

EAST DEVON CULTURAL STRATEGY - OUR GOAL IS THAT BY 2031:

1. East Devon's cultural offer is perceived by residents as high quality, interesting, fun, relevant, accessible and well-promoted
2. Residents who have taken part in cultural activity feel that their health, happiness and wellbeing have improved as a result
3. Children and young people across the district feel they have ample opportunities to take part in cultural and creative activities
4. More people work in the cultural and creative industries in East Devon, backed up by more training, skills and pathways to employment
5. Cultural organisations, artists and creative businesses feel connected, resilient and creatively ambitious (professional and voluntary sectors)
6. Investment into arts, museums and heritage through earned income, grants, sponsorship and philanthropy has increased
7. The number and diversity of visitors, audiences and participants in culture and creative activity in East Devon has increased
8. Culture is helping to tackle the climate emergency

We would be grateful if you could help us track progress by completing the following questions, if relevant, using quantitative and qualitative data, for activity between April 2023 and March 2024. Please keep answers to a maximum of 250 words.

1. Please provide a brief summary of your work this financial year.

To date we have:

- Hosted 25 high quality arts performances for 1496 live audiences with 5 participatory wraparound activity sessions
- Delivered 3 Village Exchange intergenerational skill-share projects in Ottery St Mary (young people - music focus, 4 sessions) & Honiton (older adults - reminiscence, 6 sessions) & Membury (mixed ages - heritage storytelling, 3 sessions)
- Grown the scale of our Active Care Homes commission, producing over 12 high quality digital works for use in care settings, engaging excluded participants, developing specialist digital production team & content (older adults dementia)
- Collaborated with 44 co-curators in developing our responsive programme of activity, gathering as a network in person for the first time in 4 years
- Supported over 80 artists including 8 open-call From Devon With Love scratch artists
- Nurtured artists through the current fundraising re-submission cycle (ACE)
- Developed a new relationship with University of Exeter Drama focusing on graduate retention in SW
- Completed 2 Ripple Effect Mapping cycles. Deep dives enabled gathering of qualitative data (alongside trad audience & artist surveys & environmental monitoring) that allows us to be responsive to emerging opportunities



2. How are you tracking if audiences are finding your work high quality, interesting, fun, relevant, accessible and well-promoted? What feedback have you had?

We ask all audiences to complete a Post Event Audience Survey - we provide paper forms, QR codes for display which link to our online audience survey and a post event email goes out with link to those who book online.

Alongside demographic questions, there are freeform response boxes which solicit creative responses- people often reflect on their engagement with the artist(s) in an intimate setting, affirming how talented they are, with repeated use of the following words: 'wonderful, superb, excellent, fun, amazing, professional, amazing, accomplished, relevant, extraordinary, funny, high-energy.'

We also ask audiences how they heard about an event, with the following breakdown of responses: 41% word of mouth, 20% social media, 14% local posters/ flyers, 18% online blogs, newsletters and direct mails from Villages in Action.

A great evening [sic] entertainment, which surpassed our expectations!

I always [sic] think it's unique to Rural Touring that we get to meet the artists and the team. It was extraordinary on every level. Funny magical clever heartbreaking . The actors were full of integrity. The audience engagement was just right ...how we got duped and tricked and whipped into the whole sorry madness of that time. And how that time is this time and we are still in it.

It was a phenomenal performance. Hilarious, entertaining, and deeply meaningful. Thank you!

Excellent! talented, funny and engaging. High energy and riveting

We really enjoyed the show and thought it was of a great standard. As good as anything we've seen at the Theatre!

A great night, very inclusive.

3. What evidence do you have that your audience's and volunteers' health, happiness and wellbeing have improved as a result?

We ask local promoters (or ViA staff in attendance) to complete an Event Observation Form where they are asked to give three words that describe the atmosphere of the event. Like audiences, our volunteers tend to feedback most on the performance alongside audience reactions, we see repeated use of the words 'fun, wonderful, well-received, enjoyed highly.' Anecdotally we know that some people's happiness is tied into the success of the event, and when they perceive low audience or engagement numbers/ low box office returns for the effort put in (average 24 hours per event)



they are less motivated. While we do not currently monitor wellbeing outcomes for our volunteers, this is an area for evaluation development during 2024.

As part of our Zest: Active Arts partnership project with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Wellmoor and independent dance practitioner Clare Parker we have been monitoring participants/ audience responses in care homes through an Impact Measurement Framework using 2 validated scales: Arts Observation Scale (performing arts in care homes) and Euroquol EQ-5D-5L (health) alongside case studies. Data showed improved physical, mental and social benefits from sustained engagement with our online arts platform with a majority of staff and residents recording an increase in positive change in the mood, physical function and mobility of residents, with visitors commenting on the happy sociable atmosphere in the home around Zest time. It is worth noting that a majority of the audience/ participants had dementia and so creative digital content produced by Villages in Action was bespoke for this audience.

4. How many children and young people (under 25) have been able to engage with your offer?

On average across all our performances, 22% of our audiences are made up of young people aged between 0-25. This figure is based on a post event form completed by volunteer promoters or paid members of the ViA team. While we issue Audience post event surveys these are suitable for completion by adults only (in line with sector best practice and guidance from Arts Council England).

Through the Village Exchange project that took place in East Devon both in Membury and Ottery St Mary there were 36 attendances by young people through targeted sessions for CYP.

5. Have you been able to offer job opportunities in the cultural and creative industries? Or training, skills and pathways to employment?

Yes, this is a key driver of our work. Alongside employing over 74 performance artists over the last 12 months, we have also worked with creative specialists to deliver a series of participatory and community-based workshops/ sessions. Specifically in East Devon we have given paid engagement (beyond performing artists) to 9 creative facilitators/ producers. Through our From Devon With Love (Talent Development) strand of work we have worked alongside ACED Music Champion Dave Knox to provide opportunities for young musicians to learn more about rural touring and creating their own freelance pathways, and through an introduction to Lewis Gibbs at the Devon Music Education Hub, Dave has engaged in CPD by training with the Hub on 'Challenging Voices' (music/ mental health).

While none of our residencies have focused on East Devon during the last 12 months we're busy cooking up an arts and heritage-focused ambassador programme for those in the mid stages of their professional career, alongside one of our volunteer co-curators.

6. Which partnerships (eg: cultural organisations, artists or creative businesses) have been key to building your resilience and creative ambition?



Through the Village Exchange project as well as our wider programme we have been able to develop deeper relationships with East Devon based organisations and artists including: TRIP community transport & befriending, Honiton Health Matters, Honiton Memory Cafe, Honiton Carers, and Honiton Sheddars, Beehive Honiton, Creative Beings, Libraries Unlimited, Devon Music Education Hub, Ottery Town Council, The King’s School, The Space and Action East Devon, Membury Primary Academy, Stockland School, Stockland Parochial Parish Council.

During 2023-2024 we have also been building our partnerships with a number of larger cultural organisations through commissioned work including: Exeter Phoenix and Theatre Royal Plymouth. These organisations recognise our responsiveness alongside our rural cultural network and wish to build on partnership working to increase rural engagement with their programme.

Our Creative Director, convened a country-wide meeting to discuss professional small-scale touring and talent development in February 2024. In attendance were representatives from Theatre Royal Plymouth, Landmark Theatres, Beyond Face, Doorstep Arts, Exeter Phoenix and Exeter Northcott, and it was agreed that ongoing network development would be key to ensure a joined-up approach to support the evolving cultural ecology in Devon. We believe our collaborative and non-competitive approach is key to ensuring participation from established cultural institutions as well as smaller, more responsive cultural leaders.

7. Has the funding from East Devon District Council helped you leverage increased funding?

Yes, we are confident that being able to demonstrate Local Authority financial support increased our chances of success when applying for project grant funding from Arts Council England (£89,163. April 2023-Sept 2024) as well as National Lottery Community funding (£9985 January- May 2023).

While many councils are reversing years of arts funding, EDDC is demonstrating incredible cultural leadership by continuing to fund the arts and culture, recognising its importance in place-based community development, alongside employment and business sector development. With small amounts of funding, the impact we are able to have is huge and the continuing investment in Villages in Action whose focus has broadened beyond impact for isolated and ageing communities to having regional impact in terms of the Creative Industries sector, and serving more members of our community more meaningfully.

8. How many visitors/audiences/participants in East Devon have you reached this year? And how does that compare to last year?

	April 2022- March 2023		April 2023- to date	
	Devon-wide	East Devon	Devon-wide	East Devon
Box office income	£15,326	£4,135	£15,302	£5,624
Other community fundraising	Unknown	Unknown	Av. £70.19 across all events	



Audience attendances	1479	620	1496	645
Number of performances	44	12	25	10
Participant attendances	Unknown	61	519	203
Number of participatory sessions	Unknown	6	18	13

9. Are you monitoring diversity, equality and inclusion in your audiences and cultural teams? For example do you have a breakdown of your work force/audiences by age groups, ethnic groups, disability, sexual orientation and gender?

At ViA we have been developing our EDI Policy and Governance Action Plan. Our key objectives over the next 24 months (December 2023- December 2025) are:

1. To focus on embedding three protected characteristics within the work of our organisation: Age, Race/ethnicity and Sexual Orientation. Our approach must be individualised and nurtured over time, recognising that no one size fits all
2. To adopt a proactive approach to communicating the charity's commitment to EDI with a public audience, and leading the network by example.

We monitor our workforce at the end of each financial year so as not to create survey overwhelm. In terms of artist employment we can report that in the last 12 months as part of our Talent Development strand of work we have been exploring issues of identity, culture and access for artists to rural spaces; 30% of artists supported to date have been from the Global Majority and 23% identifying as deaf, neurodivergent and/or Disabled.

Furthermore, we know that artists across all our strands of work identify in the following ways:

Gender: Female (44%), Male (43%), Non binary (7%), Prefer not to say (6%)

Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual (56%), Bisexual/ pansexual (19%), Homosexual (13%), Prefer not to say (12%)

Disability/ long-term health condition and/or Neurodivergence: No (88%), Yes (13%)

In terms of our audiences, we will have a robust data set in terms of demographic data by October 2024, however, we can highlight the following information for consideration:

Age: 35-49 years (10%) 50-64 years (39%) 65+ years (10%)

Gender: Female (75%), Male (22%), Prefer not to say (4%)

Sexual orientation: Heterosexual (76%) Homosexual (2%), Bisexual/ pansexual (6%) Prefer not to say (16%)

Ethnicity: White British (95%), Black/Black British (2%), O3ther Asian (1%), East Asian (2%)



10. How has your work helped to tackle the climate emergency? Are you monitoring the environmental impact of your work?

Through 6 month CPD support from Planet & People CIC we have refined our Environmental Policy & Action Plan. The organisation's refreshed development priorities are improving sustainable practices, communicating sustainability effectively and monitoring and improving education & travel outputs.

As a small, flexible and part-time team we recognise that our direct carbon impact is low, however we have begun to monitor how audiences and artists get to the venue:

- Artists responses to date: Driving alone (31%), Car share (63%) and walking (6%)
- Audience responses to date: Driving alone (15%), Car share (58%) and walking (27%)

Additionally, we are supporting artists whose creative output focuses on environmental themes. This might involve co-production or awareness raising of climate-change impacts on communities both locally and further afield. We feel that it's important to bring rural perspectives to the discussion so that local audiences are able to see their own perspectives being both represented and challenged.

Some audience feedback on Hattie Collins' East Devon performance of *Kindle* whose rural Devon perspective on climate change and other environmental and social factors got audiences thinking:

- *Powerful performance with a very thought provoking themes*
- *I liked the way that environmental and social themes were interwoven throughout*
- *Extremely engaging and sensitively acted. So many contemporary themes of rural hardships, social and economic pressures that are dealt with in a touching and relevant way.*

11. What challenges have you faced in the last year?

1. As a third sector organisation heavily reliant on grant funding there has been increased need / competition, where we find ourselves competing with projects that focus on feeding people or providing hardship funds. While we have been successful with a number of applications, we were unsuccessful with an application to the Postcode Lottery so that we could continue the work that we began in Honiton and Ottery St Mary as part of the Village Exchange. This targeted work supports the workforce of the future, as well as those in the third age through creative interventions. We feel this area of work has real potential for growth and alongside additional financial support for our future ambition, we would be keen to have conversations with other community-focused organisations to establish an East Devon hub that values and advocates for arts-based initiatives that support these groups.
2. We are heavily reliant on volunteers to host events and while we have grown box office income in the last year, the number of volunteer promoters in East Devon has decreased over the last 10 years. Historically (pre 2021) there used to be a large emphasis from village hall committees on fundraising, instead we now engage with volunteers who want to



experience excellent art and culture in their places and value the change that a vibrant creative offering can make to *all* members of their community, rather than seeing events solely as a fundraising opportunity. So to temper returning promoters' expectations, we have developed an Onboarding pack that clearly articulates our [Agri\[Culture\]](#) approach.

