

WHAT IS THE CIVIC ROLE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS?

INQUIRY PHASE 1 • ADVISORY PANEL DISCUSSION SUMMARY



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH



INQUIRY INTO THE CIVIC ROLE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS



The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation wants to work with people and organisations to develop a strong and growing movement of arts organisations that embrace their civic role. Help us realise the full potential of arts organisations in promoting civic engagement and revitalising communities.

We've launched an Inquiry into the civic role of arts organisations, with our project partners the Institute of Cultural Capital, What Next? and the RSA. We want everyone with an interest to take part.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT
civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk and [@civicrolearts](https://twitter.com/civicrolearts)

Front cover: Cikizwa Ndamase, Busisiwe Ngejane and Siyanda Ncobo,
in *A Man of Good Hope* at the Young Vic. Photo: © Keith Pattison

Report published in 2016 by the Calouste
Gulbenkian Foundation UK Branch

THE THREE-YEAR INQUIRY AIMS TO:

- **Increase awareness of the civic role arts organisations play nationally and in their communities**
- **Develop understanding of what 'next practice' looks like**
- **Create a movement of arts organisations committed to working in this way**
- **Recommend policy change and practical support to strengthen the civic role of arts organisations.**

We're inviting you to think about your own practice and discuss it with your colleagues. Tell us what a 'civic role' means to you and what needs to change for arts and cultural organisations to fully embrace it. The more people involved in this Inquiry the richer the results will be. Phase 1 is focusing on England while later phases will look UK wide.

To kick-start thinking, this paper describes how the Inquiry will work and sums up the first discussions of the expert Advisory Panel. These are some of the questions we hope to answer in Phase 1:

- **What do we mean by the civic role of arts and cultural organisations?**
- **What activities does the civic role encompass?**
- **What is the history of this activity in the UK?**
- **To what extent are arts and cultural organisations currently engaged in this activity?**
- **What initiatives exist to support and encourage arts organisations to develop their civic role?**

We'll be publishing the Phase 1 report in December 2016.

WHY DO WE NEED THIS INQUIRY?

Arts organisations play an important civic role. They sustain individuals and communities and help make the places where we live and work more creative and vital.

But how we access arts and culture is evolving. People relate to the arts in different ways. Communities have higher expectations about how they will be involved in creating their arts and culture.

Society is changing too. Our population is becoming more diverse. There is growing disillusionment with conventional politics. Digital disruption is all around us. Meanwhile, social inequality stubbornly persists for some.

These changes provide an impetus for arts organisations to play a greater civic role. Many are already breaking new ground. But this work often has a low profile and is under-appreciated. The time is right for the arts sector to have a robust, evidenced conversation about what its civic role can and should be.

With this Inquiry, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) wants to increase awareness of the civic role that arts organisations play nationally and in their communities – who they serve and how. Through research and consultation, we want to develop understanding of what constitutes ‘next practice’ and create a movement of organisations committed to demonstrating it. In partnership with arts and civic society practitioners, we will craft recommendations on what policy change and practical support can strengthen this role.

We are working with a wide range of partners and drawing together experts from all areas of the arts and civic society.

But we hope that this Inquiry will break new ground by engaging the widest range of people with the broadest range of experiences, views and perspectives.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

We want to know what the civic role of arts and cultural organisations means to you and what needs to change in order for arts organisations to fully embrace a civic role. Join the conversation:

- Visit civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk
- Follow us on Twitter: [@civicrolearts](https://twitter.com/civicrolearts) [#civicrolearts](https://twitter.com/civicrolearts)
- Sign up for our newsletter on the website
- Get in touch if you'd like to write a blog or share case studies or evidence

HOW WILL THE INQUIRY WORK?

The Inquiry has three phases:

- **Phase 1 (2016)** will describe how arts organisations demonstrate their civic role, highlighting inspiring examples, surveying arts organisations and interviewing key influencers; identifying the issues phase 2 will examine
- **Phase 2 (2017)** will develop recommendations to support a growth in the civic role of arts organisations
- **Phase 3 (2018)** will develop an implementation plan to secure lasting change

The Inquiry is supported by an Advisory Panel. Members include leaders from the arts, social, cultural, public and private sectors (see below).

FOREWORD

Andrew Barnett, UK Branch Director Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Inquiry Convenor

We all see the world in different ways. Artists bring a special perspective. It's why we have commissioned artists to explore the nature of arts organisations' civic role in three very different communities. This is far from the only source of evidence, and advice, we are gathering during this first phase of the Inquiry. 'What Happens Next?' describes the approach we are taking and the variety of sources: academic research, artist commissions, deep dive location studies, a sector survey and workshops.

This evidence doesn't stand on its own. It needs interpreting – putting through a prism – and the Advisory Panel has provided invaluable assistance in helping us think through the changing context and frame some of the issues that relate to the way in which organisations fulfil their civic role. In everything we do, each of us is driven by particular motivations and we respond to stimuli in different ways; whether through numbers, examples and stories or indeed metaphor which can have particular resonance.

We are extremely grateful to the Advisory Group members for inspiring the three metaphors below which we have subsequently been testing with different audiences and with a favourable response. Complementing the descriptors that our research partners the Institute of Cultural Capital has been developing, these metaphors provide a frame which we feel to be useful in categorising different ways in which arts organisations have in the past, currently, and may in the future fulfil their civic role.

For many years the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon ran a mobile libraries programme which took books to rural parts of Portugal.



WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES FOR PHASE 1?

COLLEGES:

ARTS ORGANISATIONS AS PLACES OF LEARNING

Education is about skills and creativity and about knowledge and experiences too; experience of the world we live in and its complexities, knowledge that acquaints us with our history and culture and that of others. The panel, as do we, thinks emphasis has rightly been placed on creative education and what happens in schools. However we also learn outside formal educational settings, and throughout our lives. The arts are integral to this. There are great examples of ways in which arts organisations have historically fulfilled this role: places of life-long learning. And there are many examples of arts organisations acting as places of learning today. We and the panel believe arts organisations have an important role to play in helping everyone to reach their potential.

As we look to the future, what greater role can arts organisations play in learning beyond the school gate for all generations? As imagination and creativity increasingly become fundamental for work in any sector and in building healthy communities, could arts organisations become the ‘teaching hospitals’ of the arts world, where people are trained up ready to go out into the world with artistic and creative skills? What should the relationships be between the other civic players who deliver education? Can arts organisations contribute to a new understanding of prosperity which incorporates artistic, creative, education and social as well as economic outcomes?



Participants at a creative residency at Contact Theatre in Manchester collaborating and performing. Arts organisations can be a place of learning outside of formal educational settings.

TOWN HALLS:

ARTS ORGANISATIONS AS PLACES FOR DEBATE

Art has always stimulated and reflected current debates about issues as diverse as human rights and gentrification. Pressing issues today include Brexit, climate change and ending poverty and inequality in all its forms. Trust in civic organisations is waning and even those who are expert in their fields are being questioned.

There is a risk inequality is regarded as too big an issue and therefore unsolvable. So how do we give arts organisations permission to tackle some of the really big issues? How do we give them permission to engage in politics? How can we tell 'activist' from 'traditional' organisations, when funding processes require the same language from all? How do we progress from small-scale arts initiatives around equality into large-scale political solutions? How do we make artists into politicians, and vice versa?

What can arts organisations do around the issue of trust in communities? Museums and libraries in particular are seen as trusted organisations.

As we look to the future we need a better understanding of the unique civic role that arts organisations play as neutral places for open discourse. Could they provide the platform upon which solutions to the intractable problems society faces are constructed and deployed? Can getting involved in neighbourhood arts result in people recognising their connections to places and the common ground they share with their fellow citizens? How might arts organisations best achieve this?



Finsbury Town Hall had the Council Chamber in the same building as a dance hall for 'the masses'. Lord Rosebery who was Prime Minister at the time opened the building saying how he hoped this model would spread and engender civic pride locally and in turn nationally.

PARKS:

ARTS ORGANISATIONS AS PUBLIC SPACES

The space we share with our fellow citizens is important. Public space is becoming increasingly contested and in some places people feel crowded out of their communities, be it through gentrification or migration. Public parks, freely accessible for leisure and wellbeing for all, are a perfect example of the type of spaces our Panel felt are going to be needed in the future to maintain and develop community. People use parks with a sense of agency that can be lacking in other public spaces. You choose to go to a park, mix with others and do what you want to do rather than take part in activities others have programmed for you.

We need places where a plurality of viewpoint can be expressed and heard. Where disagreements can be safely heard and compromises reached. Arts organisations have a unique ability to challenge and express a wide range of viewpoints. They are unsurpassed communicators of feelings. They shape the identity of places. They are placemakers enabling communities to thrive and attract new members as well as maintaining the health and vibrancy of existing communities.

As funding structures are re-imagined in local government and the civic infrastructure arts organisations had taken for granted disappear a step change in how arts organisations see and work with their communities is under way. To be truly civic arts organisations need to understand what 'belonging' means and to get better at understanding 'communities' not just the 'audience' subset of communities. As arts organisations move to seeing participation as co-creating rather than spectating they also need to decide how to inhabit the new public spaces they find themselves in.

One respondent suggested another metaphor: home. We feel this interesting and propose that we think of arts organisations as our colleges, our town halls and our parks conferring on each of us a sense of ownership of, and familiarity with, these important public resources.



Brazil's Biblioteca Parque is so much more than a library. There workshops and exhibitions are held, courses taught, and artistic performances created and performed. These facilities and activities are available to the homeless people who sleep in the nearby park.

CIVIC LEADERSHIP

A cross cutting theme is how arts organisations can adapt to the new reality and the role that leaders of arts organisations, and teams of leaders, could play in their communities. There are many examples of individuals who lead an arts organisation who step beyond the walls that confine them. We need to explore what skills and qualities may be required of arts leaders in the future in order that they can work collaboratively and generously within their communities.



Professional actors performing alongside older people in care homes in a Geraldine Pilgrim production.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The key questions we are asking through the lens of colleges, town halls and parks are:

- **What are the wider conditions that make it possible for arts organisations to fulfil their civic role?**
- **What should be the role of leaders of arts organisations or local authorities, the funding ecology or the wider policy environment?**

THE STAGES FOR PHASE 1 OF THE INQUIRY ARE:

2016

October

Online survey of the sector to test the working definition and gather evidence and case studies.

July–October

Twelve workshops across England to test the working definition, explore the current picture and what the civic role should be.

September–October

Three artist commissions consulting with under-served audiences on what they believe the civic role should be.

September–October

Four in-depth location studies to better understand the ecology of the civic role and what civic impact arts organisations have on their location and communities.

2017

January

Phase 1 report distributed

THE INQUIRY ADVISORY PANEL

The Inquiry has appointed an Advisory Panel to check and challenge our work.

We have been working hard to ensure we involve people from different backgrounds. The panel is balanced by gender but is still not as diverse as we would like it to be. We will be recruiting more members.

These are the current members (October 2016):

Maggie Atkinson, A New Direction
Tony Armstrong, Locality
Maria Balshaw, Whitworth Art Gallery
Andrew Barnett (convener), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Jerrell Barnwell-Duhaney, Contact Theatre
Michael Buffong, Talawa Theatre
Deborah Bull, Kings Cultural Institute
Mary Cloake, Bluecoat Gallery
Stella Duffy, Fun Palaces
Sir Stuart Etherington, NCVO
Doreen Foster, Black Cultural Archives
Diana Gerald, Book Trust
Shaks Ghosh, Clore Social Leadership
Dominic Gray, Opera North
Sean Gregory, Barbican
Polly Hamilton, Blackpool Council
Steve Hodgkins, Police, and Jobs Friends and Houses
Hilary Jennings, Happy Museums
David Jubb, Battersea Arts Centre
Teasha Louis, The Agency
Caroline Mason, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
John McGrath, Manchester International Festival
Lucy Neal, Happy Museums
Lucy Ribeiro, Museum of London
David Robinson, Community Links
Tracy-Ann Smith, Diversity in Heritage group
Andrea Stark, Foundation for Future London
Andrea Sullivan, Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Adam Sutherland, Grizedale Arts
Sydney Sylvah, The Agency
Mark Williams, Heart n Soul

ABOUT THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests, based in Lisbon with offices in London and Paris. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to bring about long-term improvements in wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value.