

nesa evaluative consultancy

Final Report

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<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page Number</u>
1. Introduction	3
2. The Evaluative Consultancy contract aims and how they were met	3
3. Methods of Evaluative Consultancy	4
4. Success Criteria for the entire project of Creative Change:	5
5. Creative Change – what creative changes have taken place?	5
7. Recommendations	10
8. Conclusion	12

1. Introduction

Karen Smith was contracted as an independent 'evaluative consultant' for **nesa**'s Creative Change Programme between February and July 2007 for a total of 10 days work.

Following a huge period of change for **nesa** it was agreed that the most productive and useful way forward was to develop a series of facilitated 'conversations' and visioning half days. These days aimed to assist **nesa** in developing appropriate and creative strategies for approaching the final parts of Creative Change, and for future project planning and evaluation. In addition, there has been ongoing support, research and discussion attached to this programme, and a formal recording and reporting process following every session at **nesa**.

A big thank you to everyone at **nesa** who has taken part in these sessions. I have really enjoyed the challenge and creative working that has taken place.

There are attachments accompanying this report detailing the half day sessions at **nesa**.

This report does not seek to address or evaluate artistic product or quality of artistic product in the Creative Change process. Specific evaluative aims as they relate to Creative Change will be addressed by the staff team's full Creative Change report due at the end of August 2007.

2. The Evaluative Consultancy contract aims and how they were met:

Aims	Met?
Assist nesa in the regular review of the programmes development and the development of plans and procedures that ensure the project is integrated with local priorities and partnerships.	Facilitated discussion regarding partnership approaches. Discussion on future projects, future strengths, project planning and strategy. Ongoing emailing of relevant information for debate and strategy development.
Help nesa to monitor the effectiveness of the nesa model in the development of the project.	Ongoing discussion, reflection, planning and design regarding method and methodology, and approaches to feedback.
Monitor the effectiveness of individual project evaluation plans.	Review of existing evaluation methods and methodology. Capturing 'evidence' – looking at the differences between qualitative and quantitative information gathering. Presentation and discussion of other methods, active change of some

	project evaluation plans, new models to be put in place.
Support us to consider the quality, effectiveness and impact of this programme.	As above. Reflection, discussion and visioning sessions regarding individual skills, nesa strengths and future planning.
Help us to promote the work.	Discussing ways to present evidence clearly, concisely and robustly whilst retaining creativity and ability to unearth and narrate stories delicately and with integrity. Thinking around profile raising with integrity and quality. Discussion and some work around writing and editing writing for publication, identifying relevant areas for publication.
Write a report that provides some key recommendations for nesa 's future development.	This Report. Plus write up 'reports' of each session as they have taken place.

3. Methods of Evaluative Consultancy

The introduction outlines the process for the 'evaluative consultancy'. There have been nine half day sessions at **nesa** facilitated by the consultant.

Each half day had a prepared and facilitated core aim, with agendas discussed beforehand and sent out to all participants in advance. Full write ups of these sessions have been provided to **nesa** within a week of the session taking place, and are attached again here as appendices. This report is signposts to those write ups, and **section 6** (page 7) of this report, gives a summary of the sessions.

The 6 February, 15 March, 26 April, 19 June and 17 July morning sessions were designed and delivered specifically for three core members of **nesa**'s staff working together on Creative Change, Creative Change itself spans both Neighbourhood Arts, and Arts & Health: Lesley Featherstone, Director; Karen MacDonald, Neighbourhood Arts and Arts & Health; Philippa Forsey, Arts & Health.

The 3 April session was designed for and attended by all **nesa** staff.
15 March afternoon session was for Karen MacDonald only.
3 April afternoon session was for Philippa Forsey only.
26 April afternoon session was for Lesley Featherstone only.

In addition to the half day sessions, ongoing throughout this process has been information suggested from the consultant which has included the following:

Emailed documents, written documents, photocopied documents, books, other evaluation reports, and other points of reference that have referred to a wider picture approach to **nesa**'s development. For example:

- Documents on practice and evaluative practice, academic and non-academic.
- Documents on evaluation regarding qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- NALGAO conference information from Friday 9 March 07 on the participation agenda.
- Arts and health evaluation documents and related useful websites, organisations and information.
- Public art documents and conference information, email links to Public Art South West website.
- Writing and rewriting documents information.

4. **Success Criteria for the entire project of Creative Change:**

As noted in the introduction, the success criteria for the entire project will be evidenced by **nesa**'s report due at the end of August 2007. However, this evaluation would seek to note the following successes:

Organisational Development

- Creative Change has enabled creative momentum for **nesa**, in terms of time taken to reflect, plan, and consider simpler dynamic and creative methods as a team utilising existing skills, knowledge and strengths. It has also led to identification of gaps and prioritisation of how to address weaknesses.
- **nesa** has built foundations to raise profile and reputation to continue to develop and deliver high quality creative community development.

Artists

- Some planning and discussion has taken place regarding artists' professional development and has marked the beginning of a new phase for **nesa** where there is great potential for creative relationships and critical discourse with a wider pool of artists.

5. **Creative Change – what creative changes have taken place?**

“Evolve: to unroll; to disclose; to develop; to give off (heat etc); to unravel. To change gradually, to result, to become apparent gradually....”

Chambers Dictionary 10th Edition, 2006.

5.1 **Evolution**

It is felt strongly that resources from Creative Change have allowed **nesa** to evolve. The following is a brief analysis of what it has allowed **nesa** to do, and where some of the successes are in terms of the evaluative consultancy work. It should be noted that **nesa** has displayed good practice in much existing work practice, and staff are committed, passionate and skilled.

During the brief time of this consultancy the dynamism and integrity of staff members has been impressive. Creative Change is doing exactly what it says. As an umbrella for a series of projects, it is has allowed within the framework, for **nesa** to unpick some of the existing ways of working, and generate the time and space to think about new ways of working, which build on the experience and history, but do not get bogged down in outdated or cumbersome models of working.

This generation of new ways of working has taken some time, and will take further time.

As the dictionary definition of evolve states above, evolve also means cumulative change, a gradual working out or development, the act of unrolling or unfolding, a series of things following in sequence (and orderly movements, e.g. of a flock of birds). **nesa** is still disclosing and unravelling (and rebuilding) practices, and the processes become apparent gradually and longitudinally. Within all this, the staff have maintained a sense of method and approach, and a realistic solid framework with which to move forward. A huge amount of participatory art work has continued to be created, managed and evaluated.

Creative Change has produced what could be considered 'real arts development' with all the 'real' things that take place within times of change, including staff leaving and changing, and continuity of processes being broken because of circumstances beyond any one person's control. Despite this, **nesa** has continued to think positively towards the future, and has approached the projects which make up Creative Change with a considered commitment to artists, participants and other stakeholders.

nesa's approach to all this change, both planned and unplanned, has been creative, and has a real potential for the future, showing solid integrity and ability to addresses challenges for the way forward. This is a legacy in itself for Creative Change, and the issues of artistic project legacy and sustainability are being considered and discussed in a positive and committed manner. The company has in keeping with Creative Change, changed 'exit strategy' to 'legacy' in writing regarding the process.

5.2 Creative Change has built internal community.

This is an external evaluation report on **nesa's** internal processes, and as noted above, does not make any evaluation of artistic quality or proving community building. It has been very clear however, that Creative Change has built community internally within **nesa's** staff team.

Some of the resources for this external 'evaluative consultancy' created the opportunity for a staff session at nesa where team building and shared working took place. Plans for a culminating celebratory event will continue to build networking. Creative Change has created potential for future community building across a community of artists, and further networking across partners and agencies.

5.3 Evaluation techniques and developments

As a precursor to the recommendations below, **nesa** demonstrates great strength in depth of thinking and action on evaluation.

Staff are not averse to considering different evaluation methodologies, and have made various changes to evaluation forms, and considered diverse techniques for participation throughout the consultancy. We have considered issues around confidence, validity, naming and using unorthodox evaluation strategies as well as more orthodox methods. Discussion around analysis and feedback and issues of process, product, qualitative, quantitative and medical models (particularly relevant to the arts and health field which **nesa** engages in) will continue, and much progress has been made.

Various changes have already been made to existing methods, for example: **nesa's** existing project outline template, has been simplified to a project proposal.

5.4 nesa team

The company is building strength in the consideration, thought and energy given over to team work and to utilising existing skills and experience in the team most effectively. The relatively recent appointment of **nesa's** new Director has also firmly marked an opportunity to change and consider new team members, in addition to rethinking the needs, skills and experience of existing staff.

5.5 nesa future and profile

nesa has much potential as an organisation which can develop expertise, presence and profile in the participatory arts field as a whole, and in addition, in specific areas of the participatory arts field. For example in:

- arts and health practice, and associated artists' professional development.
- participatory artists networking, forum, debate and ideas seed beds

nesa's profile has already been enhanced significantly:

- A promotional plan is in development.
- Presentations and workshop sessions run by **nesa** took place at an Arts and Health South West event.
- Karen McDonald delivered a double-page article in Mailout the national participatory arts magazine on a Creative Change project: Transformations.
- Philippa Forsey is looking at profiling **nesa** via national arts and health publications, and Lesley Featherstone will, time allowing, write an article for a-n, or similar publication.

5.6 Other spin offs

Creative Change has enabled **nesa** to view and discuss a number of other collaborations which may or may not take shape in the near future, for example, working with Higher Education to develop an evidence base for **nesa**'s work. Another strong spin off has been an ongoing reflection and development of the way in which **nesa** approaches creative community development. Cohesive programme working could lead to the potential development of an arts and health partnership for B&NES and how that links into the Arts & Health strategy. **nesa** could potentially lead on this for B&NES.

6. Outline of half days

This section gives an overview of the key areas discussed at each half day session at **nesa**. Further detail can be found in the accompanying attachments.

6 February 2007 morning

Initial discussion to agree the way forward for the consultancy.

15 March 2007 morning

Key areas:

- Project Evaluation plans and developing more comprehensive project planning techniques which embed evaluation rather than tack it on at the end stages.
- Participant and artist ownership and involvement in project set up and evaluation, and practical and theoretical methods and methodologies.
- Building up a range of qualitative research techniques.
- Discussion around *What is Evaluation for?* (paper prepared in advance).

15 March 2007 afternoon. Individual session.

Key areas:

- Mapping individual project planning and evaluation.
- Using and asking for data wisely, hard evidence vs fun, using gut instinct and experience.
- Balancing needs and perspectives of different stakeholders.
- Artists and residents.
- Writing and publication.

3 April 2007 morning: all staff

A facilitated, all staff session (with 8 members of staff). Evaluation of this session is attached with the write up.

Key aims:

- To discuss monitoring and evaluation at nesa
- To work as a team and look at evaluation strengths and skills
- To look at evaluation with an eye on the future **at nesa**

Main areas we covered were:

- What is evaluation for? Exercise and Discussion

- Gaining feedback. A quick exploration of methodologies for capturing evidence.
- What's in your tool bag?
- Individual SWOT analysis with particular reference to the setting up of projects and evaluation. Thinking about playing to strengths.
- Priorities / Action / Decisions

3 April 2007 afternoon. Individual session.

Key areas:

- Time planning, management, prioritisation and resources.
- Artists' evaluation and bespoke and effective methods.
- Redesigning particular evaluation forms.
- Writing and publication.

26 April 2007 morning

Key areas:

Creative Change specific session looking at key challenges, timescales, overviews, scripting, editing, and meeting all stakeholders' requirements. Form design, collation and analysis of material and writing for publication were again discussed.

26 April 2007 afternoon. Individual session.

Key areas:

- Situation, profile and relationships, **nesa's** work in relation to ongoing product and core projects.
- Vision, resources, culture, stakeholders.
- People, positions, power.
- Perceptions.

19 June 2007

Key areas:

- Reflection session with practical outcomes, and action chart for the next two months.
- Time management using learning outcome model.
- Explored learning and summaries of previous half day sessions.
- Verbal and spatial techniques to explore where Creative Change is now, where it has come from, and what the future looks like to inform the evaluation and future planning process, and individual professional development.
- Writing for a publication. Top tips for writing and rewriting had been emailed previously.

17 July 2007

Key areas:

- Presentation, consideration and finalisation of this evaluation report.
- General evaluation on the process.
- Discuss any further issues arising.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Evaluation forms

nesa has developed a wealth of forms and processes over a long period of time. A plethora of evaluation forms are used by staff in different ways, utilising different techniques. Staff are aware of this issue, and have made varying attempts to change the situation. It has, however led to ad hoc methods and discontinuity of good techniques and lack of retention or sharing of good practices and skills which already exist. There is room for more flexible and creative methods of gathering information, and a simplified written set of processes which the whole team can engage in. **nesa** are well aware of this situation, and through the process of this consultancy the following has already happened:

Philippa Forsey and the consultant rewrote **nesa**'s artists' evaluation form, and made other changes to how information is collated. Lesley Featherstone and Karen McDonald have also made changes to various 'stock' **nesa** forms.

Forms that have not already been revised or rewritten also need reviewing, simplifying and rewriting where necessary. The body of this new information or changes needs formalising and needs to be profiled for use amongst all staff as soon as possible. Plans are already in place.

7.2 Evaluation of artists, and working with artists

Evaluation of artists could be more support-based, for example, using a simplified and organisation-wide policy as discussed above. More evidence from artists themselves could be gained to feed into current practice. **nesa** has an action plan in development to support **nesa**'s unique offer to artists, (for example, further [art|speak](#) events).

Artists' own skills and experience in gaining feedback could be further utilised, for example, their own methods for evaluation, and it is possible that artists could be used more creatively in an evaluation process.

nesa have also developed a partnership with Bath Spa University who are looking to develop a postgraduate modular course in working in community settings. This will support the future development of participatory artists in the region.

7.3 Evaluation in General

nesa have been through an explorational process for their evaluation techniques which has been ongoing throughout the Creative Change process. Social and Medical practice models have been explored, and **nesa** has come to believe that their qualitative techniques were already most appropriate and of good quality, the medical practice model is not necessarily appropriate for **nesa** at this time.

It is recommended that **nesa** use less evaluation questionnaires and more discussion and creative methods to glean feedback particularly from artists and participants who are worked with on a long-term basis.

Where questionnaires are used, it is recommended that these are checked and re-checked thoroughly before being sent out or used, and that they are kept to one side of A4 where possible, and always use a direct, robust and simple method of asking questions.

7.4 Time Management

Time planning and prioritising appears to be weak at **nesa** although this could also indicate a number of other issues for example:

- A sheer impractical volume of work on a daily basis, and a need to pace expectation.
- Part-time and flexible working not used as effectively as it could be.
- Lack of relationship of (theoretical) staff contract to actual (practical) prioritisation of work on the ground.

Playing to the strengths of the staff team, and utilising administrative and marketing staff resources more fully in evaluation could support more effective time management. It is acknowledged that this already happens to an extent, but a further momentum in this area could develop positive results. **nesa** has recognised that these issues relate to staff development and communication and are developing ways forward.

Team working is strong, however the funding situation, limited resources, and part-time nature of some of the staff working means that this has to be watertight. Management as a team, in addition to each worker taking individual responsibility for their own time prioritisation, and managing expectations of delivery of their own time is crucial.

7.5 Clarity on Project aims and delivery

Nesa are already highly articulate about project aims. However, partnership projects may benefit from a clear, assertive **nesa** voice which determines what **nesa** is and is not able to do at the outset.

This does not mean that **nesa** attempt to determine what might be indeterminable outcomes, but more to assert how much expectation is fair to place on **nesa**'s shoulders.

Two examples are:

1. The possible Higher Education collaboration regarding arts and health research would perhaps go forward more swiftly if **nesa** were able to articulate and assert what they really want from the partnership and what is the optimum way of going forward. (A research brief is in development).
2. Partnership with 'hands-off' stakeholders who may ask for a number of outcomes which are actually impossible. At this point, **nesa** needs to have

the confidence to assert which outcomes are possible, which are more longitudinal outcomes to be developed over a long period of time (e.g. 5-10 years), and which are beyond the realms of expectation for shorter term participatory art activity.

7.6 nesa profile and marketing

In addition to the success or potential success of profile raising via publication of written articles, profile could also be enhanced with a further push to develop written pieces for publication on websites and in other national magazines. Other examples of publications or organisations where **nesa** could gain a regional or national profile are: arts professional, axis dialogues, ACE's own publications, ArtsMatrix, Culture South West publications, Regional Development Agency publications. Resources and capacity permitting, **nesa** could also further explore Higher Education partnerships, and possibilities for involvement in the 'knowledge exchange'.

nesa have taken significant steps to raise profile and identity, and are starting to address artistic identity. A revamped AGM is in planning, and a promotional blitz for each programme area of **nesa** and for **nesa** as a whole.

7.7 Fundraising strategy

The value of what nesa does needs profile, and with it, a fundraising strategy. Staff changes have led to no one person being able to focus or deliver on a coherent fundraising strategy. An overview of all projects, and a pulling together of all **nesa** strands, alongside consideration of long-term aims needs to be put together with funding targets. This is being addressed. A detailed action plan and a long-term business plan are in development.

8. Conclusion

The half day sessions and underlying processes associated with this consultancy have created a lived and discussed 'body of experience' with which **nesa** can continue to work on, evolve and progress.

Creative Change has not created a position of 'fixing something which is broken', it is rather, about highlighting **nesa** as a flexible, dynamic organisation with a huge willingness to take on challenging and testing projects in order for arts to support socially engaged practice in a reflexive, considered and ultimately professionally experienced way.