



International producing surgery: Participatory work

**Top tips and useful links
with Beckie Darlington**

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finding partners/ presenters

Be clear about what you need in order to make your project possible – not all programmers/organisations will be right for all participatory work. Remember you have a responsibility not only to your team but also to any participants or collaborators who you bring into that environment, so being realistic about your capacity and that of the partner is essential.

Presenting your work at an international showcase is obviously a great way to meet international programmers, but you can also build connections in other ways.

Simply keeping your online platforms up to date is a good way of allowing programmers to understand the work that you are doing – updating your website, having a social media presence, sending email newsletters. In our experience people do follow our work on Instagram and they read the newsletters we send out and we have got bookings that way.

When trying to find the right programmers to approach, it is about getting people to see the work, but also about building your profile and network. One way is identifying places you would like to present your work and visiting those places if possible. Also, looking out for residency opportunities which are not just useful for making work but also for building your network. Identify artists who successfully tour work that might have similarities to yours and see where they're touring to. Ask your UK partners/colleagues/friends who tour or are well connected internationally if they'd be willing to directly introduce you to programmers who would be interested in your work.

Remember that working internationally is a long game and so if programmers who you have met previously or who you email about a new project don't respond right away, don't give up on that connection. The first time you contact a programmer, the project might not be the right fit at that time, but our experience has been that if you keep them updated on your work then those same programmers might get back in touch years down the line with an opportunity to present your work.

promotion

We have found that having access to good home recording equipment is invaluable when making international participatory work.

Recording video messages and call outs for participants, leading sessions remotely via video call, creating videos to promote your work to a specific audience - having the ability to make these things yourself, and make them well with good sound and picture quality, can be so useful.

Similarly, in seeking out international touring opportunities, it is important to have a good promotional pack with great images and a really clear explanation of how the project is made, who the participants are and what the project offers those participants, who the audience are for the work etc.

Having video that you can share with potential programmers is also very useful – think about not just filming your work in action but making short explanatory documentary style videos about your work, which can be a much more dynamic way to explain a project and understand the process behind it.

why

What projects do you think are appropriate for international touring? International touring is expensive and takes a lot of effort on both sides – why is your work distinctive, what are you offering that a local artist can't? Look for places where work like yours doesn't already exist and think about what your most unique and ambitious projects are.

context

What are the cultural and social norms of the place you want to tour to, is your work culturally appropriate for that place? Put effort into understanding the context of where you're hoping to tour to before you do anything else, so that you understand more about whether your work is appropriate for a particular market.

Understanding the local context is really important in general, and especially so with participatory work. How can you begin to understand that context before you begin the project? Sometimes a partner can offer a research trip in advance of the project which can be invaluable in giving you a deeper understanding of the context, a chance to test out your usual material/workshops, an opportunity to work with a partner before jumping into a full project.

communication

With all international touring, don't underestimate the work that needs to be done in advance – there is a lot of time spent communicating on email and Zoom. Factor this into your budget so that you can dedicate the time to it. The clearer you can be about how the project works and what you need and the better the international partner understands the project in advance of it beginning, and the smoother things will go.

When you're making participatory work internationally there might be some instances where you have more experience creating this kind of work than the partners that you're working with. As such, being as clear as you can about the specific needs and expectations of the work is very important. For example, recognising the importance of finding particular participants, being clear about barriers that might prevent people from participating and ways in which the partner might help to break those barriers down.

safeguarding

Having your own safeguarding policy for working with participants is really useful, and also having early conversations with the international partner about what the local safeguarding requirements are. For instance, when working internationally you might find some places have a more relaxed attitude to safeguarding than the UK, spend time thinking about how/if you adapt your policy to find a comfortable and safe way of working in this new context.

translation

Don't make assumptions about translation - think carefully about what you need from the translation of your work. When making participatory work, a translator is an artistic collaborator - they are the direct connection between

you and the participants you are working with. Be clear with the partner about that so that they can find and appoint the right person, meet them in advance even if meeting is done remotely.

If you are making participatory work in a non-English speaking country, make sure to factor in the length of time translation takes in your participatory process – for example, workshops will take twice as long.

value

There is an increasing value that programmers place on work that meaningfully connects to a local context and local people - can your work engage with local people in ways other than them just attending as audience members? Are there ways you can work with local artists and engage in skills sharing as part of your work?

remote working

This is something we've all been thinking about more and more with the climate emergency and the pandemic. It is definitely possible to make meaningful participatory works across a distance – it is worth giving yourself some time to test your approach to digital collaboration before settling on your process and agreeing anything with an international partner. How are you able to test out methods for working remotely and understand the limits and virtues of working with participants remotely? One limit might be the inability to bring people together in a room, or work in a hands-on way, but one virtue might be connecting people in multiple different locations to work on a single project.

Beckie Darlington is a creative producer with over 15 years of experience working across theatre, live art, dance, and queer cabaret. Beckie works closely with artists and organisations to conceive, develop and deliver new work, including participatory art works, festivals, touring theatre performances and installations. Alongside her producing work, she collaborates as an artist with Andy Field on a series of experimental performance projects with children that aim to initiate intergenerational dialogue and new, more radical modes of civic participation. Their work has taken a range of forms, including a guidebook to St Helens, rooftop conversations about the future in Cairo, Sao Paulo and Beijing, and a local TV news network run entirely by children.