CultureCase

Effective community engagement during capital development projects

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Summary

This paper tries to understand what happens when an arts organisation undertakes community engagement efforts to support a capital construction programme. The study used survey data from managers of non-profit arts organisations in the US between 1994 and 2008. The research found that, in order to be effective, community engagement needs to be authentic, responsive and take account of voices which may be hidden or overlooked.

The paper had three specific areas of enquiry

Each related to the impact of a cultural organisation pursuing a capital project. The first was about the relationship between how leaders in organisations think about community engagement at times of capital development. The second was about how possible ‘competitor’ organisations see the capital developments of others nearby (who might conceivably be redirecting funding towards themselves). The third was that leaders at older and larger cultural organisations are more likely to positively view the community engagement activities of nearby organisations in the process of capital development.

The findings from the research provide some guidance for leaders of cultural organisations looking to engage their community as they undergo capital development projects

Community organisations will feel engaged by having their concerns responded to, not merely listened to. A responsive approach helps community engagement to be viewed as authentic, rather than just a formality. Community engagement efforts should incorporate organisations located further away, ‘since neighbouring organisations are already more likely to feel engaged’. Newer organisations should not be neglected by community engagement strategies in the course of capital projects since ‘older, more established organisations are often more visible in the community’ and are better able to make their voices heard.

Keywords

interview **USA** **survey** **community** **capital**

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