

Community consultation puts overstretched organisations on a better footing

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This research was conducted by **Ellen Rosewall** at the **University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, USA**

Summary

The paper looked at developments in the state of Wisconsin in the USA, where ‘nearly 100’ capital projects have taken place since the early 1990s, a majority of the projects have a school connection and are in rural areas. The author found that they over-reached themselves in this building boom and needed assistance to develop a better presence in their communities in order to survive.

The Wisconsin Idea

Community arts in Wisconsin began to really take effect as part of a wider civic project (the Wisconsin Idea) which sought to bring education and civic engagement to all.

Community arts organisations struggled with sustaining buildings or managing the complexities of staff, suppliers and a mix of stakeholders

Board members found themselves out of their depth and burned out. A lack of planning and co-ordination meant that there was an oversupply of arts with competition amongst the facilities for premium performers and audiences. In order to address this the local Arts Council offered assistance in the form of training and grants through the ‘Cultural Facilities assistance Program’. The

paper focuses on the ‘community assessment and audience development’ element of this.

Simple steps to become more community focused

The suggested model in the assistance programme for the struggling organisations was a series of community engagement sessions which took the following sequence: a community meeting that brought community stakeholders together to identify shared community goals and identify possible marketing avenues; an informal session within the community arts organisation to share learning on latest audience development techniques and brainstorm ideas; and then an application of these principles into the development of audience development and community outreach plans. These would be sustained with frequent and continuous community engagement through meetings, surveys and focus groups.

Keywords

consultation community USA building

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Author email	rosewale@uwgb.edu

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