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NGCV Case Study (May 2021)

Overview

The NewcastleGateshead Cultural Venues (NGCV) model evidences the power of organisations working together to place culture and the arts at the heart of political, economic and social development that creates impact for the public, the sector and also the wider region.

This voluntary partnership of 10 cultural organisations was built on a decade of informal cooperation between Chief Executives and since 2009 has involved more structured collaboration. NGCV priorities change and develop over time and have included capital development, digital strategy and talent development, as well as ongoing common priorities and initiatives around audience development and children and young people, as well as achieving standards of excellence around the operation of buildings, human resources, workforce development and equality and diversity.

NGCV members connect to the wider sector and beyond through their cultural forms and extensive stakeholder and partner networks and use their collective voice as advocates for the sector and lobbying for the strategic role of arts and culture in contributing to region-wide and national agendas.

About NGCV

NGCV is a voluntary partnership of ten of North East England's leading cultural organisations working together to build and deepen engagement with audiences and to strengthen and grow the sector and businesses within it, while delivering significant social, economic and cultural benefits for the area. All of the organisations involved are active and influential regionally, nationally and internationally in their own right and within their own cultural forms. Together the group has significant critical mass, influence and the ability to make things happen and try new approaches.

The stated aims of the partnership are 'to maximise the artistic, social and economic potential of the cultural sector in the North East 'through the development of 'strategic and creative initiatives, sharing learning, experience and resources and by being a strong collective voice '[\(NGCV Sharing Protocol, revised May 2021\)](#).

Our current priorities in the post pandemic landscape are to ensure culture is at the heart of social recovery, to continue to respond to the Black Lives Mater movement with real action, mostly around recruitment (after signing up to the [North East Anti-racism](#) statement last year) and continuing our work with Children and Young People through our 10-year initiative City of Dreams ([see statement on current status here](#)) and [Family Explorers NE](#).

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Partners

NGCV partners are ten building-based cultural producers operating 20 venues on both sides of the River Tyne in the local authority areas of Newcastle and Gateshead (and for Tyne & Wear Archives



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and Museums in North and South Tyneside). Eight of the ten are Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations/Major Museum Partners (apart from Theatre Royal and Centre for Life). Between them they cover all cultural forms including: visual arts, performing arts (music, dance, theatre), film, writing and literature, heritage, archives and museums and also science communication. It is this breadth and scope that makes the partnership unusual and invaluable in terms of collaborative working.

The 10 organisational partners are:

- Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and BALTIC 39 (visual arts centre)
- Life Science Centre
- Dance City (national dance agency for North East)
- Live Theatre (new writing theatre)
- Northern Stage (producing theatre)
- Seven Stories (national centre for children's literature)
- Sage Gateshead (regional centre for music performance and learning)
- Theatre Royal (receiving and touring productions)
- Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (9 museums, galleries and heritage sites, plus the area archives)
- Tyneside Cinema (independent cinema).

Collaboration since 2009

After a decade of more informal joint working between the Chief Executives, the partnership has expanded and intensified since early 2009, initially due to a collective desire to investigate new models of sustainability and become more resilient businesses with a greater impact. The focus of the partnership has developed and changed over time, but common priorities have resulted in a range of collective ambitions, approaches and initiatives including:

1. Investment in infrastructure, skills and talent
2. New approaches to audience development and engagement
3. Maximising organisational efficiencies and standards of excellence
4. Connecting the sector to wider innovation and opportunities

An important part of the collaboration is also around being able to measure and demonstrate success.

Approaches and examples are provided below.



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1. Investment in infrastructure, skills and talent

NGCV recognised the need to 'build on the past decade of investment, sustaining what is in place currently and investing further to take this to a new level' (NGCV Capital Investment Strategy 2012). Individual organisations in the partnership benefitted from significant capital investment of around £270m between 1996 and 2009 from range of sources including European structural funds, national lottery, local authorities, private investors and charitable trusts.

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Working together on the NGCV Capital Investment Strategy in 2012 strategy and employing independent consultants to prepare strong and evidenced arguments, contributed to individual organisation's ability to lever in additional capital investment, but also support each other in lobbying and advocacy for greater investment in the sector to support for business growth and enterprise, skills and talent development.

Since 2009 there has been significant additional capital investment across most of the venues to expand and improve core facilities such as performance and exhibition space, which support the basis of organisations' activities and income streams enhance and refurbish buildings, as well as extending business premises and developing new sites and social enterprises, with more major initiatives in the pipeline.

Organisations have developed knowledge, skills, business processes, facilities, technology and a range of other assets that are of great value to other businesses in the sector. Additionally, some NGCV partners provide a range of activities aimed at helping existing cultural businesses to grow and facilitating the creation of new cultural enterprises including:

- SME (small to medium enterprise) accommodation for start-up and move-on cultural businesses
- Clustering of cultural SME'S – co-locating other SMEs, freelancers and larger cultural businesses – building networks and relationships, resulting in opportunities for collaboration, innovation and trading.
- Specialist advice and support for cultural businesses on all aspects of business start-up and growth, in partnership with existing business support providers and cultural specialists.

NGCV also continues to lever investment into workforce development, to enhance the skills of the existing or new workforce through regionally allocated funds and positioning the cultural sector as one of the priorities for investment (including Local Renewal Fund and most recently in 2017 through European Social Fund and Skills Funding Agency resources).

Individual organisations specialise in training in their own cultural forms, but collectively, common priorities for training tend to be around business operations and skills, including leadership and management, customer service, social media and marketing, IT, enterprise and retail. NGCV



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partners are working together to support staff to learn and train together across organisations, increasing the benefit for themselves and the organisations they work for.

NGCV members previously co-operated with the regional programme run by one partner, Sage Gateshead, around providing Creative Apprenticeships across the sector for people entering the workforce. They all also offered a wide range of work based learning and training opportunities from work experience to internships and placements and share information, learning and good practice around this.

An NGCV self-funded talent development initiative, Passionate about Artists, eventually became a regional initiative (Arts Development Network) with Arts Council England support to enable artists and programmers to collaborate more effectively, cultural organisations to support new ideas and talent and give a platform for a wide range of artists, as well as promoting critical writing and review across the region. This was the first initiative of its kind in the UK at this scale and was entirely driven by creative programmers and artists and co-chaired by Dance City from NGCV and Stockton ARC from the south of the region. It is still going strong after 8 years and is a model for the rest of the UK.

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2. New approaches to audience development and engagement

Since 2009 NGCV has collaborated on ways to better engage and build more meaningful relationships with audiences and encourage them to become involved in a wider range of cultural experiences across cultural forms. Significant action research projects have been undertaken, underpinned by detailed research and evaluation. NGCV has worked closely with Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM), the UK's largest cultural strategy and research agency since 2009 to develop new ways of understanding and thinking about audiences. The MHM-NGCV Levels of Engagement Model was developed with NGCV in 2010 and this and MHM's Culture Segments have been tested through a series of research projects.

The first most significant action research projects was in 2012-2014, called [Family Explorers](#). NGCV secured audience development legacy funding for a regional project exploring new ways of engaging children and families in accessing and engaging in different cultural forms. It involved 229 families, as well as 18 schools, 17 cultural organisations, local authorities, Northern Cultural Ambassadors Network, Arts Council England, Audiences North East and Juice Festival. The partnership became one of a number of Family Arts Networks in the UK and a national exemplar for the Family Arts Campaign, with all partners adopting the Family Arts Standards. The project itself involves families being supported to explore the cultural offer of the region, with recommendations from venues and tools. A significant amount of learning and research is available about this project and fed into the next phase of development.

The learning from the original project informed a new public initiative launched in October 2014 called Family Explorers North East. With a regional steering committee chaired by an NGCV partner (Seven Stories) and cultural partners from across the region (including all NGCV members), it is self-funded through partners' contributions. Families are invited to sign up to the project for free and



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receive handpicked recommendations from cultural venues and sites across the North East every fortnight through an enewsletter, making choosing days out quicker and easier for busy families. They are encouraged to join a facebook group and share ideas, recommendations and reviews of their visits. Research shows this helps them feel more confident about trying somewhere new. The active facebook group now has around 6000 families involved. As well as peer reviews, Family Explorers also receive exclusive discounts, money saving tips and free tools to make exploring the North East easy, affordable and fun.

Another strand of research has been around shared data and audience development. NGCV secured funding through the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts for the Unusual Suspects project (April 2014- December 2015), which explored new ways of sharing data and engaging audiences. A unique data commonwealth and consortium agreement was developed, which led to a shared database of audiences across the organisations and a way of communicating with those who signed up, based on segmentation (MHM's Culture Segments). This led to a further action research project which was funded through Esmée Fairbairn Foundation until January 2019, called The Insider.

These approaches are unusual in the fact that the organisations work on the principle of a shared market and shared audiences and that sharing data and will grow the market for everyone. It is also tailored to targeted communications with audience members to appeal to them in ways they are more likely to respond to, rather than simply mass communication to the 'usual suspects' who attend

In 2017 we commissioned a feasibility study into the possibility of a joint 'What's On', ticketing and CRM platform for the ten organisations. This involved reviewing existing systems used by the NGCV partners, investigation into other groups of cultural organisations around the world and models that they use, identification of opportunities and benefits for audiences and NGCV partners, coping of models for options relating to ticketing and marketing. On the basis of this initial work NGCV concluded that a single ticketing system wasn't a desirable route but that there was a significant opportunity to explore the creation and use of joint digital marketing. This would rely on the fact that whilst there is competition between the ten venues there is also the opportunity for significant co-operation and that previous evidence of working together suggests that many cultural consumers will support more than one cultural venue. We received an Arts Council grant to further this work in 2019 and are in the process of putting out a brief to the digital sector in respect of this. Progress on this work has been delayed by the Covid pandemic.

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The newest and most ambitious initiative which NGCV has embarked upon is called [City of Dreams](#), a transformational, culture-led programme to improve the lives of children and young people in NewcastleGateshead. Following around 2 years of internal planning and discussion, NGCV partners made a 10-year commitment to City of Dreams and are prepared to act together as a catalyst for the approach, which has expanded to engage partners beyond NGCV who share the same aspirations for children and young people. City of Dreams is building on all the experience, knowledge, initiatives



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and partnerships that already exist, as well as developing and testing new work strands as well as links to regional and national policy, practice and research. Launched in September 2018, the initiative is aiming to earn NewcastleGateshead a reputation as the “best place to be young” through engagement of children and young people (CYP) in cultural and creative activity. In its first year CoD has created programmes including #MakeSomethingBrilliant, Twi-Lates, X-Culture, Creative Pathways, Our City Our Story and the Big Culture Conversation, whilst earning ‘Investing in Children’ awards for all NGCV members. It has found strategic resonance with local authorities, North East Culture Partnership, the university sector and the Cultural Cities Enquiry, among others.

Building on this activity, CoD will focus on three key themes in 2019-2022: agency, inclusion and skills. CoD will continue to curate and pool resources, share learning and test concepts, to enable delivery of multiple programmes of collaborative activity.

All of these projects have been or are currently supported by staff groups, in particular the Learning and Participation Network (for Family Explorers and City of Dreams) and the Audience Development group (Communications) for the data sharing and communications projects, which involves communications and marketing leads from all of the organisations. Each group also has a Chief Executive lead associated with it to ensure links back into the monthly sessions of the Chief Executives group, which steers and governs the partnership.

3. Maximising organisational efficiencies and standards of excellence

NGCV runs buildings and businesses which are required to have the highest levels of efficiency, equality and access. Since 2009 there have been a series of three key staff groups who meet regularly to promote a collective approach maximising savings and efficiencies, achieving standards of excellence, as well as sharing learning, good practice and ideas. These are classed as ‘back office’ groups and are the Human Resources Network, Facilities Managers and Finance Directors/Operations Group

In terms of efficiencies, all have been involved in reviewing and renegotiating contracts and suppliers. A preferred supplier approach is implemented when appropriate, where NGCV offers the potential for contracts with all organisations to suppliers of goods and services and then negotiate the best deals for the group. This is always done on a flexible basis. They also all engage experts to provide advice around key areas of policy and practice, who engage free of charge in order to make links to these organisations.

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Another common element is the use of surveys and research across the partnership to provide an evidence base for collective activities (digital strategy, audience development, workforce skills, customer services, staff and audience travel and transport)

NGCV’s Human Resources Network is a group made up of a few HR professionals and many with HR responsibilities who are not necessarily HR professionals, but have this as part of their remit. They focus on a range of activities including:



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- Sharing information across all HR issues, bringing in expertise around pensions, safeguarding, workforce development, employment law and issues
- Joining up opportunities and engaging staff in training, as well as offering their own training across organisations (e.g. First Aid, Communications etc)
- Engaging staff in the partnership - Open House events (up to 2012), Staff offers at all venues permanently to encourage engagement across venues, NGCV Staff Events, NGCV Noticeboard membership (a peer to peer sharing page in a password protected area of our main website) • Equality Standard Gold Award – the HR Network led on and ensured that all organisations achieved this national award after a collective approach in October 2013, the first consortium to do so nationally and then again in 2016 (5 out of the 10 renewed in 2019) . There are exceptionally high standards around equality and diversity, access and policies and procedures. HR leads work together to share best practice, ensure all standards and practice are excellent and that experts advise where improvements can be made
- Equality and Access Review 2015 – explored the range of approaches and good practice as well as gaps around equality and access for people with disabilities and older people and sought to address gaps, led to increases in services and support, especially around dementia and autism
- Working with external partners to improve access, equality and diversity, such as the Max Card offers for Looked After Children and children with disabilities; Safe Places scheme for people with learning disabilities and vulnerable people; Friends Action NE Accessibility Rating scheme for people with learning and physical disabilities; Dementia Friends scheme

Facilities Managers are those in charge of managing the buildings, ensuring their safety and effective running. Across NGCV they have worked together as a group since 2009 on the following:

- Shared learning has led to better contracts and savings across the board, including around waste management, lifts, energy, water and staff have work with specialists to explore new opportunities (e.g. Voltage power management; lift management, environmental sustainability and renewable energy), as well as sharing technical expertise and equipment
- Industry Green, now Creative Green (Julie's Bicycle) – a national environmental standard for the arts and cultural sector which NGCV approached as a group, sharing best practice and doing some collective activities. The individual members achieved the standard from 2012 onwards.
- Facilities Managers are the Green Leads for their organisations and established the NGCV Green Campaign in 2012 to promote staff involvement, motivation and partner buy-in. Most organisations now have Green Teams to promote environmental sensitivity and sustainability and there is a major push on improving environmental efficiency and staff, public and visiting companies behaviours across all venues. Specialists speak to Green Campaign (e.g. Green energy brokers; waste management approaches) and there is a sustainable travel and transport initiative (audience travel surveys, promotion of sustainable travel). An internal NGCV Green Week is with new initiative and activities has taken place annually since 2017.



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Finance Directors and the Operations Group played a key role from 2009 by:

- Freely sharing financial information and running annual surveys to track costs and explore efficiencies and potential savings
- Negotiation of savings and deals with providers of services
- Internal surveys to compare information and drive discussion (e.g. around pensions, pay related benefits, cost of living increases, national minimum wage and living wage approaches, as well as earned income, core subsidies and grants from trusts and foundations)
- Working with an independent research consultancy to develop and produce an annual independent Economic Impact Assessment. This is an annual report of the group's economic impact. Pioneering nationally, the group provide detailed financial, procurement, staffing, visitor and event information which is then analysed by independent economic analysts, ERS, who produce an impact assessment report, based on Treasury Green Book guidelines. Similar EIA approaches are now being taken in other parts of the country and NGCV share information about this with other partnerships and organisations. The reports and detailed background tables provide trend information, which is then discussed internally within the partnership.

4. Connecting the sector to wider innovation and opportunities

NGCV also plays a role in opening up opportunities for the wider sector in terms of new approaches and new partnerships. Often the new approaches and pilot projects initiated by NGCV grow to become regional initiatives. It has taken on this role a number of times including the currently live Family Explorers project and talent development project.

In terms of digital technology, NGCV has engaged specialists to help themselves and also the wider sector to develop both new Ecommerce approaches (engaging the creative commercial sector in advising cultural organisations in the region) and joint approaches to analytics and Search Engine Optimisation and shared training and learning .

Specific initiatives have included:

- CultureCode – an 18 month ACE supported project involving regional workshops and events bringing digital creative and cultural organisations together to build relationships and ideas and resulting in a 24 hour hack day producing new collaborations and products
- Creative Fuse North East. Creative Fuse North East was a research and innovation programme involving all five of the North East's universities - Newcastle, Northumbria, Durham, Sunderland and Teesside. It ran until October 2018. It was jointly funded by the universities, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, European Regional Development Funding and Arts Council England, to explore how the Creative, Digital and IT (CDIT) sectors in the North East can be developed to play a leading role in the region's economy.



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With the support of Arts Council England funding and ERDF, a cultural sector engagement strand of work was included from May 2017 to engage the wider cultural sector in both rural and urban areas across the region in opportunities and activities around Creative Fuse NE. NGCV worked with the universities to include the sector in this work and Tyneside Cinema (as lead organisation on behalf of NGCV) secured the contract through an open tender process to deliver this work. NGCV's previous Partnership Co-ordinator was acting as the Cultural Sector Engagement Broker to identify and communicate opportunities as well as share learning with the wider cultural sector up to October 2018.

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Economic Impact and other benefits

[The Economic Impact Assessment](#) was last carried out in 2019. It is currently in hiatus due to the covid pandemic.

NGCV has commissioned an annual Economic Impact Assessment since 2009, which is prepared by independent research consultancy ERS. This annual report enables NGCV to demonstrate its collective economic impact on the local and regional economy and is used as a profile and awareness raising tool, as well as supporting position statements, bids and lobbying activities. The report and headlines are shared annually with staff, partners and stakeholders across the region and are updated online here.

In 2018-19, the total economic contribution of the 10 organisations was £94m. For every £1 of public subsidy invested in the 10 organisations, collectively, there was a £4.77 return on investment.

NGCV directly employed 767 staff in their organisations, supporting a total of 1,191 direct and indirect FTE jobs in the region. For every 10 NGCV jobs, 4.2 were created in the region. Collectively, there were 4m attendances at cultural events and £15.4m additional visitor spend was generated in NewcastleGateshead alone, with £5.7m across the region. In addition, NGCV organisations procured 45.5% of their goods and services in the region, helping to stimulate growth in cultural businesses beyond the NGCV membership and in the wider economy.

It is estimated that across NGCV around 2000 professionals are supported directly by the organisations in their individual cultural forms either as cultural practitioners or teaching professionals. New and existing cultural business are also helped by NGCV partners to start-up and grow through SME accommodation, business support and training.

Other impacts and benefits include:

- The transformation of the cultural sector in the city has provided new jobs and wealth in the local economy and contributing to enormously changed perceptions of the City and the wider region.
- NGCV partners contribute significantly to raising the profile of the area locally, nationally and internationally as a 'great place to live, work and invest'.



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- Improving quality of life in the area through its strong cultural offering, encourages businesses to locate, invest and remain, as well as attracting and retaining talented individuals in higher skilled jobs.
- A study by ACE identified the creation of the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art as a catalyst for £100m of follow-on commercial investment in Baltic Quay. Significantly, for the first time (in 2004) more people moved into, as opposed to out of, the NE region with 'quality of place' identified as a key reason for relocating there.
- Investment in cultural venues has had a major impact on tourism in the City and the wider North East Region.

In 2018-19 of 4million visitors attended NGCV venues, with a further 40,982 attending corporate events, 44,125 attending one-day events and 10,909 attending multi-day conferences and events. Spending from only visitors from outside the region attracted by NGCV organisations generated an additional £15.4m for the local economy.

- In terms of other impacts, NGCV organisations run large learning and participation (L&P) programmes which reach out to people and are delivered in house or in communities, in 2018-19, they supported just under a million L&P engagements (574,444 children and young people, 344,775 adults)
- 1,317 volunteers gave 67,123 hours of their time in front of house and back office roles, with support for their own skills development
- Between them, NGCV also raised an additional £4m in (revenue) project funding for additional cultural activities beyond their core programmes, most of which would be around reaching out to those who might not usually engage, or people with additional or challenging needs.

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Keys to success

The key to the success of NGCV is the people involved and the time and commitment they give to the partnership. The leaders and staff of these organisations trust each other, have a culture of collectivism and a genuine common aspiration and belief that they can generate greater impact within the region by working together. Also critical is the flexibility of the partnership, the willingness to take and share risks, as well as promoting shared learning and having strong communications and relationships between staff and volunteers. Lobbying and advocacy around key national, regional and local priorities is an important element of the partnership's activities and how they build arguments and positions, as well as connect to and seek to influence wider agendas beyond their own cultural forms (NGCV Challenges and Critical Success Factors 2016).

The governance and operation of the NGCV partnership is explained in the Sharing Protocol, which is revised on an annual basis. ([NGCV Sharing Protocol June May 2021](#)).

Development of the City's infrastructure was a deliberate policy, underpinning economic development and regeneration strategies in Newcastle City and Gateshead Council from the 1990s.



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Now there is a critical mass of world class cultural infrastructure covering all cultural forms in a very tight geography, adds to the strength and success of the partnership.

Building on the quality of the physical buildings, skills and talent development have been key in developing a workforce of professionally trained practitioners, in a host of cultural disciplines, thereby developing the professionalism of the sector and retaining a skilled workforce. Additionally, business support and work with self-employed and micro businesses in the sector have been important in helping to develop and sustain the ecology of the sector. Both individual and collective initiatives, as well as a range of wider partnerships with universities, the public and private sectors have served to support this and continue to evolve.

The physical clustering of organisations increases opportunity for collaboration, fostering 'innovation and growth' through the partnerships it forms and the transactions it enables.

NGCV organisations continually explore ways to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness, improve standards and to become better informed about one another, as well as the 'external landscape' in which they operate. This positions them better to use their shared resources and measure and demonstrate their 'collective value'. Staff are able to meet in groups and work together, share experience and learning and develop new initiatives. Staff are kept informed of what is happening in the partnership through regular mailings and an internal online network.

NGCV partners are also able to engage with key partners, stakeholders and influencers and present coherent positions, as well as being able to act together and quickly. They have a team of ambassadors and messengers who can deliver key points around regional and national policy and practice and support lobbying and advocacy. NGCV has a [public website](#) to share information with the sector and partners and an [newsletter](#) which goes out twice a year to profile the partnership's activities, initiatives and ambitions.

NGCV believes that the significantly collaborative approach 'unmatched anywhere in the UK' is key in terms of sharing finances, knowledge and resources. Local Councils recognise NGCV's impact as 'exceptional' making significant contributions to the 'social and economic well-being of the region' and defining NGCV partners as a 'key component of the City's future'. These collective factors increase NGCV's credibility as a voice in representing the case for continued investment in culture and gaining support for new initiatives, as well as gaining maximum value from existing investment.