

Case study

Cardboard Citizens

Strategic Review

Cardboard Citizens is the UK's only homeless people's professional theatre company. Established in 1991, the organisation has grown from a start-up with primarily arts funding to a well-established arts and social services organisation with substantial funding from statutory programmes, trusts, private donors and traditional arts funders. It currently runs programmes across London with the ability to replicate the model throughout the UK where needed.

Rapid growth and changing organisational needs were the impetus for the consultancy project. Historically, Cardboard Citizens has used a range of venues for its programming, taking classes, training, awareness-building exercises and performances out into the community. Much of this has been done in partnership with other arts and/or social service organisations. However, in late 2005, Cardboard Citizens found it had outgrown its current office and venue resources. In early 2006, the idea was proposed to establish a Cardboard Citizens centre, where classes, rehearsal space, participant consultations and administration could be housed under one roof, reflecting the integrated nature of the organisation and its approach to service delivery.

Action Planning was engaged to undertake a strategic review and to advise on the feasibility of moving the company into its own leased or purchased building. There were two key challenges. First, there was tension within the organisation between its artistic and social services aspects. Second, while the staff was supportive of the move and consolidation, the board was more cautious regarding risk and stability. Cardboard Citizens had gone through a major financial crisis not long before, and the board was very hesitant to jeopardise the current tenuous stability. These two ongoing conflicts had eroded morale and increased staff turnover. Therefore, the internal environment was the primary overall challenge.

Consultancy Approach

The process began with an assessment of organisational structure, current strategy, staffing and funding. The information from this review was complemented with a top level assessment of funding options for a capital campaign and also an examination of the impact of consolidation on revenue fundraising. In addition, research was conducted into premises issues, including lease/buy, renovation and facilities management.

The recommendation was made that Cardboard Citizens move to a temporary leased location in order to initiate the consolidation process. Once in the temporary (3 to 5 year) location, a capital appeal could be launched to raise the funds to purchase a permanent location. This was deemed the most feasible solution in light of overall stability of the organisation, financial risks involved with moving, capabilities among the board and staff to assess the real demands of facilities management, and ability to absorb costs of relocation, renovation, and hiring of additional staff.



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