

# What is Audience Development?



Ehara taku  
toa i te toa  
takitahi,  
engari he  
toa takitini

My success  
is not mine  
alone, it is  
the success  
of the  
collective

## What is Audience Development?

Audience development is not a silver bullet for how to sell more tickets, nor is it a fancy way to talk about promoting or marketing what you do – although marketing is one of many useful tools you might use to connect with your audience.

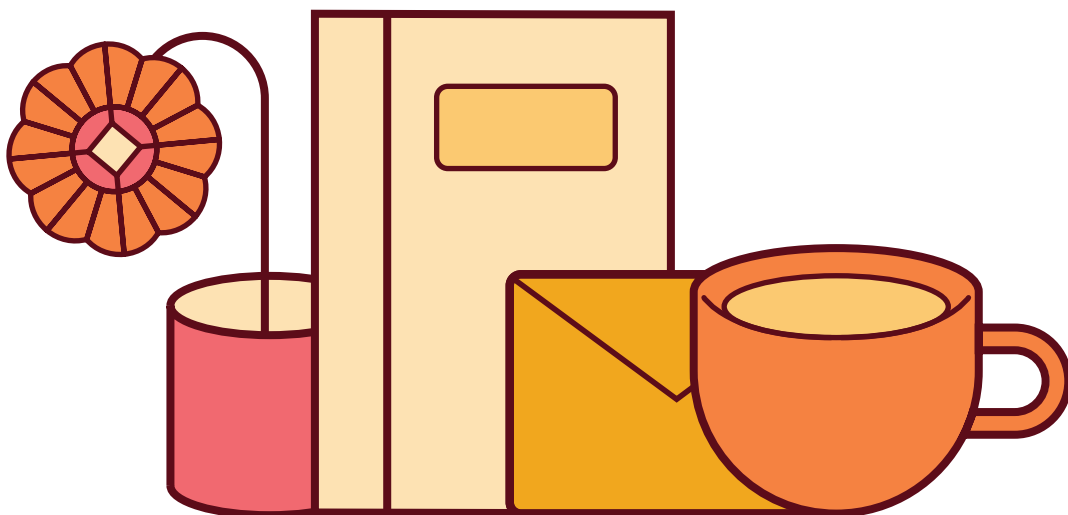
Audience development is best understood as a set of concepts, ideas and pathways to engagement that can support you and/or your organisation.

This Audience Development Toolkit is less a specific method, and more a philosophy or approach that you can use as provocation in your mahi. It is something that you and/or everyone in your organisation needs to live and breathe to create the most benefit.

## Our definition

Who are you for and why? These are fundamental questions to consider.

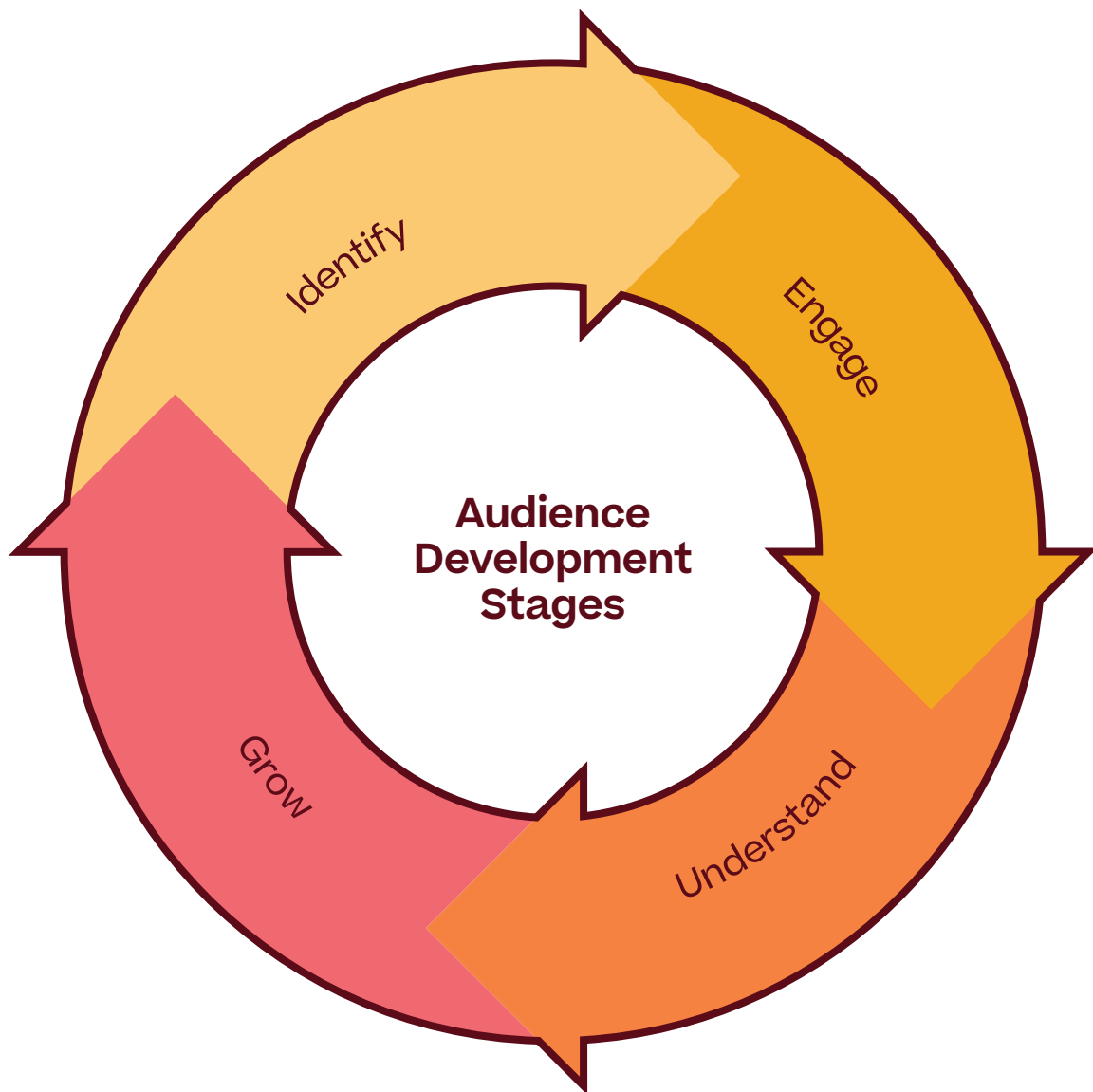
Audience development requires a shift from thinking of audiences as merely numbers, 'bums on seats', or ticket sales. It means starting a genuine connection with your audience, building a supportive and loyal community that grows with you.



It's about having a clear vision for who you are as an artist/creative/arts organisation – and everyone championing this vision. It's about engaging your audience to want to be part of your community, reaching out with authenticity and a desire to create meaningful experiences, aligning them with your vision. It's about understanding who your current audience is, who you are excluding, who you want to reach in your potential audience, and all the mahi you do to engage with these audiences.

It's about having an authentic two way conversation with your audience, listening to what they want, their arts experiences, their attendance obstacles, and creating access, trust and loyalty so that they will support and grow with you.

Through your ongoing audience development mahi you will contribute to a thriving, valued and sustainable creative sector, that ultimately benefits us all. You will nurture the health and wellbeing of our communities and the individuals within them.



## Audience development at the core of what you do

Placing audience development at the core of what you do is fundamental. It enables a critical understanding of what is important to your audiences, the barriers – and above all it helps to develop a genuine connection with audiences.

Audiences are made up with people, and genuine connection with these people is at the core of what audience development is all about.

And the pay off is rich. Your audience-focused approach will build a strong community around you of “loyal supporters...advocates, active stakeholders, trusted partners, valued volunteers, and inspirational co-creators.”<sup>1</sup> And it doesn't have to cost you much other than your time!

Audience development methods are about thinking outside the square, innovating, testing ideas and getting feedback. They're about being prepared to be honest with yourself about what's working and what's not working, and adapting your behaviour. They're about collaborating with others in your ecosystem, and exploring unexpected alliances that might bring surprising results.

For example, could your museum run a quiz night at the local pub? Could your theatre group form a relationship with the local kapa haka group and invite them to perform on your opening night – and could you then share a scene from your performance at a kapa haka event? Could your art gallery decorate the windows of the main street during the Diwali festival?

But most importantly, audience development is about being genuine, generous and curious

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How do you do this?

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Well, the very first step is to figure out who you are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mhmandrew.medium.com/culture-in-lockdown-part-2-the-7-pillars-of-audience-focus-1a0cb57b9ab5>

**Who are you as an artist/  
creative/organisation?**



**Why do you exist as an  
artist/creative/organisation?**

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**What makes you special and sets you apart?**

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What is your vision?

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Who are you working for and why?

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Who are you not working for and why?

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What impact do you want to have, and on who?

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# Knowing this first is crucial to then engaging with your audience and community.

Because the reality is, you are not your audience. To really understand who your audience is – what they want, what they don't want, what their obstacles are – you need to engage in a conversation with them. How do you do this? You ask. You more than ask, you really get to know them, and you do this through engaging them in meaningful two way conversations.

**Refer to Toolkit 02  
and 03 for tips and  
tricks on how to do this**



Really consider – who are you trying to connect with? Are you creating content that they even want to see?

If you say you are wanting a 'younger audience', or a 'local audience', are you sure that what you are offering appeals to them? Perhaps it doesn't, and that's ok.

Once you know, you can then choose to either change what you create or do to appeal to that audience, or continue with the content you want to be creating, and look to find (or retain) the audience that connects with that.

You can't attract a new or different audience without changing what you do or appealing to what they want. If you want to engage with a new audience, then changes may be needed.

If you want a diverse audience, you'll need a diverse programme and a diverse way of engaging.

And if you want your art to stay the same, then potentially your audience won't grow too much.

Through this process you will need to have the courage to be honest about who you are and where your art fits in the world. The reality is that not everyone will get what you do and what you produce for the world, and that is ok.

Once you do know who you are and who you are for, then (if you are an organisation) EVERYONE — from each committee or board member, to the performers and artists, community volunteers helping behind the scenes and beyond — in your organisation needs to know, invest in, and drive this vision.

**If you are an independent creative /artist, YOU need to live and breathe it**

## Don't let your vision be all talk. Walk that talk!

Develop genuine manaakitanga – warm hospitality and respect for the needs of your audiences. People should feel welcome right from their first interaction, whether it be at the ticket box on the night or pursuing your website for the first time.

If it's your website, ensure it's easy to navigate, that it has all the info that audiences need to know – from parking and how to buy tickets, to your disability access etc. If it's at the ticket desk, ensure everyone extends manaakitanga and positively engages with the audience. If your vision is to 'create joy', then ensure you or everyone in your organisation engages with this in mind.

We are living in a post-Covid world, where we have a unique opportunity to be more radical and creative in our approach to our audiences.

According to audience development research company Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, "the 'winning formula' post-Covid will be vision-led artists and organisations producing content that is authentic and human, in an attempt to engage and build their communities".<sup>2</sup>

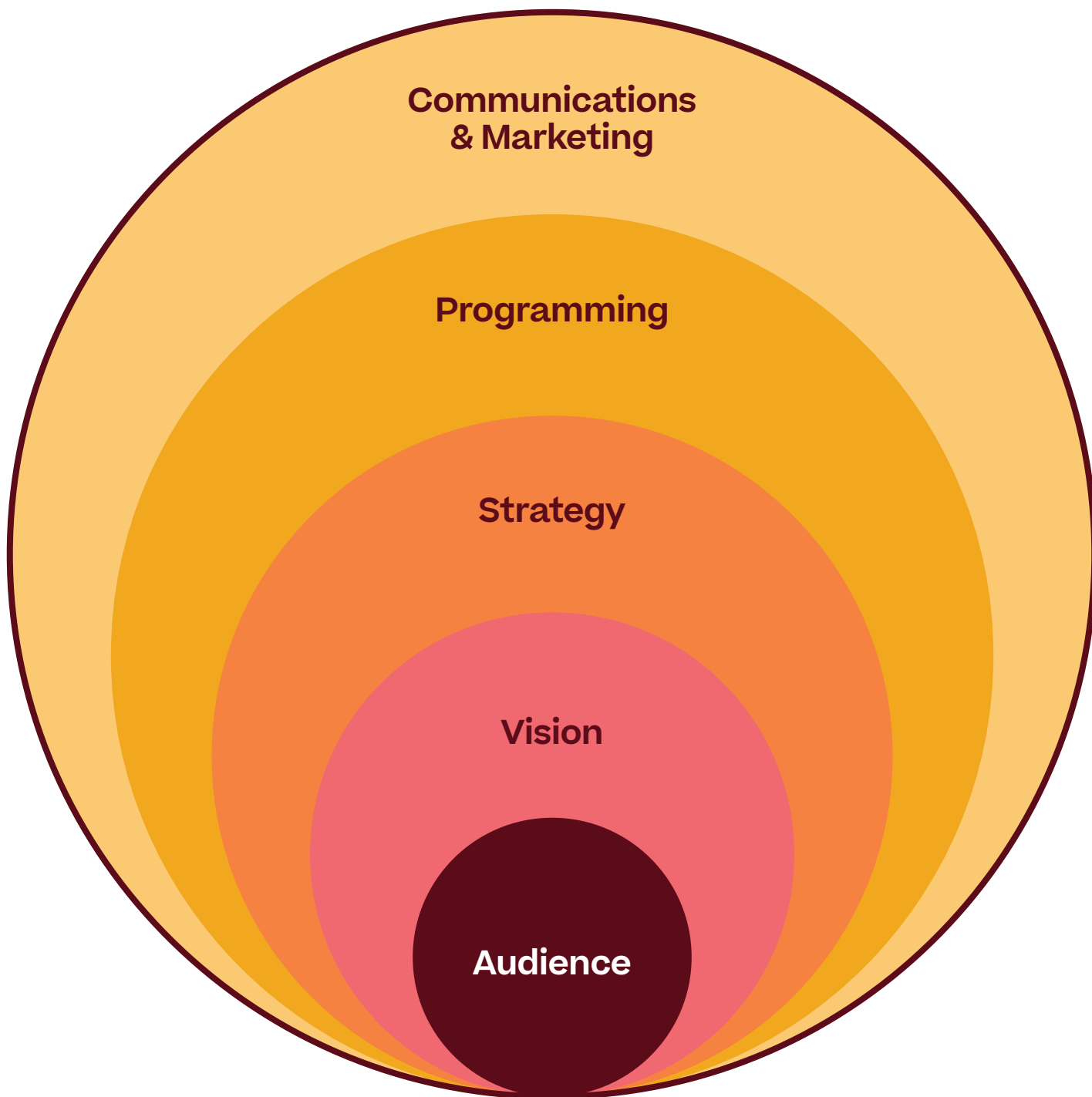
<sup>2</sup> <https://mhmandrew.medium.com/culture-in-lockdown-part-2-the-7-pillars-of-audience-focus-1a0cb57b9ab5>

Success will be won by “those that are...vision-led & relentlessly audience-focused...

putting the needs of their audiences at the heart of all of their processes.”

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre

If you're committed to an audience development approach, then your audience will be at the heart and forefront of your everyday; your vision, your strategy, your programming, your communications and marketing, your interactions with everyone who touches your organisation – and not just an after-thought when you need to sell tickets.



## So where to start



Below are some useful questions to spark your own understanding of audience development from your own unique perspective, and hopefully illuminate a direction forwards.

**Who are you including and who are you excluding from your audiences?**

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**What assumptions do you have about your audiences?**

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How are you listening to your audience?

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How do your audiences perceive you and what you do?

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Why do they come/engage with what you do?

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How can you seek/embed an audience perspective in your organisation?

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How can you prepare everyone in your organisation to listen to the feedback, the good AND the bad?

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What are the existing barriers for your current audience, and for new audiences?

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Who is in your neighbourhood,  
and are you engaging them?

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Other thoughts?

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## Useful links and reading

The Tao of Audience Development for the Arts;  
Philosophies About Audience Development Five  
Years in the Making by Shoshana Danoff Fanizza

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### Waikato Arts Navigator

 [creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Waikato-Arts-Navigator\\_Regional-Strategy\\_ONLINE.pdf](https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Waikato-Arts-Navigator_Regional-Strategy_ONLINE.pdf)

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### Wellbeing and Arts, Culture and Creativity in the Waikato (2022)

 [creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/HS\\_Creative-Waikato\\_Wellbeing-and-Arts-Culture-and-Creativity-in-the-Waikato\\_FINAL.pdf](https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/HS_Creative-Waikato_Wellbeing-and-Arts-Culture-and-Creativity-in-the-Waikato_FINAL.pdf)

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### Culture segment Audience Atlas 2022 – summary

 [creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/Legacy-Page-Documents/20220126-audienceatlassummary\\_v40.pdf](https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/Legacy-Page-Documents/20220126-audienceatlassummary_v40.pdf)

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### Culture segment Audience Atlas 2022 – full report

 [creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/Legacy-Page-Documents/20220126-audienceatlasfinalamended\\_v17.pdf](https://creativenz.govt.nz/-/media/Project/Creative-NZ/CreativeNZ/Legacy-Page-Documents/20220126-audienceatlasfinalamended_v17.pdf)

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### Culture in Lockdown. PART 2: The 7 Pillars of Audience-focus (2020)

 [mhmandrew.medium.com/culture-in-lockdown-part-2-the-7-pillars-of-audience-focus-1a0cb57b9ab5](https://mhmandrew.medium.com/culture-in-lockdown-part-2-the-7-pillars-of-audience-focus-1a0cb57b9ab5)

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### Transformation or Bust by Diane Ragsdale, keynote speech at Creative New Zealand's The Big Conversation 2016

 [youtube.com/watch?v=spFn0kFD-Cs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=spFn0kFD-Cs)

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### The Art of Relevance, Nina Simon TedX Talk

 [youtube.com/watch?v=NTih-l739w4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=NTih-l739w4)

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