

# Manifesto for Audience Focus

Want to develop your audience? Don't be for everyone!

The experience of no (physical) audience during lockdown made even more obvious how central audiences are for our cultural organisations. Now is the time to really develop our audience centricity. I have reflected on what I learned from my different experiences as a consultant, working at Tate and, before that, working in branded consumer goods, as well as from engaging with human-centred design more recently. The result - a manifesto for audience focus:

## 1. You are not your audience.

You are too deeply involved and your experience has shaped your view of audiences. But the world changes and audiences change. Bust some audience myths and appreciate the reality of your audience.

## 2. Listen.

Listen to your audience - current and potential. Listen for practical as well as emotional needs. With empathy. If you can't do your own audience research, access what is available in the sector. And don't forget to listen to your front-of-house team, they have a lot of experience with your audience.

## 3. You won't get a useful answer to the question 'what do you want?'

You have to dig deeper. Understand the world your audience lives in, what they care about, what is relevant to them. Bring quantitative and qualitative data together. From this spring your ideas, then test them with your audience.

## 4. Don't be for everyone.

Choose your audience, the ones you really want to attract and please. Don't say you want to be for everyone and then not do much for many of them. Be honest, and be okay with not focusing on everyone. But be welcoming to anyone who turns up.

## 5. Because you can't do everything.

And you can't be everything to everyone. Especially with limited resources. So, you have to prioritise.

## 6. Your purpose is your filter.

It helps you set priorities and make decisions. So does your audience insight.

## 7. Articulate your intentions.

Write them up. Communicate them to everyone in the organisation. Assign your resources to your priorities. This is your audience strategy.

## 8. Communicate your strategy.

Don't let it sit in a folder. Share your audience strategy with the whole organisation. Keep referring to it. Visualise it. Activate it.

## 9. Democratise your insight. And use it.

Make it available to everyone. Understanding audiences helps their decision making. If possible, include staff in talking to audiences. Nothing is more convincing than hearing it directly.

## 10. Champion audiences.

Put an audience hat on in your meetings. Bring their point of view or even actual audience representatives to the table. Show the importance leadership puts on audiences.

**11. Start thinking audiences when you start planning.**

Not as an add-on at the end.

**12. Make audience development part of your core work.**

Real impact is not achieved with one-off projects. Building audiences requires a continuous effort.

**13. Success looks like...**

Does everyone know what difference you want to make for your audience? Find a measure the whole organisation can get behind that says more than numbers through the door. Audience satisfaction is a simple one to start with.

**14. All are accountable.**

All functions touch on audiences. Hold everyone accountable in some way for their contribution to audience development.

**15. Foster a culture of collaboration.**

In three areas - internally, with audiences and with other partners.

**16. Join your silos.**

As all functions touch on audiences, the responsibility can't just be with Marketing or Education. Encourage collaboration across functions. And put structures in place that enable this.

**17. Work with audiences as equal partners.**

Value them as people, as humans, as partners, not just faceless consumers. Develop your offer with them. Consider not only what you want to get out of this - what's in it for them to work with you?

**18. You don't have to go it alone.**

Look for partners who are interested in a similar audience. There is so much your audience can do in their leisure time - that's your biggest competitor, not the arts organisation down the road.

**19. Be welcoming.**

Especially for audiences who are new, who are not like you, who might not know what to ask for or what to expect.

**20. Whose viewpoint might you be ignoring?**

Check your biases. We all have them. As individuals and as organisations. Start by acknowledging there are some. Then find ways to become aware of what they are.

**21. Treat your staff the way you want them to treat your audience.**

The visitor experience and the staff experience are closely linked in visitor facing organisations.

**22. Experiment.**

Ideate, build prototypes and show them to audiences. It is easier for people to respond to a prototype than to tell you what they want. Reflect, learn and iterate. Don't be afraid of failure, it can be a great teacher.

**23. Build your innovation on your insight.**

Root your ideas in your insight and focus on outcomes for your audience. Traditional approaches have not provided the audience diversity and growth expected. The mindset and process of human-centred design can be a more promising way forward.

**So, tear up the old audience rulebook and try a new approach.**

Do you have any thoughts about the Manifesto? Suggestions what should be added?

Any questions? I welcome your feedback, please [get in touch](#).

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