Job Profile - Community Arts

This information has been sourced by: https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/community-arts-worker

“Community arts workers collaborate with local groups and individuals, encouraging the use of artistic activities to support their development and improve their quality of life.”

Generally, they work in areas where there are social, cultural or environmental issues to be addressed. They use a range of art forms to engage with these different community groups, including:

Types of art forms that may be used:

- carnival arts;
- craft;
- creative writing;
- dance;
- film;
- music;
- theatre;
- visual arts.

Types of community arts worker

Community arts worker is more of an umbrella term as job titles tend to relate quite closely to the role or type of work; similar titles are arts development officer, youth engagement officer, youth arts practitioner, and community projects assistant. Creative practitioners are usually freelance creative professionals.

Project work may fall into categories such as race, gender, disability, health and the environment, and may focus on the following groups:

- young people, especially those at risk;
- young offenders;
- homeless people;
- people with disabilities and mental health conditions;
- ethnic minorities;
- the elderly;
- drug and alcohol users.

Depending on the role, the work varies considerably between the facilitation and delivery of creative projects and more administrative responsibilities.

Responsibilities

The work may vary between arts development, arts outreach work and youth arts and education. In some local government positions, the role will have more of an administrative and project-management focus and the artistic input will be provided by freelance community artists or professionals.

In arts companies, agencies or charities the community arts worker will coordinate, project manage and deliver activities alongside freelance artists.

Community artists who work on a freelance basis may be involved in all aspects of the project, including managing, delivery and fundraising.
Typical activities, depending on the nature of the role, include:

- working with a range of community groups to identify their needs and then adapting projects to meet these needs;
- negotiating with community groups to see what art form they would like to use for the project;
- designing and delivering programmes and workshops to engage different communities;
- teaching different art techniques through workshops and classes;
- helping groups to develop artwork for their own community;
- project managing one-off events, such as festivals and longer-term projects, including the setting up, monitoring and evaluation of the project;
- building up a pool of arts professionals to hire in or work with for projects;
- administrative duties including bid writing, fundraising and managing budgets;
- offering advice and support to community groups on fundraising and forming projects;
- liaising with a variety of people and organisations including local authorities, schools, companies for sponsorship, freelance professionals and specialist workers;
- marketing and publicising projects via social media, the press, etc;
- managing and supporting volunteers.

Salary

- Typical starting salaries for administrative roles are £16,000, rising to between £20,000 and £30,000 for experienced community arts workers.
- Senior executives at local government or arts agencies can earn salaries of over £30,000, but these roles require significant experience and are mainly strategic.

Freelance work is common in the sector and freelancers usually charge a daily rate. Rates vary depending on experience, project budgets and location. Alternatively, a set sum may be offered for a particular project over a specific timescale.

Job security and benefits are not comparable with public sector positions, but there is more flexibility and choice of work. It is also common for freelance creative professionals to combine part-time employed work with freelance project work to provide a regular income.

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

Working hours

Long working hours, weekend and evening work are common, with working hours linked to project work and community need, so a flexible approach is essential. At museums, cinemas and galleries, for example, the work may be more in line with office hours, with occasional evening and weekend work. For those working with young people, the hours and times can vary as projects may be linked to the curriculum in school hours. Evening work may be required if the project or workshop is run through a youth club.

What to expect

- A large proportion of contracts are fixed term and/or part time.
- For outreach or community-based projects, typical work settings include youth clubs, community centres, care or residential homes and schools. Outdoor work is not uncommon for projects such as festivals and carnivals.
- The general working atmosphere is relatively relaxed, with a casual dress code.
- Community arts workers may be exposed to difficult or stressful situations, depending on the specific environments or particular groups they are working with.
• Travel within the working day is usual if the role involves a lot of outreach work, either to local communities or around the region.
• Opportunities for overseas travel may be possible but are limited. Funding for projects is often provided through sources such as the European Regional Development Fund and through grants from arts councils, but it is very much down to the individual to pursue these opportunities.

Qualifications
Many community arts workers are qualified or trained in a particular arts discipline. Although this area of work is open to all graduates, HND and foundation degree holders, a degree in the following subjects may increase your chances:

- art, design, fine art;
- art history;
- contemporary art;
- drama, theatre, dance or performing arts;
- event management;
- media, film or photography;
- music;
- teaching and education.

Entry without a degree is also possible. Emphasis is placed on having the right skills and experience.

Creative and Cultural Skills has developed the Creative Employment Programme to create traineeships, apprenticeships and paid internship opportunities in England for young unemployed people aged 16 to 24 wishing to pursue a career in the arts and cultural sector, including community arts.

A postgraduate degree is not essential but may be useful. Some institutions offer an MA in community and participatory arts and several institutions now offer Masters specifically in community music or community dance.

Though many community arts workers may be specialist artists in their own right, an interest in the creative sector and a good overall knowledge of the arts in general is beneficial.

Read publications and newspapers from your local area to keep up to date with relevant community issues, and take every opportunity to network and make contacts.

Skills
You will need to show evidence of the following:

- creativity in one or more art forms and an understanding of the creative process;
- the ability to generate new ideas;
- the ability to facilitate the creativity of others and a willingness to share their own creative work and work collaboratively with creative professionals;
- teamworking skills, as well as self-motivation and time management skills;
- written and oral communication skills;
- organisational and administrative skills;
- awareness of the context of the work, including issues of social regeneration and inclusion;
- knowledge of the specific needs of different community groups;
• an enthusiasm for working with groups in the community and a willingness to build relationships with these different groups; strong interpersonal skills, patience, empathy, a positive approach and respect for others;
• project management skills;
• flexibility and adaptability;
• negotiating skills, especially to secure funding for projects;
• basic business knowledge, especially if working freelance;
• confidence in decision making and a proactive approach to work.

You will need to have Disclosure and Barring Service clearance to work with young people and other vulnerable groups.

Initial entry positions may be in arts administration or as an assistant arts development officer with a local authority. For arts administrator roles, good IT and communication skills, together with an interest in the creative sector, are key.

Work experience
Pre-entry experience in the field of community and participatory arts is important and a portfolio of experience in delivering projects may be sought when applying for jobs. Many community arts groups and initiatives rely on volunteers and it may be possible to get involved in a range of projects in a voluntary capacity or through internships.

Regional arts councils hold lists of local community arts activities, organisations and events:

• Arts Council England
• Arts Council of Northern Ireland
• Arts Council of Wales
• Creative Scotland

Also, contact local arts agencies and companies to see if they have any voluntary opportunities.

Advertisement

Employers
Local government is a major employer of community arts workers and many councils even employ small teams of arts workers.

Many art and cultural organizations also have an outreach remit and are committed to making their art forms and venues more accessible. These include:

• galleries;
• larger independent cinemas;
• museums;
• orchestras;
• theatres.

They can employ education and community officers, who work directly with community groups, introducing them to their respective art forms through workshops, events and other activities.

Community arts workers are also employed by specific community arts support agencies where they offer advice and support to others.

Look for job vacancies at:
Professional development

Continuing professional development (CPD) is important in order to keep up to date with new legislation, practices and opportunities. Freelancers in particular need to seek out training opportunities.

Local councils may run short, training courses to introduce arts practitioners to the field of community work. Similar training is also offered by larger community arts organisations. Details of courses, which are specifically aimed at the community arts sector are listed on Voluntary Arts.

Information on training and professional development, as well as various projects and programs is provided by Artwork, the youth arts development agency. Freelance community artists may be able to get training funded through the project they are involved in, or be prepared to fund themselves for training courses.

Community arts work extends beyond using creative talent. Whether in local government or freelance, you may need to supplement your artistic training with courses in the following areas:

- writing funding proposals and bids (the Institute of Fundraising has developed a series of fundraising qualifications);
- people management and managing teams;
- PR and marketing;
- project management, budget planning and financial accounting;
- health and safety, child protection, insurance and liability;
- relevant aspects of social work and youth work;
- working with specific groups such as young offenders.

Some community arts workers decide to formalize their teaching and training experience by studying for a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) or a PG Dip/MA in Education. Museums and galleries also offer training for their own staff and those from other organizations within the sector.

Career prospects

Community arts workers in local government usually aim to progress from junior roles to more senior positions, possibly taking on managerial responsibility, supervising a team of junior arts officers or becoming the head of arts. They may also move into management roles within arts organizations or they may choose to work for arts councils, arts development agencies or regional development agencies.
Promotion to managerial level largely depends on getting experience of managing large projects and budgets. Posts as directors and chief executives exist within these organizations, but opportunities are limited and require significant experience of developing policies and strategies.

Some local government or public sector community arts workers choose to move into freelance work, drawing on the contacts and experience they have gained.

Freelance community arts workers develop their careers by working on a range of projects to build their portfolio. Networking is essential for finding work, as is contacting arts centers speculatively to be considered for new projects. With experience, opportunities to work on larger scale projects with bigger budgets will become available.

It is also important that freelancers add to their portfolio of skills so that they can deliver a variety of workshops and projects to community groups and schools.

Many freelancers aim to secure funding to establish and manage their own independent projects or not-for-profit organizations. Some, however, aspire to a more permanent position in the public sector, in local government, for example, or working for one of the larger arts organizations.

Career development generally needs to be driven by the individual, as outside local government there is a lack of clearly defined career pathways.