

Donor motivations and attitudes in the context of contemporary crafts: A qualitative research report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project speaks to new funding challenges in the British contemporary arts and crafts sector. The project has been commissioned by Craftspace as part of Catalyst Evolve Consortium 2016-2018, funded by Arts Council England (ACE).

The main objective of this research is to explore latent, low net worth individual¹ donors' motivations and attitudes toward giving funds to arts and contemporary crafts organisations such as Craftspace. A secondary objective is to examine potential messages and/or activities that might strengthen individual intentions to donate to contemporary crafts.

The exploratory qualitative research design uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 participants who fit the profile of low net worth individual donors. Purposive sampling criteria include: individuals aged 25 and over; individuals who have donated to charitable causes or arts organisations at least once in the past year; individuals who have gone to a museum, art gallery and/or other art exhibition or cultural spaces in the past year; and people who are craft enthusiasts and/or hobbyists. Data analysis is guided by a thematic approach, involving the coding of verbatim data through an iterative process.

Research results are addressed in relation to the importance participants attach to arts and contemporary crafts, individuals' attitudes toward donating to cause-based versus arts organisations, reasons for and against donating to arts and contemporary crafts, and personal opinions of Craftspace's communications. Each section of the findings provides actionable implications for Catalyst Evolve partners' future fundraising considerations.

While participants demonstrate commitment to diverse types of charitable giving, low net worth individual intentions to donate to contemporary arts and crafts is a challenge. In part this is driven by the hedonic (as opposed to needs-based) aspects of experiencing arts and crafts, but also by the fact that the arts are generally perceived as part of the commons and, as such, audiences expect arts organisations to be funded by government.

About a third of participants have donated to arts and culture, and have positive attitudes towards supporting the arts generally. These are participants with high levels of involvement and personal affinity with the arts and crafts, who cite small donations as a means of giving something back for the hedonic benefits they derive from their visits to arts and cultural venues. Other donation motives include helping to maintain heritage sites, helping to sustain local artists' spaces and emerging artists, helping friends who are artists, as well as supporting friends who are fundraising for or through arts and crafts. Much like in cases of cause-related charitable donations, having a personal connection to a particular art form or artist plays a significant role in motivations to donate and support arts and crafts organisations.

It is also relevant to highlight negative attitudes and 'reasons against' donations to arts organisations. The main negative reason cited by nearly all participants is that they do not see arts and cultural organisations as charities. The beliefs supporting this 'reason against' are diverse, but include expectations of government funding, which cause a 'crowding out' effect². Potential donors are also sceptical of arts organisations' need for support, as some

¹ Craftspace defines low net worth individuals as individuals with some level of disposable income, with the potential to donate to contemporary crafts. High net worth individuals are considered to have assets worth one million pounds and over.

² 'Crowding out' effects occur where other sources of funding cause potential donors to perceive their small donations as insignificant and, thus, not needed.

participants find it difficult to distinguish between which arts organisations and projects are for profit and which ones are not. Also, prominent galleries and large museums own expensive artwork. Therefore, some participants do not see how such organisations might need their support and how their small donations can make a difference. These perceptions then spill over to other types of arts and crafts organisations, which in turn impact relevant audiences' intentions to donate to contemporary arts and crafts. Similarly, a few participants mention perceptions of contemporary arts and crafts as inaccessible, a bit niche, not good at engaging with the general public, and therefore not in line with a charitable ethos. Additional 'reasons against' include other donation priorities based on charitable causes that are more personal and close to participants, as well as the attitude that they would rather support contemporary arts and crafts organisations by purchasing products and experiences. Also strong is the perception that those who have or do benefit the most, and who are able to offer their support to the arts and culture, should 'pay it forward'.

With regards to supporting Craftspace more specifically, the most significant barrier is lack of awareness of the organisation and limited understanding of what Craftspace does. In many ways, the key message is that audience development and engagement go hand-in-hand with fundraising from latent, low net worth individual donors. While a few participants are averse to the idea of supporting makers' development, most participants are not – though one negative aspect is the perception of 'contemporary art' as pretentious and inaccessible. Nevertheless, the craft programming and activities presented on Craftspace's website are seen positively. Participants want clarity around specific needs, how their donation money would be spent, the difference their donations can make and stories of prior impact that go beyond stakeholder engagement. They are positive about supporting a local organisation, but will not donate through a website.

Appealing fundraising strategies and activities include a donation box at exhibition venues – which is not always feasible for organisations without a public-facing venue – as well as entertaining fundraising events. Participants are positive about the idea of a low or suggested ticket price for exhibitions. Many are also positive about attending workshops for fundraising purposes. 'Meet the artist' events are more popular among those with high involvement in arts and crafts. Another popular idea is having 'night out' events connected to craft and 'augmented' craft viewing and making opportunities. Having a presence at art and craft fairs is also cited as a means of connecting and developing relationships with new audiences and future supporters. Other ideas include crowdfunding, family events, fundraising auctions, having a selection of products to purchase at key touchpoints and being invited to see the making process. Whatever the fundraising activity, point-of-contact communication must signal the need for support, as without a direct ask message (and an immediate means to donate) latent donors will not know of the need for support.

Additional opportunities to fundraise from low net worth individuals may arise out of engagement with businesses in resonant sectors such as the creative and cultural industries. Suggested ideas include business parks as places to tap into captive audiences, setting up exhibitions in the workplace and team building workshops pitched at HR professionals. Making it easy for potential donors to give by setting up 'arts NGO of the year' schemes through workplace direct debits may also be a feasible strategy.

Participants struggle to articulate specific ask messages that can appeal to them, which is likely a result of lack of prior awareness and understanding of Craftspace. Those who are able to articulate such messages make references to the importance of crafts in people's lives, the impact of Craftspace's work (both at a societal level and within the realm of artists'

careers), the importance of skills other than academic competence, and messages around inspiration and wellbeing.

In moving forward, Craftspace must build a clear positioning in the minds of potential donors and raise awareness of the organisation, by creating and cultivating relationships with an audience broader than beneficiary artists. Communications about the need for support must show (rather than tell) the success stories of beneficiaries, and be crafted in ways that minimise 'crowding out' effects. Also, there is the potential to capitalise on the psychological benefits of donating to specific Craftspace projects, by being specific about how these donations will be used and the difference they can make to either artists or other stakeholder groups. There is a need to communicate clearly with potential donors and amending specific features of the organisation's website is a first step in achieving this goal.

Despite the challenges involved in attracting funds from low net worth individuals, it is possible to develop such a fundraising stream. However, it would be unrealistic to expect a large proportion of contemporary crafts organisations' funds to be raised from low net worth individuals, particularly in the case of organisations without a public-facing venue.

Full report available from Craftspace.