

Suffolk Libraries

Suffolk Libraries and National Portfolio Organisation status

Locally brilliant, nationally significant

Introduction

Arts Council England's biggest and most prestigious funding stream is the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status which invites organisations into a four-year funding agreement to produce excellent arts and cultural opportunities.

The 2018-2022 NPO funding round has been the first-time libraries have been able to bid for NPO status. In June 2017 the organisation heard it had been successful in its bid and would be one of six library services nationally to be invited into the portfolio. This means the service will get £704k over four years to do this work.

The Suffolk Libraries bid was written based on a number of key themes, including:

- The programme to be aimed at young people aged 11-24
- 'Digital arts' will be the focus – this could be any kind of art which makes use of any kind of tech
- The programme will seek to build young people's skills and confidence around using digital equipment
- Resilience and wellbeing will be core outcomes for young people participating

The bid was also written to include an arts partner – METAL – who will work with Suffolk Libraries in year one to build the service's understanding of the arts and its confidence in delivery.

What we want to achieve

The overarching intention of this four-year programme is to build a library-based arts and culture offer in Suffolk. However, 5 other core aims are:

1. We will embed creative thinking and approaches within the organisation through opportunities for front line staff to develop their skills
2. We will engage with young people (aged 11-24) and grow this audience in libraries
3. We will build young people's voice and diversity understanding into the organisation's governance
4. We will develop a programme which contributes to the resilience of the organisation *e.g. through expertise and income streams*
5. We will contribute to a new national framework for artistic engagement in libraries

Young people

Young people are at the core of the programme and the intention is to create something which offers meaningful experiences for young people to engage in culture and arts-based activities and projects in libraries. The programme seeks develop their confidence and skills as writers, musicians, storytellers or artists and there will be a focus on using digital media to grow digital skills.

The programme also aims to build the confidence, wellbeing and resilience of young people through providing them with a range of opportunities to try new things and make new friendships. Suffolk Libraries already has an excellent track record around wellbeing, and so it is hoped this programme will be able to offer more of this.

Art forms and digital arts

While most of what will happen in the libraries is not fully sketched out yet as this will happen later into 2018, Suffolk Libraries can be sure in that it will be making use of professional artists so that young people experience and produce good quality arts. The service will not put any emphasis on any particular art form and they will all be treated equally. However, all the art forms will be incorporating an element of digital in them. How this translates is yet to be seen, and it is hoped that young people will shape this aspect themselves. It could be something simple like a young person composing music electronically or even a dancer learning how to record and digitally manipulate their work.

Year 1

The programme is four years and organisations are asked to submit detailed plans year-by-year. The Year 1 business plan focuses on the 3 biggest libraries in year 1 to get the work going with the intention of other libraries coming on board in years 2, 3 and 4.

Year one of the programme starts April 2018 and will focus on laying the foundations of the project and there is also some lead-in work to this which is currently ongoing:

- Programme Coordinator recruitment begins February '18 – *internal and external recruitment exercise*
- Engagement with stakeholders starts from January '18 – *Work to bring other organisations and groups on board with the plans and see if there is any join-up*
- Arts Development Programme for staff (April '18 – June '18). *An opportunity for 24 staff initially to undertake a leadership course on the arts and working with young people*
- Culture LAB – artists in residence (July '18). *Artists working with libraries, staff and library users to think about the role of libraries and how this can be translated into artistic and cultural experiences*
- Development of ideas and implementation (July '18 – March '19 - *Work with young people really starts to happen!*
- Arts Award development and implementation (Oct '18 – March '19) – *Opportunities for young people to gain recognised accreditations for their work with the arts*
- Evaluation and years 2-4 programme design – *Ready to learn for year 2*

Key facts

The NPO status will mean the following for Suffolk Libraries:

- £704k of funding for arts and culture activities split evenly across 4 years - £176k each year
- Much of the money will be used to generate arts and cultural opportunities for young people in libraries
- A good amount of money will be used to offer development opportunities for front line staff to develop themselves as arts and cultural leaders through training opportunities
- Locations: all libraries will see the benefit over the four-year period, but in year one the programme will start in Bury St. Edmunds (with Thurston), Lowestoft and Ipswich. The programme will roll-out further across years 2, 3 and 4
- Suffolk Libraries will be teaming-up with the arts organisation [METAL](#) in year one
- Designed to be a full cost recovery programme