

How to set an audience target

produced by AMA



on behalf of
The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon



About this guide

This guide presents a framework to help you set realistic and ambitious audience targets that will help your organisation achieve its aims, mission and vision. It has been produced as guidance for organisations applying for funding from The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

The suggestions in this document are just one way of setting realistic audience targets so please use these ideas as inspiration, there is a wealth of information on how to do this successfully so see this as a starting point, not the end point.

How to use this guide

Successfully setting audience targets needs to be done as:

- part of a process that takes into consideration your organisation's ambition and context
- part of your business planning process — long-term targets provide your organisation with the best opportunity to see real change
- a team — taking a holistic approach to thinking about audiences will result in deeper relationships with your chosen communities

You can use this guide with your team to take a strategic approach to setting audience targets. You will find ideas to think about, questions to answer and further links to enable you to explore each area in more detail. To make this a simple process you could use the steps listed under 'The Framework' as agenda items for a meeting with your team.

What do we mean by “audience”?

“Audience” means readers, listeners, attendees, visitors, or any other publics who consume or otherwise experience your work.

What is an audience target?

For the purpose of your application your audience targets are likely to cover a range of things. This might include:

- Visitors to an exhibition
- People engaging with outdoor art
- Individuals consuming the artistic content you offer online
- A family buying artefacts produced as part of your artistic activity
- The type of people engaging with you

Setting these targets will help you think about how you will engage people with your artistic output. You should also think about the rest of your offer and the audience-related targets that you might want to set. To offer an exceptional visitor experience you need to think about how you can work with your colleagues to understand the full experience your audiences have at every step of their journey with you. This is part of the journey to becoming an audience focused organisation.

Taking an audience focused approach

Becoming audience focused will help your organisation build stronger relationships with audiences and lead to a stronger future.

An audience focused organisation is one that puts audiences at the heart of what they do with every team member taking responsibility for helping to build stronger relationships with people. It's an organisation that is open and inclusive, that welcomes people into its processes, its planning and its decision making. To successfully develop an audience focus you need to get to know your visitors, the ones you have now and the ones you'd like to have, their values and how you are or could be relevant to them.

For inspiring and practical information on what an audience focused organisation looks like you might want to look at:

[The Art of Relevance, Nina Simon](#)

[From 'Them' to 'Us', the art of leading with an audience focus](#)

The framework

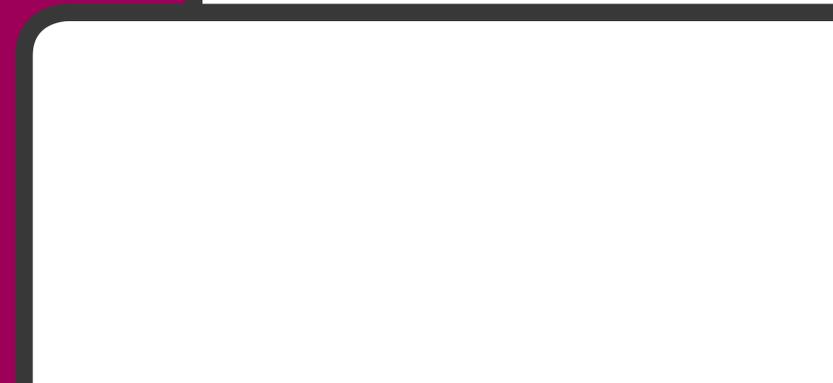
This guide presents a framework to help you set realistic audience targets that will help your organisation achieve its aims, mission and vision:

- 1. Vision**
What is our vision for our organisation and for our audiences?
- 2. Current Audiences**
Who do we have relationships with and what do we know about those people?
- 3. Potential Audiences**
Who could we become relevant for and how will we do that?
- 4. Targets**
How can we set realistic targets?
- 5. Monitoring**
How do we monitor our progress?



1. Vision and mission

What is our vision for our organisation and for our audiences?



Your vision is an ideal future caused by you

Your audience targets should be designed to enable you to achieve your organisation's vision and mission.

“A personal or company vision gives you a sense of how things could be. It's your ideal future, it says what you, or even the world, could become.”

Mel Larsen

Your vision is the driving force behind your organisation. It's the thing that gets you up in the morning and keeps you awake at night.

Your vision is the difference you want to make in the world. It is your version of an ideal future and it should tell the world where audiences sit within your organisation.

Your mission is your ideal future action statement

Your mission keeps you on track. It explains why you exist, who you exist for and what you do. It's your mini master plan of how you'll achieve your vision.

Your mission talks to people. It says this is what we plan to do for you and why.

How vision and mission inform targets

We're not expecting you to re-write your vision and mission as part of this process but looking at it can inform the targets you set. Bring your team together and ask:

- Do our vision and mission include audiences?
- Do they tell us who we will be engaging with when we are operating at our full potential?
- Is it clear how we will remain relevant to our audiences in our ideal future?

If your vision and mission don't answer these questions don't panic, take some time to work with your team to think about:

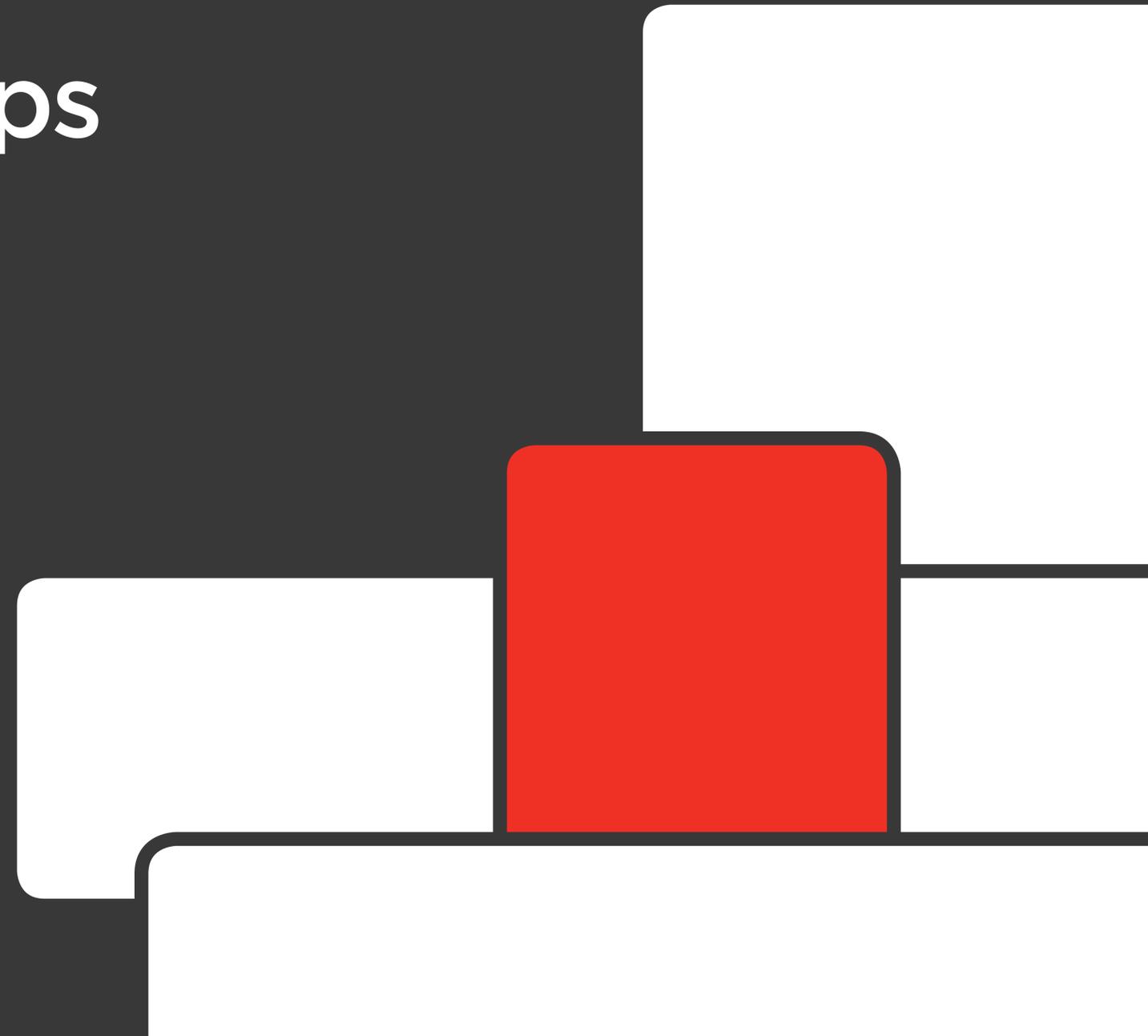
- Who are we for?
- What difference are we trying to make to people's lives?
- How are we relevant to the groups that we want to build relationships with?

You could start this process by asking your team to visualise your organisation 10 years from now and imagine who might be reading your publications, visiting your exhibitions, enjoying your festival. Use the results of this visualisation to answer the questions above.

If you do decide to update your vision and mission you may like this [mini guide](#).

2. Current audiences

Who do we have relationships with and what do we know about those people?



Gathering insight

So, you've asked the big questions about who you are for and started to think about where you'd like to get to – what your vision of the future is. Now it's time to think about where you are right now. Who are your current audiences and what do you know about them?

Gather your team and work out what you can find out about your audiences, who can find it out and how you can find it out. There is likely to be a wealth of information you can gather from inside the organisation and if you are a producing company talk to your partner venues and ask them to provide you with this data. The following questions may help.

- Who is visiting / engaging with our work now?
- Where are they coming from?
- What do we know about them? (age, gender, ethnicity — but remember that these things don't tell you everything about your audiences. Not all 20 year olds are alike.)

- How many people are we reaching at the moment?
- How many people are coming to our shows/exhibitions/ events?
- How many people are reading our publications or downloading our artistic content?
- How often are people interacting with us?

- What are people interested in? What are they attending / taking part in?
- What is our average audience number per event?
- Are our audiences just getting involved with one part of our offer or are they engaging more broadly?
- For ticketed events what is the average income per ticket?
- What is the average % of capacity reached?

- Why are they engaging?
- What is it about what we offer that is relevant to people?

How can I find this information?

Every organisation has access to really useful information. This might be:

- From surveys
- Inside the heads of your volunteers
- Written in visitor books or comments cards
- Accessible via Google Analytics
- In a list of customer names and addresses
- In a box office system

Benchmarking

Are there organisations you know that you could exchange data with? You don't need to share everything but rather than giving away competitive advantage this will lead to a stronger knowledge base for your organisation.

Sharing data with other organisations helps you to see how well you are doing and what the potential for growth might be.

What if I don't have this information?

If you don't currently have any of the information detailed above there are some simple ways to gather it. You can of course design surveys or ask a consultant to help you but there are other, low-cost but effective things that you can do:

- Ask your volunteers to ask audiences two simple questions and then bring them together to share their insight
- Write a very simple post-experience survey and email it to people, give it to them to fill in as they leave or ask your volunteers to help. You can find advice on writing surveys at culturehive.co.uk.
- Is there a school or university who might have students that need opportunities to carry out research to test out their academic learning?
- Think about how you can gather information easily. Is there a book club attached to your organisation that you can talk to? Are there community group leaders who regularly engage with you? Can one or two of your team take time to observe people at your next event? These things won't provide robust figures but they will help you to build a picture of who is engaging with you.
- Does anybody on your board have expertise in this area?

What should I do with this information?

Once you've gathered all of this data work with your team to bring it together into a series of meaningful points. These might cover:

- A picture of who your core audience / audience groups are (age, where they are from, how often they come)
- Detail on the popularity of different parts of your artistic offer
- Things that you are proud of
- Things you would like to change
- Opportunities for growth

We will talk about what to do this once you've completed the next section on potential audiences.

3. Potential audiences

Who could we become relevant for and how will we do that?



Who are your potential audiences?

You've gathered the information you have on your visitors but what are the gaps?

Who could be engaging with your organisation?

Undertaking a market analysis will enable you to see how you might achieve your organisation objectives by making the most of these opportunities.

Mapping your audience

The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon [Mapping your Audience](#) tool will be able to help you build a picture of your potential offline audience. This tool details demographic information on the population in a number of drive-times surrounding 84 arts venues across Ireland. Using this will enable you to find out information about your potential audiences age, education, ethnicity, internet access, propensity to be Irish speaking, nationality, gender, disability, socio-economic group and economic status.

You can use the information provided by the [Mapping your Audience](#) tool in a number of ways. For example, if you are trying to generate additional income then understanding the socio-economic status of your local area may help you think about how best to do this. Alternatively, but not exclusive to raising income, your ideal future may one where a more diverse society engages with the arts. In this instance the [Mapping your Audience](#) tool might help you to identify people that your organisation is not currently engaging.

Spend some time looking at Mapping your Audience and answer the following questions:

- Are our audiences representative of the population we could be engaging with?
- Who are we not currently reaching?
- Where is there potential for growth?

The Arts in Irish Life

The [Arts in Irish Life](#) is a really useful resource to help you think about the context of your organisation and who your audiences might be. It is full of nuggets of information such as the fact that those amongst whom 'all/most' family members attend similar events will themselves be 201% more likely to be in the heaviest personal attendance category. If you feel there is scope to grow your audience you may find that encouraging people to bring a family member yields good results. This might not work for everyone but these are the kinds of insights that [The Arts in Irish Life](#) contains.

Another example of the insight held within [The Arts in Irish Life](#) is the evidence that people aged 15-34 are the most under-represented age group when looking at people who attend "Theatre/Stand-Up Comedy/Other Shows", "dance performances" and "any other cultural events". "Concerts, Recitals or Other Music Events" is the only one in which this age group are well represented. This is insight that should impact the targets you are setting for this target group.

There is a great deal more insight in [The Arts in Irish Life](#). You may choose to share the chapters in the resource amongst your team members and ask each person to identify the most important fact in their section followed by a discussion about how this might impact audience targets.

What else do I know about my community?

You might want to think about socio-economic status, social tensions, schools in the area, community groups you could work with etc

4. Targets

How can we set realistic targets?



Identifying your target

This is the moment you need to bring together the information you've gathered so far to set your targets. This can feel daunting but the framework you have followed helps.

1. Where do we want to get to? (vision, mission)
2. Where are we now? (current audiences)
3. How are we going to get there? (setting targets for current and potential audiences to fulfil your vision of the future)

You will find an example below of how this process may work. Please note that for the purpose of this example each stage has been simplified for clarity. A producing organisation has a vision that states:

“Traditional folk music will be a part of everyday life across Ireland.”

So we know that they need to think about how they engage with audiences across the country. The organisation has spoken to the venues they tour to. They have also carried out some post-show surveys and can surmise that:

- Their core audiences are aged 45-64, male, middle/upper class, white, heavily engaged arts attenders.
- Their performances sell best in urban venues where they are currently reaching capacities of an average of 60%
- They have seen audiences rise where they have developed strong partnerships with schools
- They are proud to be touring to more venues than ever before
- They would like to see a broader range of audiences engage with their offer
- **Arts in Irish Life** has shown that those attending ‘Traditional Irish or Folk Music Concerts/Recitals or Events’ are 42% more likely to be Irish speakers/readers/writers than people attending other genres.
- They feel that partnership working may be the key to audience growth

Identifying your target

Following this they have looked at [Mapping Your Audience](#) and know that in the areas they currently tour to they are only reaching a small percentage of potential attenders. For example, at the venue they go to in Cork there are over 300,000 Irish speakers within a 30-minute catchment area. They are currently reaching less than 1% of this population so there is huge room for growth within this part of the population.

All of this information suggests that with the right targeting and planning they can aim for both audience growth and the development of new audiences.

As a result of this process the organisation knows that they can set targets about:

- Increasing audiences by focusing on the Irish speaking population
- Focusing their growth targets on areas where schools are open to partnerships
- Focus their development targets on younger audiences perhaps by starting with those who speak Irish before moving onto people that are likely to be harder to reach

This rough list can now start to form a set of objectives which will include your audience targets.

SMART objectives

You now have a broad idea of what you want to be achieving. It may help to turn these ideas into SMART objectives. This stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Agreed (with your team)
- Realistic
- Timed

By setting SMART objectives you can easily monitor your progress.

A not-smart objective might read:

We want to increase the number of visitors to our next exhibition.

A SMART objective might read:

Visitor numbers will increase by 20% for our next exhibition. 10% of this increase will be from repeat visitors. 5% of this increase will be from families as a result of our family friendly plan. 5% will be students as a result of our new work with the university.

You can see from this that your audience targets are part of your SMART objectives. It is these numbers that are the targets you need for your application to the Arts Council.

It can be difficult to decide if an objective / target is realistic. This is where the information gathering you did in the previous sections is useful. For example, to check the objective above you could look at the information on families and young people in the Mapping Your Audience tool — how many people are there in your local area that could fit into this group? Is 5% of your previous audience a sensible amount to expect?

Setting realistic targets

When you are attaching numbers and time-scales to your targets or objectives you need to think about:

- How much time do we have
- How much budget will we need
- How much staff time will this take

Setting realistic targets is essential. Without them you could damage morale, spend precious resource focusing on the wrong things and fail to reach the results your organisation was planning on to thrive. Realistic targets mean you have a real chance of achieving your vision for the future.

Setting ambitious targets

It's clear that setting realistic targets is vital for success. It's also vital for the development of your organisation that you are ambitious. This can be a fine balancing act but what you are really asking yourself is 'are my ambitions realistic'? Think about the evidence you've gathered — does it suggest that the answer to this is 'yes'?

5. Monitoring

How do we monitor
our progress?



Monitoring progress

As well as setting realistic objectives you need to monitor the results. Finding out 12 months after setting targets that they haven't been achieved will be damaging for your organisation. Monitoring progress allows you to work in a more agile way responding to results and tweaking (or pivoting) on activity to get the results you need.

Ideally you will monitor progress with your team. Be sure to build in measurement opportunities in the planning stage to give you the data you need to track your success.