

How to develop a public program

Designing public programs which are meaningful cultural experiences for new and existing audiences.

Public programs are a core way that galleries and museums engage with audiences and attract new visitors. When done well, public programs can make the museum or gallery feel like a welcoming place for everyone, reaching community members who might not otherwise attend. Such programs can make a genuine impact on community members, making people feel, think or behave in new ways. They can also demonstrate to funders and decision-makers the vital contribution that galleries and museums make to a region's cultural vibrancy and social cohesion.

This guide is designed to help you devise public programs in a way which:

- Are driven by data about your existing and potential audiences
- Furthers the vision of the organisation
- Makes a genuine difference to visitors' lives

This guide is based on a process which Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) and BYP Group designed and trialed with four galleries in 2017 as part of the development of their public programs for touring exhibitions [Soft Core](#) and Tracey Moffatt & Gary Hillberg's [Montages: The Full Cut 1999-2015](#). These public programs were delivered as part of the Engaging Art initiative. The four galleries were overwhelmingly positive about the process, leading M&G NSW to develop this resource to share the steps with the wider sector.

Set aside a few hours to develop ideas for the public program

It can be difficult to find time in a busy schedule to step back and brainstorm about a public program. But the good news is, you only need a few hours to devise a public program which still meets budgetary limits but is far more targeted and meaningful for the audiences you want to attract.

Set aside about 3-4 hours to undertake the steps in this guide and see how much more effective and targeted your public program is.

We propose the following process for the session. This is based on BYP Group's design process, tailored to public program design with M&G NSW.

DEFINE:

- Articulate the originating idea (15 min)
- Identify the target audience (15 min)
- Identify parameters (15 min)
- Decide what the criteria are for a 'good' idea (15 min)

GENERATE:

- Brainstorm ideas (30 min)

PROTOTYPE:

- Test the ideas against the criteria (10 min)
- Select and refine two ideas (30 min)

SHARE:

- Pitch the ideas (10 min each idea)

CHOOSE:

- Select the idea (10 min)

Articulate the originating idea (15 min)

The intent of a public program is not just to attract certain audience segments. You could do this by giving away free food and drink or car parks!

A public program provides target audiences with a way “into” an exhibition. It helps people to experience an exhibition from a deeper point of view; it invites people to open themselves up to having an emotional response, an intellectual engagement, and an aesthetic experience which changes them in large and small ways.

To achieve this deeper impact on people, you need to articulate the core rationale or theme for the public program which ties into the exhibition.

Ask yourself:

- When I think about the exhibition, what words or feelings come to mind?
- What is the artistic rationale of this exhibition?
- What is the exhibition trying to convey?
- What do we want an audience member to feel, learn and experience from this exhibition?

For the *Soft Core* exhibition, gallery staff identified the words “softness, surprise and fun” as the artistic connective tissue between the intent of the public program and the exhibition. For the *Montages* exhibition, gallery staff felt that the phrase “express yourself” best articulated their aims for the public program connected to the artist’s intent.

Identify the target audience (15 min)

Now identify who it is you want most to attract and engage with the public program. You might start out by saying, “everyone,” and of course this is valid. But it is a good idea to refine this into priority groups. For example, your organisation might especially want to attract young people, local community members, visitors to the region....

It is often useful to identify the different segments of your current and potential audience and there are a number of ways to think about audience segments that have been developed by others which might be helpful (see links at the end of this resource). For example The Australia Council for the Arts uses Culture Segments, a sector-specific segmentation system for arts, culture and heritage organisations. Read more about this method of audience segmentation [here](#).

You can also develop your own segments that reflect your current and potential audience – this could be drawn from data from surveys you have undertaken and observations of staff. Some examples of audience segments could be: young adults, families with young children, retired experience seekers, school aged children, tourists etc. You should then identify how you are currently engaging these segments, for example:

Audiences that the gallery is already attracting:

- Tourists
- School aged children

Audiences that the gallery could further grow:

- Young adults
- Families with young children
- Retired experience seekers

Decide on the segment you want to target or prioritize and articulate why.

Identify parameters (15 min)

There are bound to be practical considerations which need to be taken into account. Jot down these parameters for example:

- Timing
- Budget
- Space
- Reporting requirements

Decide what the criteria are for a ‘good’ idea (15 min)

Spend about 15 minutes brainstorming together about the criteria for a ‘good’ public program idea. For example, the four galleries who trialed this process came up with the following criteria. You may like to use these as a basis for your own criteria, or throw them out and start from scratch – whatever best suits your working style.

See *Figure 1*

Brainstorm ideas (15 min)

The main rule for the brainstorming session is that there are no crazy or bad ideas! Forget for a while the criteria of a ‘good’ idea. Don’t worry: the testing and refining comes later. At this stage, participants are encouraged to go wild with imagination.

Someone should take the job of scribe and jot down ideas.

Test ideas (30 min)

Once everyone has shouted out their initial burst of ideas it is time to start testing the ideas against:

- the originating idea (from step 3)
- the target audience (from step 2)
- the criteria of a ‘good’ idea (from step 1)

You might like to pin up a checklist of each of these, and run through it for each idea.

This is a quick process, and does not need a lot of agonizing over each idea. It is a way to decide on a short list of ideas. Someone in the meeting can take on the role reading out the checklist whilst everyone responds.

At the end of this process, you will hopefully have at least one idea that has made it through the checklist. If you don’t you may need to go back to the brainstorming stage until you have an idea that meets enough of the criteria.

Is the idea...			
Community	Artistic Vibrancy	Legacy	Feasibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsive to your organisation’s community context • addressing a community or audience need/gap • appropriate to your community, exhibition and any target cultural groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respectful to the artwork and artist/s • interactive • fresh, original or unique for the target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a model / pilot for future programs • creating a legacy for the participants, gallery, art, culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievable • flexible / adaptable • value for money • measurable in impact e.g. numbers, depth of engagement

Figure 1: Criteria for good ideas

Prototype shortlisted ideas (10 min)

- Now spend a bit of time sketching out the shortlisted ideas. Answer the following questions:
- What would this program look like in reality?
- What would be the pros? Cons? Challenges? Opportunities?
- Who would we need to partner with?
- What would success look like and how will we measure success?

Pitch the ideas (10 min per idea)

Now it is time to pitch the final ideas to the group. Address the following questions in the pitch:

- What is the originating idea for the program? (Remember, this refers to the core rationale/theme for the program which ties into the exhibition)
- Brief description of the program, including how you will address potential challenges
- Who will the program target and why?
- What does success look like?
- How will we measure success?

Choose idea (10 min)

Now it is time to select the idea. You might need to write up the idea from the sessions and present it to your gallery director or funder. Now you have conducted this process, you will have a strong rationale for your program.

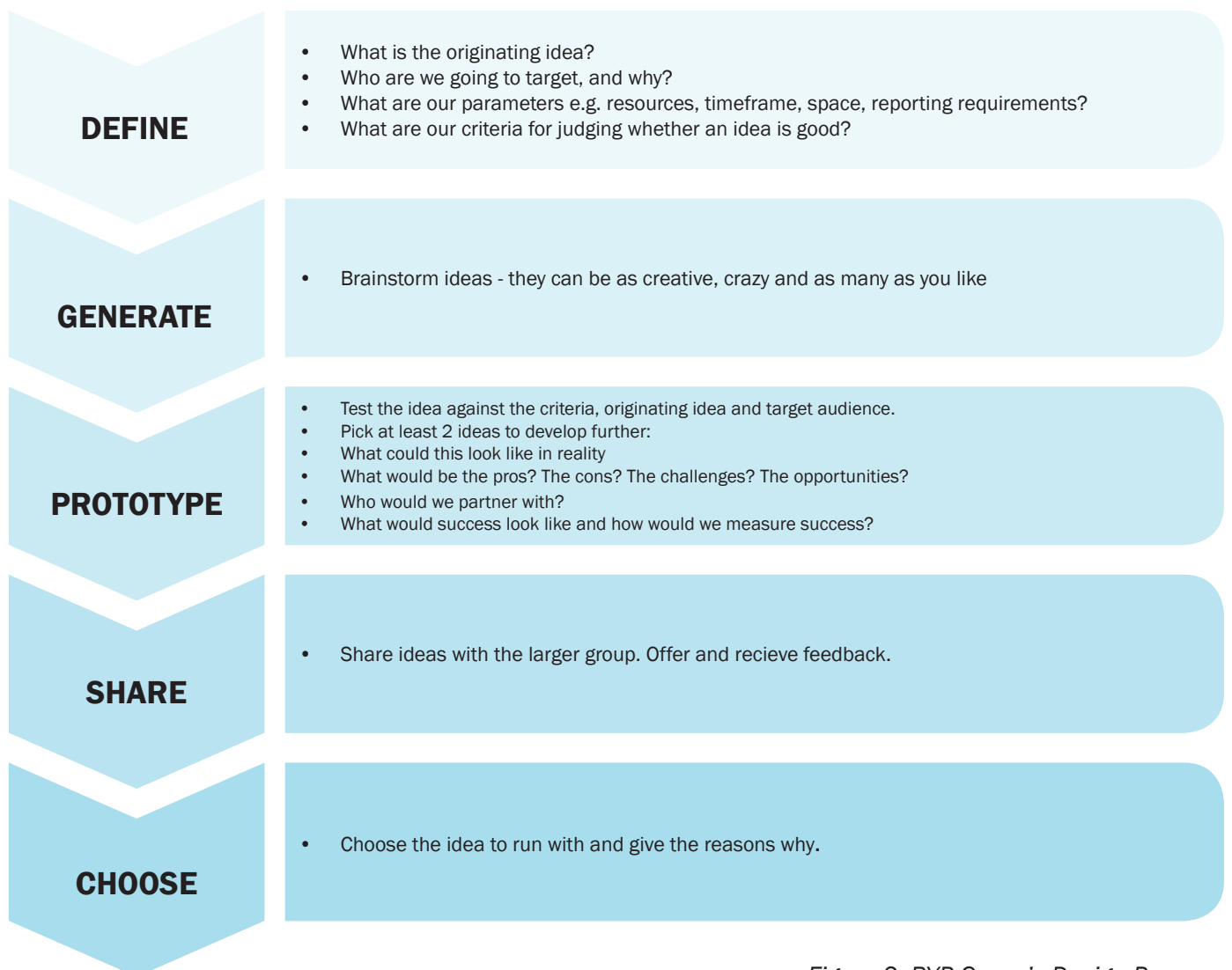
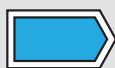


Figure 2: BYP Group's Design Process



You might also like ...

10 quirky ways to engage audiences

<http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/visual-arts/10-quirky-ways-to-engage-audiences-247206>

Culture Segments Australia - Pen Portraits for the Australia Council

http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/pen_portraits_cs_ausco_4595_9_598a64fd744ea.pdf

How to engage with young people

<https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/exhibition/how-engage-young-people/>

This resource was written by freelance evaluation, research and writing consultant **Jackie Bailey, Principle at BYP Group** as part of Museums & Galleries of NSW's *Engaging Art* initiative.

To find out more about *Engaging Art* visit:
mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/engaging-art/

To find out more about BYP Group visit:
<http://bypgroup.com/>

Engaging Art has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

