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empowering artists and writers

# Getting Started With Commissioning:

A Toolkit for Arts & Culture  
Organisations in the South East



**More and more Local Authorities and health funders are shifting from traditional grants to tendering and commissioning. As competition for arts funding increases – and statutory arts funding is cut – your organisation needs to get ‘commissioning ready.’**

# Summary - The Short Answer

## ➔ What Is Commissioning?

Commissioning (also called tendering) is different than traditional grants funding. Rather than offering grants around a range of themes or priorities, funding bodies are:

- Choosing specific services they want voluntary sector bodies to provide
- Setting specific outcomes & outputs they expect will be achieved
- Paying close attention to value for money via unit costs

## ➔ Find Your Local Commissioners

**Do:** Try and meet local commissioners & sign up for relevant e-mail alerts for opportunities

**Don't:** Cast your net too widely by looking too far afield geographically or services beyond your area of expertise

## ➔ Align With Relevant Strategies

**Do:** Review relevant strategies to help show how your work directly relates to commissioners' priorities

**Don't:** Overly stretch the definition of your remit to fit a priority...or change your work to fit priorities unless it is fully in line with your beneficiaries' needs and organisational development plans

## ➔ Find Supporting Evidence

**Do:** Focus in on statistically significant data which directly relates to your beneficiaries and services

**Don't:** Hoover up huge amounts of information which doesn't directly correlate to what you do and who you do it for

## ➔ Evidence Your Impact

**Do:** Establish strong, concrete evidence of the impact of your work on your audiences/areas/beneficiaries

**Don't:** Stretch credulity by trying to prove inconclusive impact. Stick to a few concrete, causal outcomes rather than too many that overreach.

## ➔ Show Value For Money

**Do:** Put some background work in to show the economic value of what you do

**Don't:** Overstate your value or make unprovable claims

## ➔ Partner Up

**Do:** Make links with relevant partners

**Don't:** Get into unequal partnerships where you're getting crumbs from the table...or with partners who can't carry their weight.

## ➔ Keep An Eye Out

**Do:** Keep up to date with commissioning opportunities

**Don't:** Miss the deadline—it might be three years before you get another chance!

# ➔ What Is Commissioning?

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While the [Social Value Act](#) requires commissioners to consider the wider social, economic and/or environmental benefits of proposals, the highest outputs for the lowest unit costs remains a prevalent consideration.

Commissioning is just as competitive as grants funding—and sometimes more so when large national charities and even private companies are bidding. It's definitely worth doing some background work to get ready for when a good opportunity arises.

This is especially true because commissioning bids are longer, more complicated and more technical than grants applications, and often have a very short turnaround time from opportunities being published to the closing date.

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Successful commissioning usually happens when organisations already have a relationship with the commissioners. You might have met them at a 'Meet the Commissioner' event, you might have invited them to a preview or arranged a meeting. Like all successful income streams, commissioning relies on strong relationships and trust. Meeting the commissioners will give you a chance to talk about how your projects meet their priorities, the impact of your services and convince them of your financial sustainability.

A lot of formal commissioning now takes place through separate web portals—it's important to set up an account in advance as you can:

- Create an organisation profile—which will save time later
- Choose the geographic areas and services you're interested in—there are loads of opportunities, be judicious or you'll be overwhelmed with alerts
  - Get e-mail alerts when tenders are published

[South East Portal](#)

[South East Business Portal](#)

[London Portal](#)

[East Sussex County Council - Commissioning & Procurement](#)

[West Sussex County Council - Commissioning & Procurement](#)

[NCVO Procurement & Contracting](#)

You can also use this [NAVCA guide to finding your commissioner](#).

## ➔ Local Authorities

Local Authority commissioning will appear on individual Borough/Council websites:

- [East Sussex County Council](#)
- [West Sussex County Council](#)
- [Brighton & Hove County Council](#)

Use these links to search for the latest 'Commissioning Grants Prospectus' which outline what commissioners are looking for, Meet the Commissioner events and details of commissioners.

## ➔ Health & Social Care

Public Health Commissioners are involved with the following:

- Local Authorities - contributing part of their commissioning budgets to local authority commissioning around health/wellbeing projects
- Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)
- Health & Wellbeing Boards

See also this guide to [who's who in your region](#). Also, the [Aesop Marketplace](#) aims to match health decision-makers with relevant arts in health programmes.

## ➔ CCGs

There are seven CCGs in Sussex, and each of these holds public meetings where you can meet commissioners:

- [Brighton and Hove CCG & Procurement](#)
- [Coastal West Sussex CCG](#) (covering Adur, Bognor Regis, Chichester, Arun, Cissbury, Worthing & Chanctonbury) & [Procurement](#)
- [Crawley CCG & Procurement](#)
- [Eastbourne, Hailsham & Seaford CCG & Procurement](#)

- [Hastings & Rother CCG & Procurement](#)
- [High Weald & Lewes-Havens CCGs & Procurement](#)
- [Horsham & Mid Sussex CCG & Procurement](#)

See the [CCG boundaries map](#) for the areas the CCGs cover and this [NHS Commissioning Guide](#).

## ➔ Health & Wellbeing Boards

These are strategic bodies with open, public meetings to lead on coordinating commissioning across the NHS, social care and public health services.

- [West Sussex](#)
- [East Sussex](#)
- [Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Board](#)

There continues to be some progress around social prescribing—[see here for an overview](#). Personal Health Budgets are also increasingly being used for services from the charity sector—there are two emerging support networks from [National Voices](#) and [Voluntary Voices](#).

## ➔ Local Enterprise Partnerships

LEPs are partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They sometimes have commissioning opportunities or projects voluntary and cultural sector organisations can get involved in, though they cover large areas and their focus is on economic growth and job creation.

- [Find your nearest LEP](#)
- [Coast 2 Capital](#) - covering Brighton & Hove, West Sussex, Croydon & Gatwick areas
- [Solent LEP](#) - covering Portsmouth, Southampton & the Isle of Wight
- [Enterprise M3](#) - covering Hampshire & Surrey

## ➔ Other Commissioners

Commissions for arts activities can be secured via a wide range of sources including:

- Housing Associations
- Recovery Colleges
- Rehabilitation Centres/Projects
- Service user support groups
- Day Centres
- Bail Hostels
- Libraries
- Churches
- Universities
- Arts Centres
- Museums & Art Galleries

Creative Future have run arts activities with all of the above. If you're interested in finding out more about commissioning from the above organisations get in touch with us.



## ➔ Align With Relevant Strategies

**Do:** Review relevant strategies to help show how your work directly relates to commissioners' priorities

**Don't:** Overly stretch the definition of your remit to fit a priority...or change your work to fit priorities unless it is fully in line with your beneficiaries' needs and organisational development plans

All commissioners expect you to clearly demonstrate how your proposal will help them to accomplish their strategic aims and objectives. It's worth collecting these and highlighting those most relevant to your work in advance.

### ➔ Local Authorities

Every local authority publishes a range of strategies on their aims and priorities, whether directly on arts & culture, health & wellbeing, tourism, public spaces and so on. It's worth researching those most relevant to your work and highlighting the specific goals relevant to your work.

[West Sussex - Strategies](#)

[East Sussex - Strategies](#)

[Brighton & Hove - Arts & Culture](#)

[East Sussex Strategic Partnership - Pride of Place](#)

ESSP - [Culture, Sport & Leisure](#) & [thematic partnerships/partners](#)

[East Sussex Arts Partnership](#) (& East Sussex Cultural Strategy)

[East Sussex Adult Learning & Skills Partnership Board](#)

[Brighton & Hove 'Connected City'](#) - contains links to information, data & intelligence used to inform Brighton and Hove Council plans and strategies including:

- Reports
- Surveys
- Needs Assessments (JSNA)
- Performance

### ➔ Health

Public health commissioners outline their strategies, objectives and targets in the following documents:

- The NHS as a whole is moving towards wide-ranging [Sustainability & Transformation Plans \(STP\)](#) which will drive future spending
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) - Invaluable wealth of data and information on health inequalities and health & social care aims. [West Sussex](#) / [East Sussex](#)
- CCGs 5 year plans - see the CCG links above
- Health & Wellbeing Strategies - see the Health & Wellbeing Boards links above. Local authorities also produce their own health & wellbeing strategies.

Local authorities and health bodies also sometimes put out a call for evidence to inform their JSNAs and local plans—submitting a good case study is a great way to get yourself on their radar and even influence future decision making on how they allocate funding.

In addition to referencing their strategies & aims, make sure you also use their language—Museums & Wellbeing Alliance has produced a great [glossary of health terms](#).

# ➔ Evidence Your Impact

**Do:** Establish strong, concrete evidence of the impact of your work on your audiences/areas/beneficiaries

**Don't:** Stretch credulity by trying to prove inconclusive impact. Stick to a few concrete, causal outcomes rather than too many that overreach.

Very little commissioning is strictly for arts & culture; most has social care/preventative aims to improve health/wellbeing, educational attainment, skills & employment, etc. Therefore you'll need to show clearly and concretely how your work impacts on the key aims you've found in the relevant strategies.

Ideally, if you can, get an external independent evaluator to evidence the impact of your services as this holds more weight. Ideally you should aim for [NESTA's Level 5 of evidence](#). If you can't afford an evaluator, try getting a MA or BA student to make evaluating your organisation part of their coursework or dissertation. The following contacts may be able to help with this:

- [Community University Partnership Programme \(CUPP\)](#) aims to create sustainable partnerships that provide an enduring benefit to local communities and links students up with local organisations
- [Brighton University](#)
- [University of Sussex](#)
- [University of Chichester](#)

It may also be worth looking at a relevant externally accredited [quality standard](#).

See also:

[King's College Cultural Institute](#)

[Guardian Voluntary Sector Network](#) - summary of measuring impact & tools

[Social Value UK](#)

[Inspiring Impact - Measuring Up](#)

[NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit - Impact](#)

[Institute of Cultural Capital](#)

[Social Value Hub](#)



# ➔ Find Supporting Evidence

**Do:** Focus in on statistically significant data which directly relates to your beneficiaries and services

**Don't:** Hoover up huge amounts of information which doesn't directly correlate to what you do and who you do it for

Like all funders, commissioners are interested in knowing how you'll make a difference—and what external evidence you have your approach will do so. Being able to show specific data and statistics of the problems you'll address shows you have a clear and concrete grasp of the issues. It's also crucial to show your approach has been externally validated through data, research and in other areas. This is especially important as arts & culture is often seen as only producing 'soft' or inessential outcomes for people.

There's an increasing amount of evidence of the benefits of the arts on health, mental health, well-being and other important indicators for commissioners. A selection of places to look for specific evidence to back up your case to start with are:

- [National Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing](#)
- [Arts, Health & Wellbeing Research](#)
- An excellent [commissioners' briefing](#) released by MIND on why 'life support' is vital - and is as important as any more obvious frontline service
- [Createquity](#) - summary of evidence on how the arts improves lives
- [What Works Wellbeing](#)
- [Artswork Alliance Knowledge Bank](#)
- [Culture Case](#)
- [Royal Society for Public Health](#)
- [Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts & Health](#)
- [MMU Arts for Health Research](#)
- [Arts & Health South West](#)

You'll also need to find evidence around the need you're aiming to address—i.e. if you're making the case that your arts work improves people's mental health, you'll want to show how mental health is of particular concern in your area or target group.

- [East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs & Assets Assessment](#) - regularly updated so subscribe to their monthly [email alert](#)
- [West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs & Assets Assessment](#)
- [Public Health England & PHE South East](#)
- Local authorities also publish their own reports & analyses—such as [this one for Brighton & Hove](#) or [this page for Brighton & Hove](#) on health
- For other kinds of data related to the places & people you work with (including Census and Index of Multiple Deprivation statistics), see the [ONS' Neighbourhood Statistics](#).

Some of the larger charities (e.g. MIND, Age UK) produce excellent reports which can also add well to your evidence base—such as [this one mapping high-risk areas for loneliness in older people](#).

# ➔ Show Value For Money

**Do:** Put some background work in to show the economic value of what you do

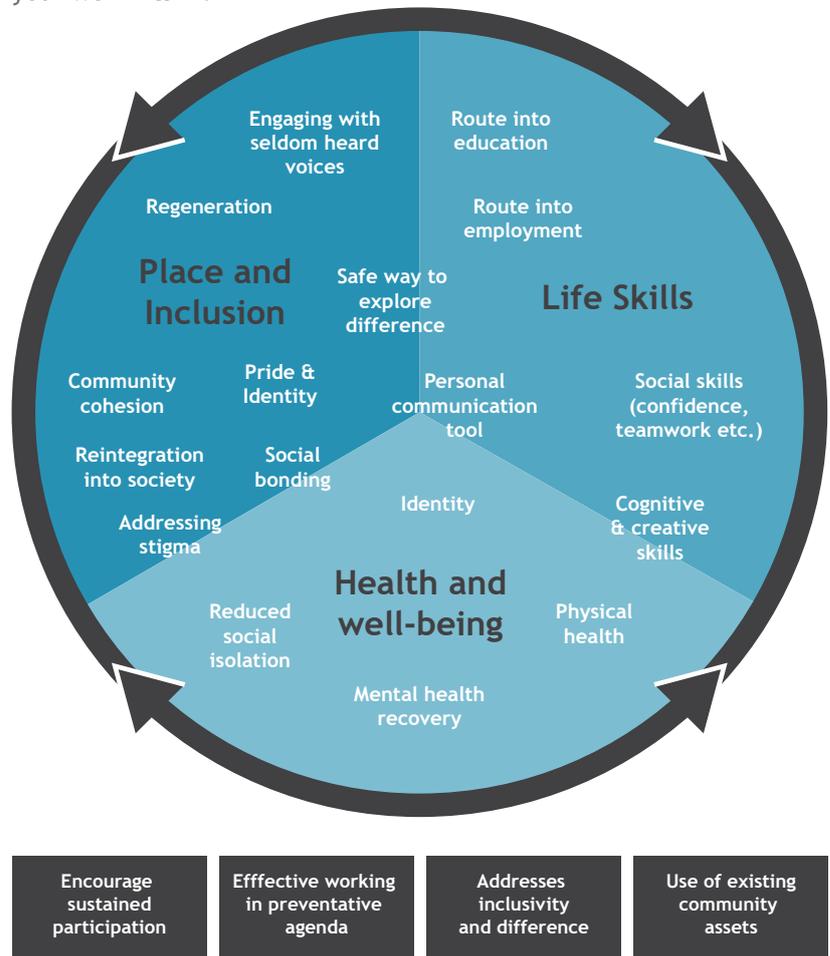
**Don't:** Overstate your value or make unprovable claims

Due to their ever-more stringent budgets, commissioners are always looking at the bottom line—how they can make every penny count. For cultural organisations, showing the economic value of what you do may be a new area to develop.

There are a range of tools and established methods to work this out:

- [Social Return on Investment](#) - measures the social, environmental and economic impact of your work. It's often a big and complex task to calculate, requiring at least a [training session](#) and potentially help from an external consultant.
- The [Social Value Portal](#) has a range of great resources - see also [this guide](#)

This diagram from the Cultural Commissioning Programme is helpful in thinking about how your work fits in:



Value delivered by arts, museums, libraries (NPC)

You can also work through an Internal Analysis Organisational Scorecard - to identify strengths and weaknesses of your organisations and work out what you need to do to be 'commissioning ready'.

Making some basic calculations need not be a huge undertaking. At Creative Future, for example, we use the Personal Social Services Research Unit's [Unit Costs of Health & Social Care](#) to determine the cost savings to the NHS vs. the cost of the services we supply.

Dimension	Rate 1-5 (Low-High)	Evidence/ Actions Needed
Understanding of local need		
Articulation of your market offer (e.g. where you fit in the sector/ commissioning landscape)		
Application of developmental model (e.g. organizational strategy, Theory of Change)		
Clearly defined organisational outcomes		
Use of research & evidence tools		
Internal capacity & skills		
Communication to stakeholders		
Clear financial story		



## Partner Up

**Do:** Make links with relevant partners

**Don't:** Get into unequal partnerships where you're getting crumbs from the table...or with partners who can't carry their weight.

As an arts organisation you've been working in partnerships for years, it's the only way to get things done on a tight budget, right? So now use the partnerships to approach commissioners together—that way you create a stronger 'ask' and commissioners will have more faith that you will be able to deliver.

Many commissioning opportunities (particularly those from Local Authorities) require organisations bid in partnership. Even when partners aren't required, there's definite advantages to partnering up to deliver a bigger, stronger project.

For both Local Authority and health & social care commissioning, it's well worth partnering with local organisations who can help you reach your target audience, particularly if you have a health/well-being outcome in mind. Having a relevant service provider on board can help further convince commissioners your project will reach people in need and

have a strong impact.

Partnership building takes time, and looking for the right partners in the middle of a short commissioning turnaround isn't going to give you enough time to plan properly. It's worth exploring potential links in advance.

Partnership project management also takes time and resources. It's fairly standard for the lead partner—who will be responsible for the contract, reporting and finance, as well as coordinating the partnership—to get a project management fee of 5-10% of the contract or an appropriate financial amount.

# ➔ Keep An Eye Out

**Do:** Keep up to date with commissioning opportunities

**Don't:** Miss the deadline—it might be three years before you get another chance!

As mentioned previously, the turnaround time between tenders being advertised and the deadline are often woefully short. Similarly, a good deal of commissioning will be for 2-3 years, meaning if you miss out, it will be a long time before there's another opportunity.

It's therefore crucial to keep a close eye out—sign up for alerts from commissioning portals, CCGs and funding newsletters like those available for [East](#) and [West Sussex](#).

At the same time, the [difficulties charities face in commissioning is increasingly acknowledged](#), with [DCMS pledging at the end of 2016](#) to develop a Public Service Incubator to help charities get commissioned, and develop a best practice commissioning kitemark.

## ➔ Next Steps

This is just a short overview to get you started. Below are some excellent selected resources to take you forward:

[Arts & Cultural Commissioning Toolkit](#)

[Cultural Commissioning presentation](#)

[NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit - Cultural Commissioning](#)

[NCVO Cultural Commissioning Resources](#)

[NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit - Commissioning & Procurement](#)

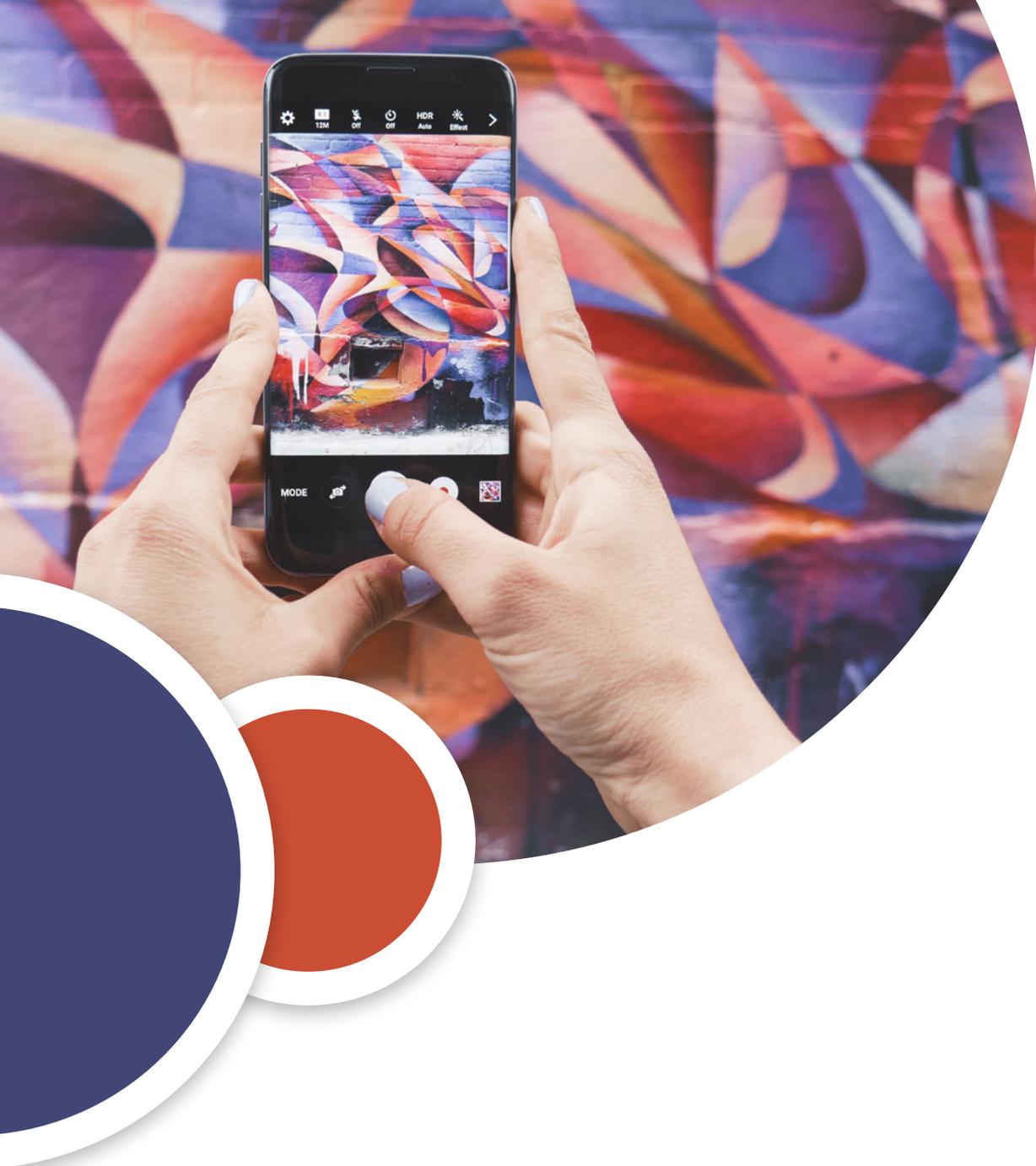
[National Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing - Commissioning](#)

[Understanding commissioning: A practical guide for the culture and sport sector](#)

[Engaging with Health & Wellbeing Boards \(pdf\)](#)

[Engaging with Clinical Commissioning Groups \(pdf\)](#)

[Engaging with LEPs \(pdf\)](#)



If you find this tool kit useful, or you discover further information that should be included please email [info@creativefuture.org.uk](mailto:info@creativefuture.org.uk). We'd love to have your feedback.

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