



PRODUCED BY THE ARCHITECTURE CENTRE

GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY VENUES



PRODUCED BY



➤ ABOUT US

BRISTOL OPEN DOORS

Bristol Open Doors is the city's annual festival of architecture and culture. For over 20 years it has enabled the public to explore the rich architecture and heritage of their city. It is part of the national Heritage Open Days initiative which sees thousands of buildings across the country open their doors for visitors every September, to get behind the scenes and discover their stories.

THE ARCHITECTURE CENTRE

The Architecture Centre is Bristol's centre for architecture, design and placemaking, championing better buildings and places for everyone. The Centre has co-ordinated Bristol Open Doors since 2015 and is passionate about making the event accessible and engaging for everyone.



**“WE’VE LIVED IN BRISTOL
ALL OUR LIVES BUT HAD
NEVER VISITED THE PLACES
WE LOOKED AT TODAY.”**

– VISITOR TO BRISTOL OPEN
DOORS VENUES

THIS COMMUNITY HANDBOOK

The Architecture Centre and Bristol Open Doors festival are keen to engage a diverse audience with the festival and encourage community buildings across the city to open their doors for the public to explore. The rich variety of community buildings in Bristol tell the stories of the city's neighbourhoods and communities, and sometimes lesser known stories or hidden histories. The festival would like to champion buildings from all corners of the city, by supporting them to open their doors to the public and revealing their stories. This handbook aims to help these venues.

➤ OPENING YOUR DOORS

COMMUNITY VENUES OPENING YOUR DOORS

In 2017 the Architecture Centre's *Opening Doors to Heritage* programme worked with several volunteer-led community venues, supporting them to participate in the Bristol Open Doors festival. Our learning from this experience is shared in this guide to encourage, inspire and support other community venues to open their doors to the public.

Many community buildings (community centres, mosques, churches, neighbourhood & heritage venues) are run by volunteers with limited time and resources. This booklet aims to help these dedicated volunteers by providing useful hints and tips.

Why open your community building to the public? What are the benefits?

- A chance to celebrate your building, its history and the activity that goes on inside it
- Raise the profile of your building in your neighbourhood and across the city through participating in a city-wide festival
- Generate a new and more diverse audience for your building, its services and activities
- Recruit new volunteers to get involved with your building
- Share your passion for your building and what makes its unique with a diverse audience
- Inspire a passion and interest in architecture, heritage, design and community to the next generation
- Usefully contribute to funding applications, community consultations and public engagement which you may want or need to do
- Raise money for your venue - entry to Bristol Open Doors must be free but additional elements such as refreshments, workshops or performances could be an opportunity to generate income.

➤ ATTRACTING THE PUBLIC TO YOUR OPEN DAY

BEFORE THE EVENT

Plan early to make sure that people know well in advance that your building will be opening to the public. Consider if you have anyone with IT or design skills in your community who could create a poster for the event which can be shared on social media and displayed locally in noticeboards, shops and house windows. Social media is a very effective tool for promoting your event for free. Ask friends or family who regularly use social media if they can help with this, or contact your local college or university for student volunteers. Are there any local newsletters or newspapers who could write a short article on your building and the open day? Make sure you let them know well in advance as they often have early print deadlines which you don't want to miss.

WHEN VISITORS ARRIVE ON THE DAY

Make your building visible and inviting from the outside. Flags, balloons, signs, banners and bunting displayed outside the building all draw attention, make people feel welcome and make it obvious you are open and part of the festival. These are all low cost and can be homemade.

HINTS AND TIPS

Register your building early with Bristol Open Doors (and Heritage Open Days) and try and provide as much information as possible:

Travel and access information, timings, special tours and activities, available facilities such as toilets, refreshments, baby change/breastfeeding areas.



© JonCraig.co.uk

WELCOME AREA

A good welcome for visitors is essential. Create a simple welcome area near the public entrance, staffed by venue volunteers. Volunteers can use the welcome area to meet and greet visitors,

explain facilities, timings, routes and what's on offer, answer questions and collect visitor data. It's important to collect data such as visitor postcodes and feedback comments to help improve and fund events in the future.



© JonCraig.co.uk

SIGNAGE

Positive and helpful signage can help visitors enjoy their visit. Clear signage and directions for facilities are important (eg. toilets, refreshments, buggy parks). Invitations to take part in activities should use positive and appealing language, such as:

- Please feel the texture of these stones/tiles
- Please enjoy this beautiful painting/sculpture by using your eyes and your feelings – it is delicate and touching it could cause damage.

ACCESS

There may of course be areas of your building that have restricted access. This might be because of health and safety, limited volunteer numbers or because budgets are limited for specific access aids (eg. access ramps). The most important thing is to try and be as welcoming and accessible as is practically possible.

HINTS AND TIPS

There are simple and cheap ways to help make your building more accessible:

Large print signage, magnifying glasses for visually impaired visitors, a comfy chair and drinking water for breastfeeding mothers, having multi-sensory ways for people to enjoy the building (eg. audio tours, storytelling or a smell trail). These can make all the difference for visitors.

“WE LOVED THE POSITIVE SIGNAGE ENCOURAGING US TO PICK UP AND FEEL CERTAIN OBJECTS - SO MUCH MORE FRIENDLY THAN THE USUAL ‘DO NOT TOUCH’ SIGNS.”

- FAMILY VISITOR TO DOORS OPEN DAY HERITAGE VENUE

➤ ENGAGING YOUR AUDIENCE

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

Visitors to your building will be of different ages, from many walks of life and with diverse interests. A useful starting point is to focus on the audience (visitors) and to think about what they might want or expect to get out of visiting your building, and how you might attract them in the first place.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC WITH YOUR BUILDING

Helping members of the public to access a building or a story is not quite the same as providing information. Information does not in itself lead to learning or to an enjoyable and memorable experience. For people to really get something out of their visit, they often need guidance and inspiration through interpretation.

INTERPRETING YOUR BUILDING

Interpretation is a process that helps visitors construct their own meaning, understanding and knowledge. A good interpreter doesn't have to know everything about a building or its story. A little information can certainly help, but more important is a commitment to respond to individual interests and assist visitors along their own journey of discovery.

HINTS AND TIPS

Ask the visitor questions:

What is their interest? Why did they come today? Do they have any prior experience, knowledge or personal stories of the building?

“CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE IS REALLY IMPORTANT AND MAKES VISITORS FEEL RELAXED AND WELCOME. WE PLAYED UPLIFTING MUSIC IN OUR BUILDING, PARTLY TO SHOW OFF THE GREAT ACOUSTICS, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY TO CREATE A RELAXED AMBIENCE TO HELP NEW VISITORS FEEL COMFORTABLE.”

– ULA, COMMUNITY VENUE ORGANISER



© Chris Wilkins

Focus your communication on things that provoke curiosity and consideration:

- Point out things that cannot be easily seen, that are intriguing, secret or contested
- Remember to use all the senses – hearing, touch, smell (even taste!) – as well as looking
- Use the familiar to measure space and volume (for many people ‘ten double decker buses’ is more easily digested than cubic meters)
- Do encourage individual responses and debate “*feel this... listen a moment and hear that... some people say...but what do you think?...*” is much more enticing than a lecture from one person’s point of view.

HINTS AND TIPS

Take note of what works and what doesn't and modify your approach throughout the day. Watch people's faces and respond accordingly – they will show interest, boredom or curiosity.



© JonCraig.co.uk

SUPPORTING VISITORS WITH SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Some visitors will have more specific needs. Bristol Doors Open Day aims to be as accessible and inclusive as possible. There is a wealth of information, support and training available on how to welcome diverse audiences:

- **HERITAGE OPEN DAYS** Tips on reaching new community audiences www.heritageopendays.org.uk
- **FAMILY ARTS CAMPAIGN** Welcoming family audiences to your venue www.familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards
- **WECIL** Supporting disabled audiences www.wecil.co.uk
- **DEMENTIA FRIENDS** Supporting visitors with Dementia and their carers www.dementiafriends.org.uk
- **SOCIAL SKILLS AGENCY** Supporting neuro diverse audiences socialskillsagency.org

➤ WELCOMING FAMILY VISITORS

FAMILY WELCOME AND PRACTICALITIES

Bristol Open Doors is particularly keen to encourage and inspire the next generation about architecture and culture, and so families are an important audience to welcome to your building.

Practical & simple things which make families feel welcome and comfortable:

- Ensuring volunteers provide a warm and friendly welcome on arrival and are clearly recognisable and visible to the public
- Clear signage for toilets, buggy parks, refreshments, baby changing spaces and play zones for under 5's
- Making free drinking water and comfortable seating area for breastfeeding mothers
- Remember that family groups come in many different combinations (eg. teenagers with parents; babies/toddlers with grandparents; intergenerational groups; single parents with their children, nieces and nephews; carers/support workers with groups of children, young adults with their parents). Try to create an experience which appeals to everyone.



© Chris Wilkins

“I REALLY ENJOYED VISITING THE BUILDING, THERE WERE DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES FOR THE CHILDREN, WE COULD SIT DOWN IN THE POP-UP CAFÉ AREA WHERE VOLUNTEERS HAD TEA AND CAKE FOR SALE, AND THE VOLUNTEERS MADE US FEEL REALLY WELCOME.”

– FAMILY VISITOR TO
ALL HALLOWS CHURCH



© Chris Wilkins

ENCOURAGING FAMILIES TO INTERACT WITH YOUR VENUE

- Have dedicated family activities easily accessible and get staff and volunteers to highlight them to family visitors on arrival
- Use positive ‘can do’ language wherever possible (eg. ‘please touch this’, ‘you are welcome to explore this’, ‘you are invited to draw, smell or feel this object’, ‘please walk, run or play a game on the grass’)
- Think about the sightline of displays and information. Can some items be at the eye level of children (eg. signage, tables, prompts, display areas, peep holes and handling objects)
- Encourage family visitors to explore your venue using all their senses - get staff and volunteers to highlight interesting textures, colours, views, echoes or smells which family visitors can experience
- Simple art and craft activities are always popular. Material can be low cost, borrowed or donated. Words describing the building can be creatively displayed and used by children to create a poem responding to the building (*Useful prompts could include: how does this building make you feel? If these walls could talk, what would they say?*)
- Other simple and cheap activities which appeal to families: trails around the building (eg. *i-spy*, *treasure hunt*), collecting rubbings and storytelling.



© Architecture Centre

HINTS AND TIPS

A simple way to encourage families with young children to relax and be able to stay longer is having an area set aside to serve basic refreshments, complimented with a simple play mat and a few toys for younger children. These items can simply be borrowed from members of your community group.

STAFFING AND PRACTICALITIES

VOLUNTEERS

Having capable volunteers can really help make your open day a success. Ensure you have plenty of volunteers – you may be busier than you expect and you need to make sure that volunteers can take comfort breaks throughout the day. It is always best to enlist more volunteers than you think you will need. If you don't have enough capacity in your community group you could think of getting others to help:

- Young people from local schools or youth groups may need volunteering experience (eg. as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Awards)
- Volunteer networks such as Voscur may be able to recruit volunteers: www.voscur.org
- Local colleges or universities may have keen students who are willing to volunteer as part of their course (eg. event management courses, architecture or heritage courses)
- Students or trainees in the arts, art therapy, early years or teaching may be willing to develop and run a family/creative learning activity for your venue as a project element of their college or university course.

These additional volunteers will need briefing and some support, but can be an useful extra resource.

MAKE VOLUNTEERS VISIBLE

Make sure volunteers are clearly visible to the public through badges, T-shirts, hats etc, so that people are clear who to ask for information and help. Reinforce this volunteer support with signage (eg. 'Our friendly volunteers (wearing pink rosettes) are looking forward to hearing what you think about our building and to answering any questions you might have').



© JonCraig.co.uk

“RECRUIT TWICE AS MANY VOLUNTEERS THAN YOU THINK YOU’LL NEED – HAVING PLENTY OF PEOPLE TO HELP ON THE DAY MAKES THE EVENT EASIER TO MANAGE – AND MORE ENJOYABLE!”

– JUDY, COMMUNITY VENUE ORGANISER

HINTS AND TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Don't talk too much or for too long or read a speech. Your job is to help visitors learn and discover, not to demonstrate what you do or don't know already. Don't worry if you don't know the answers to all the questions.

VOLUNTEER ROLES

It is a good idea to allocate specific volunteer roles (eg. meet and greeters, tour leader, building expert to answer questions, family activity organiser, photographer, refreshments, collecting data and feedback from visitors). Try and match volunteers skills and experience to the tasks they are best suited to doing or most motivated to do well at. This skills matching may sometimes involve a degree of diplomacy!

To support volunteers to do a great job of welcoming visitors to your building they may need some support and a clear briefing session before on the day.

THE PRACTICAL STUFF

Heritage Open Days provide advice and support on some of more the practical elements of opening your building to the public, including:

- Health and safety
- Data collection
- Evaluation
- Safeguarding
- Insurance
- Risk assessments

For more information, visit:

www.heritageopendays.org.uk

AND FINALLY...

Lastly, have fun opening your building to the public. This is your chance to celebrate and show off a building which is uniquely special. Enthuse people about its story and enjoy their interest, curiosity, appreciation and feedback.

HINTS AND TIPS

To save on volunteer time, encourage visitors to record their own data/feedback.

Ask visitors to use sticky dots to record their postcode data, ask visitors to write their feedback on luggage tags and then tie them to a 'feedback tree' as a fun, informal way for people to leave comments.

**“A FANTASTIC WAY TO FEEL LIKE WE
REALLY ARE A PART OF OUR CITY.”**
– BRISTOL OPEN DOORS VENUE ORGANISER

FOLLOW THE FESTIVAL



@BrisOpenDoors



@BrisOpenDoors



@BrisDoorsOpen

www.bristolpendoors.org.uk

PRODUCED BY



www.architecturecentre.org.uk

If you'd like to join the festival and open your doors, get in touch:
centre@architecturecentre.org.uk

Front cover illustrations:
© Naomi Hocking
Design by Sam Welch

SUPPORTED BY

Bristol Open Doors is part of the Architecture Centre's *Opening Doors to Heritage* programme, supported by:



Historic England

SPECIAL THANKS

The Architecture Centre would like to thank the following community venues who contributed their ideas to this booklet: All Hallows Church, Jacob's Wells Baths, Shirehampton Public Hall.