-developed site is a portal to sources of information about networks, practical information and advice on travel, money, accommodation and language barriers.

UK Trade and Investment (export)

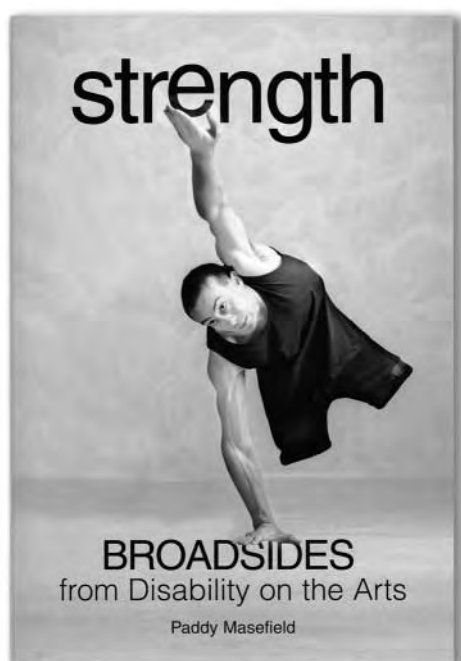
www.tradeinvest.gov.uk

This government website offers profiles of particular sectors and countries and general advice on developing partnerships abroad.

Visiting Arts (import)

www.visitingarts.org.uk

Includes a forum where organisations can exchange information about overseas artists they are planning to bring to the UK.



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AUDIENCE EUROPE NETWORK



CONFERENCE

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The Hague, 4–7 October 2006

With a theme of 'developing effective partnerships for audience development' you will be able to gain new perspectives, explore ideas and build international partnerships.

Den Haag Marketing and Events (www.denhaag.com) will host this meeting of delegates involved in audience development from across Europe.

There will also be plenty of opportunity to sample The Hague's cultural and social scene while you are there.

If you'd like to be the first to find out about the conference programme and booking details as we get them,

e-mail helen@a-m-a.co.uk