

## Collaborate project proposals

Compass Live Art <https://compassliveart.org.uk/>

### What do you want to explore and why?

Compass Live Art wants to explore what impact our model of co-creation has on the lives of community participants. Does the level of agency affect the level of impact?

Compass Live Art is an independent, innovative organisation that has grown a specific practice commissioning artists working in the public realm. Projects are many months, sometimes years, in the making and are co-created with local participants, mostly non arts attenders, whose occupations and lived experience make them experts in the issues being explored. For ten years we have produced the Compass Festival in Leeds – socially engaged, interactive live art in the public realm.

We are aware that co-creation is widely interpreted. The model we have developed is led by artists who collaborate with participants, creating a community of interest around each project.

Large studies such as Relative Values by People's Palace, The Gulbenkian Foundation's The Civic Role of Arts Organisations and the DCMS Taking Part Survey, have produced valuable broad socio-economic indicators drawing on a wide range of cultural activities, often with people who already engage in the arts

We want to focus specifically on live art, co-creation and individual local participants'/non-arts attenders' personal journeys.

Our varied projects invite different levels of engagement. We want to know if more engagement equals more impact and we've chosen 2 projects in the 2022 Festival to compare:

1. 'Citizens Advise' by Empathy Museum with participants from low socio-economic backgrounds engaging in deep conversations to build a collective citizens' knowledge for survival.
2. 'Satellite' by Toni Lewis who is convening a steering group of Black participants to curate and populate a touring installation, a safe space for People of Colour in Leeds.

Compass was established to make art, the creation of art and its benefits, accessible to people who may not normally experience it. Bringing artists and communities in direct and creative contact with each other to co-produce meaningful experiences.

This research will give voice to underrepresented groups, provide detailed narratives of personal journeys and tell us whether a greater level of engagement equates to greater personal impact.

We have anecdotal evidence of the impact of our work with communities - they enjoy participating and the care we take - but we have lacked capacity to investigate what degree of agency they experience in the artistic process and whether this has longer-term impact in their

lives. We'd like to plan with participants and artists what they want to get out of the work in relation to the 2022 festival, monitor their engagement, and be able to return to them afterwards to reflect and draw meaningful insights. We'd also like to return to participants from previous festivals to explore any long-term changes they may have experienced.

From this we would expect to gather a robust evidence-based understanding of the impact over time of the work we do. A chance to review in detail our current practice, learn how we may improve, share this learning with others, provide a framework to experiment with new approaches and move into our next phase of development with good evidence of our value, and a secure understanding of the impact we have on participants' lives.

Sharing our research findings among the wider sector: Live Art UK, Arts Council England, Co-Creating Change Network, the Social Art Network, Axisweb, Arts Professional and the Centre for Cultural Value would, we anticipate, contribute to better articulating the value of socially engaged co-created art in the public realm, which aims to reach more than the "unnecessarily narrow social, economic, ethnic and educated demographic that is not fully representative of the UK's population." (Warwick Commission 2015).

## **What are you looking for in an academic research partner?**

As ethical producers we are alert to the intersectional inequalities and power dynamics inherent in co-creation. We'd expect academic researchers to exhibit similar awareness and help us unpack these issues further.

We are looking for researchers sympathetic to qualitative research, able to engage with participants in a personable manner with skills to elicit information without interrogation, checklists and questionnaires. Meeting participants on their own ground. Speaking in simple language. Considering social events and dinners, for example, as a means of learning what participants think. (We appreciate researchers may not always be physically present, but they can support Compass staff in these sympathetic enquiries).

We would anticipate researchers will:

- Have some knowledge of socially engaged practice and strategies for art creation that go beyond the theatre and the gallery – i.e. live art.
- Have knowledge of a range of approaches to co-creation as practised around the country and abroad.
- Share our ethical standards, approaching participants as collaborators, not subjects of a study.
- Be alert to the intersectional inequalities experienced by our participants and artists and audiences.
- Be open to agreeing a framework for the power dynamic between Compass and themselves. To approach the research as a collaborative effort which marries the practical expertise Compass has with the academic experience they bring.

# **CENTRE** FOR **CULTURAL VALUE**

We would anticipate the researchers' role would be to bring their academic rigour and expert knowledge to help us:

- Scope out the research question/s
- Agree the methodology – what data we need and how to gather it
- Support Compass in data gathering
- Analyse and present the findings
- Make recommendations for developing our practice
- Produce a final evaluation report