

'Test Drive the Arts' for Families



Image: Family Friendly Film Festival 2010, Victoria Baths, Manchester; Photo The Audience Agency.

Background

In 1998 Anne Roberts wrote 'Test Drive the Arts'¹ a practical guide to setting up schemes that bring people into the arts, or a particular art form, or venue for the first time. The term *Test Drive* was used by Arts About Manchester², to describe initiatives in the arts that encouraged new audiences to try out the art on offer in a way that was low risk. This approach is much like how car retailers operate, by encouraging people to 'Test Drive' their products free of charge. Test Drive as a concept is not new, many organisations have been using this approach to target new audiences for years and there are many examples that you can learn from³. Test-Drive is more than just free tickets however, it refers to an overall approach describing:

"An arts organisation's planned and incentivised encouragement of people to experience something in the arts for the first time, leading to lasting relationships".

p3, Test Drive the Arts, Anne Roberts, 1998

Test Drive is not necessarily about working with audiences that you find very hard to appeal to; although they may be included in your targeting. It is about broadening your audience base to anyone that you currently don't attract. It is about finding out and knowing what families want, and responding to this. It is about increasingly teaming up with other organisations to make best use of resources and to ensure families in 2013 and beyond are offered the best possible arts experiences we are in a position to offer.

¹ Original Test Drive the Arts guidance available at <http://www.takingpartinthearts.com/content.php?content=908>

² Now The Audience Agency.

³ Further examples are listed in the final section of this document.

This resource

This resource is designed to be a quick prompt to support you to:

1. Identify where you are now and where you would like to be in terms of reaching new family audiences.
2. Have a really effective conversation either internally or with partners about what taking a Test Drive approach could achieve.
3. Start to plan a new Test Drive campaign

Step 1: Where are you now?

Families tend to know what they want and repeat visit places that offer it.

Your first step should be to **establish what kind of track record you have in terms of attracting families**. Do you know what percentage of your overall audience are families? How do you account for this figure? Do you know what they come to you for and what they value about it? Or is it that you don't currently know enough? If this is the case talk to some of the families you do attract at this point to find out their views; this will save you a lot of time and energy and will make sure your plans are heading in the right direction.

Family demands are often clear and need addressing by venues in order to increase family audiences. The good news is that satisfying these demands is often relatively quick and inexpensive.

Know what families are saying about you and where possible respond to what they want. Based on what families have told you so far, are there things that you could do in your venue to improve your offer to families? Often things like improving signage and staff awareness of family facilities and activities make a real difference. Venues that make families feel unwelcome however good their programming will always find it hard to attract new families who will automatically be more wary visiting an unfamiliar space. Sometimes a half-day training course between different colleagues can really kick-start a new enthusiasm and understanding for what new audiences are likely to need.

There are many different types of family out there and many different motivations for watching or participating in something. Do you know enough about who currently comes to your venue and why?

Identify who you're already reaching and why they have chosen you. What do you know about the families that come to you? How often do they come? What is the average size of a group; is it that you offer opportunities for quality time between small groups or do you have the offer and the space to house large groups of families and friends? What kinds of families are you successful in attracting? Once you know this, it may be quite straightforward to build a picture of what you're doing well. You should then use this insight to communicate the benefits you offer families and start to target similar audiences.

Families often look for recommendations before testing out a new experience in the arts.

Work with other organisations to see if you could benefit from encouraging sharing and cross-over between your audiences. This could take the form of shared marketing, programming or working together to make larger events. Make sure you find out first the extent to which your own audiences are shared or discreet to ensure you will actually be able to attract new audiences by working in this way.

Step 2: What are you trying to achieve?

The term 'family audiences' could potentially include practically every person in the world! Start your planning by defining who it is out there you are actually targeting; you'll be much more likely to reach them. You might want your Test Drive campaign to reach:

- The families you've traditionally found it hard to attract. Often these might be locals living geographically close to you and yet have no awareness or interest in your venue. They also might be families that due to the reputation or history of your venue feel unconnected or unsure of what you offer. Be aware these families may need their perceptions changed and this may take time. This is no reason not to target them but make sure you have the resource and enough time factored in to enable this work to grow and start to show impact.
- The families that attend similar arts experiences in your area, but are not engaged with you. Reaching these might be about working in partnership, joint marketing campaigns and tapping into networks where parents and carers can start to recommend you to their friends.
- Families that you have not had access to previously; many areas are experiencing population changes and it may be that there are now new families that you have the potential to reach for the first time. Often these families are increasingly diverse.
- Families in the broadest sense; we know that grandparents are playing an increasing role when it comes to providing child care in family life and also that families that contain a step-parent are increasing. If you've previously been very traditional in your approach to families you might want to start going beyond just parent and child to considering who else in the family could enjoy what you offer.

Step 3: Who is your audience?

To attract new audiences you need to know two key things:

- 1) As much as possible about your current audience

Pool together all the information that's been gathered to date from your marketing, education and any other relevant teams or individuals who work with families. Do you know where families come from, how often they visit, what motivates them to come and what they think of the experience you offer? Use any information you have to help you plan how best to approach new audiences.

- 2) Where to find new audiences

Use tools and data that are available for free online to help you search out new audiences. The CASE Local Culture and Heritage Profile tool brings together a wealth of information about geographical areas, including education levels (one of the most important signifiers for how likely someone is to engage in the arts as an adult is whether they are educated to degree level or above) and attendance and participation figures for the arts.

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do2/research-and-data/evidencing-our-work/case-the-culture-and-sport-evidence-programme/local-heritage-and-culture-profiles/>

If you are targeting geographically to particular postcodes the Office for Neighbourhood Statistics is also a helpful free resource to help you build a picture of an area.

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>

Once you are starting to form a clear idea of who you are targeting approach individuals with local knowledge and connections with your target audiences for advice and introductions.

Step 4: What are your barriers and opportunities?

To really develop your family offer in a way that will benefit your organisation, stop and reflect on the barriers and opportunities that you have in relation to family audiences. Agree which ones you would like and are able to either change or develop and stay focused on these for the highest impact. Think about:

Facilities

- How do families experience your space? Is there room to do anything differently? Victoria Baths in Manchester screened a family friendly film in their empty pool and created a really novel event.
- Is there a dedicated space for families? Either permanently or at certain events. Being able to make noise, take part in messy creative activities, play and eat a packed lunch are all activities that family arts organisations should offer. Even a simple step like putting cushions on the floor in a corner of your space can signal a more welcome attitude. Equally are there adaptations that can be made to your adult facilities to make them children friendly? For example, offering booster cushions for small children?
- Do you have any outdoor or unused space? Can you create a picnic area or informal play space that will encourage families to stay longer with you? Only do this however, if you have room and the desire in your organisation to encourage families to take their time.

Transport

- Do you advise the easiest and cheapest method of transport to reach your venue? Are there travel short-cuts that you and your regular audiences know but that new audiences might not? If in doubt or you have a venue that is tricky to find, ask a new family to test out their journey to your venue and work with them to write directions.
- Are there any ticket deals families could get to travel to your venue, e.g. rail deals for London attractions? Add links, and details to your website and marketing materials.
- Do you advise on the cheapest and closest car park - prices, hours, access and pick-up points? Families include people with mobility needs and/or heavy prams and buggies.
- Are there barriers to reaching you? If you're not well connected to travel or a local audience do whatever you can to address this. Are there opportunities to take part in or promote your work at key festivals or events that attract large audiences? Do you know any funders or volunteer organisations that can support community transport?

Communication

- Most new families want some kind of recommendation or endorsement from someone they trust. Are you making connections in this way? Could you develop communication specifically dedicated to families? e.g. a page on your website or Facebook page.
- Do you offer detailed overview of your facilities in your communications to families? Always include details of any disabled access facilities you might have available. Could you profile your interactive content, e.g. video, on social media platforms to allow families to get a personal feel of your venue? E.g. 360 tour of your venue. Checking out facilities in advance is something families can be keen to do.
- Could you offer more quirky ways to engage new families? - Lakeside in Nottingham has a resident mummy blogger.
- Is your Google presence strong enough? Lot of families search directly for things to do rather than joining e-lists these days, do you appear when people search your venue and also if someone searches for 'cheap days out for kids' in your area?
- Are you making the most of opportunities to gain publicity through your connections? For example the Family Arts Campaign can help you link your programme with the huge range of other organisations taking part and in doing so show your commitment to raising awareness of family arts opportunities.

Your family offer

Successful family programmes enable families to explore, have fun and make creative choices.

- Can you increase the opportunities to appeal to different generations? As much as possible try and offer experiences and materials that families can't get easily at home; things such as working on a big scale, working with authentic props or artefacts, all create memorable and fun experiences.
- Do you offer activities for families visiting your venue that they can do independently?
- Are you aware of and communicating about what age range your programme best suits? Families can be disappointed if their child feels like the activity is too baby-ish or frustrated if something is too advanced or unsuitable.
- Are you developing an on-going offer that families can rely on? This could be one regular family Christmas show a year or a self-led activity for families on a visit to your venue. It could also be about teaming up with other partners to create a programme that is far beyond what you could do as an individual organisation.

Step 5: What different models could you choose?

There are many different ways you can approach Test Drive. Think about there being a spectrum of options from offering free tickets online to proactively targeting families unlikely to ever connect with the arts themselves. The most important thing is to think about who you are trying to reach and then choose the right model/s to best suit your target audience. We recommend working with a small group representative of who you are trying to reach, to test out your ideas first to ensure you don't waste time and resources.

Example 1 - Targeted free tickets



In Northern Ireland 86 cultural organisations have attracted new audiences to take up 17,149 tickets to 2,017 performances over a period of 3 years. Run by Audiences Northern Ireland, *Test Drive the Arts NI* offers free tickets to a wide range of art forms and both performances and participatory opportunities. The scheme is all about motivating audiences to try something new for free and tickets are booked online. To claim a free ticket for a particular arts event you need to be over 18 years old and live in Northern Ireland. The scheme works on the premise

that users can only get tickets for venues, companies or organisations that they haven't been to for at least 3 years. 96% of audiences who have taken advantage of the scheme have indicated a positive intention to re-attend. Test Drive the Arts is run in a similar way in Australia, with over 100 venues taking part in Victoria including Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Theatre Oz.

<http://www.testdrivetheartsni.org/>

<http://www.arts.vic.gov.au>

Example 2 - Supported visits



Introducing families to art forms that are considered less family friendly is another approach. BBC Philharmonic have developed a scheme aimed at introducing families to classical music. Several concerts are picked out of their programme every year and these concerts are then promoted using big ticket price discounts and free workshops to learn about the orchestra. Audiences receive specially created child-friendly programme notes.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00nkw2v>

Example 3 - Family arts branding and joint marketing campaigns



Working with other organisations to share audiences and the time and costs of marketing can be a smart approach. Since 2007 The Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Ribble Steam Railway & Museum, The Museum of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment and Museum of Lancashire have worked together to establish a family friendly identity called "The Hands on Gang" in Preston. This brand is used to advertise family programming suitable for 5-11 year olds across the 4 sites, and uses Facebook to advertise directly to families. This year they are working together on a joint programme to mark the 100 year anniversary of the First World War.

<https://www.facebook.com/PrestonHandsonGang>



Example 4 - Strategic partnerships and social media

The new film "Despicable Me 2" has developed a partnership with Mumsnet, the online network for parents. They invited 400 mumsnetters to a preview screening of their new movie giving them free tickets and asking them to provide feedback which was distributed on Mumsnet. Through exposure to Mumsnet's extensive online network, the site has received 50 million page views and over 8.5 million visits per month.

<http://www.mumsnet.com/microsites/despicable-me-2-screening-feedback>

Example 5- Community Engagement and shared experiences



Mousetrap Theatre Projects are a charity working in London.

They work with Community Agencies to deliver Family First Nights (FFN), offering low-income families the best tickets in the West End for £5 a ticket. This offer happens for 1 month each year (between the end of July and August) and in 2012 over 2000 people attended a show as part of the scheme. For 12 months after their free ticket families are sent details of reduced price theatre offers to encourage continued visits.

<http://www.mousetrap.org.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/FamilyFirstNights>

Step 6: What are your progression routes?

Test Drive is all about setting up initiatives that attract new audiences building them for the longer-term. You can only achieve this with planning. Think about:

- **The basics.** How do these audiences want to be communicated with? What is the incentive to come back? Do you have the programme to attract them? Do you need to do more research?
- **How you show impact.** Can you track if audiences are coming back? If you don't have a system like a box office that captures this are there other solutions? Can you offer vouchers for repeat attendance? Can you do some audience surveying at family events that will collect data from a sample? Knowing what you are achieving will help you in numerous ways; helping you to set goals, play to your strengths and motivate staff with news of how their work is impacting on new audience numbers and satisfaction.
- **How you deepen relationships.** If families are enjoying your offer how can you build on this? Can you create a programme across the year of key events that are family highlights to encourage repeat visitors and families to bring their friends? Can you create new opportunities for family events to be more inclusive, actively encouraging Aunties, Uncles and Grandparents to come along? Is there scope to involve families in

delivering and planning activities? South London Gallery have worked with local parents to deliver family weekend activities in their new learning space.

Further resources

To access the full range of resources that are available in the cultural sector about working with families, visit www.culturehive.co.uk and search 'families'

For some more specific resources about previous Test-Drive projects you might want to:

- Read the evaluation of the 1998-1999 Test Drive project, which targeted 20 000 new attenders in the North West. This will help you to understand what has been learnt about how to deliver great arts experiences to new audiences
<http://www.takingpartinthearts.com/content.php?content=97>
- Visit the Taking Part in the Arts website and search 'Test-Drive'. This will bring up an additional 6 documents including case studies that are not mentioned specifically in this document.
<http://www.takingpartinthearts.com/>

Need step by step advice?

If you'd like more guidance about setting up a Test Drive campaign - download Anne Robert's original Test Drive guide, to access advice about how to set up, deliver and evaluate.

<http://www.takingpartinthearts.com/content.php?content=908>