

IDEAS TEST

Phase 3 Year 2

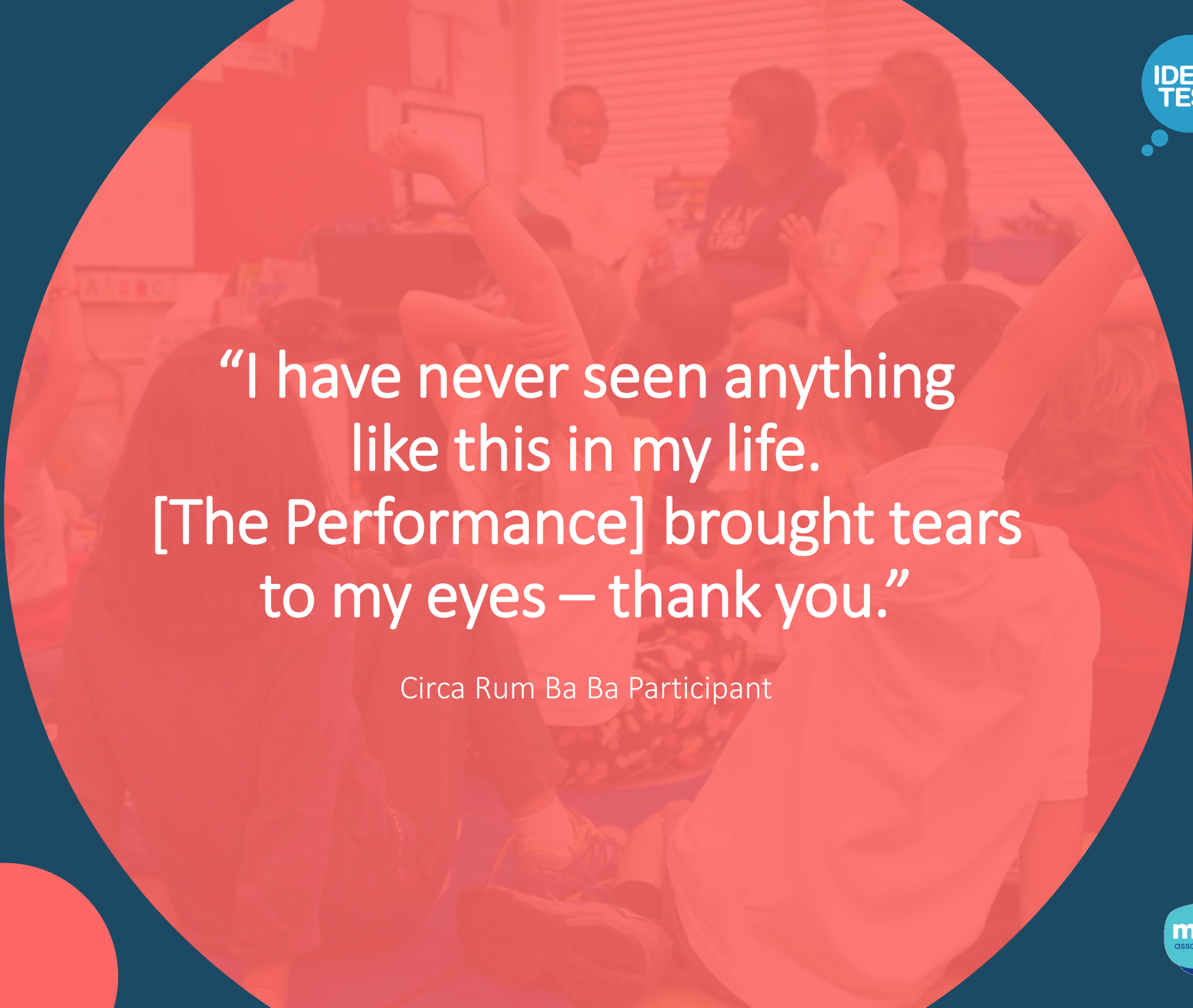
Summary evaluation report: The evolution of Ideas Test

June 2022

mb
associates



Medway Fun Palaces – Precious Plastic

A large, semi-transparent red circle covers the background of the slide. Inside this circle is a photograph of a group of young people, mostly of African descent, sitting in a circle on the floor. They appear to be in a classroom or a community center, with some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The lighting is warm and the atmosphere seems to be one of a group activity or performance.

“I have never seen anything
like this in my life.
[The Performance] brought tears
to my eyes – thank you.”

Circa Rum Ba Ba Participant

Year 2 summary

Year 2 of Phase 3 has been a transitional year for Ideas Test. It has adapted and flexed through the COVID pandemic and has come out the other side.

Delivering locally, with the Medway Light Nights event as a showpiece at the end of the year, has been successful. Effective partnerships have been key to this. There have been challenges along the way which have become learning opportunities.

The pandemic created opportunity for Ideas Test to create new partnerships and highlighted the need for increased capacity within the team.

The team has felt the value of creating and cementing real partnerships that have a strong potential future. Ideas Test feel it is in a secure position moving forward.

The team reviewed the evaluation framework, mapping out the project cycle and identifying opportunities where feedback and information about the difference it is making could be collected. Embedding this learning into the the next phase of delivery would benefit the team with being able to demonstrate the impact they have and to illustrate the story of Ideas Test.

The way in which Ideas Test work is important to the team. Aligning with its Story of Change to have a stronger brand, the team value that people like the way they work. They also place high value on their adaptive way of working, proven through the COVID pandemic, feeling that this has drawn people to them and encouraged some of their new partnerships.

Given the transitional phase and the change in Director towards the end of the year, plus the fact that Ideas Test have been successful in gaining NPO status, it stands to reason that the ability to plan strategically was placed as the highest value outcome at this time

It is notable that the key successes are with delivery while the challenges are with management of the programme and with resourcing in the team.

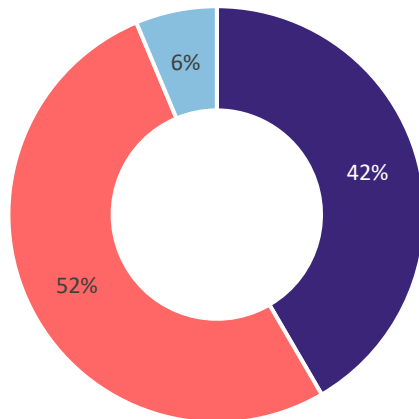
Year 2 numbers

Demographics of participants and audience & highlight numbers.

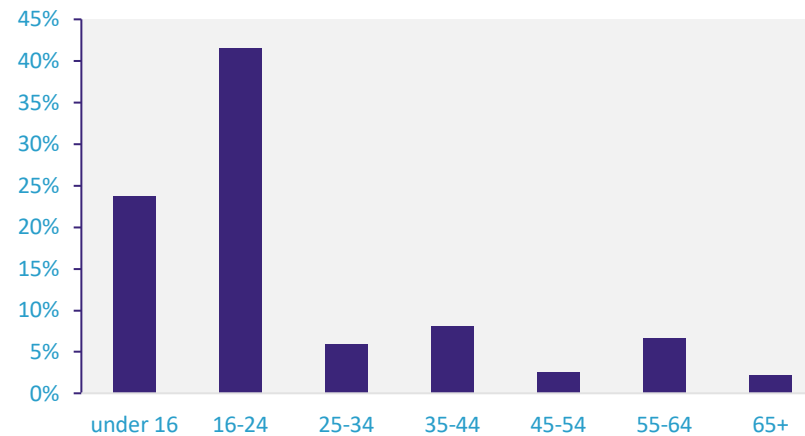
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Gender identity*

Male Female Other

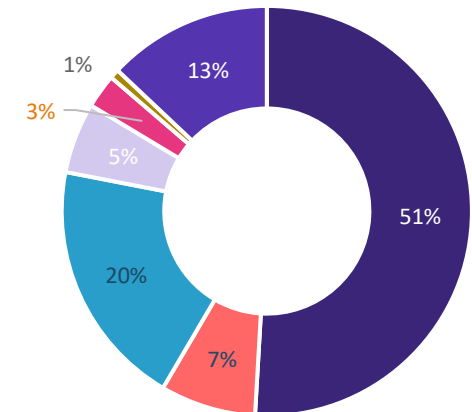


Age*



Ethnic background*

White British White other Black Asian
Mixed Other Don't know



68,103**

Total audience
& participants

194

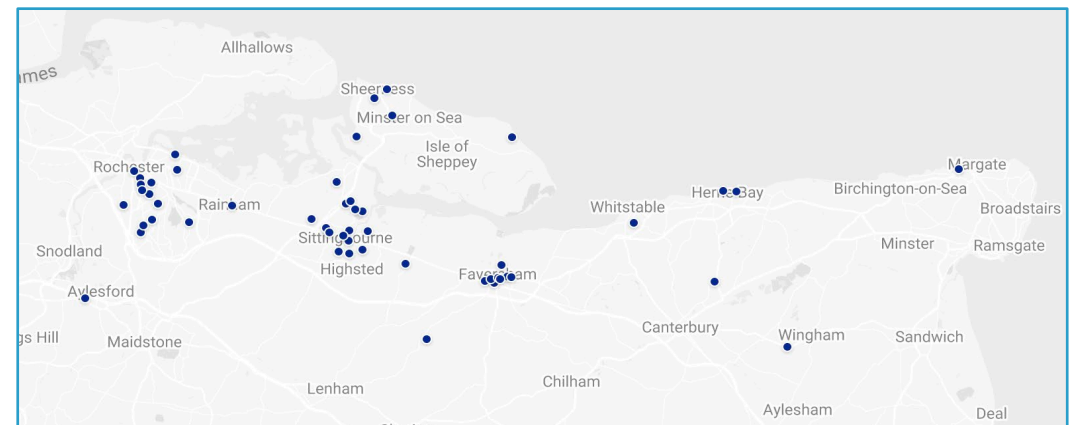
hours of
programmed
activity

86%

Audience from
low & medium
engaged

£250k+
total spend

Map of audience/participants***



* 75 participant responses.

** Total number of audience and participants for Year 2 of delivery, including 60,000 audience members at Medway Night Lights Festival

***67 postcodes

Projects

Year 2 delivery

- **Hidden Lands**

An Ideas Test & Creative Estuary co-commission with the local community at Milton Creek Country Park in Sittingbourne with artist Patrick Walls.

- **Make Waves**

A creative career programme for 18-25s in Medway where the cohort became creative producers and created their own projects and events.

- **You Me Us Too**

A project to improve the wellbeing of people who are lonely and/or socially isolated in Medway & Swale through a series of creative sessions.

- **Medway Light Nights**

Large scale public event in Rochester in partnership with Cohesion Plus. A lantern parade with local schools and a film installation created by Cybersaur Arts about Medway, giving the diverse community a voice right at the centre of the event.

- **Circo Rum Ba Ba - Empty Shops**

A partnership project supporting Circo Rum Ba Ba to find locations for their projects in empty shops and other locations across Swale & Medway

- **Pull Up A Chair residency**

Working with Quiet Down There, Ideas Test supported Chloe Cooper to take up an alternative artist residency model specifically designed for socially engaged artists on Sheppey.

- **Eco Monster Magic Lanterns**

Supporting artists Nicole Mollett and Frog Morris at their event during Swale's Big Green Week at Milton Creek Country Park in Sittingbourne. The project engaged families to think about ecological issues via the painting of glass magic lantern slides which were then projected during this event.

- **Outdoor Studios: Winged Wonders / Plant Based Secret Coding / Explore & Draw / Waking the Senses**

Supporting outdoor visual arts engagement in Swale's natural spaces.

- **Estuary Stories (Estuary Festival)**

Working with artist Natasha Davies to create a film about Medway for Estuary Festival 2021. Ideas Test supported Natasha with connections to the community and with a live Digital event where the film was premiered with a Q&A after.

- **Moving Memory – Train the Trainer**

Training opportunities with Moving Memory Dance Theatre Company for those working in community organisation. The aim was to teach them how to organise and facilitate their own 'Moving Well' groups.

- **Medway Fun Palaces**

Artist Xtina Lamb led an activity to create 'stained glass' out of recycled shopping bags. This formed part of Medway Fun Palaces, led by Nucleus Arts.

Challenges

Being an action learning programme, reviewing what is working (or not) and responding to challenges is embedded in Ideas Test practice.



Over Year 2, Ideas Test has encountered the following challenges:

- The level of delivery in Swale continues to lag behind that of Medway. There is a noticeable difference between the two areas with how art and cultural events are valued and prioritised. Ideas Test have actively engaged with local leaders, keeping up-to-date with the changing political landscape and seeking opportunities to influence decision makers to increase their value of the arts on their communities.
- A new Director was appointed at the end of Year 2. The uncertainty during the recruitment process was hard to navigate for some of the team.
- The demand on the resources of the team has meant that individuals have been incredibly stretched at times. This has had a knock-on impact on wellbeing, which became more intense when project timings changed and key delivery moments overlapped.
- The reliance on volunteers has made delivery unpredictable at times. Organising volunteers takes up a significant amount time, which is not always available, especially when the team is already stretched.
- The continued uncertainty of the pandemic and the changing restrictions have meant that Ideas Test have had to respond and adapt to what is safe to do and what their audiences are happy to do.
- Very tight deadlines for some funding applications has meant that the level of consultation that Ideas Test strive to do has not been possible. As a result the proposals and ideas have not been as developed as they could have been, although Ideas Test has remained ambitious with its intentions.
- Recruiting participants for some projects has been challenging and has resulted in delays to delivery and the scope of some projects being changed. This has been compounded at times when working with partners where there are differing priorities, expectations, a lack of clarity or ownership has impacted project delivery. Establishing the boundaries and responsibilities at the start of a project, and having difficult conversations where needed, is key to minimising this risk.
- One partnership was problematic as Ideas Test felt their input was less noteworthy. Managing this relationship was challenging although it gave the team the opportunity to reflect on the impact they have and what their core values are.
- Collecting data has been hard at times due to audiences and participants being out of practice of providing feedback and the difficulty of getting feedback with online delivery. A central system for collating all feedback is in development to support future data to be more consistent and easily accessible.

Showcase – Medway Light Nights

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The delivery of Medway Light Nights was the pinnacle. It took place over two nights on Rochester High Street in February 2022 and reached 60,000 people.

Ideas Test and Cohesion Plus collaborated to make We Are Medway – a 20-minute film, projected at huge scale on a wall bordering Monument Gardens between the side of the cathedral and Rochester High Street.

It strove to showcase community voice and make work that was specific to its site. It captured pride in place and a sense of belonging to the area.

“Rochester was packed with families enjoying everything being open – more of this please.”

Instagram comment

The film featured a diverse cross-section of Medway’s communities talking about how they felt about living in Medway. Filming took place in temples, mosques, community centres, schools, churches, synagogues and shops. The final film featured 27 people and one (guide) dog. It was also subtitled.

The scale was designed to highlight the democratic and heroic status of those taking part.

“Proud to have played my part in Medway Light Nights, a free spectacular festival of light which transformed Rochester's iconic buildings and spaces into works of art this weekend.”

Facebook comment

Xtina Lamb worked with local schools to make lanterns, which were paraded on opening night, involving 600 people. Young people from Make Waves programme volunteered to marshal the parade and capture feedback.

The video installation and lantern parade were just two elements of the festival with a majority of the other activities being ‘off the peg’.

This is the first big event that Ideas Test has delivered since the pandemic so it held significant value and was a poignant moment for all of those involved.

The popularity of the festival indicated that there was a social and cultural need with three times the amount of people attending than had been expected. Being part of an in-person event brought a real sense of joy.

“Thank you so much for doing this. We’ve loved taking part.”

Participant



Medway Light Nights

Conclusion & recommendations



“I would describe them as...
a catalyst for community creativity
and I would add the word essential in
there because I think the work that
they do reaches many people who
wouldn't even have considered culture
and creativity if **Ideas Test** hadn't
supported them in doing so.”

B & G consultation

Conclusion

1. Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?

Ideas Test has been reaching local people who are less likely to engage in the arts. Considering how long they have been delivering and the challenges of the pandemic, this is a success.

Audiences and participants have enjoyed their experience. Some have developed new skills and others been inspired to do more.

2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of process of engaging communities achieved?

Ideas Test have remained committed to delivering high quality art some of which is unexpected. Local people are showing signs of now expecting and feeling deserving of such art in the area.

Raising ambition, supporting creatives to be curious and developing networks and partnerships have been successes for Ideas Test.

3. What approaches were successful and what lessons were learned?

- Targeted communication with hyper local areas has enabled Ideas Test to reach those less likely to engage in the arts
- Online inequality remains a barrier. Offering a hybrid programme with free events can support with removing this barrier
- Putting local people at the heart of projects and embedding co-creation have enabled the local voices to be heard and delivery to be shaped
- Leaving a legacy through utilising the art in future projects and developing follow-on projects. Enabling local groups to become independent has also been part of this
- Being present at a strategic level has supported Ideas Test in developing its brand and allowing it to influence the value of art and culture
- Having a consistent focus on social media has also supported Ideas Test to increase its presence and be more visible to its audience
- Finding partners and freelancers who 'get' its values has enabled effective working and delivery of projects, and the ability to flex and adapt where needed
- Balancing the team resources and time against commitments, especially when there has been sickness or vacancies has proved challenging

Recommendations



- Embedding the learning from the evaluation review in day-to-day activities and having a central system that feels intuitive will enable Ideas Test to gather information and feedback that will fully demonstrate the impact that it has
- Take more risks to get noticed more and for the team to tell a better story about what it does and how
- Focus on working with more people and partners that 'get' them
- Exploring communication between the team and the Board, utilising strengths and networks and enabling a mutually beneficial relationship to support Ideas Test to be the best it can
- Through strategic planning and leadership, align resources with commitments, identifying a clear direction for the next phase



Results

Using the data that **Ideas Test** have shared, we have explored the emerging themes and findings with a focus on answering the three ACE Research Questions.



ACE Research questions

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One.

ENGAGEMENT

Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?

The level of engagement with communities least likely to engage in the arts is explored in the section ACE Research Question 1.

This looks at the results of the Audience Agency's segmentation profiling and reporting on postcode data by the indices of deprivation as well as data collected by Ideas Test.

Two.

QUALITY

To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of process of engaging communities achieved?

The extent to which the programme was both inspiring and of high quality is explored in the section ACE Research Question 2.

This section looks at the whole programme and digs a little deeper into some key projects.

Three.

EMBEDDED

What approaches were successful and what lessons were learned?

This question is answered throughout the report, with learning emphasized and recommendations highlighting the key actions for the future.

ACE Research Question 1

Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?



A large circular area with a purple tint contains a photograph of a classroom. Several children are sitting on the floor, some with their arms raised, suggesting an active learning or play session. A teacher or adult is visible in the background, interacting with the children. The overall scene is bright and lively.

“Great that this is in Medway, things
like this never happen here.”

Visitor comment

Being engaged & inspired

Reaching people least likely to engage in the arts is the main aim of CPPs. Breaking down barriers to engagement by understanding its audience and giving them the confidence to engage is important to Ideas Test.

Findings

- Ideas Test are continuing to reach with those who are less likely to engage in the arts
- 90%* of participants were from the local area
- 86%* came from low or medium engagement groups
- 35%** were new to the arts
- The careful transition back to more in-person delivery has been welcomed by the team, participants and audiences
- You Me Us was successful in their targeted communications with those less likely to engage in the arts
- Participants reported being inspired to do more and having increased confidence as a result of the activity or event
- There are indications that Ideas Test is engaging a more diverse audience
- Local people are beginning to feel that Sale and Medway is deserving of original art that is captivating

“Rochester was packed with families enjoying everything being open – more of this please.”

Instagram comment

*From 135 respondents **From 68 postcard respondents

Challenges

- Data collection has continued to been a challenge at times. This is likely to mean that the true value of Ideas Test is not demonstrated
- Online inequality remains a barrier for some people in accessing the events that are delivered online
- Some audience members and participants remain cautious about returning to in-person events

“The lantern parade was so popular and members of the public joined in at the end.”

Medway Light Night
volunteer marshal



Medway Light Night

ACE Research Question 2

To what extent was the aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities achieved?



A large circular area with a green tint contains a photograph of a group of young people sitting in a circle on the floor. Some are raising their hands, suggesting an interactive session or workshop. The background is a solid dark blue with two large green circles on the left side.

“Now I *know* events is
something that I want to do.”

Artist

Excellence of art & engagement

At the heart of CPP programmes is the commitment to deliver quality and captivating art. This includes excellence in the programming and excellence in the process of engagement of the community within the programming.

Findings

- Ideas Test is expert at making connections between organisations and people, enabling great work to be produced and relationships built
- Local people are at the heart of the delivery programme and making their voice heard is a key priority. The intention and driver for doing this is authentic, and that shines through
- Co-creation has been a big success in enabling the voice of the local people to be heard. We are Medway film is an example of this
- Ideas Test have been a catalyst for change and creative community. The programme has inspired others, giving them the confidence and encouragement to push their creativity and ambition
- People discovered new talents and improved their skills which made them feel better about themselves
- Creatives developed their practice and be curious about aspects of the project or delivery that they had not considered before
- Ideas Test is not adverse to taking risk and delivering the unexpected.
- You Me Us and Make Waves are examples of projects that demonstrate co-creation, ambition and high quality art
- Participants have experienced pride of place and pride in their achievements
- Participants and audiences are recognising that they deserve to have high quality art in Swale and Medway.
- Leaving a legacy is a priority that Ideas Test has for all projects and we see this being achieve across a number of projects.

How Ideas Test is evolving

Over the year, **Ideas Test** has continued to evolve in a variety of ways, paving the way for Phase 4.



“We need to embrace risk and sometimes failure and the attendant learning arising from it, arguably the best learning comes from things not working and knowing you would approach a project totally differently next time.”

Director

What worked well



What worked well	Example
The profile and brand of Ideas Test has improved and this has had knock on effects across everything it does.	Being involved in key conversations, raising expectations of the local people
The team has been present and actively engaged with key people, partners and networks.	Creative Estuary, Medway Council
People want to work with the team, they value what Ideas Test bring to a partnership and they are confident with what Ideas Test will deliver.	Being approached by partners to advise and be a delivery partner
There has been a consistent focus on social media activity and this is reflected in the digital engagements Ideas Test has achieved by way of steady growth.	Posting regularly on a range of platforms
Ideas Test demands excellence from the partners it works with and hold itself to the same high standards. Being true to their values, holding boundaries and protecting their participants in a way that is mutually beneficial.	Morpheus
A number of excellent co-creation delivery models have emerged which shows action learning and high ambition.	Make Waves, Hidden Lands
As they build and develop their partnerships, it has become apparent at what works well and who Ideas Test want to work with. There is huge benefit working with freelancers (who support with delivery) who really get Ideas Test, can tell its story and are invested in it's values.	Creative Estuary Emerging Producer, Dante or Die
Through the partnerships and collaborations they have created jobs and opportunities for participants and creatives in the area.	Opportunities for Make Wave participants with Chatham Dockyard, Electric Medway, Kalikas Amour, Icon Theatre, Messroom, Nick Ashton/Chicken Monster Illustrations, MACA and Hidden Kingdom Films
The team has demonstrated their resilience and support of each other along with responding to the changing demands and landscape, being adaptive and being unfaltering in their committed to delivering high quality projects.	Responding to the pandemic restrictions and adjusting projects in response to challenges or as a result of the co-creation process
The Director who left at the end of Year 2 is leaving her own legacy within Ideas Test through having achieved NPO status and secured funding for Phase 4.	

Ideas Test continuing to evolve

As an action learning set, continuously learning, and responding to this learning, is at the heart of Ideas Test's practice.



Findings

- It has been a transitional year for Ideas Test and it is in a secure position for its next phase of delivery
- Achieving NPO status is a significant milestone which will enable stability and provide opportunities although it comes with the risk of it veering towards the arts above community engagement or social purpose
- The brand (digital and reputation) of Ideas Test continues to gain presence through active engagement in key networks and projects
- Ideas Test has been involved at a strategic level locally including influencing cultural strategies
- The way Ideas Test works, demanding excellence and quality art, is important to it and its partners enabling effective and mutually beneficial partnerships
- People want to work with Ideas Test and can see the value it brings to a partnership
- Collaborating with people and partners who 'get' Ideas Test is an important part of delivering high quality art and supports Ideas Test to tell their story
- Co-creation is a common feature in a number of its delivery models which has resulted in excellent art being delivered
- Adapting and flexing have been key attributes of the team and partnerships which have enabled to flex to the changing needs of projects

- Social media has seen a small but steady growth and has responded to the trends that it has noticed with video being the preferred content to engage with
- Systems and processes have been established to provide a firm footing for Phase
- The Director who left Ideas Test at the end of Year 2 has left her own legacy through achieving the milestones of NPO and securing funding for Phase 4

Challenges

- Being as visible as it would like to be with some of its target audiences
- Resources have been stretched at times which has put pressure on the team and impacted on wellbeing. There is the need for increased capacity within the team
- Engaging with certain areas and communities has required hard and continued effort to make a small progression

“Ideas Test feels so much more rooted in Medway now. Always a juggling act to work across such a vast geography but right now I can feel all the potential and the excitement of things opening up again.”

Director