

## **Collaborate project proposals**

**Something To Aim For (STAF)** <https://www.somethingtoaimfor.com/>

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

Within the larger theme of hybrid cultural engagement, we want to explore human interaction with culture in the digital space, specifically for groups currently underrepresented in the cultural sector as audiences and participants, including people with physical disabilities; mental distress; and neurological conditions.

We want to relate this question to interaction on and with our own newly-developed digital platform, STAF Live. We want to think in a structured way about the communities we want to reach; how they engage with the content we produce remotely; and what a successful user experience looks and feels like.

Since Spring 2020, Something To Aim For (STAF) has been working to reach and sustain artists and communities with lived experience of inequality, disadvantage, and discrimination. Part of this response has centred on developing the STAF Live platform, which brings artists, audiences and communities together in an inclusive online space.

Within a wide-ranging and often noisy conversation about the future of digital and hybrid cultural production, we've identified limited research that is truly user-centred and focuses on human interaction in hybrid cultural spaces, including the digital space, as experienced by groups who face intersecting barriers to 'traditional'/ venue-centred cultural engagement.

In developing our own hybrid model, we want to better understand the specific barriers, from physical to sensory to psychological, that STAF's target communities currently face in engaging with culture in a digital context. Particularly when a cultural experience in the digital space has a simultaneous 'live' manifestation. We want assumptions about good practice and perceived barriers tested and challenged through the rigour of focused research. We also want to produce research outputs which can be disseminated with authority throughout the cultural sector, via our own highly developed networks, to positively influence inclusive, user-centred practice in digital and hybrid engagement.

The STAF Live platform is a key part of STAF's long-term transition to a hybrid production and engagement model. Hybrid, to us, encompasses the online space; live performance, and streaming/ screening which reaches those for whom traditional cultural spaces are inaccessible/ uncomfortable (for example, through community-based screenings) .

As far as possible, we want the quality of cultural experience for those engaging with our work to be experienced equally across all formats. It's crucial to our commitment to being a radically inclusive organisation, reaching and platforming those underrepresented and often marginalised within the cultural sector. Within the scope of this research, we want to improve our understanding of the user experience and interaction with STAF's cultural offering in the

online space, and developing a set of practical actions and design considerations we can explore to enhance this. This is a highly complex area, and relatively new to us.

As the course of the pandemic has shifted, there's uncertainty around the future of digital cultural programming, and hybrid forms of cultural engagement. As recent Theatre Access survey findings indicate, simply maintaining an 'online option' for culture, without further considerations around interaction/ relation to the 'live' space, is an ineffective approach to creating parity of value.

STAF's own experience and consultation suggests that maintaining hybrid options for cultural engagement, including remote-access, is incredibly important to those who face a variety of barriers to deriving value from culture which is platformed in solely live settings. We want focused and rigorous research to sharpen what is often anecdotal evidence into a robust case for best practice. We see a lack of research (confirmed by those working in similar fields) that's deeply informed by these perspectives, going beyond 'access' to consider experience, impact, and perception of value. This is what we want the project to address.

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

We are ideally looking for an academic research partner with expertise in Human Computer Interaction, human behaviour and if possible, psychological/sociological theories of the nature of human communication, with an interest in the effects of technology on communication patterns between individuals and groups.

We would like to work with a researcher who has prior experience of undertaking research with diverse groups of people and understands participatory design principles and practice, and public engagement. An interest in the creative sector and its interactions with social justice and public health is desirable.

We want to work with this partner to analyse the different patterns of interaction on the STAF Live platform, which includes a variety of spaces and mechanisms for engagement, participation and conversation, alongside the feedback we receive from people who are accessing the platform.

We want to do more analysis on the psychological spatial experiences of the STAF Live platform, and how these are encountered differently by, for example, a person with a visual impairment; a person with a neurological condition such as epilepsy; and a person living with mental distress.

We would also want our partner to participate in one or more events on the STAF Live platform, as opportunities to test certain concepts from the developing research.