



TURNING POINT NETWORK

EVALUATION CASE STUDY

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Case study: Mentoring

The South West group delivered a project to develop new ways of working through mentoring. The objective was to support organisational development, especially partnership working. 11 applications were received and three projects were selected: Reveal in Somerset, Cotswold Water Park and Porthmeor Studios in St Ives. The mentor was Ann Jones. Each project had 14 hours of support, which included face-to-face sessions, email and Skype contact.

Description of the project

Reveal arose out of the Thrive programme in 2008. It is a partnership between Somerset Film, Visual Arts at The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre and Somerset Art Works. Rather than employing a separate worker Reveal chose to operate through each partner contributing director time to the shared projects (a secondment model). An evaluation we carried out in 2011 found that the 83% of local stakeholders thought the secondment model has worked as an approach to collaboration. The secondment model had strengths in terms of expertise, sustainability, continuity and value for money. There were challenges in terms of clarity, potential conflicts of interest and introspection.

The three Reveal partners had three meetings with the mentor in order to set the future direction for the partnership. This process helped Reveal to clarify its mission statement, write a strap line, develop a consultant's brief for the next phase of work, and identify a possible consultant.

Porthmeor Studios is carrying out a £4 refurbishment scheduled to complete in September 2012. This provides an important opportunity to re-launch the building, creating a shared vision across the Borlase Smart John Wells Trust, St Ives School of Painting and Tate St Ives. St Ives School of Painting had already engaged on a process of organisational development with the support of Arts Council England, Unlocking Cornish Potential and Cornwall Council.

The mentor facilitated a day-long event to bring the organisations together and strengthen relationships. 26 people attended. The day was structured around questions such as: how positive do you feel about Portmeor Studios? What does the future of Portmeor Studios look like? What needs to be done to get there? What are the values of the partnership?

Cotswold Water Park Trust is a conservation charity working in Wiltshire, Swindon and Gloucestershire. The organisation has a separate arts strand run by two part time freelancers and the aim of the mentoring project was to improve integration into the Trust business plan and structure while maintaining artistic quality and integrity.

The mentor suggested examples of organisations that illustrate lessons around integration, and provided individual advice. The mentor was intending to attend the first meeting of the new Trust Arts Working Group but this was not possible within the timespan of the project.

Lessons from the project

The evaluator facilitated a three hour learning seminar with two of the three partners and the South West coordinator to consider the lessons from the project.

Summarising the overall debate, what worked well was:

- There was a good mix of projects at different stages in partnership development.
- The brief for the mentor was very clear and was generally delivered.
- The project built on work that had already happened through Thrive and other Arts Council England funding. It gave a sense of the support infrastructure being joined up.
- The authority of Turning Point Network strengthened the convening process.

“The project got the ball rolling, opened community. The process had credibility because it was backed by Turning Point Network and Arts Council England.”

- The project was special because it took the personal approach that is associated with mentoring and applied it at an organisational and partnership level: it directly addressed the emotional barriers to collaboration.
- The mentor challenged participants to consider the key questions.

“The mentor was very good at coming back all the time to the question you are avoiding without realising it.”

“We have been on a long journey. What was useful is that the mentor took us back to basics.”

What worked less well was:

- The short time span of the project meant that the projects (two of the three) only met at the learning seminar. On paper the three projects looked very different. However, in the learning seminar participants found many parallels which suggested that an earlier meeting might have been useful.
- The project had included an expectation that organisations would contribute to a blog to share learning. This did not happen and the learning seminar showed that organisations lacked a context to communicate to each other and were concerned about confidentiality, given the sensitive nature of some of the discussions.
- The timing was too short. Resolving issues, especially emotional issues, takes time.
- Mentoring tended to focus on key individuals. Wider involvement would have helped with buy in and follow up.
- A couple of the sessions happened over Skype. This didn't work well, especially whether there were three participants without the technology for video.

The group decided that they would meet together again after the learning session to help develop inter-regional learning, which was a positive outcome. In addition, Turning Point South West has plans for a follow on project around leadership development.

“Inspiration tends to be international rather than regional. We would benefit from a closer regional dialogue and projects such as inter county residencies for artists.”