

L 7 DIGITAL ROADMAP FOR THE ARTS

A guide for reaching
digital maturity in arts
and cultural organisations



This roadmap has been produced by Dr Sophie Frost as part of a one-year Creative Economy Engagement Fellowship, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and hosted by the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester in partnership with Phoenix.

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE 'DIGITAL' IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS?

The arts and cultural sector must embrace the challenges and opportunities now offered by digital technology. But what does it mean to be a digital organisation? And how is the 'digital' defined?

The digital can be described as "as any technologies that enable information to be created, stored or shared in digital form."¹ The 2018 UK Digital Code of Practice defines the digital as the means of "applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations."²

Policy-makers have come to imagine the digital as a vast and interlinked set of processes through which people navigate their lives; a world to which arts organisations must acclimatise and respond in order to deliver their services more creatively or effectively.

But how can arts and cultural organisations better navigate this often daunting terrain?



WHY HAS DIGITAL GAINED PROMINENCE IN CULTURAL POLICY?

There is an acknowledgement in cultural policy that digital technology is increasingly important to the production and consumption of art and culture.

Yet, in terms of how the digital is deployed, current policy thinking remains aspirational and visionary rather than pragmatic and solution-focused.

The recent *Culture is Digital* report calls on organisations to develop their "digital thinking."³ ACE share the intention to "challenge organisations" to think deeply about their digital futures. They are encouraging collaboration with non-arts sector partners which might enable arts organisations to "discover the new together."⁴ Nevertheless, while policy-makers promote the virtues of digital technologies there remains a lack of developed formulas for leading digital transformation in arts organisations. According to a recent survey, 37% of art sector organisations say that a lack of capability and knowledge is a major barrier to achieving digital aspirations.⁵



HOW HAVE ARTS ORGANISATIONS RESPONDED TO THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL?

Arts and cultural organisations can sometimes find it hard to see the benefits of adopting digital technology. Even where there is a willingness to adopt, it is not always easy to become a digital organisation. Arts organisations can often feel "held back" by a lack of infrastructure, resources, or digital knowledge, skills or training opportunities.

Case studies are few of organisations which have smoothly achieved an integrated approach to digital. Some of our larger mixed-media arts organisations like Watershed in Bristol, HOME in Manchester, Quad in Derby, Broadway in Nottingham and Phoenix in Leicester are noted for their forward-thinking and integrated approach to using digital technology. Yet, for some smaller or discipline-specific arts organisations, the challenges can be quite difficult and particular.

What is clear is that organisations need to shape their own context-specific approach to the digital.

According to Julie Dodd's *The New Reality* (2015) organisations need to focus on six key factors in order to improve digital delivery: **leadership, culture, infrastructure, innovation, funding and service delivery.** <https://thenewreality.info/>



INTRODUCING 'DIGITAL MATURITY'

Arts organisations should aim to become 'digitally mature' The DDCMS define 'digital maturity' as:

...where digital activity is embedded across an organisation as part of the strategic vision and throughout every part of the business, from its creative output and audience outreach through to e-commerce.⁶

According to Fiona Romeo, former Director of Digital Content and Strategy for Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), "in digital maturity...you have everyone doing digital as part of their role."⁷

Key signs of a 'digitally mature' organisation include:

- **A more holistic approach to digital where it is incorporated in both creative and distributive processes;**
- **Where 'digital' has become normalised into "everyday thinking and decision making;"⁸**
- **Leaders and trustees are proactively driving this understanding of the all-encompassing role of digital in the business;**
- **An awareness of, and strategy for, the current deficit of digital skills in the cultural sector;**
- **A clear strategy for interpreting digital audience data based on the specific needs of the organisation.**



PHOENIX AND DIGITAL MATURITY

At Phoenix in Leicester efforts are being made to develop digital best practice and work towards a greater digital maturity. The ways in which this is being done include:

- **Acting as a creative hub:** bringing together a wide variety of different digital communities and interests, formally and informally within Leicester's art ecosystem.
- **Providing an innovative digital art offer:** Phoenix has a progressive digital art programme with six exhibitions a year featuring a variety of mixed media artists. It commissions a range of artists who use technology in the broadest and most inclusive sense to drive their creative practice.
- **Offering digital education and outreach:** Phoenix has an expanding digital education and outreach offer – both in-house and extending into the local area. Activities include events with families and young people such as 'teach yourself' workshops for under-10s that combine craft with technology.
- **Developing digitally-focused partnerships:** There are a number of partnerships that the Phoenix is acclaimed for and which highlight its digital role in the city, notably:
 - University partnerships such as an ongoing collaboration with DMU and research collaborations such as with CAMEo at the University of Leicester.
 - Community partnerships such as with Spark children's festival each year. The annually-run Digital Playground involves interactive art installations, drop-in workshops and short films curated around the theme of technology.
 - Artist partnerships, for example with artists resident in Phoenix's Interact Labs.

In the future Phoenix will continue to build its digital maturity by seeking ways to improve its use of the digital in its operations and data management systems, upskilling its staff, building new networks and collaborations with external partners, and looking to act as a 'digital hub' for arts and creative economy activity in Leicester.

¹Gorton, C, 2016. *Building Digital Leadership and Resilience in the UK's Cultural Sector*, p.5

²<https://doit.life/charity-digital-code>

³DDCMS, 2018, p.9

⁴Gorton, C, 2016, p.33

⁵DDCMS, 2018, Culture is Digital, p.31

⁶Ibid, p.33

⁷Gorton, C, 2016, p.17

⁸Ibid, p.29



DIGITAL ROADMAP FOR THE ARTS

This roadmap offers an initial guide for arts and cultural organisations who might be seeking ways of becoming more digital and working their way towards digital maturity. It is arranged according to three key stages:

- **PRELIMINARY STAGE:** identifying the specific digital needs of your organisation and its publics
- **DEVELOPMENT STAGE:** putting in place a combination of achievable and realistic measures to enhance digital maturity
- **MAINTENANCE STAGE:** maintaining a constant feedback loop of monitoring, assessment and planning new digital strategies.

A PDF of this document is downloadable at www.le.ac.uk/cameo-reports



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1. PRELIMINARY STAGE

WHAT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IS MOST RELEVANT TO YOUR ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT?

1. Undertake and/or commission research into the wants and needs of your local community and business stakeholders in terms of digital provision – both artistic and commercial.
2. Elect a ‘digital trustee’ to your board, preferably a specialist with a background in digital transformation initiatives who can offer guidance on related issues;
3. Prioritise a review of existing data management systems and software; identify ways to create more synergy in your data capture.
4. Get staff involved in assessing the ‘interoperability’ of technology on site – how do existing digital technologies systems and activities connect and communicate with one another? Develop an action plan for how interoperability can be improved.

2. DEVELOPMENT STAGE

HOW CAN WE NORMALISE THE DIGITAL INTO OUR EVERYDAY ACTIVITY?

1. Improve and maximise partnerships with local arts and culture-friendly businesses, organisations and social enterprises who might have lots to offer in terms of specialist knowledge and tools as well as commercial opportunities.
2. Build stronger local university links by:
 - a. Providing more opportunities for students to be involved in digital arts programmes, perhaps offering student curatorships or apprenticeships for local students;
 - b. Identify and build stronger connections with university digital researchers and centres of digital research excellence.
3. Rethink the physical and virtual spaces you offer:
 - a. Are they flexible? Do they enable and facilitate mixed purpose use – for learning, making and working in all formats?
 - b. Are they open and inclusive?
 - c. Could they be utilised in new or different ways to expand your audience reach? For example, by developing an online gallery platform or a digital channel.
4. Implement a digital upskilling programme for staff, rolled out in stages over a given period of time so as not to disrupt day-to-day operations.

3. MAINTENANCE STAGE

IS OUR DIGITAL STRATEGY EFFECTIVELY WORKING TOWARDS DIGITAL MATURITY?

1. Regularly monitor your digital progress:
 - a. Nominate a ‘digital taskforce’ or identify a key staff member or mentor to assess and feedback on the strategies that have been implemented.
 - b. Undertake quarterly reviews of your digital maturity with all staff – are your development strategies working?
 - c. Use your new approach to data capture (if you have implemented one) to assess whether or not you are achieving an improved quality of information on your audience base.
2. Engage with key partners, other organisations, your audiences and the sector, perhaps by producing a ‘digital manifesto’ which showcases your intended direction of travel.
3. Remember: there is no best practice model for digital maturity. **It is context-specific and requires intuition, flexibility, agility and constant reassessment.**