

# Star and Shadow Cinema

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## *Attracting volunteers through a flexible 'give and take' approach*

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### Context

Star and Shadow Cinema is a community hub in Newcastle upon Tyne set up in 2006. It has multiple facilities including a cinema, music venue, café, bar, meeting rooms, dark room and a community garden. It offers a unique space for grassroots community organisations, independent artists and members of the public to promote cultural ideas through film, music, discussions and working groups.

The venue is currently closed due to Covid-19 restrictions. When open, it is completely volunteer-led. Prior to the pandemic, Star and Shadow Cinema had about 70 volunteers involved in its activities.

### Challenge

Total dependency on volunteers means it is essential for Star and Shadow Cinema to encourage as many people as possible to participate in order to run its events and activities.

*“Our problem is recruiting volunteers. We’re always short of volunteers everywhere. There’s never enough people to do everything.”*

Community business representative

### Action

Star and Shadow Cinema uses several methods to attract sufficient volunteers to manage its offer. Firstly, it operates an ‘open door’ policy, so anyone can volunteer as long as they commit to attend an induction session. These are held weekly to maximise the recruitment opportunities.

*“Inductions are wide open and every Sunday we hold a two-hour induction session where anyone, any member of the public, can turn up.”*

Community business representative

Secondly, all volunteers have an equal role in decision-making and can choose their roles and the extent to which they volunteer, from a one-off occasion to weekly regular slots, on the business’ website to suit them.

Lastly, it adopts a ‘give and take’ approach with open programming of events. People in the arts sector are encouraged to offer their time to contribute to the running of the community space and the various activities, in return for the opportunity to put on their own cultural activities at the venue.

*“... the thing that attracts volunteers is the idea of being able to put on events or be autonomous in the decisions and be able to have a say in what happens. Giving the opportunities to people to make their own ideas happen for the space.”*

Volunteer

## Result

By welcoming anybody to volunteer, Star and Shadow Cinema brings together people from

different age groups and backgrounds, which fosters greater creativity and enriches the venue's events as well as the experience for volunteers.

*“It's the different personalities and the different ways of working. I think that's the richest and most beneficial thing. So, you have a bunch of artists mixing or working with other very practical people and you get totally different outcomes.”*

Community business representative

The autonomy given to volunteers to sign themselves up for shifts and roles using the business' website encourages them to take responsibility for running the venue collaboratively.

*“I'm part of the programming team, so that means attending programming meetings which are every two weeks ... so it basically means as a volunteer, organising an event essentially. It could be a club night or a cinema screening, but you're the one responsible for that event, organising it, promoting it and making it happen.”*

Volunteer

This is of personal benefit for volunteers seeking to develop vital skills and experience to pursue a future career in the sector. For example, an art student seeking to become a film maker:

*“I've learned so much about how to find the distribution company of a film and how to create marketing material and then market something through social media. I've learned how to project films, and it's probably also built up my confidence quite a lot as well.”*

Volunteer