

# CREATIVE PROJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**A TOOLKIT**



# CREATIVE PROJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY: A TOOLKIT

Creative projects in the community imply creative projects that are at the service of communities and the individuals that have a place in that community. There is an open discussion on how to define community projects among practitioners and academics in the field. In this context, this document is looking specifically to support creative practitioners' work and suggest ethical standards when engaging with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This is in light of Arts Council Malta's support of such work, especially through the President's Award for Creativity which it co-manages together with the Office of the President.

This document is not written as a set of ethical guidelines or a code of practice. Such a document would be written in the context of a profession being recognised and established, in the same way that arts therapists, arts educators and other professionals are bound to specific codes of practice depending on the representing bodies with which they are registered. This document is therefore not exhaustive and has been written as a framework of principles and questions that can support a creative practitioner wanting to work in the field of community arts and provide insight into the considerations they need to make.

---

## COMMUNITY

Who is the community? This is an enormous question in and of itself and is the first question that a practitioner who wants to work in this field needs to address before embarking on a project in the community. Creative projects in the community for the purpose of this document include work with adults, young people or children whose life experiences share a common circumstance that increases their vulnerability or social disadvantage. It is important to keep in mind that even in shared circumstances, each person would have a different experience of that circumstance and a community is made up of individuals. Examples of circumstantial experiences that bring people together include domestic violence; illness; rehabilitation programmes; limited education; ethnicity; environmental hazards.

# SERVICE

As has already been outlined in the opening paragraph of this document, creative projects in the community engage creative processes in the service of a community. The creative practitioner who is meeting a community therefore needs to think about how their practice can meet the people of the community and service their needs.

The implications of this are two-fold. The first is that as part of the practitioner's ongoing self-reflection, s/he should ask what their motivation is to engage with the community and the project. This should support the practitioner in thinking about their role in the project and what they bring to the project. They may need to address the way they will be taking decisions throughout the process as to how much of their own artistic vision and values are to play into the project.

This leads to the second consideration, which is that the artistic process is always at the service of the community and in the balance of things, the needs of the community as outlined in the objectives of the project need to be prioritised. This may mean that the creative practitioner is led to a compromise in their own artistic standards. It may also require a balance between commitments to funders and commitments to the community to be revisited and discussed with funders.

Since the project is at the service of the community, then it is up to the community to decide whether the project is relevant to them. Sometimes a community can approach a creative practitioner to work with them towards an already identified goal, or a creative practitioner can approach a community with a proposal. In either case, it is the community members who ultimately approve of the project and their own participation in it. In the case where it is management staff or caregivers who take on the project and by default the participants in the project are there out of obligation to something bigger than the creative project in itself (for example residents in a rehabilitation programme; or children in a school), then it is recommended for the creative practitioner to understand the implications of this on the participants' engagement with the project and to empower them with artistic choices in order for them to own the process.

# RELATIONSHIP

When engaging with creative projects in the community, the creative practitioner who is working with vulnerable or disadvantaged adults, youths or children, takes on a responsibility and duty-of-care towards the participants, within the boundaries of their role.

The creative practitioner must not interpret this as a position of power and should always act in the best interest of empowering the participant in their own decisions and actions. This also means that each participant should be empowered with decisions about what to do with any creative products, such as photographs, puppets or installations that are created. This also applies to decisions about how the project is to be portrayed in the media where this is an important part of the work. Consent should always be sought for exposure of the project to be published, as well as for images of the participants. This is especially important where participants are a part of a confidential setting such as a rehabilitation programme. The creative practitioner should always liaise with staff management, who usually provide strict guidelines in regard themselves.

The creative practitioner should always work from a position of respect towards the participants of the project, both in their direct contact with the participants as well as in communicating about them and the work. The creative practitioner engaging in this field should always practice non-discriminatory. In order to ensure a trusting and empowering relationship with the participant, the creative practitioner should ensure transparent and open communication at all times. The objectives and intentions of the project need to be clearly defined. This also includes clear timeframes within which the project is to be carried out and to which the creative practitioner is to commit.

The creative practitioner is to work within the limits of their competence and to be clear about their role. They must be clear of this personally, as well as to communicate it. This needs to be reflected also in the way of dress and demeanour at all times. Where social activities become a part of the project, the creative practitioner needs to be even clearer as to where their professional boundaries lie. Where the practitioner is unclear of the implications of engaging in social activities in parallel with facilitating the creative process, it is recommended to discuss this with the management staff, or another professional in the field before embarking on such projects.

# HEALTH AND SAFETY

---

The creative practitioner is to be mindful of the safety implications of the place where they are working. They are to discuss responsibility for this with the management of the organisation or community leaders with whom they are collaborating.

# CONSULTATION

It is the duty of the creative practitioner to be aware that the creative process will have implications for the community with whom they are working. Depending on their training or professional competence, the creative practitioner may need to seek advice from professionals who can offer mentorship in regard, or professionals within the organisation with whom they are collaborating and even work alongside them. Further, mentorship or supervision will add support to the practitioner whatever their level of competence or years of experience and is thoroughly recommended.

Info by: Lou Ghirlando, dramatherapist



Arts Council Malta,  
Casa Scaglia  
16, Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street  
Valletta VLT 1311

Tel: +356 2339 7020  
[fundinfo@artscouncilmalta.org](mailto:fundinfo@artscouncilmalta.org)

[www.artscouncilmalta.org](http://www.artscouncilmalta.org)