

OUTPOST ARTS
BUSINESS PLAN
2021-2026



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1. Note from our Chair

We are proud of OutPost Arts' achievements over the past two years. From our position as a small, start-up charity in 2018, we have become an important part of the local and regional creative infrastructure. We have been delighted to support over 200 young people engage with the arts, and 36 artists with commissions and/or exhibitions. Our adult wellbeing and community programmes have supported 125 people to step out of their comfort zones and get involved in activities. Our creative consultation event in 2019 (commissioned by Scot Gov/D&G Council) engaged 149 people between the ages of 14-40; empowering local people to engage in the town's action-planning and decision-making processes.

OutPost also moved into its first home in September 2019: The Look Out on Langholm High Street. From here, we have been able to host creative gatherings, provide exhibition and sales revenue for local artists and facilitate workshops and learning events. However, like many other organisations in a time of crisis, we have recognised the importance of moving away from traditional bricks-and-mortar delivery and we, after much discussion, vacated the Look Out in October 2020.

It hasn't all been rosy. Funds are increasingly competitive, and we've found it at-times difficult to deliver a local ambition at a time of national upheaval. We've faced challenges and learned valuable lessons, but it's all been worth it to see the powerful, transformative potential of creative engagement.

Throughout 2020, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, we decided to review the Business Plan to ensure that our organisation can respond flexibly, creatively, and appropriately to a rapidly changing situation. Amidst uncertainty about the future, we are clear that arts and creativity should (and will) play a prominent role in the economic and social recovery of our area.

Our Business Plan 2020 therefore reflects our ambitions to utilise creativity to promote a better sense of connectedness, health, and support in the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to emerge from this crisis as a stronger organisation, with the capacity to better co-ordinate lasting change for our community, and in doing so promote arts and culture as a key tool for success.

The landscape has changed. Never has there been a greater need for enhancing social inclusion, supporting physical and mental health, broadening opportunities in the arts, and reconnecting our community.

Our charitable aims, to advance education, health and wellbeing, and citizenship and regeneration, remain central to what we do, but the circumstances in which we operate are moving quickly. To deliver against our priorities, we have recognised the need to build our own capacity and expand our provision digitally as well.

At OutPost Arts, we believe strongly in delivering change by opening the door to creativity. Inspiring people of all ages to get involved, to find a place within their community and support the economic and social advantages of an arts sector will help us to recover and move forward from this time of national anxiety.

OutPost's Business Plan is about bringing communities back together. That's what our strategy for growth is hinged on over the next five years: enabling and encouraging people to understand the power of creativity in an uncertain world. We are sure that by working together, we can make this happen.



Jason Railton
Chair, OutPost Arts

2. Executive Summary

<p style="text-align: center;">VISION</p> <p>OutPost’s vision is to become a leading rural arts organisation in Scotland - creating artistic and cultural opportunities for current and future generations, affirming the role of creativity in health and wellbeing, reversing current trends of economic decline and making it a viable economic choice to live, work and thrive as a creative person in a remote part of southern Scotland.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LEADERSHIP</p> <p>Two-tier SCIO model with Board of Trustees and wider membership</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">MISSION</p> <p>Our mission is to deliver an ambitious, contemporary, and diverse programme of rural arts. We offer a high-quality creative education programme, creative health, and wellbeing opportunities, support the regeneration of Langholm and the Esk Valley and benefit people of all ages and abilities. Through this, we will bring communities back together and support them in a time of change.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">VALUES</p> <p>Inclusive: We support creativity for all</p> <p>Collaborative: We know nothing is achieved in isolation</p> <p>Embedded: We are a key component locally</p> <p>Community-minded: We strengthen and champion rural areas</p> <p>Innovative: We build on a rich history of ambition</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Creative Director</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIC AIMS</p> <p>Be digitally proactive to ensure broad engagement</p> <p>Work to improve the creative economy and secure opportunities for local artists</p> <p>Deliver high quality education around the arts</p> <p>Collaborate to enhance health and wellbeing via creativity</p> <p>Strengthen organisational capacity to ensure sustainability and better forward planning</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RESOURCING</p> <p>Financial We have developed key relationships with funders and look to explore strategies for income generation. We need to strengthen our financial protocols and invest in skills for success.</p> <p>Human The Board and Creative Director provide a range of experience and skills that support our continued growth and development. We need to ensure that we can support ourselves to succeed by growing our capacity.</p> <p>Physical We are seeking a permanent premise to deliver our activities but have found that digital delivery can have a powerful impact. We have built a stock of physical resources.</p> <p>Brand The OutPost brand is strong and widely recognised locally and we have worked hard to develop our networks and partnerships. We will build on this and look to expand service delivery.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MONITORING</p> <p>Creating milestones and holding regular internal discussions on development</p>

3. Introduction

3.1 Who are OutPost Arts?

OutPost Arts is an innovative creative organisation working to deliver an ambitious, contemporary, and diverse programme of rural arts. By collaborating and building creative partnerships, we offer high-quality creative education programmes, health and wellbeing improvement opportunities and innovate in local regeneration.

We were founded in 2018 by a small group of enthusiastic, creative-minded individuals with a keen interest in building a sustainable focal point for arts-related activity in Langholm. Our motivation was to strengthen the burgeoning creative sector locally by supporting, representing, and facilitating opportunities for artists in our area.

It soon became clear that pathways to creative opportunities were limited in our locality. The potential of the arts to unlock economic and social success was not fully realised and a clear gap in provision existed not just for practicing artists, but local people of all ages.

Currently, OutPost Arts has six Trustees, and one non-voting advisor. Activities and operations are led by the Creative Director, who is contracted on a self-employed basis. The team has a significant and varied skillset including project management, health, education, events co-ordination, fundraising, creative practice and marketing.

In the two years since we achieved charitable status, OutPost is proud to have made a demonstrable impact on the creative sector, through our work with schools and other partner agencies, our new approach to tackling local issues, and our participation in regional and national conversations.

3.2 Our Approach

By recognising the transformative power of the arts, OutPost delivers projects and facilitates opportunities that promote a broader and more open engagement with creativity for people of all ages locally.

Our approach is centred on the belief that anyone, regardless of age or income, should have equitable access to high-quality opportunities while recognising the benefits that creativity can have on learning, health and community regeneration.

OutPost Arts aims to create a vibrant rural arts base in Langholm that has regional significance and a far-reaching and positive impact on the creative opportunities of local people; enhancing the attractiveness and marketability of Langholm and the Esk Valley, directly improving local education and learning opportunities, health and wellbeing and local regeneration. We aim to enrich local:

EDUCATION & LEARNING

HEALTH & WELLBEING

CITIZENSHIP & REGENERATION

Working in partnership with the community and local organisations, OutPost Arts has and will continue to co-ordinate and manage accessible events, festivals, projects, and networks that contribute to regeneration. We will increase local cultural engagement and citizenship and allow the community to explore and meet their creative potential. We strive to facilitate creative enrichment by directly linking artists with the community, offering individuals the opportunity to realise goals and build skills.

The presence of an arts organisation and structured programme of activities will create opportunities for volunteering, training, work experience and promote creative experimentation, mentoring and skill-sharing. By tapping into and developing existing local creative resources whilst creating new meaningful links and connections with artists and organisations out-with Langholm, we will create a challenging, dynamic, and forward-thinking creative environment.

As we move forward, we want to enhance our accessibility and broaden our audience by embracing digital media in our work. Creating an online arts hub with the resources and expertise of our growing network of artists can help to bridge the cultural divide and enable participation for more people. In doing so, OutPost will reach a more diverse population and support different people to access the benefits of getting creative.

3.3 Current Snapshot and Achievements

Since our inception back in 2018, we have completed over 20 projects, with 5 ongoing, benefiting a total of 550 people. These projects have all related to our stated aims of improving health & wellbeing, education, and community regeneration. They have also allowed us to develop excellent relationships with our funders and donors who continue to believe in the strength of our work.

People have never had such open access to creative opportunities in Langholm – a culture that OutPost is changing for the better.

Key to our success is the development of powerful partnerships with agencies and organisations. Langholm Initiative, the XCEL Youth Project, Langholm Academy and Primary, and Rose’s Wardrobe are local organisations with whom we have established meaningful, mutually beneficial and trusting partnerships to support the creative sector in our area.

We have also been able to place OutPost on a regional and national platform by building relationships with organisations outside of our locality. The Stove, SURF, For Enjoyment CIC, Upland and DG Unlimited have worked closely with us to build better creative strategies cross-region, to understand the rural experience and to help solidify the role of arts and culture in our lives moving forward.

We have supported artists to connect with communities via our public arts, well-being, and education programmes; promoting and growing local creative talent by showcasing work in our display/incubation space. We have added value to several partner projects, supporting them to explore and facilitate creative links and solutions. Our formal and informal education activity has allowed our community to access creative learning, skill-building and follow pathways towards wider opportunities and initiatives.

Early in our development, OutPost was successful in pulling in funding for a range of projects locally, including the youth-focused consultation **Upstart** in 2019. This was our first major contract over the course of which we delivered 7 innovative events/activities to gather opinions from people aged 14 – 40 and the outcomes directly informed Langholm’s Community Plan; encouraging placemaking activities to promote the town and encourage visitors.

To date we have raised £70,191 to promote arts and culture for our community.



4. Vision, Mission, Values and Strategy

4.1 Vision

OutPost's vision is to become a **leading rural arts organisation in Scotland** - creating artistic and cultural opportunities for current and future generations, affirming the role of creativity in health and wellbeing, reversing current trends of economic decline, and making it a viable economic choice to live, work and thrive as a creative person in a remote part of southern Scotland.

4.2 Mission

Our mission is to deliver an ambitious, contemporary, and diverse programme of rural arts. OutPost Arts offers a high-quality creative education programme, creative health, and well-being opportunities, supports the regeneration of Langholm & Esk Valley and benefits people of all ages and abilities. Through this, we will bring communities back together and support them in a time of change.

4.3 Values

- We are **inclusive** and believe in artistic expression for all.
- We are **collaborative** and see the strength in working together.
- We are **embedded** in our area and champion rural places as vibrant, creative, and filled with potential.
- We are **community-minded** and believe our creative approach enhances cohesion.
- We are **innovative** and build on the rich history of ambition in our community.

4.4 Strategy

Our strategy focuses on five key elements which have short, medium and long term goals. These priorities have been identified by the Board and through consultation with our local community, as well as partners. Delivery of these priorities will require sourcing expertise and support, creating strong links with agencies and organisations, ensuring our Board have the time and capacity to contribute, consistently improving our financial position and effectively evaluating and promoting the work of OutPost.

Above all, our strategy is about **bringing communities back together**, and using creativity to do that.



5. Summary of Phased Growth Objectives

Short term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Seek appropriate support to develop and implement a fundraising strategy➤ Identify a group of trustees to support and develop fundraising activities➤ Identify training for Trustees in response to the Skills Audit➤ Develop evaluation methodology to ensure effective delivery➤ Invest in digital delivery for projects while recognising the importance of blended learning
Medium term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Identify and explore opportunities for trading activities➤ Examine the governance arrangements and look at expanding the Trustee Board as well as assigning specific roles to Trustees➤ Identify and explore potential premises➤ Maintain effective and open communication with stakeholders➤ Improve the function and purpose of the creative network and begin introducing opportunities for local artists➤ Make clear progress on the aims outlined in our Business Plan
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ An annual report which reflects on our activities and successes to date which is widely available➤ Expand service provision across Annandale & Eskdale, collaborating with partners where possible➤ Provide opportunities for our creative network to contract on projects➤ Build strong dialogue with key agencies including SOSE and Creative Scotland➤ Contribute to policy which impacts rural arts➤ Investigate asset ownership as a means of income generation and organisational stability

6. Key Drivers for Change

6.1 The local context

OutPost is driven by a passion for our community and the recognition that creativity can inspire and deliver change when it is fostered and allowed to grow. Langholm sits in the heart of the Borderlands, peculiarly nestled on the periphery of three counties: Dumfries & Galloway, Scottish Borders and Cumbria. This position brings significant issues, but also presents opportunities for the future.

Our area has suffered from extensive **industry decline** that has precipitated lasting economic damage locally. Where there was once a steady stream of long-term employment from textile mills, from the 1990s onwards we have witnessed increasing youth outward migration in search of jobs and education. This decline in fortune has steadily continued until the present day – recently, Edinburgh Woollen Mill transferred its Langholm-based HQ operation, which employed 260 people (mainly locally) to Carlisle. In November 2020, EWM was placed into administration. Within a week of this jarring news, Langholm's biggest building contractor T Graham & Sons announced its immediate closure. In total, seven main employers have closed with an estimated 1000 job losses.

Langholm is in Dumfries and Galloway which is the **lowest paid region in Scotland** and is currently some £7280 behind East Renfrewshire at the top of the scale. Dumfries and Galloway was ranked by USwitch in 2015 as one of the top 20 worst places to live in the UK in terms of employment, income, housing and cost of living. This is particularly felt in Eskdale due to a lack of access to high quality jobs. In fact, more than 30% of all working people in Eskdale work in the lowest-paid elementary occupations and almost 50% of all working people travel 5km+ to get to work every day. Low pay, remoteness and the rising cost of living mean that in-work poverty is a real issue in our rural community. SIMD information reports that one in every five people in Eskdale are within the top 30% most deprived people in Scotland (Citizen's Advice Service Dumfries & Galloway, 2017). Eskdale may appear externally as an affluent former textile community, but pockets of quite extreme deprivation exist hidden beneath the surface, which is not always apparent by looking at the deprivation statistics.

Being located remotely, with a confused cultural and economic identity, means that physically and socially **Langholm is isolated** from the cultural 'centre' of Dumfries, and is disconnected the creative sectors of Carlisle and Hawick. As a result, local people have limited access to services, support, and opportunities to develop their interests and skills in arts and culture. It has also meant that creativity for positive mental, physical, and social change has not, until recently, been adapted here.

Despite what can look like a bleak picture, there are clear and exciting opportunities for the creative sector in our community.

- **The culture sector contributes £4.4bn to the Scottish economy every year.** By improving the local links to creativity, we can help to improve the ability for the sector to flourish in our area.
- **Dumfries and Galloway recognises arts and culture as within its top five key industries region-wide.** This is one of the fastest-growing industries in our part of Scotland, and now is the time to encourage its growth.
- **Investment in the south of Scotland from Government level has never been higher.** The development of the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and the Borderlands Growth Deal have placed south Scotland in the national picture – we need to take advantage of this.
- **Cultural tourism is vital to Scotland's recovery and growth.** Through improving our audience development, we will ensure that Langholm and surrounding areas are central to this.
- **OutPost Arts has established itself as a key agency for change.** Developing key partnerships locally and across the region has ensured that OutPost is an essential contributor and will continue to influence positive change for people and communities.
- **A long period of lockdown and national anxiety has increased the need for dedicated responses to health and wellbeing issues and community disconnection.** With our exciting and innovative creative support and education programmes, OutPost is well placed to respond to the social and economic harm caused by COVID-19.

6.2 COVID-19

Coronavirus is the single greatest public health issue we have faced in a generation. It has impacted every organisation, individual and community across the globe. The impact has been tragic: deaths and long-term illness resulting from infection, but also less obvious: poorer mental health has been one significant effect from the virus.

COVID has necessitated a digital transformation among agencies and organisations. Overnight, it was no longer possible for services to engage with their users as lockdowns were instituted globally. As a result, progress and meaningful change was lost across the charity sector. We are fortunate to live in a digital age where engagement should be straightforward and plentiful, however the reality is that many people are digitally excluded for many reasons. The difficulty, therefore, is being able to support people without capabilities – who are often the people that need the most support.

Small businesses have suffered because of COVID-19. Scotland has the [highest average loss](#) of earnings outside of London for SMEs, many of which will be sole-trader, self-employed creative businesses. These creative businesses make up 3% of Scotland's entire workforce and are among the top five industries in our region for employment and economic contribution. Support will be required to ensure that these businesses and sole traders can continue operations.

6.3 Our COVID-19 response

COVID-19 has forced us to fundamentally overhaul our delivery methods and change our focus from physical to digital. COVID-19 impacted:

- Our key project delivery for 'A Creative Place'
- Ongoing contracts with partners and artists
- Access to our central creative hub on Langholm High Street
- Capacity to promote and develop OutPost as a brand

Our key response to COVID-19 was our 'Art Journaling' project. A group of local people were provided with materials and tuition to help engage their creative selves. The idea was to offer respite in a time of national anxiety to people that needed support.

Despite our position as a small, new charity – we were able to respond flexibly and efficiently to the 'new normal' of physical distancing and digital delivery. We have been able to host our workshops online, using Facebook and Zoom to engage with people where possible. We have facilitated delivery of creative materials in a safe way so that everyone who wanted could take part. We have a distance to go before our digital strategy is as inclusive as it needs to be, but we are proud to have made a good start.



6.4 SWOT analysis

Strengths

- A committed team of Trustees with diverse experience and skills
- A driven and talented Creative Director
- The organisation is well-established with clear aims
- We have had success in funding bids that have enabled us to take work forward
- Broad links and networks across the region and mutually beneficial partnerships
- A quick and effective response to COVID
- Innovative projects which engage a good cross-section of ages
- Strong, inclusive values
- A successful track record of project delivery and strong funder relationships
- A reputation for high quality contemporary arts

Weaknesses

- Time availability of Trustees to dedicate to planning or practical support
- Skills gaps broader Board, especially around fundraising and governance
- Lack of permanent base
- No clear funding strategy
- Minimal staffing capacity, e.g., no support staff, no operations management
- Lack of clear roles for Trustees whose skills could be better utilised
- Trading and income generation hasn't been developed as anticipated
- Pressure/overwork/over-reliance on Creative Director

Opportunities

- Strong digital presence could be utilised to drive engagement
- Potential to increase capacity through developing a volunteer scheme
- Expand current operations to surrounding areas (Lockerbie, Annan) etc and utilise our links with other organisations to do so
- Emerging local projects e.g. Langholm Community Moor Buyout could provide exciting opportunities
- COVID presents opportunities (supporting mental health etc) for our creative programme
- Better engagement with our creative network to provide more opportunities
- Renewed political attention on the south of Scotland through SOSE, Borderlands
- Build on momentum to increase funding and capacity
- Increase our networks and participate in sharing learning/marketplace activities
- Willingness of local schools to get involved could present better opportunities to develop our work

Threats

- Continuing struggle for consistent funding streams
- Loss of Creative Director
- COVID impacting project delivery and engagement
- Difficult to recruit more skilled Trustees given the number of local groups
- Lack of shared responsibilities leading to exhaustion/fatigue
- Limited access to local funding
- Limited understanding/trust of other organisations around what OutPost does
- Lack of succession planning for Board members
- Brexit/COVID: less philanthropy/less leisure money/more social issues
- Local organisations and persistent parochial politics – OutPost's role within this and importance to look outward

7. Strategic Aims

Our strategy is about **bringing communities back together**. In the social, economic, and political contexts of Brexit and COVID, there has never been more uncertainty in every walk of life. As we await the true fallout from cumulative crises and divisions over the past few years, OutPost Arts sees an opportunity to use arts and creativity to help cement community cohesion and bring people back together. At the time of writing, there are no clear timescales for moving forward from COVID – but our strategy is to be flexible, innovative, and ambitious in pushing arts to the top of the agenda and using it as a tool for change.

Each of these aims has its own action plan listed in the appendices of this Business Plan.

7.1 Aim One: Digitally proactive

We aim to be pro-active in our digital approach and understand that as an organisation we need to have a greater digital presence which will increase opportunities for all.

Digital delivery is the new normal. Organisations of all shapes and sizes are finding their digital transformation effectively dictated by necessity. Our organisation is now impacted by ensuring that we can deliver our services digitally, in as high-quality a manner as possible. We were able to make the switch to digital relatively simply, demonstrated by our Art Journaling project. We have a functioning website and social media presence which has been key to engaging participants and developing communities of support as people embark on their creative journeys.

The key issue with regards to digital delivery is that we need to recognise that not everyone has access to digital skills, equipment, resources, and capacity. We need to ensure that our service delivery does not therefore entirely hinge on access to a computer and that we do not promote exclusivity in our programmes.

Success in this area would be enabling people of all ages to engage with our work in a supportive way, by promoting a blended learning model and signposting users to specialised support for learning digital skills and gaining access to technology and resources. We will have a digital strategy that safeguards our participants, and which takes into account barriers to access like age, income and disability. Our digital provision will be flexible, accessible and continue to maintain the high standards we have practiced so far.

We will also consider the needs of our contractors, staff, and partners in promoting our digital delivery, including any support they require to adapt to this model of working.

We will achieve this by working in close partnership with Langholm Initiative's Digital Skills Project, and other organisations including SCVO and local schools and colleges. In doing so we will be able to develop a strategy which means we work in accordance with best practice and that our beneficiaries continue to reap rewards from their time with us. Blended learning will play an important role in this as we move forward, with key emphasis on providing as much support as possible for those that don't have the level of skills they currently require.



7.2 Aim Two: Improve the creative economy

We aim to improve the local creative economy and support creative practitioners navigate the post-COVID world.

OutPost Arts was formed from a meeting of creative practitioners in late 2017 who wanted to use their collective voice to source more opportunities for support and development. As such, it has been an integral part of our mission, and even more so given the current economic crisis looming because of COVID-19. We have been working to promote opportunities for local artists, whether through our own commissioning process or by creating strong links across the creative sector in south Scotland. For example, our Mural Stories project provided commissions for four D&G-based artists in 2019.

Key issues surrounding this aim will be identifying where to begin and which priorities are most important for local artists, securing the necessary funding for training and development, understanding the true impact COVID has had on the sector locally and fighting for support for arts and culture while many other, traditionally 'more important' industries are struggling.

Success for us would be the launch of a range of support networks aimed at linking together creatives to share experiences, collaborate and develop new contacts to help propel their practice forward in a post-COVID age. Our networks would feed into policy responses from agencies like SOSE and Scottish Government, and we will be able to influence future decision making with a real understanding of the rural arts scene. We will have improved opportunities for artists, particularly young artists, through creating lasting change and mentorship.

In order to achieve this, we will develop a range of in-person and online events aimed at building networks and opportunities for artists including exhibitions, guest speakers, cultural trips, collaborations and 'take overs'. We will use our partnerships to highlight the importance of the creative sector and work with key partners who are already influencing regional and national policy. By developing commissioning opportunities, we hope to kick-start the local creative economy and opportunities for training and development, as well as a mentorship scheme to offer young creatives the opportunity to improve their practice, skills, and business potential.



7.3 Aim Three: Delivering high quality education

We aim to develop high quality educational and learning opportunities for arts and creativity for all ages.

Education has been a key element of the OutPost mission since day one. We recognise that the greatest legacy we can have is inspiring people to become creative, to examine the world through a cultural lens and broaden their minds as to the importance of arts. We have delivered several educational projects, including Arts Awards, Arts Clubs, Big Draw Projects, evening classes, workshops, and arts trails.

The clear impact of COVID is that we cannot engage as easily with our beneficiary groups as we could previously. This is particularly difficult with schools who comprised a large portion of who we worked with. Large parts of our strategy are predicated on our ability to access groups of people to create informal, fun, and high-quality educational experiences that give people a new experience of art.

Our vision for this aim is that people in our community have easy access to a range of educational opportunities across a variety of mediums that interest them, and that people are excited to try new and different things. The traditional lack of culture that has existed here will be replaced by the knowledge that they are free to engage with creativity at any time. Young people will access our programme in addition to their schooling and it will offer them an alternative to set curriculum and a wider freedom of expression. These opportunities will in turn feed into our aims of improved health and wellbeing and improved community development and economy.

In order to achieve this, we need to form a close alliance with education providers like schools and colleges to understand what our role will be moving forward and how we can adapt our blended learning model to support their needs. We will continue to provide the workshops, evening classes and online learning experiences that we have so far as long as we can ensure the safety of all involved and prescribe to Government guidelines relating to COVID. We believe that now is an important time for people of all ages to be developing interests and OutPost Arts will continue to be here to serve that function.



7.4 Aim Four: Enhancing health and well-being

We aim to develop high quality creative opportunities that engage the local community and support health and wellbeing.

We understand that COVID-19 will have had a significant and lasting impact on mental health for people were either already in a precarious position or who have not adapted to the lockdown and its subsequent isolation. Similarly, anxiety and depression is on the rise as a result of worrying news stories, bereavements, illnesses and job losses.

OutPost Arts has had a long-term commitment to improving health and wellbeing, with particular focus on mental health. As a result, we have developed several projects that focus on giving people the space and time to engage with participatory arts as a gateway to developing skills, coping mechanisms and mindful practice. We recognise the transformative power of arts and culture in health and wellbeing, strongly supported by evidence, and champion it as a key element of our forward strategy.

Key challenges achieving this aim are engagement of people who require support, ensuring our support is still effective as we adapt it for COVID-19 conditions, building effective methodologies for evaluation, securing the necessary funding and training, and financial barriers including sustainability.

Success is a connected community, rich in social capital and the willingness to lend support to each other. Our vision is that local people automatically think about engaging creatively when having a bad day, that they understand that ours is not a clinical service, but a part of a holistic approach that helps them utilise self-expression as a means to improve their physical and mental health. We will have functioning partnerships with health and social care providers including NHS, Health Improvement Teams, adult and child social services via local authorities, Day Centres and sheltered housing.

Our roadmap to success involves promoting and developing our ongoing Making Space and Art Journaling projects which have piloted our ideas about participatory arts and mental health. We will also seek further funding to develop and establish this programme as a feasible, long-term part of the local response to healthcare. Increasing local knowledge about what we do and establishing an effective engagement strategy will be key to making sure our aim is met successfully.



7.5 Aim Five: Strengthening our organizational capacity

We will work collaboratively to strengthen our organisational capacity.

In order to position ourselves as a leading rural arts organisation in a post-COVID world, we need to build our capacity to deliver and sustain ourselves. Our work has been well received locally and we have embedded ourselves as an important part of a tapestry of organisations not only within Langholm but the wider area of Dumfries and Galloway. We are well-respected, established, financially healthy with a well-understood mission, a successful programme, and a strong Board of Trustees with a rich understanding of a variety of subjects.

Some issues to consider in achieving this aim will be the time and capacity of our Board, the lessening availability of funding, increasing pressures on staff, the relative insecurity of local premises, identifying risks and filling gaps in existing knowledge.

Strengthening our organisational capacity will have been achieved when we have a fulsome, achievable fundraising strategy that clearly outlines where our financial position will sit over the next five years. Our Board will be fully aware of any gaps in knowledge and we will work proactively to fill them. Our presence will be well established in the local community and we will have secured a reasonable, long-term lease on a property that enables us to fulfil our social mission as well as investigate increasing commercial revenue. With key partnerships, we will continue to be an important member of the local, regional, and even national cultural scene providing high-quality opportunities that influence change.

We will achieve this aim by strengthening our own skillset and asking for help when we need it. By pulling in external sources of support (such as Cranfield, Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway, Business Gateway, DG Unlimited etc) we will be able to create the strategies we need to give us comfort in finance and fundraising. We will also develop closer working relationships with potential landlords to avoid any conflicts and ensure the spaces we inhabit are reflective of their purpose and need. In short, we will be a stronger organisation through open communication, a willingness to learn, dedicating our resources as best we can and building stronger alliances that benefit both ourselves and the communities we work for.



8. Resourcing

Resourcing at OutPost Arts has been necessarily ad-hoc in its early development. This is as a result of not having clear funding, premises or support as work has been ongoing. Although the organisation has worked within these limitations, we recognise that to grow effectively, we need to invest in our resources and build on success.

Financial

Currently, our financial resourcing supports a 0.5FTE wage as well as project costs. This is a result of successful funding bids over the last twelve months. However, the cash-flow situation is a risk for the organisation and will become detrimental if nothing changes within six months.

In order to improve our financial resourcing, it is important that we develop a fundraising strategy that outlines which elements of our work we are looking to fund, how we will fund that work and what the exit strategies are. The Board consider this a priority and will develop a response as soon as is possible.

Human

Our Board and Creative Director have the skills and abilities to manage the organisation effectively but recognise that to meet our objectives for growth, we need to increase skills and time commitment. We need to ensure that staff are supported and not overworked and need to ensure open and meaningful dialogues to prevent this. We must also look at increasing the staffing capacity to handle administration of projects.

Physical

OutPost had an extraordinarily successful run in its High Street premises across 2019/20 which helped to engage more people and support local creatives. However, the risk of this premises proved too high with landlord underinvestment, near-crippling electricity charges and time commitment to organising constant streams of activity. We recognise the importance of having a headquarters but have found that digital delivery can support quicker and more broad engagement. The Board will revisit the need for premises when this becomes apparent.

Brand

The OutPost brand is a key asset. It has become well-established not just in our own community but regionally as our work proves to be important and effective. We must build on this brand recognition and ensure that OutPost remains a key player in championing rural arts.



9. Finance and Funding

OutPost Arts is a charity and relies heavily on grants and donations to provide the important services and activities that we do. We have developed key relationships with funders such as Holywood Trust, the Robertson Trust, DECBG and Muirhall Energy who have recognised the importance of our work and supported its development.

There is a clear need to develop a sustainable, commercially focused source of income for the organisation which will lessen dependence on grant and donation income, which we anticipate will be threatened by the economic recession. We have therefore devised short, medium, and long-term goals for the organisation to meet as we move forward.

Short term

- Increase staffing capacity to maintain financial records and work on fundraising
- Create clear guidelines for financial management and protocol which increase confidence in the organisation
- Achieve Gift Aid status and claim 25% on eligible donations

Medium term

- Develop a fundraising strategy that focuses on grant funding and commercial income
- Plan, develop and execute a 'Friends of OutPost Arts' scheme which invites patrons and subscriptions
- Identify and nominate key members of the Board to work on fundraising and finance
- Revisit commission structures, room lets, programme charges, additional services and consultancy services

Long term

- Develop long-term relationships with funders and achieve core funding for multi-year projects
- Investigate the potential for asset acquisition as a business model
- Establish a regular donor scheme

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring this plan

We will monitor and evaluate this plan by:

- Establishing milestones to meet and ensuring that we are meeting them
- Sharing this plan with our wider partners for accountability and support
- Using this plan as the foundation for Annual General Meetings
- Holding a six-monthly Board discussion to agree targets and scrutinise development

Financial monitoring

OutPost Arts maintains stringent controls over its finances and has agreed a range of actions and authorisations which form its Financial Protocol. Although every Trustee has equal responsibility in the management of organizational finances, the Chair and Treasurer are charged with oversight of the protocols. The Protocol document outlines these responsibilities and authorisations in detail and helps to ensure transparency and fairness in decision making and governance.

Project monitoring and evaluation

Projects will create milestones to meet to ensure effective delivery. Each project will have an individual Trustee who can work closely with the project manager to ensure success. We have recognised that our projects need to have a stronger and more robust evaluation procedure. The Board will create a standard for evaluation that will enable us to communicate the difference we are making much more effectively.

Appendix 1: Aim 1 Action Plan

Priority	Actions
<p>Develop digital delivery for our work.</p>	<p>Identify and nominate Board and staff members to develop a long-term digital strategy that outlines our digital transformation moving forward.</p>
	<p>Share this digital strategy with key partners to ensure it meets their standards.</p>
	<p>Ensure that we have the technology and skills to bring our digital strategy to life through an audit.</p>
	<p>Provide support for staff, Board and participants to engage digitally through signposting to other services.</p>
	<p>Be aware of equalities monitoring and ensure that we are not promoting exclusivity in our work by ensuring that all participants have the necessary skills for certain programmes.</p>
<p>Promote blended learning as a route to encourage inclusivity and as a response to physical distancing guidelines.</p>	<p>Embark on learning from other organisations and agencies who are delivering through blended learning models and institute change in a similar way.</p>
	<p>Create strong links with schools and partners to add additionally to their ongoing activities.</p>

Appendix 2: Aim 2 Action Plan

Priority	Actions
<p>Develop a programme of support for artists to improve and increase their networks</p>	Plan and launch a regular meeting of artists and creatives of all ages.
	Establish opportunities for work to be highlighted including exhibitions and a programme of guest speaking.
	Ensure this is a 'safe space' by encouraging open expression and exchange of ideas.
	Encourage collaboration through introductions and offering time for artists to demonstrate their skills.
	Promote and arrange cultural trips and meetings - including a large event e.g., a south Scotland-wide meeting of creatives and creative organisations in Langholm.
<p>Create and sustain strong links with agencies and organizations to influence policy change and increase opportunities for artists.</p>	Develop and sustain key partnerships with agencies who are striving for similar goals.
	Broker opportunities with major local creative agencies including DG Unlimited, Alchemy, Upland and the Stove to increase the presence of OutPost in the regional picture.
	Utilise our Artists Network to regularly consult and feedback to agencies like SOSE and Creative Scotland.
<p>Increase opportunities for commissions</p>	Begin an incubation project which offers local commissions to local artists.
	Continue to invite artists to take part in our educational programmes.
	Recognise the wider reach we will have through digital participation and use this to increase opportunities for artists.
	Broker training in Arts Awards for local artists so they have a wider remit for work.

Enable and mentor young artists to prepare for their careers.	Establish a scheme of linking young artists with experienced mentors who can offer support on practice, business and networking.
	Provide mentorship as part of our commissioning process.
	Encourage and provide the capacity for greater cross-generational creative collaboration in a way that encourages the sharing of ideas, improved outcomes and opening business routes and networks.

Appendix 3: Aim 3 Action Plan

Priority	Actions
Form close partnerships that enable us to access audiences	Re-engage with partners that we have worked with including Langholm Academy, XCEL and Langholm Initiative.
	Form a strategy of arts learning based on identified need by partners.
	Continue to provide workshops and sessions for people of all ages with respected artists.
	Build our reputation as a key provider of creative education in our area through high-quality work.
	Pull in funding to support our education programme and make this a key element of our fundraising strategy.
Develop a blended learning model that is accessible.	Highlight within our digital strategy how we can best approach blended learning.
	Provide support for remote learning and provision of arts materials.
	Investigate the digital and remote delivery of this work, as well as the potential to re-engage with schools and gain physical access to schools as we did previously.
Continue our successful Arts Awards and Arts Clubs	Develop our relationship with Trinity as a best-practice example of Arts Awards.
	Increase Arts Clubs provision to include nurseries and Playcare as a route to increased income.
	Offer training in Arts Awards to artists to increase our own capacity to deliver.

Appendix 4: Aim 4 Action Plan

Priority	Actions
<p>Respond effectively to the impacts of COVID-19 on mental and physical health.</p>	<p>Understand that mental health can be a barrier to engagement and ensure that we have an inclusive engagement strategy.</p>
	<p>Identify and nominate a Trustee with a specific interest in guiding this work.</p>
	<p>Continue to utilise our creative programme as a means of self-expression for people of all ages, including our successful Making Space and Art Journaling projects.</p>
	<p>Investigate new ways of connecting with people that reduce the need for close physical contact and contribute to our ongoing digital strategy development.</p>
	<p>Seek funding to develop a longer-term commitment to support people that need it.</p>
<p>Understand our role and the impact we have in improving health outcomes locally so that we can share this and be a demonstrator for change.</p>	<p>Develop and sustain key partnerships that increase our reach and the benefit that our participants receive as a result.</p>
	<p>Invest in stronger evaluation methodology so that we can demonstrate the difference we are making more effectively.</p>
	<p>Identify training from partners and support agencies so that our staff, volunteers and contractors feel confident in handling difficult situations.</p>
	<p>Take opportunities to talk openly about this work and encourage similar organisations to learn from our experiences.</p>
<p>Ensure that we are innovative and experimental in our approach to supporting mental and physical health</p>	<p>Engage frequently with our participants and take their feedback on board.</p>
	<p>Ensure our research on other arts organisations and their responses is up-to-date and that we encourage knowledge sharing.</p>
	<p>Communicate well with partners to develop meaningful change.</p>

Appendix 5: Aim 5 Action Plan

Priority	Actions
Develop a fundraising strategy	Outline our current situation with regards to funding, projections, future costings and outline expected resources over the next few years.
	Identify a group of Trustees to focus on fundraising as a priority.
	Investigate sources of support for building a fundraising strategy. Contact organisations like Furlough Go and Cranfield Trust.
	Strengthen our relationships with current and future funders through seeking advice, building alliances and developing communication.
	Identify and promote trading activities.
Identify gaps in knowledge and work to fill them	Complete a Trustee Skills Audit.
	Present the data from the Trustee Skills Audit for consideration of where skills can be improved.
	Identify training from partners and support agencies.
	Identify and consider if skills gaps should be filled by extending the Board.
Establish our presence in the community	Identify potential future premises.
	Conduct a cost/benefit analysis of having a premises.
	Consider future asset acquisition as a route to sustainability.

Identify and strengthen our stakeholder and partner relationships	Create a list of our key stakeholders, how they work with OPA, and any potential for developing the relationship. Where do they fit with achieving our aims and fulfilling our Business Plan?
	Identify stakeholders that will be important for delivering against the business plan (e.g. SOSE)
	Explore opportunities for collaborative funding, partnership delivery and sharing resources.
Identify, manage and reduce risk	Create and upkeep an organisational risk register.
Develop strategic communications that place OutPost at the forefront of rural arts	Streamline our mission and vision to clarify who we are, what we do and where we want to be.
	Increase media coverage and build strong relationships with media outlets.
	Provide good publicity by entering OutPost for appropriate awards which reflect the good work undertaken.

Appendix 6: Trustee Skills Audit

The Trustees of OutPost Arts have a wide range of skills which we have been able to draw from in our journey so far. In order to assess any critical gaps in our knowledge, the Trustees undertook a Skills Audit.

We have categorised the skills as follows:

Understanding and knowledge of the creative industry

OutPost has a strong skills base within the creative industry. The Board take their lead from our Creative Director and Trustees with complimentary experience. The key strengths of the organisations clearly lie within arts and events management, knowledge of issues faced by creatives in rural areas and experience and knowledge of the industry itself. To sustain this working knowledge, the Board should strive to recruit from within the sector when vacancies become available. In doing so, there will be a continued emphasis on OutPost's mission of supporting and realising opportunities for the local creative people.

Technical skills and experience

A diverse range of available skills means that OutPost has foundations of knowledge to rely on to cover many business processes. The key skills here are understanding of financial and HR policies, office management, strategy development, teaching and education experience, and partnership development and management. Specialised skills evident in some Trustees involved fundraising, understanding the voluntary sector, graphic design and managing risk. There are no significant skills gaps here, rather Trustees with certain skills should be encouraged to pass these on to others to avoid over-reliance on individuals. Training should also be arranged for Trustees to grow skills within fundraising generally.

Governance

Governance is a key issue to explore developing Trustee understanding of. Governance compliance and business planning should be improved as the organisation grows. Trustees should participate in training from Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway to strengthen their understanding of governance issues and should work collaboratively to build better business planning processes, including project management.

Behavioural competencies

The Trustees demonstrate a solid commitment to OutPost Arts and its aims, as well the willingness and ability to work together, challenge each other when appropriate, maintain high ethical standards and communicate openly. There are no significant skills gaps here, but the organisation should embed its values on all newly recruited Trustees during Trustee induction.

Appendix 7: The OutPost Team

OPA is governed by a team of Trustees and managed by our Creative Director. We work as a collaborative unit, sharing our individual skills and experiences for the benefit of the organisation and wider community.



Lucy MacLeod
Creative Director

A commercial Illustrator, Artist and Educator for almost two decades, Lucy has created visuals for a huge variety of clients, exhibited internationally and taught at Universities and Colleges across the UK. After moving from Edinburgh to Langholm in 2012, Lucy co-founded OutPost Arts in early 2018 with a vision to create opportunities for rural artists & makers and increase access to cultural activities and learning for local/regional communities.



Jason Railton
Chair

Currently a Project Manager with the Langholm Initiative Jason has extensive knowledge in fundraising and community development. With a key focus on skills development and digital, he understands the value of partnership working and the importance of joint approaches in fulfilling project aims. He believes in the worth of inspiring young people to understand and engage with their communities as a route towards resilience and sustainability and in empowering people of all ages to take ownership of local issues.



Ellen Cumming
Treasurer

A primary school teacher in East Lothian for 8 years before moving to Langholm in 2018, Ellen decided to use the relocation as an opportunity to set up her own floristry business, focusing mainly on weddings and events. Ellen has a real passion for education, particularly working with children. She aims to channel her interest in a variety of art forms and her skills as an 'ex-teacher' to bring about new creative experiences for children and young people in Langholm.



Carys Mainprize
Secretary

Carys is currently a project assistant with Langholm Initiative, working to support the community and young people to gain knowledge and connections with nature, benefiting mental health and well-being and intergenerational relationships. Carys has a passion for creative writing, with years of experience, and writes for the E+L Life magazine. Carys believes that art and nature are intricately connected and recognises the numerous benefits of a rural arts organisation, including as a way for the community to empower themselves.



Sophie Jarzyna
Trustee

An emerging local artist, Sophie returned to the Esk Valley in 2019 to pursue a career in hand thrown Ceramics. Sophie has several years' experience working with business start-ups in London and is also a partner in one of Langholm's longest established family businesses. As a former pupil of Langholm Academy, Sophie is particularly passionate about promoting creative expression and igniting an entrepreneurial spirit in the new generation.



Gilly Fraser
Trustee

As a Journalist, Gilly worked on headline news stories including a siege at Peterhead Prison, the Lockerbie air disaster and Foot and Mouth. Over thirty years, she developed her skills on newspapers, radio, and television. Since leaving ITV Border to go freelance, Gilly has produced DVD's, ghost-written several books and produced a local magazine. She writes features for newspapers and national magazines, manages websites and blogs and is an active member of local performing arts societies.



Peter Renwick
Non-voting Advisor

Pete has lived in D&G for ten years, working on arts and community-led projects throughout this time. Pete is passionate about where creativity, community empowerment and local regeneration meet. Pete is currently in post as Langholm Facilitator for SURF: Scotland's Regeneration Forum, and a member of the Langholm Moor Working Group, who are investigating a community buy-out of land set to be sold by Buccleuch Estates. Pete previously worked for D&G Arts Festival.



Leanne Duncan
Trustee

One half of Rose's Wardrobe - a sustainable vintage clothing brand based in Langholm; Leanne is passionate about supporting the local textile industry; using local fabrics in the fashion collections which ship all over the world. Rose's Wardrobe is keen to encourage younger generations back into the textile and manufacture industry via creative collaborations with local schools and youth organisations, to give young people new opportunities to develop an interest in the sector.



Claire Musson
Trustee

Claire worked as a Drama Teacher and Theatre Director for 8 years, before relocating to Borders and starting a family. She now works for Newcastleton and District Community Trust, spear-heading projects which support community development and wellbeing, whilst also training to be a counsellor. Claire is particularly passionate about increasing local engagement in Art and Culture, as a way of improving mental health, resilience, and raising aspirations.



WEB: www.outpostarts.co.uk
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FACEBOOK: @OutPostArt