

# A Year in the Life of the Culture and Commerce Taskforce

## What we learnt about set-up and delivery

*Written by Andrea Lee, Project Manager,  
Culture & Commerce Taskforce*

### Introduction

This 9-point guide sets out the main steps taken to set up and deliver the Culture & Commerce Taskforce and the lessons that the Taskforce Team supporting it learnt from the experience. It is designed to be a helpful resource for areas and organisations embarking on a similar approach.

### A 9-point guide

#### 1. Know where you want to finish

Having the clearest picture of why the Taskforce has been set up, the problem it needs to solve, the work it needs to lead and steer and how that will happen, sets a Taskforce off on the right track. It means that the phases of work, specific tasks and resources required can be planned in advance. An agreed core vision and set of values also helps to influence the language, brand, ways of working and defining contribution of the Taskforce in a consistent way.

The Culture and Commerce Taskforce was set up as a 'task and finish' group to demonstrate that closer working between the sectors would be mutually beneficial and establishing the Lord Mayor of the City of London as the Chair was a key factor in the profile, members and impact that the Taskforce has been able to secure. The membership of the Taskforce was very carefully curated in order for the group to be able to effectively work together at speed, and to ensure a diverse mix of representatives from multiple sectors and areas of London. It was designed to exist for a year so had to move swiftly through an R&D phase to recommend impactful programmes of work and a delivery phase of small-scale pilots to demonstrate impact and generate learning. This was an incredibly tight timescale but was important given the urgent nature of the impact of the pandemic and it focused energy on an end goal – making a difference and sharing the learning by October 2021.

This also enabled key decision-making points to be planned in advance. The Taskforce met six times in total, the inaugural meeting in October 2020 where Lord Mendoza, Commissioner for Cultural Recovery and Renewal at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) gave the keynote highlighting the importance of the work of the group. There were a further three meetings in the following two months, then a meeting to review progress in May 2021 before the final meeting in September 2021. Each meeting started with a 'creative boost' – a five-minute exercise led by an artist – in order to firmly locate the group in a creative mindset and encourage them to think differently.

#### 2. Build the Taskforce as a team

Once the goals for the Taskforce are agreed then it becomes easier to invite people to join who can deliver what is required. Alongside relevant knowledge and experience, Taskforce members need to have convening power and access to networks. Whilst it can be a challenge finding a balance between those who hold influential positions and those who can influence activity at ground level, the ideal is a mix who can collaborate to drive forward the programme of work.

A welcome pack was created for the Culture and Commerce Taskforce members including the rationale for the Taskforce, key research, statistics and specific outcomes. This provided the 'case for change' and saved time by ensuring a shared understanding of the state of play.

Also included were the Terms of Reference describing their role, expected time commitment and anticipated contributions ranging from providing thought leadership, championing projects, acting as a critical friend, informing content and advising on how impact may be maximized for the cultural and commercial sectors, and taking part in public-facing media opportunities wherever possible. Several Taskforce members were active in project delivery – providing space, expertise and resources.

Taskforce members were exceptionally busy during this period, so all communications were short and to the point, meetings to get to know them and talk through their ideas and contributions on an individual basis were efficient – we perfected the art of a 30-minute 1-2-1 outside of the formal Taskforce meetings especially to inform report recommendations and project development at the start of phase 2. There was an advantage in getting dates into the diary as soon as possible especially for Taskforce meetings.

### 3. Secure a team and resources behind the Taskforce

A small team – The Taskforce Team – acted as a secretariat and comprised of 9 representatives from across the City Corporation, Culture Mile and Mansion House including policy, strategy, partnerships, marketing and engagement, media and communications specialists, all of whom worked on the Culture and Commerce Taskforce part-time alongside regular day-jobs. A dedicated part-time project manager was also brought in to drive the programme forward – this role was critical for co-ordinating activities, acting as a first point of contact and ensuring the work plan stayed on track. Key responsibilities of the Taskforce Team included: convening and facilitating the Taskforce meetings, managing the launch and publication of reports, set up and support of projects, managing the budget, liaising with colleagues in the City Corporation/Culture Mile and being the external face of the Taskforce. The team also managed the reporting, evaluation and monitoring of progress, the Taskforce 'wrap-up' and final report. The team used simple, fit-for-purpose tools familiar in project management: a weekly one-hour meeting to plan and trouble-shoot, a timeline, progress reports and regular reviews to prioritise activities. Success hinged on the team adopting a problem-solving and open and transparent approach. The team was focused and lent support to colleagues by being flexible and switching roles when needed.

In cash terms, to run and support the operations of the Taskforce, a budget of approximately £100k was required, the key expenditure from this being an externally-recruited project manager, seed-funding to enable projects to progress to the delivery phase, creative activity, communications and events. This figure does not account for staff time from the City Corporation, Culture Mile and Mansion House who spent on average a day a week on Taskforce Activities.

### 4. Quickly transition from Recommendations to Delivery

The Taskforce was very quickly able to get up and running with a shared 'theory of change'. It was able to build on the foundation of the relationships established and research undertaken in recent years by the City Corporation and Culture Mile.



#### Key research documents

[The City as a place for people – City of London](#)

[Creative Enterprise and Innovation report – Culture Mile](#)

[Creativity: The Commercial Superpower report – Culture Mile](#)

Digital consultation with the Taskforce members in advance of the first meeting identified the areas of focus as business and investment models, skills and talent, digital expertise, space, and international connections. Taskforce members chaired sessions on these topics with experts, academics and practitioners, a series of roundtables were held on these with further stakeholders, and an online survey was undertaken to seek the widest possible input in a short space of time.

From these discussions, three key recommendations and a series of 10 proposed projects emerged and the Taskforce Team played a central role in shaping and refining these ideas into the Taskforce's report, *Fuelling Creative Renewal*, which was launched and published on 9 February and included artwork specially commissioned to reflect the report's themes. Reaching this point in a matter of months was testament to the effort of the Taskforce in driving forward the debate, the willingness of a large constituency of people to engage and think innovatively in a short space of time, and skillful management and crafting of the report.

The report and launch were a 'call to action' to make the recommended projects happen. It marked a shift to a different phase and presented a number of opportunities and challenges to manage.

The call to action resulted in a great deal of interest – over 90 expressions of interest arrived in the Culture and Commerce in-box from all sizes of organisations and from freelancers from across the culture, commercial and civic sectors. At the same time, existing partners of the City Corporation and Culture Mile were keen to be involved and we wanted to secure the skills and expertise of the Taskforce as well as connect to existing work that aligned with the recommended projects. The activity of the Taskforce Team at this point can best be described as a mix of pooling information and exploring offers, possibilities and options, mostly undertaken through short 30-minute meetings. In parallel we were sorting and filtering the information and data to gauge the viability of each recommended project.

Whilst this absorbed the Taskforce Team's time, realistically the main objective at this stage was to find project leaders and strategic partners – people who were best-placed to develop a project plan, bring resources, networks and organisations with them and would be willing to take on the responsibility to drive this forward. It was a tough ask and we had to return to our pool of 90+ call to action respondents to explain in more detail what we were looking for in this phase of the Taskforce.

At the same time the Taskforce Team felt there needed to be a properly designed prioritisation process to focus efforts on the most feasible and impactful projects. Various criteria, assessments and sign-off processes involving the Taskforce were used, as well as a process of 'natural selection' that occurred. It became clear that activity similar to some of that recommended by the Taskforce was already underway and being led by partners elsewhere in London, for example the GLA and the Central London Alliance, and other recommended projects were taking longer to progress or the ideas proved more difficult to develop. Other projects emerged as having a wide-range of support, were well-aligned with existing strategies and could be run as small-scale pilots and rose to the top of the priority list.

So by the middle of April, and two months after the launch of the report, the Taskforce programme of work had successfully transitioned to its next phase which was to get the priority projects up and running, and we did this with Start-up sessions.

## 5. Use start-up sessions to kick-start projects

If the Taskforce's report had set out the "why" and "what" then the start-up sessions became about the "how". These sessions involved organisations and people who were potential leads or partners from the cultural, commercial or civic sector, who could bring expertise, experience and ideas to the table with the aim of co-creating a plan for actioning the recommended project. Over 50 people took part in 4 sessions<sup>1</sup> including 5 members of the Taskforce.

For three projects: Enhancing the City, Creative Exchange Programme and Creative Skills London, the Taskforce Team worked with *Cognitive Risk* to design a session that would enable a co-design approach and result in the first steps of a project delivery plan for a small-scale pilot project. These 90-minute sessions, co-facilitated by the Taskforce Team and *Cognitive Risk*, combined a short presentation on the background to the Taskforce's recommendation with an interactive workshop element using Miro, an on-line whiteboard and collaboration tool. Participants were invited to refine the project statement and then suggest the activities needed to make it happen. A group prioritisation of the activities created an outline of a project plan together with participants indicating the contributions they could offer, including the roles of project leader and coordinator.



### For more information

<https://www.cognitiverisk.com/>

<https://miro.com/>

The Taskforce Team worked hard to create an environment where participants from culture, commerce and civic sectors, most of whom had not met before, could very quickly share ideas and co-design the approach to the project. The sessions were successful in generating ideas and Miro proved to be an effective tool for on-line collaboration. It has the added advantage that the 'whiteboard' can remain open and be added to at later dates, and the output of a session is easily captured and sent to participants. In advance of each session participants were sent a start-up pack, setting out the purpose of the session and how it would run, together with the 'hallmarks' of a Taskforce project, the roles of the Taskforce/Project lead/Project co-ordinator and the Taskforce Team to show responsibilities and how these linked together. This proved a useful exercise for the Taskforce Team in getting everyone quickly on the same page and forcing some critical thinking on what was expected of project leads and project activity in the delivery phase.

<sup>1</sup> Including an earlier session on the digital-related project recommendations which was convened and led by a Taskforce member.

By the end of the start-up sessions, a smaller group of participants had self-selected to become part of the project team and meet on a regular basis. One of the projects became co-led by partners from the cultural sector, one project led by Culture Mile and one by the City of London Corporation. These sessions were pivotal in completing the transition into the delivery phase of the Taskforce's work and enabled the Taskforce Team to draw up an Action Plan for five Corporation led or co-led projects which received seed-funding of £20k from the City Corporation.

### 6. Prioritise communication

The importance of communication can never be underestimated. The Taskforce is no exception with its mix of stakeholders across sectors, and internally in the City Corporation, together with press interest and a large potential audience of other places and local authorities interested and active in similar approaches.

At one level the Taskforce was a campaign to bring about closer working between the cultural and commercial sectors: the launch of the Taskforce set out the case, the publication of the recommendations was a 'call to action' and the collaborative approach to working on projects accelerated the impact and learning. From the beginning, a strong visual identity was developed for the Taskforce together with a confident presence on social channels through the hashtag #cultureandcommerce. Taskforce members and other stakeholders have been provided with the social assets to share themselves and encouraged throughout to promote activity more widely to their networks. This has helped give the Taskforce a clear presence and by the end of the year the Taskforce has had significant success in raising the profile of culture and commerce working together, and the value that this collaboration can bring to accelerating recovery.

The Taskforce chose 4 key media moments: the launch of the Taskforce in October 2020, which achieved good press coverage, the publication of the Taskforce report *Fuelling Creative Renewal* in February 2021, the announcement in July 2021 of 5 confirmed projects led or co-led by the City of London Corporation following presentation to two Corporation Committees and a final news release on completion in October 2021. These have been accompanied by social media activity through all our organisational channels using the shared hashtag (#cultureandcommerce).

Other methods of communication have been the use of *Medium* in the early phase for Taskforce members to post thought-pieces, and a website with details of projects, acting as a portal to register interest in the projects. These methods have enabled the Taskforce to share emerging ideas and provocations alongside the information on completed projects. The website is likely to gain more importance as a digital knowledge bank of case studies and shared learning which can be expanded upon. A dedicated email address has been used extensively for invitations to events, for communications with the Taskforce and also as a way of 'keeping the conversation going' as a direct line of communication to the Taskforce Team.



#### For more information

Culture and Commerce Taskforce - Medium

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/tourism-trends-and-strategies/cultural-strategy/culture-and-commerce-taskforce>

The final output will be a short film aimed at a wide audience to provide a visual overview of what the Taskforce was about. A short report aimed at a more engaged audience, and potentially one that wants to adopt and adapt the ideas, will focus on impact and lessons learned and provide signposting to more detailed descriptions of case studies and guides for those undertaking similar work themselves.

The communications channels have been central to creating the identity of the Taskforce with specific and consistent branding. All publications are clearly identifiable and this extended to internal documents and presentations to the Taskforce.

### 7. Be transparent about resources from the start

The Taskforce anticipated that projects would be resourced by a mix of pro bono activity, support in kind, trust and foundations or income generation. An early review of funding concluded that trusts and foundations had long lead times and tended to focus on 'communities', so many of these appeared less appropriate for economic recovery activity. Securing the required investment was therefore a challenge. The Taskforce provided support which many gave in terms of space, pro bono expertise, aligning the activities of their own organisations to help deliver, and providing cash support from their own organisations. The resource that's required even for a small-scale pilot is still a challenge to secure and on reflection, having a more transparent conversation about this challenge earlier in the process would have been useful.

## 8. Account for the full range of achievements and impact

The key point about a Taskforce is that its achievements are greater than the sum of its parts. So alongside the impacts of the individual projects it was important to be able to cite the bigger and more strategic picture. The true impact may take some time to realise as the profile of the campaign takes hold in the City and beyond – maintaining conversations helps to understand how the word is spreading. Keeping a close eye on the immediate reach of the Taskforce provides a good indication of scale e.g. almost 40 organisations were involved in initial roundtables, 500 people attended the report launch resulting in 92 expressions of interest and 60 organisations were involved in project design. Many more people have been, and will be, engaged in the creative activity of the Taskforce projects, and capturing the reach and impact of these types of activities in the future presents a challenge that needs to be addressed (for example, how to measure increased footfall due to creative activity).

The Taskforce Team were clear with the project leads at the start that data capture and evaluation were required and designed a 'data collection sheet' to help embed the process. But it wasn't just about the numbers. The degree of collaboration and involvement of partners was fundamental and was in itself an achievement given that this was the first-time many people from the culture and commercial sectors had worked together. Reflecting this though is a greyer area and not always as eye-catching as the quantitative information. A video was made for one project and a series of case studies provided a complementary and more in-depth look at processes and activities. A group of project and partnership managers shared their experience of managing cross-sector partnerships and these qualitative methods helped to tease out and articulate the mutual benefits of partnership working – often an under-communicated aspect of cultural and commercial collaborations but a central tenet of the Taskforce's campaign.

Whilst the number of beneficiaries of some projects was small, simply by virtue of them being designed as small-scale pilots, feedback was obtained including how participation is expected to impact future work, or in the case of young people, their future career choices. If resources allow, ideally a follow-up a year or so down the line would provide new insights into the potential of a short-term intervention to initiate positive changes.

## 9. Ensure an orderly wrap-up

Knowing that the Taskforce would finish with a final meeting in late September meant that preparations for completing the work and marking the end of the Taskforce began as early as July. It was certainly a tricky situation to manage in that all the 5 Corporation led or co-led projects felt as if they were just getting underway.

The focus initially turned on a 'reception' to be hosted by the Lord Mayor as a celebration and thank you for the work over the course of the year. This became an opportunity for cultural and commercial partners to meet in person now restrictions had been lifted, and continue to build connections and partnerships. The date was set shortly after the final Taskforce meeting so that Taskforce members could engage and refine the key messages for the event and the published outputs. The event was attended by 150 people who had worked on projects and guests from the culture, commerce and civic sectors. A strong creative presence was important so there was a performance and DJ to showcase Taskforce projects. Project leaders and key partners were 'in the room' as well as the young people who had participated in the Creative Skills pilot workshop.

The final report is designed to distil the impact and achievements of the Taskforce with signposts to more detailed project reports and case studies. The ambition is for the Digital Knowledge Bank to house the case studies and practice guides from the Taskforce and become a 'go to' place for anyone wanting to adopt and adapt the ideas tested and demonstrated by the Taskforce's work.

## Taskforce Timeline: A Taskforce in 4 phases

Phase	Month	Activity
<b>Phase 1</b> Set-up and R&D	September 2020	Taskforce set-up
	October 2020	Media Release
		Taskforce inaugural meeting
	November 2020	Virtual' Roundtable discussions led by Taskforce members
		Taskforce meeting
	December 2020	Two Taskforce meetings
		Commission artwork
		Drafting recommendations
	January 2021	Sign off report and recommendations
Prepare launch and publication		
February 2021	Launch of Fuelling Creative Renewal	
<b>Phase 2</b> Project design and planning	February 2021	Receive expressions of interest
	February/March 2021	35 meetings with prospective partners
		Meet all Taskforce members on a 1-2-1 basis
	March 2021	Project prioritisation
	April 2021	Prepare 3 Start-up sessions
		Start-up sessions
May 2021	Draft Action Plan with proposed 5 projects	
	Taskforce meeting, present draft Action Plan	
<b>Phase 3</b> Project delivery	May/June 2021	Assemble project teams and prepare delivery phase
	June 2021	Prepare and submit Action Plan to City Corporation committees
	July 2021	Action Plan presented to City Corporation committees, and approved
		Media Release announcing 5 Corporation-led or co-led projects
		Begin preparations for wrap-up
<b>Phase 4</b> Taskforce wrap-up	August 2021	Commission film
		Design and issue data collection sheets and case study templates
		Send invitations to One Year On reception
	September 2021	Collate data and qualitative information from projects
		Project and Partnership Manager Learning Forum
		Final meeting of the Taskforce
		Reception hosted by Lord Mayor at the Museum of London
	September/October 2021	Draft report on impact, legacy and learning
	October 2021	Publish, film, report with Media Release
		Taskforce complete