

# Cultural Education Partnership Leadership and Operation

## Desirable qualities for successful CEP Leadership:

**Strategic awareness** and vision across the locality, and beyond – tied in to regional, national and international agendas.

**Diplomacy and listening skills** – being able to facilitate the different voices around the table.

**Good people skills** – CEPs are as much about people as they are about organisations and partnership. Participants need to feel integral to the team.

**Advocacy skills** – willingness to talk endlessly about the benefits of arts and culture for children and young people.

**Partnership leadership** – skills for leading a partnership, which are different from heroic leadership or leading an organisation.

**Dispersed leadership** – leadership approach which creates other leaders, with clarity of vision and focus from within or behind.

**Mobilising leadership** – leaders who go out and get other people involved, rather than those who want to do

things themselves. Key decisions may be made outside and/or above the CEP, so there is a need to influence the influencers.

**Growth mindset** – belief that things are possible and the disposition to make them happen.

**Taking risks and challenges** with appropriate mitigation strategies.

**Living your values** and ensuring you practise what you preach.

## CEP chairs

Not all CEPs have chairs, but in those that do, interviewees cited the following attributes as desirable:

- An influential, well-connected and proactive figure;
- Someone who is visionary, and really understands the power of arts and culture for children and young people;
- Someone who can be neutral in the CEP, perhaps someone from outside the arts and culture sector;
- Someone who is independent from the lead partner organisation (if there is one);
- A good, diplomatic decision-maker – democratic but decisive – and

good at identifying actions before, during, and after meetings;

- Good at chairing and curating meetings, including ensuring that they are not dominated by larger or more outspoken partner organisations.

## Decision-making and democracy

CEPs are diverse and often sensitive partnerships. Partners need to feel they are listened to. They are reliant on a potentially fragile currency of voluntary or in-kind contributions which need to be effective and mutually beneficial.

However, CEPs need to consider how open and democratic they are and strike a balance between democracy, accountability and practicality. In hindsight, some found they were too democratic. People (particularly from smaller organisations) will not engage if they don't feel they have a voice. Democracy and listening is often more important when collaboration is a key goal and many people of diverse mindsets have come together. Getting stuck into clarity and activity earlier, rather than later, will maintain energy. If the CEP is seen to be successful, more people will want to join.

“CEPs are diverse and often sensitive partnerships. Partners need to feel they are listened to... People will not engage if they don't feel they have a voice.”

---

## Dynamics of being a lead partner organisation

Two distinct lead partner roles have emerged across the South East CEP portfolio:

**Lead partners**, who tend to be fund-holder partners, often host the CEP leader amongst their staff and may provide CEP administration, co-ordination and management, including having staff supporting those roles. Most lead partners 'host' the CEP, oversee its work programme, supervise its contracting, lead its fundraising, and administer its meetings.

**Fund-holder partners**, who are the organisation that holds a funding contract with a funder, generally with partnership agreements with other CEP partners, but who may not actually lead the CEP.

In most cases, a lead partner emerges early on. They are sometimes identified through agreement with other early CEP partners and based on capacity to support the set-up of the CEP. Some lead partners are agreed on a temporary basis until a more suited partner is identified.

Technically, CEPs only tend to need a fund-holder partner when a grant application has to be submitted with a designated grantee organisation, or some other funding source requires a legal contract/guarantee.

In practice, all CEPs have chosen a lead partner early on, to establish and set-up the partnership. A CEP can potentially have more than one fund-holder partner (e.g. for different projects or grants) but generally only one lead partner.

A third role relates more to managing CEP activity:

**Project manager:** In some cases, particularly where the lead organisation is fund-holder, it may also manage the CEP's delivery projects.

## Do you need one lead partner?

In theory, a CEP could be led by multiple lead organisations. Brighton & Hove is probably the CEP that comes closest to this: they have a partnership board, overseeing the strategy for the CEP as a whole, and the bulk of the CEP's work is undertaken through thematic sub-groups. They have a fund-holder partner (Brighton Dome) but emphasise that the role is to hold the funds, rather than lead the CEP. Significantly, whilst the CEP has a central Business Plan, it establishes partnership agreements between partners on a needs-basis, when projects require it, rather than having a central Terms of Reference.

## Roles, responsibilities and risks of being a lead partner organisation

Characteristics of being a lead partner:

**Work load:** A risk to lead partner organisations is the amount of work the role entails which can be very significant. This can present an internal challenge, with leaders having to regularly convince their management of the value of supporting the CEP.

**Perception of dominance:** There is a risk that lead partners may be seen as too dominant by other partners. Lead partners need to be aware that other partners hold this perception, even if the lead partner feels that they're taking on the majority of the workload.

**Organisational fit:** As well as having the capacity to take on the role, it is important that the CEP leadership role fits the lead partner's agenda, otherwise it will likely impede their ability to support the role and/or cause internal challenges.

**Organisational benefits:** There are many benefits of being lead partner which are not always recognised.

“ Desirable qualities for successful CEP leadership: Growth mindset- belief that things are possible and the disposition to make them happen.

“ Democracy and listening is often more important when collaboration is a key goal and many people of diverse mindsets have come together.

Getting stuck into clarity and activity earlier, rather than later, will maintain energy. If the CEP is seen to be successful, more people will want to join.

---

## Administrating the CEP and servicing the CEP partnership

Interviewees emphasised how much administrative support is required for a CEP and how critically important it is that this is done well.

However great the commitment behind a CEP and the partners' belief in its aims, it will not thrive without support and servicing. In particular:

- CEP meetings require administration, venues, logistics, planning, leadership and write-up;
- Agreed actions need follow-up in between meetings;
- Needs analysis, focusing, communication, current & potential partner liaison, evaluation, strategy & planning, formalisation, resource-mapping, accounting, fundraising and other activities will all require time and effort;
- Delivery and mobilisation work require time, effort and management.

**Desirable qualities for successful CEP leadership: Mobilising leadership- leaders who go out and get other people involved, rather than those who want to do things themselves.**

### About this work

The content for this resource has been drawn from a longer developmental evaluation that was commissioned by Artsworld and undertaken by Ben Sandbrook/World Pencil in 2019 to identify what happens, and what works, in setting up and running a Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) in the South East. The research has been undertaken through data and written materials analysis, 26 semi-structured interviews with Artsworld and CEP representatives, and an online survey completed by 30 CEP representatives.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

**WorldPencil**