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Action Learning Resource  
***TO BLEND OR  
HYBRIDISE:  
THE SPECTRUM OF  
PHYGITAL  
PARTICIPATION***

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**“It’s about what can be held, felt, seen, known, perceived, and cared about – or not; how we define IRL (in real life) and what we allow to sit within IRL; about the value we place on remote participation alongside in -person participation; if we can create a mutualism between the two; what we decide matters.”**

- Pamela Crowe, Phygital Commissioned Artist

Developed as part of the Let's Get Phygital commissions by Axis 2022

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Artists in research phase one: Bolton Contemporary, Hull Artist Research Initiative, José García Oliva, Pamela Crowe, Simon Hall

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# FOREWORD

Let's Get Phygital is an Axis commissioning series to better support hybrid physical/digital participation. This continues our ongoing Social ARTery research strand investigating how best to support artists working with communities and technology.

The ambition is to support the cultural sector to imagine innovative ways of integrating technology into our lives in an increasingly digitised world. Through a combination of support we are encouraging artists to address digital inclusivity and social engagement asking: how is creativity expressed and participation made simultaneously online and in person?

We aim to support and promote meaningful engagement in a post-pandemic world, where technology has integrated itself deep into our working processes. Our commissioning series are always about learning and sharing that knowledge with our members and the wider arts sector.

This action-resource pack is a living document, which we will revisit and revise as we evolve socially and technologically. Find this and other resources in our new and growing Knowledge Bank coming out in 2023.

**R.M. Sánchez-Camus** Axis Development Associate and Project Lead

Image: Simon Hall



# INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade digital culture has become more and more prominent to the world of socially engaged practice. While institutions focus on digital infrastructure and social media reach, community and participatory organisations, artists and producers explore the potential digital has in engaging communities and creatively enriching people's lives.

Over the past three years, like our lives, jobs and education, art practice has become more hybrid. A combination of both the online world and the in person one, in some form or another. While there are many opportunities within this new form of engagement, there are still many unknowns, growing and adapting practices and procedures, and gaps in knowledge and experience.

With any new way of working there's a lot of trial and error which can be exciting and lead to glitches or "happy accidents". However, the digital functionality of the unlimited undo is not always useful when developing and designing projects and programmes, where artists are still learning to navigate this dual space at the same time as participants.

Let's Get Phygital is an opportunity for us to learn about the needs of artists, as well as communities, and how best support them. Whether the approach taken is hybrid, blended or a combination of both, the driving factor should be the needs of all those involved.

This action learning resource aims to document some of the processes of navigating socially engaged practice in the digital/physical world. It offers advice and invites questions. The tools and resources aren't intended to be prescriptive, but an offer of thought towards an inquisitive need for a better understanding of technology among participatory and socially engaged art.

**John Whall**

**Digital Participation Mentor**

**Resource Pack Lead Author**

# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

## Who is it for?

For those in the early stages of adopting digital/hybrid practices, as well as for those interested in other areas to which they are currently working in.

## Why do we need it?

This action learning resource is a point of reference to identify new ideas, new ways of working and opportunities to develop an understanding of an ever growing medium of socially engaged practice.

## What is it?

It is a reflection on the activity that has taken place, with reference to external sources and context. It is non-conclusive, and a documentation of action open to critique and influence by the reader.

## How do we use it?

To support the planning of a new project, identify areas of discussion with a new delivery partner or community group, or to test ideas against current practice.

You may also be surprised that the outcomes and discoveries in the document are not unique to digital and can be applied to any artistic participatory practice

# WHERE WE ARE/WHERE WE'VE COME FROM

The inclusion of digital in socially engaged art began before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. However, it was during this time that hybrid approaches started to grow out of necessity. More importantly, to keep participatory art and the need to be creative a part of the lives of our communities, relevant.

As venue based arts organisations scrambled to share collections online, or produce browser based gallery experiences, community focused organisations and departments worked collectively to connect with communities and share practice for the greater good.

While there are many great examples of this, one that stands out is the work by the Centre for Excellence in Participatory Theatre:

"In Spring 2020 the Centre for Excellence in Participatory Theatre pivoted its work online, delivering several planned masterclasses and events digitally instead of IRL. We asked participants what they felt the sector needed at that unique moment in time. They said: the space to talk with peers about socially distanced practice, to play, try out games and exercises, and test out new ways of working. So in August we hosted four Open Playground events. Practitioners added well known drama games and exercises that worked well online to an open source document that others searching for inspiration could use. The learning from those sessions is in our Participatory Theatre: Top Tips for Online Facilitation presentation – aimed to be an easy access, handy top tips guide."

- Marianne Matusz, Sector Development Programme Coordinator at Collective Encounters

Not only was their work reacting to the changing situation we faced as a society, but a created resource also became open source, allowing it to be freely shared and accessed, as well as adapted and added to as the document URL passed from one practitioner to another. It became alive and participatory in a way we hadn't experienced before. Physical games and exercises were shared in a digital document, so they can be used in hybrid spaces, all while being updated and changed as more people used it.





# SURVEY RESULTS:

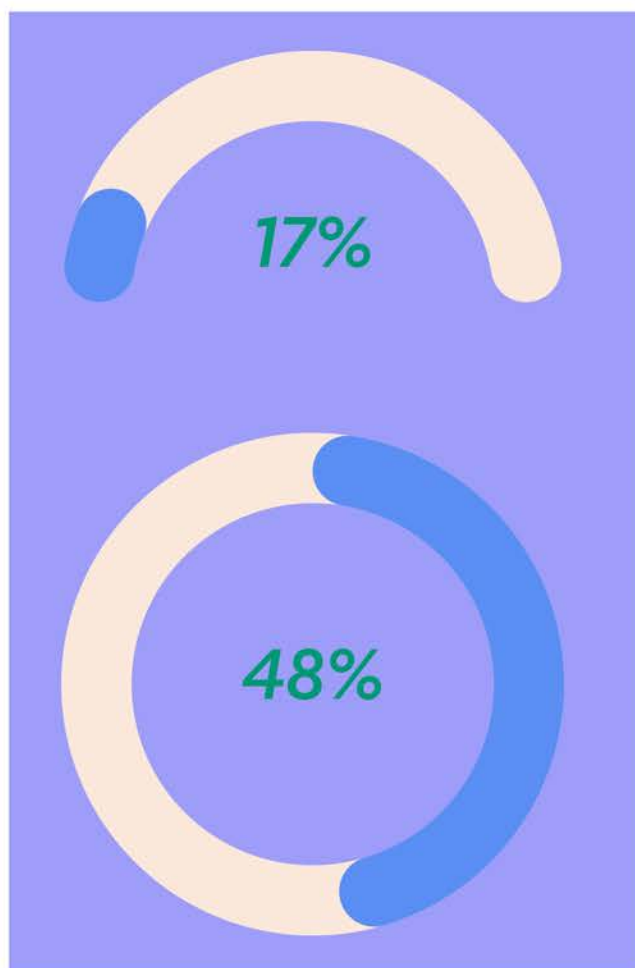
## KEY FINDINGS

To support the Let's Get Phygital project, as well as contribute to this action learning resource, a survey was shared among Axis members and the wider sector, to ask socially engaged artists and producers about how they currently work with, and would like to work with, digital.

The survey was designed to capture current practice, as well as the needs of artists and communities. The questions looked to gain insight into the technologies currently used by socially engaged artists, what they would like

to explore and how, as well as how they would like to be supported in developing skills and interest in technology when working with communities.

Below are some key insights gained by the responses received. They provide useful information in understanding the needs of artists and communities. Working with evaluator Dr Ria Poole we have developed a logic model that, alongside this resource, will form a follow up process that Axis will launch in 2023, to deepen the learning.



Even though most of those who responded used digital in their current practice (98%), only a small number (17%) felt they knew where to go for information on digital/hybrid delivery without time to research.

The most popular technologies being used in digital/hybrid delivery were screen based (camera's, computers, tablets, remote access meeting spaces and online notation tools), while the most interest in technologies to explore (but haven't) are immersive (MoCap, VR, AR, projection mapping and haptics).

Of the technologies being used in digital/hybrid delivery, nearly half of those who answered (48%) had combined technologies to be used at the same time.

Do you feel you had enough time with these technologies to fully explore their potential in your practice?

Yes No Unsure

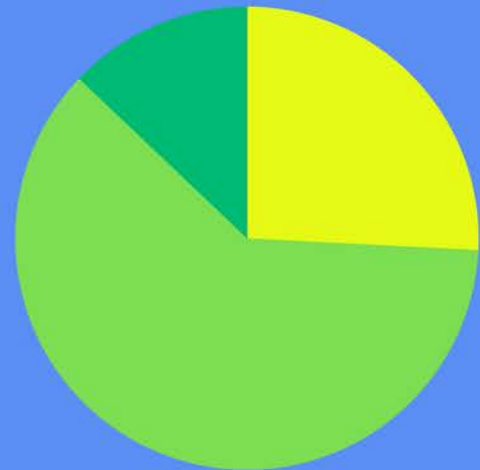


Of the technologies that artists had explored in digital or hybrid delivery, only 8% felt they had enough time with these technologies to fully explore the potential in their practice.

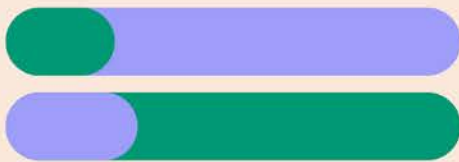
Needs of the artist

Needs of the community

There  
Not there  
Don't know



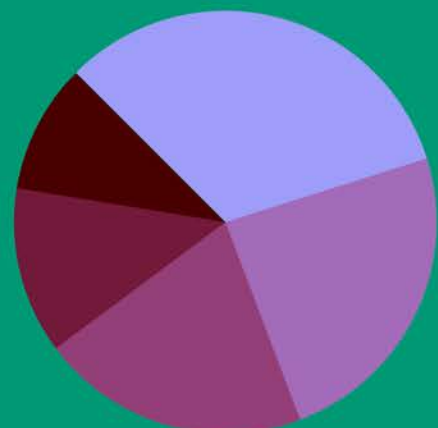
Nearly half of those who responded (47%) felt that the technology is there to meet the needs of their practice, while only a quarter (24%) felt the technology was there to meet the needs of the communities they work with.

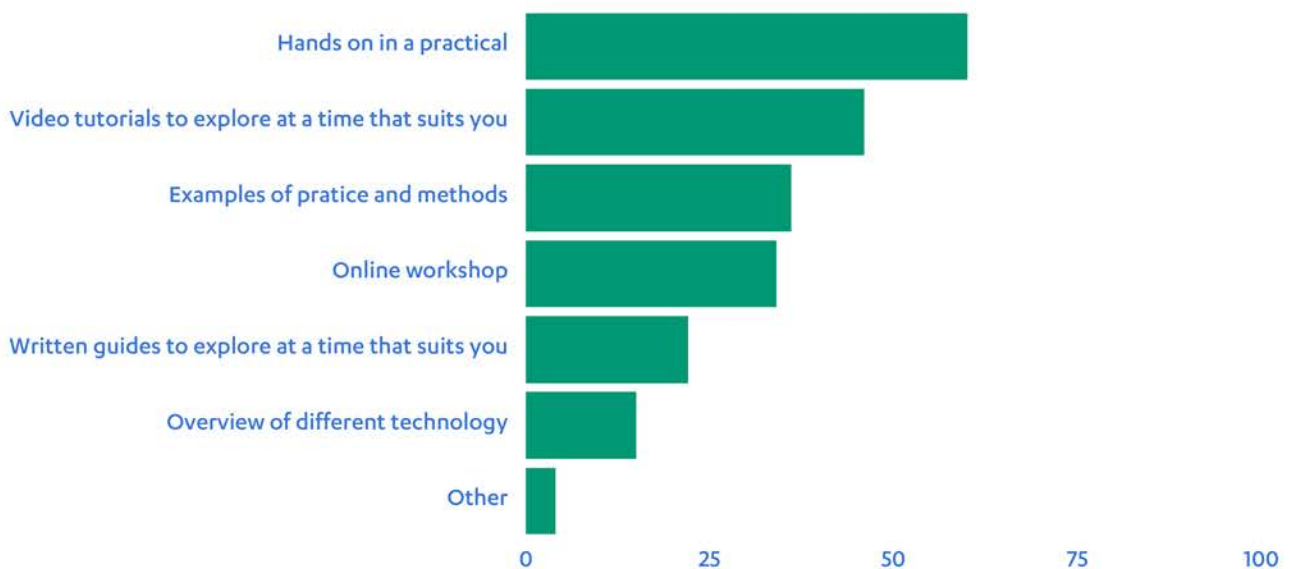


Those who responded to the survey also showed an overall increase of 24% in hybrid/digital practice following Covid-19, with most recent projects rising to 29%

The most common approach to hybrid delivery was the use of physical tools in digital spaces (33%), e.g. craft sessions via zoom, followed closely by the use of digital tools in physical spaces (24%), e.g. tablet based animation in a workshop setting.

Physical tools in digital spaces  
Digital tools in physical spaces  
None  
Digital tools in digital spaces  
Other





Most of those surveyed preferred hands on practical methods of exploring technology, followed by video tutorials to explore at a time that suits

While non-conclusive, these survey results show us that the use of physical practices alongside socially engaged ones, has increased since Covid-19. With this increase, there is a clear need for better signposting to information for artists, and an increase need for technology and methods to meet the needs of communities participating in socially engaged activities.

Of current practice, hybrid delivery where physical tools and materials are used in digital spaces, is a good indicator that artists are still drawing on traditional practice to engage with communities in online/digital spaces. The use of digital tools in these spaces is relatively low and it is unclear if this is because of a lack in skills and knowledge, availability of tools, desire to use these tools, or something else.

Interests in types of digital technologies is also changing. Screen based technologies have been the norm for a while and certainly an accessible means to working with digital technology, as well as being essential during the Covid-19 lockdown.

However, with online exhibitions and experiences increasing in availability, along with the rise of affordable virtual reality technology, lockdown also drove the interest in more immersive experiences. This change is not surprising either. The natural desire to try new things, along with its increased use in arts and culture over the past decade, and rise in popularity in social trends, make this technology more desirable.

This shift in interest comes with the need for a shift in skills. Not only for artists to learn how to create with immersive technologies, but also how to deliver its use in socially engaged projects. While more organisations and funders are increasing support in this area, there is still a need for a strategy in supporting long-term investment in artist skills and guidance.

We hope that a follow up investigation into the findings will provide recommendations that can support with this strategy and help to improve the use of hybrid/digital technology in art practice.

# *CORE RESOURCE*

**“In my work, I think a lot about how digital spaces, like the physical spaces we move through, are in fact a social production. Which means they can be intervened in and remade.”**

- Kit Braybrooke, Digital Anthropologist and Director of We & Us - Beyond the Now

# USE OF LANGUAGE: DEFINING HYBRID AND BLENDED

In order to understand the simultaneous blend of **physical** and **digital** spaces in socially engaged practice, it is useful to explore what we mean by the words most commonly used to describe it. While this project adopts the term “**phygital**”, there are two words that most often defines this way of working: hybrid and blended.

## Hybrid:

A thing that is made by combining two different elements, resulting in something new. It is in and of itself.

## Blended:

A combination of things being brought together, each with their own identity.

The combining of digital and physical elements in participatory and socially engaged practice can result in hybrid or blended engagement (or a combination of both), depending on how the activity is structured.

Hybrid engagement tends to lean towards online activity where physical participants are engaging in an online space, but this can also be the case in virtual reality environments accessed through a headset, whether online or not. Blended elements like the use of physical materials and online tools, for example JAM Boards, are also used in this hybrid working

space, but their use typically doesn't create something new outside of the environment.

Although blended engagement can exist in an online space, it is more common with engagement in the physical space, where a number of digital tools and materials are used in shaping the creative output. These tools and materials can include both devices in the physical space, or inputs from online sources. Elements that are brought together can then become hybrid, but maintain a separation from the whole.

It is important to note that both methods can result in a physical output, digital output, or a combination of both.

# THE OPEN CALL

For the Let's Get Phygital programme an open call was put out inviting artists interested in exploring how social engagement can happen simultaneously in blended physical and digital spaces, to submit proposals to take part in commissioned action research.

The call was aimed at artist interested in testing new approaches to working with people and technology. This could take the form of looking to address digital poverty, online exclusion, AI racism, or any other topics that relate to accessibility, social equity and digital spaces. Artists were invited to think outside the box about how to use digital devices to develop socially engaged practices or facilitate collaboration in group settings.

The commissions were available to explore new ways of collaborative art making in a blended online and in-person way. Commissions could take the form of an event, a workshop, a DIY making space, a community intervention, or any other idea that invites people to engage in art and technology in an accessible and meaningful way to understand: What are new ways of working together that combine the best of being in person and online? Moving into a post-pandemic future Axis aims to help artists think of innovative ways of working that use some of the digital tools we have become accustomed to and increase accessibility for those homebound, with the need to reconnect in person and create live participatory work, including how can we address both these aspects creatively?

## Commissions were selected on:

1. **Feasibility:** How much does ambition match practicalities? What communities do they want to work with and are they already connected?
2. **Innovation:** How strong is the project idea? Is blended art central to the work and unique?
3. **Phygital Focus:** Does the proposal incorporate a blended model at its core? Does the applicant have knowledge of basic digital technology?
4. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** Does the proposal have an equitable level of participation? Does it address accessibility needs?
5. **Track Record:** Do the artists have the experience to work independently and deliver the commissions?



# *THE COMMISSIONS*

This section provides an overview of the Let's get Phygital phase one commissions included in the learning resource. It provides an overview of the activity and learning that took place, as well as provides recommendations for consideration towards new projects and ways of working.

## **Commissioned artists include:**

Bolton Contemporary CIC (Andee Collard and Rebecca Harrington)

HARI: Hull Artist research Initiative (Sarah Pennington and Thomas Robinson) and collaborators

José García Oliva

Pamela Crowe

Simon Hall



**ADAPTION  
BEYOND  
ARTFORM**

Image: Bolton Contemporary CIC

**Artist(s):** Bolton Contemporary CIC (Andee Collard and Rebecca Harrington)

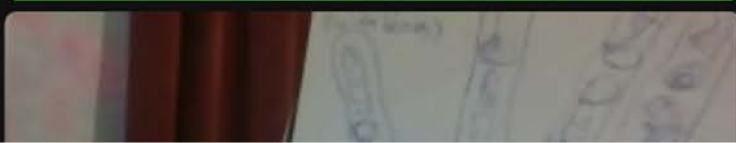
**Participants:** Young carers

### Commission:

Like most traditionally skilled artists, Bolton Contemporary CIC found themselves in a post-pandemic world where online hybrid activity is in demand, especially when engaging those with complex needs. However, translating an analogue practice into a hybrid one, because your participants are now accessible online, isn't always straight forward.

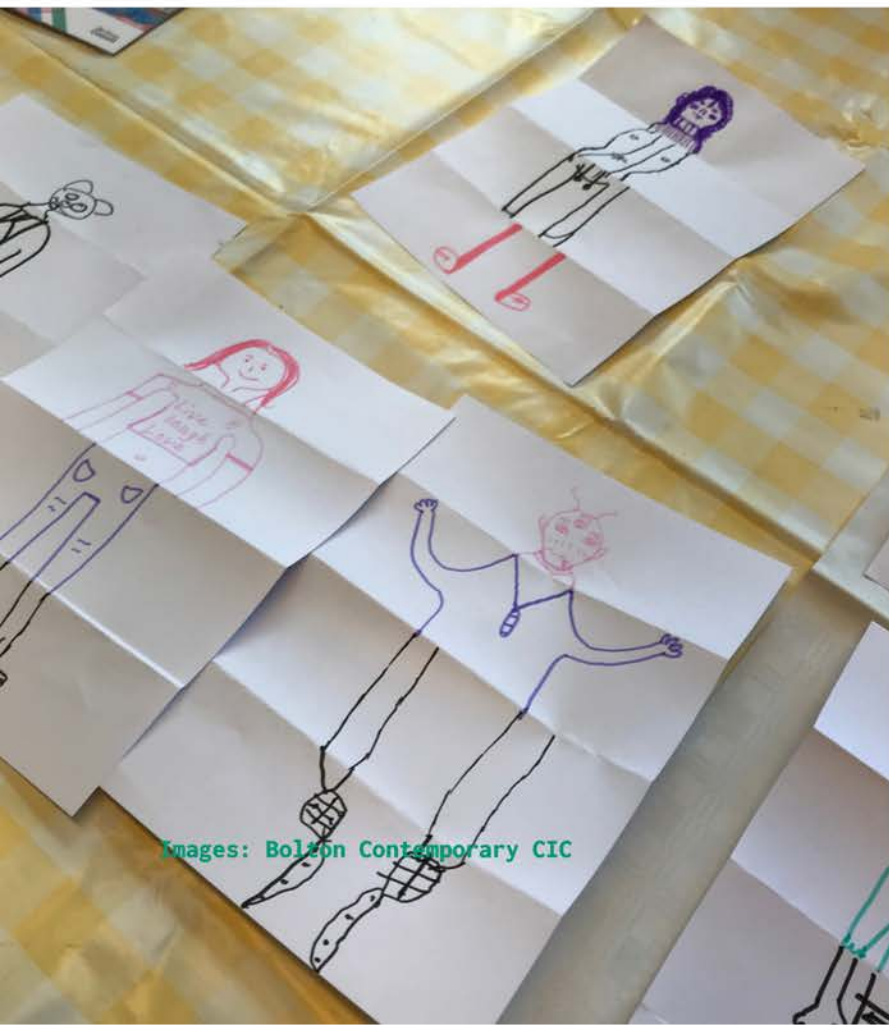
Leaning on skills in drawing, DIY publishing and clay model making, Andee and Rebecca are interested in accessible methods for participants to develop their own creative practice. As part of their project, they would explore digital/hybrid approaches to these skills through both in person and online workshops, to test how the two spaces can intermingle.

These approaches were both related to the facilitation of the online space and the use of materials within it. The online space can be highly accessible, but not always practical. Andee and Rebecca found themselves experimenting with camera angles in Zoom, to facilitate and share examples of work, leading to changes in conversation and allowing participants to open up around chosen themes. However, capturing high quality images of the participants work for DIY publication proved problematic and physically obtaining the work required additional steps, complicating the hybrid workspace. This resulted in simplifying the process and stripping back the online activities to a purely online interaction without specialist materials.



Capturing images from online spaces also presented another common problem since moving to hybrid working, that of capturing images of the participants and their home environments. Like most hybrid participant activities, this project had to consider data protection in the logistical aspects of the activities, as well as the complexities of image rights. Particularly when working with children and young people.

This commission went beyond the intention of exploring physical skills in digital spaces. It raised questions about the practicalities of these spaces; the safety and needs of those who occupy them; and learning what can't be done while exploring the possibilities of what can. While an artist's practice evolves through the addition of digital materials and environments, the transition into hybrid delivery can sometimes take them too far into the unfamiliar territory of digital facilitation, away from the skills and artistry that defines them.



Images: Bolton Contemporary CIC





Image: Hull Artist Research Initiative (HARI)

**NOT TRYING TO  
REINVENT THE  
WHEEL**



Image: Hull Artist Research Initiative (HARI)

**Artist(s):** HARI: Hull Artist Research Initiative (Sarah Pennington and Thomas Robinson) and collaborators

**Participants:** Sound Contributors, Sonic Artists, Audiences in the space and online

### Commission:

HARI finds themselves in a place of transition towards the “new-norm” of hybrid programming. Their project ‘Phygital Phonics: Nature Sounds’ (initially titled ‘ToGather’), explored the themes of Art:Nature:Environment in an experimental programme of online/offline performance and sharing, as well as to digitally capture audio of the natural world. This trial event was an opportunity to learn, experiment, share and grow, and would set the basis for new ways of programming future activities and performance.

In preparation for the live event, participants (general public) were invited to make sound recordings of the natural world, for HARI to share with sonic artists, as part of an active engagement research activity. The artists would then create new work for sharing during a performance event, curated with artist [Phoebe Riley Law](#). The event itself became a blend of hybridity, with in person and online performance simultaneously shared in the physical space at an Axis Vacant Space property, hybrid space on Zoom and online space via YouTube. From the outset, HARI Recognised that the physical and online spaces are separate and knew they had to accommodate for that. This complex hybrid approach raised questions around how to hold the individual spaces, working with the artists’ needs and how to best observe and capture the audience responses. Becoming the stage managers of three shows at once.

HARI confess that they are not the experts in the sonic artform, or even how to best present it. Their goal was not to become the expert, but to explore how to best support these artists in hybrid performance, through a community focus approach and the importance of ensuring everyone is valued. Taking direct inspiration from the artists they work with, they



aim to build an interconnected knowledge around arts processes and other subjects key to working with artists and audiences.

Their project allowed Sarah and Thomas the time and resources to navigate a number of hurdles to support future programming, including upskilling in digital broadcast technology, building their tech infrastructure (including the installation of WiFi) and programming hybrid/digital spaces. To support this new way of working, they invited artist Jay Moy to join the shared learning process and bring his digital knowledge and interests to the event development and to learn alongside HARI through the implementation of the event.

Key interests for HARI in this project and for future programming is bringing artists and publics together in shared research and learning. They hope that this knowledge and evidence exchange between artists and publics will continue phygitally as well as directly within their meanwhile space – as appropriate to the different artist interventions.

This commission took the plunge into hybrid programming with a goal to learn. When most organisations have now found a comfortable place in their programme for sharing work online, or hosting hybrid webinars and events, as HARI is an emerging independent artist-led venture, Sarah and Thomas embraced the discomfort of not knowing. By programming for multiple spaces simultaneously, they were able to gain a lot of experience in one project. Experience that would instantly influence future programming. This was a big risk, but like the best approaches to art and art programming, the biggest risks provide the biggest rewards.

***THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
PHYSICAL  
EXPERIENCE/SPACE***



**Artist(s):** José García Oliva

**Participants:** Audience, Online Customer Service Agents based in Pakistan

### Commission:

Global online connectivity and interactivity often disguises real world lives. Especially by those whose jobs are contained within these cyber realms. Live chat services, often provided by corporations as a convenient customer service utensil, offer the illusion of conversing with a real person, while said person is only able to follow a scripted performance more commonly associated with simple robotic commands, e.g. "if this, then that". José García Oliva's commission subverts the rigidity of corporate chat services, while emphasising the real people at the other end of the screen.

José's work incorporates physical installation, online communication and physical publication to draw attention to the people behind digital consumer services. The physical replication of a call centre cubical and online representation of a chat service website, allow participatory audiences gain a glimpse through the psychological mirror of the life of a Customer Service Agent. They are free to chat with the agents and equally, the agents are free to chat back, unshackled from corporate scripts. The online space, sharing a live stream of the physical installation, places the non-professional participant into the role of the professional one. More importantly, emphasising the physical participatory experience often given less consideration in hybrid participatory work.

Image: R.M. Sánchez-Camus



Saadia Abbasi Admin

Support Agent

sadiaabasi@gmail.com

- > Groups
- > Additional info
- > Working hours
- ∨ Performance

■ Total chats	72
☑ Goals	0
👍 Chat satisfaction	100%
✅ Solved tickets	0
🕒 Ticket first response time	n/a
👍 Ticket satisfaction	n/a

Through this commission, José was able to bring physicality to what we all experience as an online interaction. Putting participants into the position of the “other” and bringing emphasis to the human element of digital engagement. We are often disconnected from our physical self during online interactivity and therefore unable to look past the screen to relate to the person at the other end.





**A DIGITAL DOOR  
TO THE NATURAL  
WORLD**

# SEVEN

# SHORT

# CIRCULAR

# WALKS

from the  
**Cardigan Community Centre**

**Artist(s):** Pamela Crowe

**Participants:** Older participants from the Elders Project at the Cardigan Community Centre, Leeds

**Commission:**

If your participants can't join you for a walk... bring the walk to them. Through this commission **Pamela Crowe** introduced older participants to how smart devices and online applications can not only connect you to the wider world, but also to the natural one. Working with both physically abled and lesser abled participants, **Pamela** uses technology to address accessibility issues in order for a more inclusive project.

During a walking activity, participants would use a combination of technologies to both share and view the outside world. Outside participants would go on a curated walk, sharing their experience through mobile live stream, location data and captured image. Those remaining in the community centre are then able to be taken on a virtual walk using digital tools, such as WhatsApp, what3words and Google Maps, to document the activity and curate captured images. A shared technical language would start to form, so that everyone involved could communicate between the outside and the digital worlds.

This commission was about learning from participant experience, testing assumptions about technology and its benefits to a participant group, and the value we place on remote participation alongside the in-person. As a group that **Pamela** knows well, this work allowed for more understanding of participants and their

needs, while also developing her own practice. Integrating technology takes time, the incubation of shared language and experience, and to explore the question “why are we doing this?”.

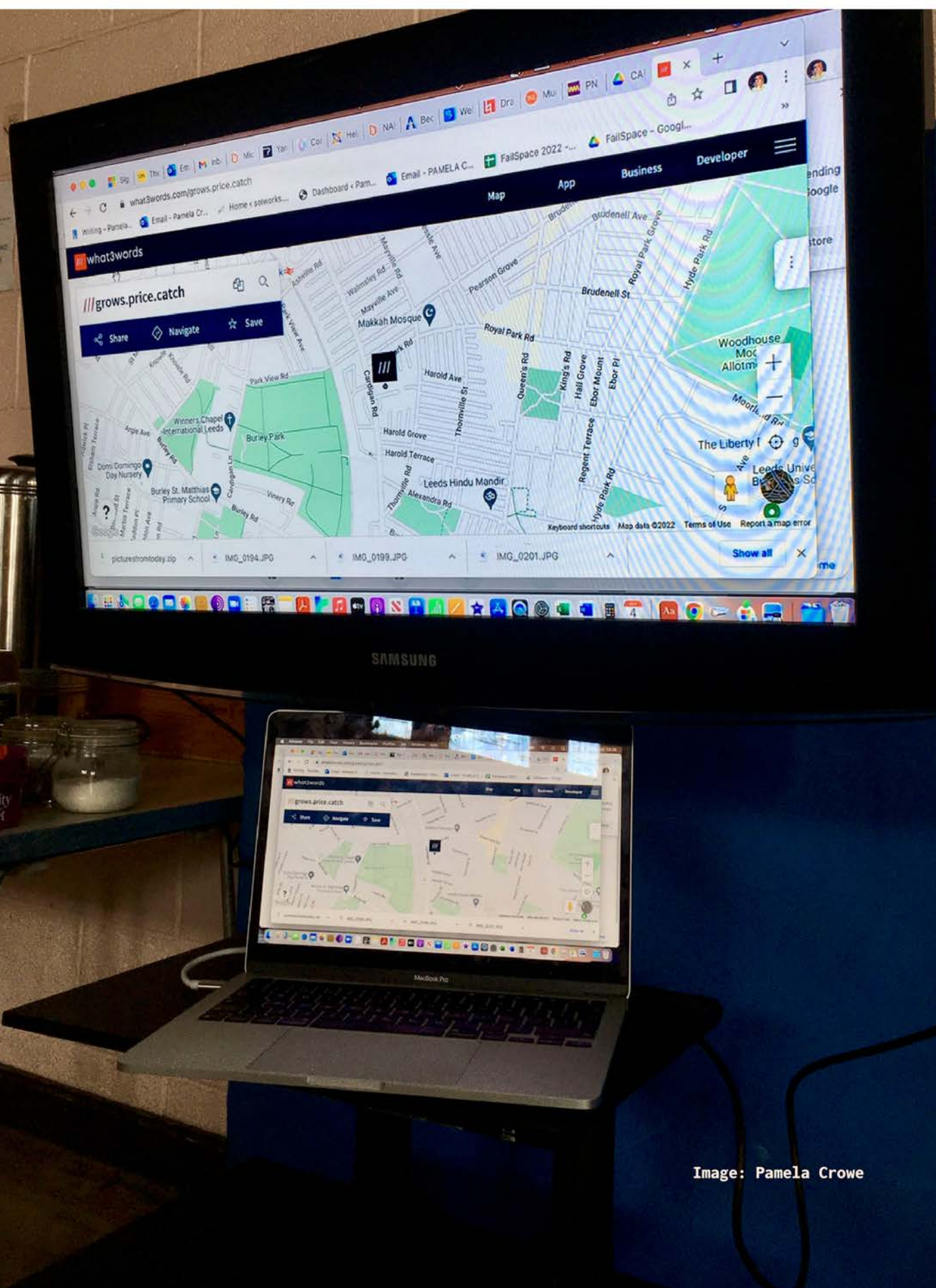


Image: Pamela Crowe



**REPRESENTING  
AND ALTERING:  
HOW WE SHARE AND MODIFY  
OURSELVES**

Image: Simon Hall

**Artist(s):** Simon Hall

**Participants:** Adults and young people with a cleft lip and palate, Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA), healthcare professionals

### Commission:

Simon Hall explored the use of virtual reality (VR) and three-dimensional creative technologies, as a means to deepen engagement with the cleft lip and palate community, interact in a digital interface, collaborate and foster interconnectedness. 3D models would be created and imported into virtual spaces, where creative tools would be used to explore aspects of self, stigma and representation, while maintaining a safe environment for participants.

Initial plans for the project included the layering of community building through social platform Discord, where young people would share real-time conversation and feedback, directing those in VR in ways to sculpt and manipulate 3D scans of the artist and taught to use digital modelling tools to explore making the fantastical self. While the CLAPA maintains an interest in developing hybrid approaches to participant engagement, this was not something they had capacity to support during this project. However, learning from the project will help to support long-term strategies for digital/physical engagement at the organisation, including online safety and data protection.

With a shift away from the intended participatory group, Simon was able to focus on upskilling himself in 3D scanning, modelling and VR tools, and working with specific individuals (a facial surgeon, psychologist and an adult with cleft lip and palate) to explore alternative perspectives allied with this community.

Images: Simon Hall

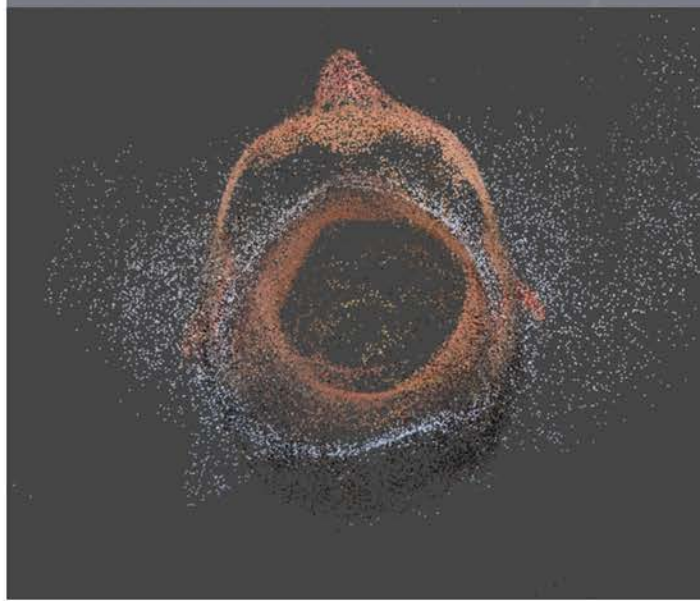




Image: Simon Hall

This change in direction opened deeper learning around sharing of our digital selves with the artists 3D identity being altered by participants. Additionally the participants reflected on how such novel digital tools could be useful in healthcare decision making to experimentally view the holistic cranial and facial appearance beyond the limits of photos and mirrors.

This commission was one of self-discovery and development for the interest of others. It carefully considered it's participant group, offered safe spaces and representations in collaboration with the charity, and put the artist in the role of the participant. The learning **Simon** has been able to undertake in this role is both important in future working with those who have a cleft lip and palate, but also professionals and support organisations who are interested in how digital technologies can better support the communities they work with.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations from each commission draw on the themes of considering the needs of everyone involved; develop work in and with hybrid spaces in arts programming; how the physical can bring meaning in digital spaces; conceptualising the value of remote participation alongside the in-person, and how artist participation can lead to wider goals for a community.

They are offered to guide thinking and to explore considerations otherwise missed by those working with participants in the phygital world.

## ADAPTION BEYOND ARTFORM

### **Finding a balance for self and for others.**

As we grow as artists, for every idea or skill learned there are often those that get left behind. This is also true when digital practices are introduced. However, when the need for digital practices results in replacing those that have defined an artist's work, balance must be found to maintain the identity of the artist. This is especially tricky when attempting to meet the needs of the participants, as well as

supporting organisations navigate the establishing bureaucracies of the hybrid world.

### **Ambiguity of needs.**

Digital technology is becoming more and more accessible all the time. However, it is not accessible for all, all the time. Devices and interfaces can be challenging for some, even more so for the unprepared. Artists that are in the early stages of exploring digital technology (and in truth, also for those who are digitally native) can sometime find themselves working with those with complex needs for the first time in online spaces. For this to work, artists need to work closely with partner organisations to understand participant needs, as well as assess how to reduce the complexity of the activity where necessary.

### **Physical aspect of the hybrid approach is still physical.**

Not all aspects of hybrid delivery should remain digital. To get the most out of activities that do take place online, it's a good idea to still be in physical contact with participants through face-to-face activities and communication. This helps us to truly observe a group and gain a better understanding of their needs in a way that annotated information and screen based windows can't.

# NOT TRYING TO REINVENT THE WHEEL

## **Have a long-term plan.**

While hybrid engagement has become a part of toolkit for arts producers, it can still be simply seen as a way to put an event online. Setting a long-term plan will allow you to think about why you want to provide hybrid experiences for your audiences, how can you best support artists in these spaces, what infrastructure and skills do you need to grow, and who do you need to work with in order for it to be successful?

## **Finding the right technical support.**

The rise of hybrid and broadcast-like event delivery has shown an increased demand in the technical skills required to host them. While many of these skills can be learned, working with those with these skills can elevate your programme in ways you may not have considered. This can especially be the case when working with technically skilled artists, who take a more creative approach to working in hybrid spaces.

## **Don't be afraid of things going wrong.**

Whether your approach is slow and steady or plunging head first, working with technology will always have the risk of something going wrong. Most of the time this can be mitigated though planning and testing, but even the most digital experienced can and do face problems that need to be overcome. Only by facing these problems will you learn what works, what doesn't and why. More often than not, things that don't work provide more opportunities than those that do. After all, if at first you don't succeed...learn, adapt, try again.

# *THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE/SPACE*

## **Being 'digital' doesn't mean you have to abandon the physical space.**

Using the physical environment in hybrid engagement exposes the presence of the person in the activity. It can make us more comfortable in taking part, or reveal a shared connection. While not all participants will chose to disclose their physical space or presence, the option should always be available.

## **Match the experience to meaning of the work.**

If it is important to share the physical experience, then the digital one should be a platform for this and not just added in for the sake of hybridity. This is especially important for physical mediums, such as the performing arts.

## **Value the expertise of your participants.**

Participants of all kinds will always bring knowledge, experience and expertise to a project. This should always be valued by the artist. If possible, by paid contribution of time (after all, the artist is likely to be), or by providing a space where participants are free to express their ideas. Only through this freedom will you get the most from all involved.

# A DIGITAL DOOR TO THE NATURAL WORLD

## **You can't be two places at once, or can you?**

Dual working across multiple locations (and technologies) can be complicated to facilitate. Hybrid working often requires a person in each space to manage the different elements. In online workshops, this is less of an issue, but if you're working in both a physical and online space at the same time, you will likely need additional facilitators. Ideally those who are practiced in that space.

## **The physically active are still the most physically active.**

Care must be taken when working with participants with varying levels of activeness. While the best intentions are to provide a shared experience that all can take part in regardless of physical ability, an activity that separates the active from the inactive will likely result in one side dominating the experience.

## **Be mindful of the data you will be capturing.**

Participation projects involving the live streaming of location information can often unintentionally capture more information about a participant than intended. Always consider what you're capturing, why you're capturing it, who will see the information and if the data will be stored/shared in anyway. You may also need to consider how the platform you use also captures data. If in doubt, always ensure your consent forms include information on the potential participant data you may capture and what will be done if it is.

# REPRESENTING AND ALTERING: HOW WE SHARE AND MODIFY OURSELVES

## **Self-learning will only improve your work.**

By taking the time to develop your digitally creative skills you are in a better position to creatively respond to participants, as well as be more relatable through personal experience. Not all artists identically represent the communities they work with, but shared understanding will always create stronger experiences.

## **Barriers are often sign posts to other routes.**

Often projects are planned with the best intentions. Once they actually start, certain realities are faced and can create barriers. Changes in direction can still provide the desired outcomes, even if solely through sharing of learning.

## **Change is inevitable, but not the end.**

While many social media influencers have adopted the phrase “trust the process”, as artists we must also accept that the process may and will change. We are still able to achieve our goals, they just might not be in a way we expected. The ever changing nature of digital means that we must often adapt to the things we already know, more often than not on a daily basis.

# ADDITIONAL

## TIPS:

- The technology should never come first. You may have a great idea for its use, but if it hinders the participatory process or experience, then it isn't being used correctly.
- Activities will likely take more time than you expect. Keep things simple and don't try to achieve too much at once. Where possible, try and introduce the technology first as a separate session so that participants can get use to it and ask questions before starting a task.
- Ask yourself if the use of technology is a problem solver or to be solved? Knowing which will start you off on the right footing.
- Learn to be intuitive to a groups needs and adapt the sessions accordingly. Have an idea of what you want to do for the session, but keep your options open.
- Make the most of the physical and digital spaces. What functions do they offer and how can you use them in your activity.
- Don't be afraid to use physical means to assist with session delivery. If it's best for the activity and participants for things to be sent in the post before an activity, then use this method. Equally, if you need things to be sent back, provide stamped addressed envelopes etc
- Be curious and develop your ability to vision - dream big as anything could be possible.

**“We are learning to be intuitive to the groups needs and adapt the sessions accordingly, having an idea of what we want to do for the sessions but keeping options open has been key to making things work better for us.**

- Bolton Contemporary CIC

*TOOLS AND  
RESOURCES FOR  
WORKING WITH  
DIGITAL*

# PARTICIPANT NEEDS

## The digital participant

The digital participant is one that engages with an activity online. They may be joining from a home location, or at a remote activity centre.

- Simplify the activity wherever possible. This can support engagement online where the ability to be hands on isn't available, or with unfamiliar technology in a physical space.
- Online participants tend to be more relaxed due to the comfort and familiarity of their environment, as well as the ability to "hide" by turning off their video. However, it is much more difficult to engage with an online participant on a 1-2-1 basis and therefore care should be taken to ensure each participant is comfortable with their task.
- Use online facilitation support wherever possible. This is a person who is able to manage the online space, manage breakout rooms, spotlight important moments and camera angles, and generally have better direct contact with the participants.
- Online participants are reliant on personal equipment and/or internet access. This can vary the support each participant requires depending on the device they're using. It is also worth exploring the provision of internet access costs as part of your programme budget, or additional funding opportunity.

## The physical participant

The physical participant is someone who is physically present in a workshop environment and will be engaging with digital tools and materials.

- Physical participants can often get distracted or anxious when using digital software for the first time, exploring the screen in front of them rather than the instructions given. It's always worth demonstrating an activity before letting participants get hands on.
- Physical participants often ignore mistakes and carry on. This can be problematic in some instances when the mistake prevents the completion of a task and the whole activity has to be started again. Always make sure you show how to undo mistakes and encourage saving often.
- When using VR, physical participants can forget about the physical world, moving and gesturing without awareness of others. Always allow for adequate space and ensure instructions are understood before taking part.
- Physical participants who use online digital spaces may need access to these spaces to share their creations away from the workshop environment. Always make sure you establish the needed access and settings to avoid spaces being open to abuse.



# TOP TIPS FOR APPLYING TO FUNDERS



Image: John Whall/CrAIyon

## 1 - Include the costs for training and development

Funders will be looking for quality outputs, but also for investment in your skills and abilities. Including costs for time to develop your skills in the work you're undertaking, or even to hire in the support of experts that you will learn from, will show commitment to your projects success.

## 2 - Don't skimp on equipment budgets

This is a big risk factor for funders assessing the feasibility of your project. Digital technology is expensive and trying to keep costs down in this area to demonstrate value for money, will likely result in not getting funded. If your equipment budget takes you outside of a funds maximum value, then you will most likely need to look elsewhere, or obtain match funding.

## 3 - Make the case for digital

With the above in mind, not all funders understand the benefits of digital technology verse it's high cost. Include facts and research that help justify that the technology you're using is the right, or only, way to deliver your project. This will help the funder to understand why this is the only way the project can be achieved and how they will be investing in new ways of working.

## 4 - Digital access

Digital poverty and access to digital equipment is still a big factor in participant engagement. Your project should include how you will breakdown these barriers. This could take the form of providing equipment, upskilling, onboarding sessions, or even simple actions as to provide pre-paid sim cards or install broadband in homes for online access. There are charities that support with digital access, as well as tech providers such as Vodaphone, which could also be a source of match funding.

## 5 - Demonstrate the technology works

Experimenting and trying out ideas will go a long way when applying for project funding, even when applying for a development fund. Demonstrating that you have explored your chosen technology and its potential will show a funder that your ideas are based on solid grounding and reduce the risk of project failure.

## 6 - Find an appropriate digital partner

Partnering with an organisation or individual who can lead on the technology side of your project will demonstrate to funders that experienced people are working with you. This can be strengthened by finding partners who are align with the causes your project are trying to support.



# BEST PRACTICE

## Safeguarding

Always ensure no-one can join an online space uninvited.

Make sure appropriate housekeeping is set out at the start, with a safe space policy (for both online and offline if necessary) wherever possible.

Ensure participants know if a session is livestreamed or recorded and what is expected as good behaviour. It is also important that participants understand what they can do to notify you of any unwanted behaviour.

Use a platform where private messaging is not available or able to be switched off.

Always offer participants the option to turn off cameras and mic's. This can often make engagement more comfortable for some.

However, if a participant is joining from home, do check that the participant is who they say they are either by a 1-2-1 check before the session begins, or through the use of a breakout room.

Be conscious of background environments and whether others are sharing the room with a participant.

Ensure any links to live resources, such as Miro or Jam Board, are only shared in the activity and not before.

If activity is taking place in an online and physical space at the same time, have someone responsible for each to ensure any safeguarding concerns are captured in an adequate time.



## Consent

Any recording of a participant, video or audio, that captures their identity constitutes as personal data under the Data Protection Act, 2018.

Under the act, in order to store and/or share the recordings you will need to make sure they are:

- Adequate for the stated purpose
- Relevant to the purpose
- Limited to only what is necessary

You must also make sure that a participant has been provided with information on what will be captured and how. It is recommended that you break down this consent to each individual component (granular), so that a participant can withdraw specific elements if they wish.

Make a list of all the digital tools being used in the activity and how they may capture data. For example, smart phones are able to capture information on a participants location during the activity. If this data is being stored for any reason, then consent must be obtained.

## Digital accessibility

Establish whether you require the use of accessibility tools or live interpretation. This could involve live close caption, audio description or a BSL interpreter. For best results, always check with the participant on how they have used these in the past.

If a session is recorded for sharing, it is always best to provide close captions and ask speakers to visually describe themselves.

Some participants maybe joining an online session for the first time. If this is the case, do check to see if they require help with settings or navigating the interface, prior to them joining.

Provide documents and guides in advance so that participants have the time to get comfortable with the technology.

Always consider if a participant is able to continue an activity away from a session. Try to use free/open source software and tools wherever possible.

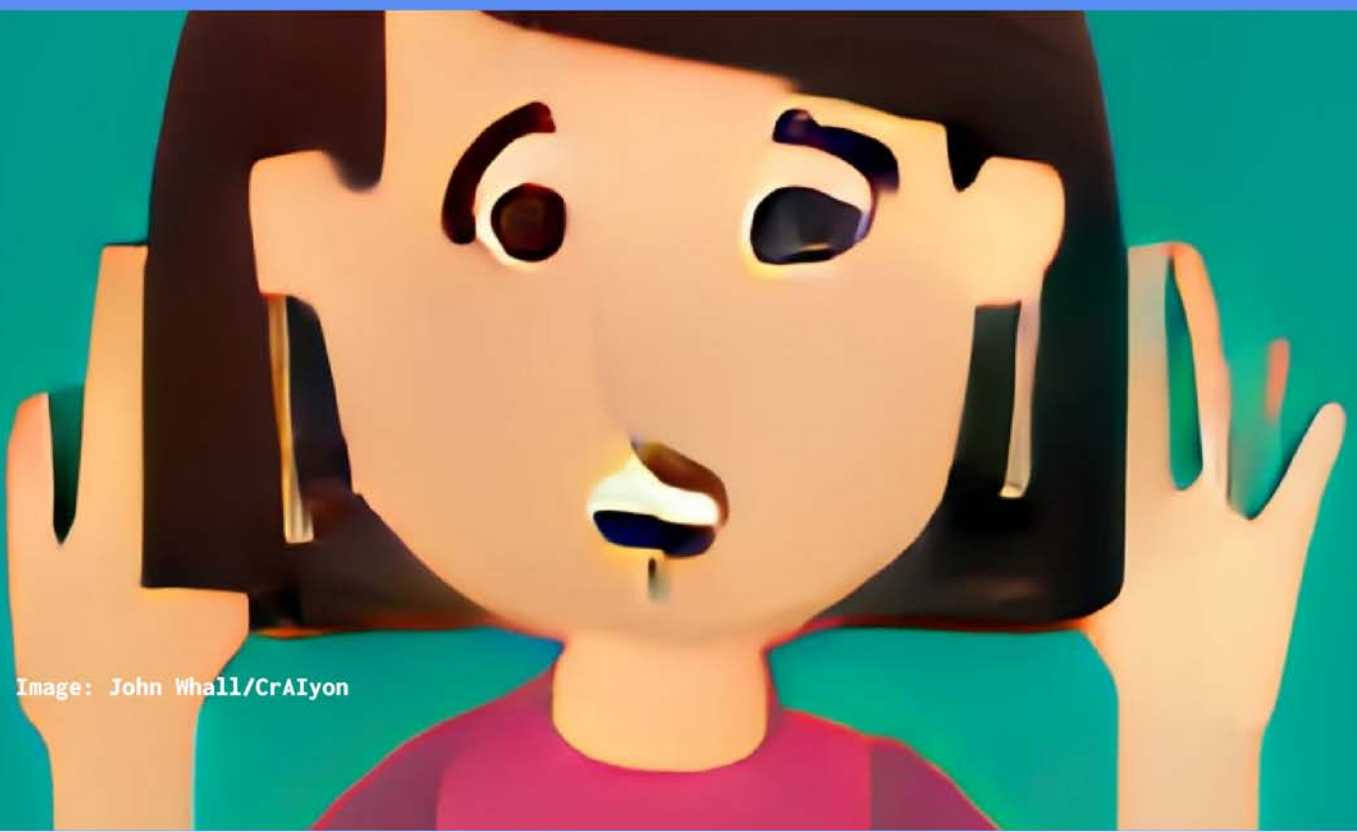


Image: John Whall/CrAIyon

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI is intelligence demonstrated by machines. It can be used to create responses for a specific purpose from sets of data.

## Augmented Reality (AR)

Virtual objects and experiences overlaid on real-world environments

## Blockchain

A blockchain is a digitally distributed, decentralised, public ledger that exists across a network.

## Coding and algorithms

Coding and algorithms both describe the process or steps used to instruct a computer programme on how to perform a task

## Cyber

Something that involves, uses, or relates to computers and computer technology

Games Engine: Software used in the creation of computer games that incorporates virtual environments, physics, lighting, animation and interactive experiences

## Game Platform

A computer system made for playing video games, or game like experiences

Generative design: A design process that uses algorithms to create

## Geolocation

A process used to identify the geographical location of a person or thing using digital technology

## Glitch

A sudden/temporary malfunction or fault of equipment that can lead to unexpected creative outcomes

## Haptics

Technology that simulates the senses of touch and motion

## Head Mounted Display (HMD)

Small displays integrated into eyeglasses or mounted into a helmet or hat.

## IRL (In Real Life)

Used to describe offline meeting between two or more people

## JAM Board

Machine Learning: A set of techniques use to identify patterns in data

## Metaverse

A social virtual reality space where users can interact with each other and a computer generated environment.

## Modular Computing

A combination of computer components that are combined to create a device or piece of software

## Modular Electronics

Linking together a number of electronic components into a singular system

## Motion Capture (MoCap):

A digital recording of human movement that is superimposed onto a digital 3D character

## NFTs

Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are digital assets based on blockchain technology. An NFT is a unique digital identifier that cannot be copied, substituted, or subdivided.

## Open Source

Often used in context with software, open source refers to freely available original source code that can be modified and redistributed, often without cost (can vary)

## Photogrammetry/Lidar Scanning

The process of visually capturing a thing, person or environment through images or measurements, that is then reconstructed as a digital 3D model

## Projection Mapping

A projection technique used to turn objects into display surfaces for video projection.

## Real time

A system where input data is processed by a computer so that it can provide almost immediate feedback

## Streaming

Refers to data or media content – live or recorded – delivered to devices via the internet and played back in real time.

## Unlimited Undo

A means of undoing steps of a process using a digital programme or application.

## Virtual Reality (VR)

Full immersion in a virtual environment created by computer software

## Web 2.0/Web3

Both describe stages of the internet that include participative and social interaction. Web3 introduces more immersive 3D environments and experience, such as VR.

This list of terms is not definitive and has been compiled as a starting point to become familiar with phygital language. There are plenty more out there to be discovered.

# RECOMMENDED READING LINKS AND RESOURCES

- Aesthetics of Interaction in Digital Art, Katja Awastek. (2013) Cambridge, The MIT Press.
- AR Post - How Different Age Groups Can Use Virtual Reality - <https://arpost.co/2022/10/18/different-age-groups-use-virtual-reality/>
- Art as Social Practice: Technologies for Change, Edited By Xtine Burrough and Judy Walgren. (2022) New York, Routledge.
- Arts Council England - Making Digital Work: Accessibility - [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/DigitalRDFundGuide\\_Accessibility.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/DigitalRDFundGuide_Accessibility.pdf)
- Arts Council England and The Space - Digital Access to Arts and Culture Report: <https://digiaccessarts.org/report/>
- Artworks Alliance - Digital Participation - <https://www.artworksalliance.org.uk/our-work/digital-participation/>
- Beyond the Now – New Coalitions in Socially Engaged Digital Practice - <https://beyond-the-now.com/season/s02/new-coalitions-in-socially-engaged-digital-practice/>
- Collective Encounters - Blurring the Lines: Six short case studies on hybrid participatory theatre - <https://collective-encounters.org.uk/blurring-the-lines-six-short-case-studies-on-hybrid-participatory-theatre/>
- Collective Encounters - Participatory Theatre: Top Tips for Online Facilitation - <https://collective-encounters.org.uk/library-resource/participatory-theatre-top-tips-for-online-facilitation/>
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport - Culture is Digital Report 2019: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/811304/2019\\_CID\\_progress\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811304/2019_CID_progress_report.pdf)
- European Parliament Think Tank - The relationship between artistic activities and digital technology development report - [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_STU\(2019\)634440](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2019)634440)
- Heritage Fund – Digital guide: an introduction to online accessibility - <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/introduction-online-accessibility>
- NSPCC – Social Media and Online Safety - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/social-media-and-online-safety>
- The Institution of Engineering and technology – Safeguarding the Metaverse - <https://www.theiet.org/impact-society/factfiles/information-technology-factfiles/safeguarding-the-metaverse/>
- Threshold Studios Digital Democracies Blog - <https://thresholdstudios.tv/digital-democracies/digital-democracies-blog/>
- Vodafone Everyone Connected Campaign - <https://www.vodafone.co.uk/mobile/everyone-connected>

# *WE'D LOVE TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS!*

We'd love to hear your feedback, ideas, and new developments in working in hybrid ways with art and participants.

Get in touch with the team with any suggestions, recommendations or learnings you would like to share at: [hello@axisweb.org](mailto:hello@axisweb.org).

Please include "Let's Get Phygital" in the subject line.



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