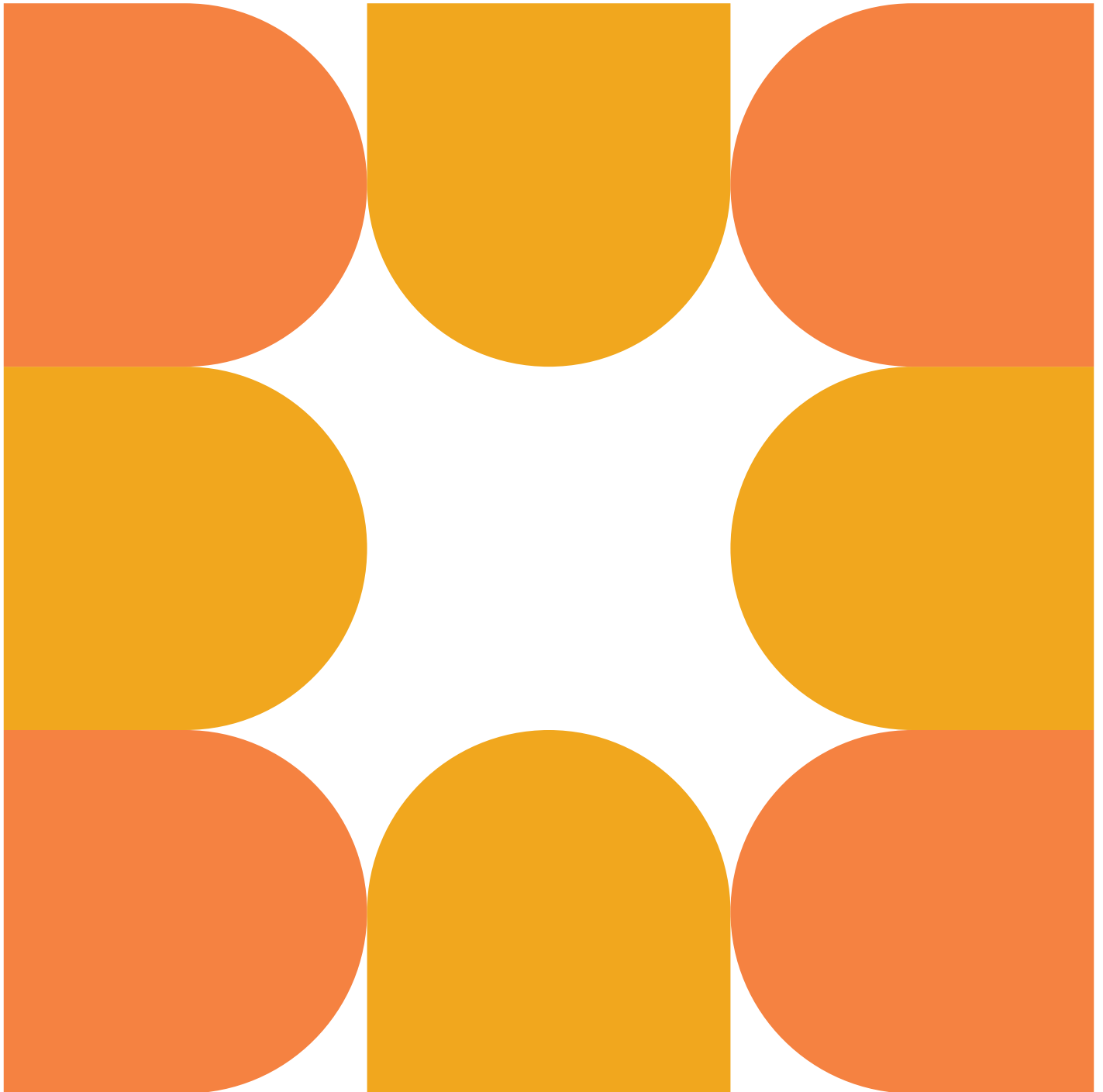# Programming & Curating

Me mātau
kī te whetū,
ī mua ī te kōkīrī
o te haere

Before you
set forth on
a journey,
be sure
you know
the stars

Please note: you don't have to be a musical ensemble or a theatre group to find this resource relevant—if you select and schedule something for an audience, such as a workshop/workshop series, classes, exhibitions, events and gigs, shows and performances, then this resource has something for you.

This resource talks about the process and the thinking behind the process of offering tangible events for your audience to engage with. So although we use the word 'programming', this term applies to anyone doing the mahi of selecting and scheduling offerings for an audience, and so it may just as likely relate to the work that you do.

Programming or curating events is about more than just dreaming up something you feel like offering at the time.

Especially when you consider how over the course of a period of time, a year or two for example, this range of offerings becomes a conversation with your audience, and says quite a lot about who you are as an individual or organisation. Over an even longer period of time, your programming becomes your very identity.

So, what you offer to your audience says a lot about who you are and what you have to say. It also says a lot about where you are and where you want to go.

With this in mind, programming becomes a powerful strategic action.

Do you want a more diverse audience?

How diverse is your programming?

Do you want to make meaning and enact meaningful change with your work?

How then does your programming over a period of time reflect this bigger strategy?

Are you wanting to branch out/stretch what you do and how you do it, but are afraid your audience won't go with you?

Strategic programming over a period of time will guide you and your audience, slowly moving your audience's comfort zone to a new level. Or, slowly growing a more authentic audience who aligns with your values.

Do you want to connect more with what is going on with your audience and what is going on in your community/the world?

Make sure your programming makes these connections.

Programming can be thought of as a practical application of your vision, a clear and tangible way of communicating your vision with an audience.

Themes can be a useful overarching concept in order to deliver a variety of offerings, connected and cohesive as a whole. They can become ways to shape artistic decisions that can remove barriers of context, chronology or structure from the works that are selected. Themes can be universal, like, love, nature, joy, sadness, discovery and more. You could, for example, curate an exhibition that includes work about birds from 200, 50, and 1 year ago and explore the similarities and differences in the artistic approach. Or you could programme a concert with songs about heartbreak and find songs from different eras or genres that deal with that theme.

Marc Taddei, Orchestra Wellington's Music Director, often sets a season under a theme, because he says, "thematic programming allows for less known works to sit side by side populist works in a way that can remain attractive to the audience".[1]

While the audience's enjoyment and appreciation clearly need to be held as important, there is of course a back-and-forth dialogue occurring.

As Marc Taddei also says, "I want my programmes to have point of view—to tell a story—to educate… presenting a series of concerts allows me the opportunity to illuminate not only what I like or think is important, but to give an argument for why I hold this view".[2]

This storytelling, balanced with delivering on your bigger strategic vision, whilst also holding space for what you know your audience loves…well it could be argued, is what makes good programming.
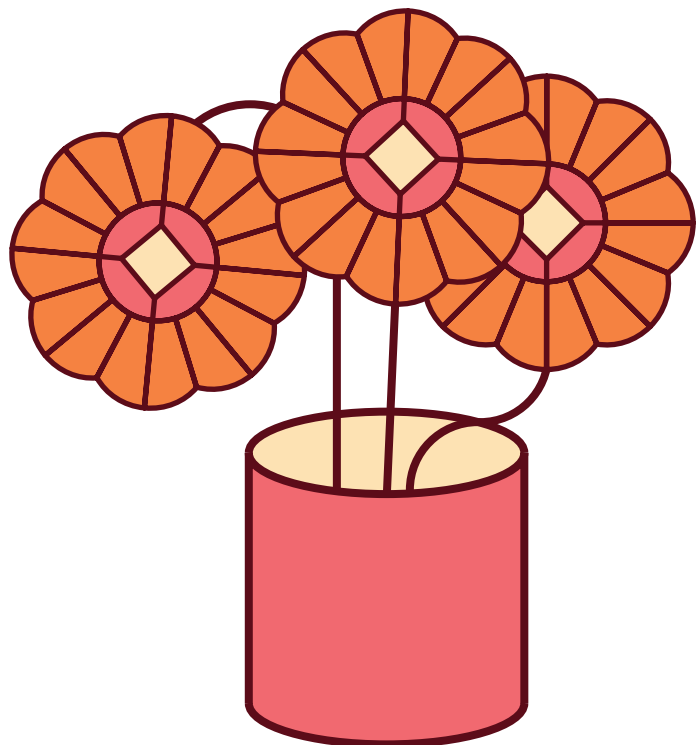
1 & 2 http://www.marctaddei.com/blog/post.php?s=2016-10-06-education-and-programming

Strategic programming over a period of time will guide you and your audience, slowly moving your audience's comfort zone to a new level. Or, slowly growing a more authentic audience who aligns with your values.

Who aren't you?

Equally important perhaps is what you DON'T programme. Not just content, but people, performers and acts that you may engage and align with, and therefore represent you — you may want to do your research to ensure their kaupapa, values and messaging align with yours.

It may also be worth considering a programming guide, where it is clearly stated what you are NOT comfortable with. You may well have assumptions about what these might be, but for many creatives and organisations, we'd urge you to be transparent through a programming guide. This way, if and when you find yourself with a difficult situation, all parties can be guided by clear policy, rather than raised emotional responses.

Evaluation

At the end of a season or period of time, as you are strategically planning your next, it is a key time to evaluate how well your programming is going. Some important questions you might ask are things like:

Have we hit our intended goals through our offerings/programming?

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What was the most successful part of the programme/season?

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What was the least successful part?

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What impact has the programme made?

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Were we successful in reaching new audiences/participants?

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What improvements would we like to make for the next season/programme?

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Some of these answers will be found internally and anecdotally, but much of this important information will come from asking your audience.

How to do this?

You could conduct very brief anecdotal interviews with audience members leaving performances/exhibitions/gigs, or send a targeted follow-up survey (you might like to offer some kind of incentive, such as a reduced price ticket for a future performance/event).

You might have a feedback book or box, or even hold a small focus group.

For more information see Toolkits 02 and 03
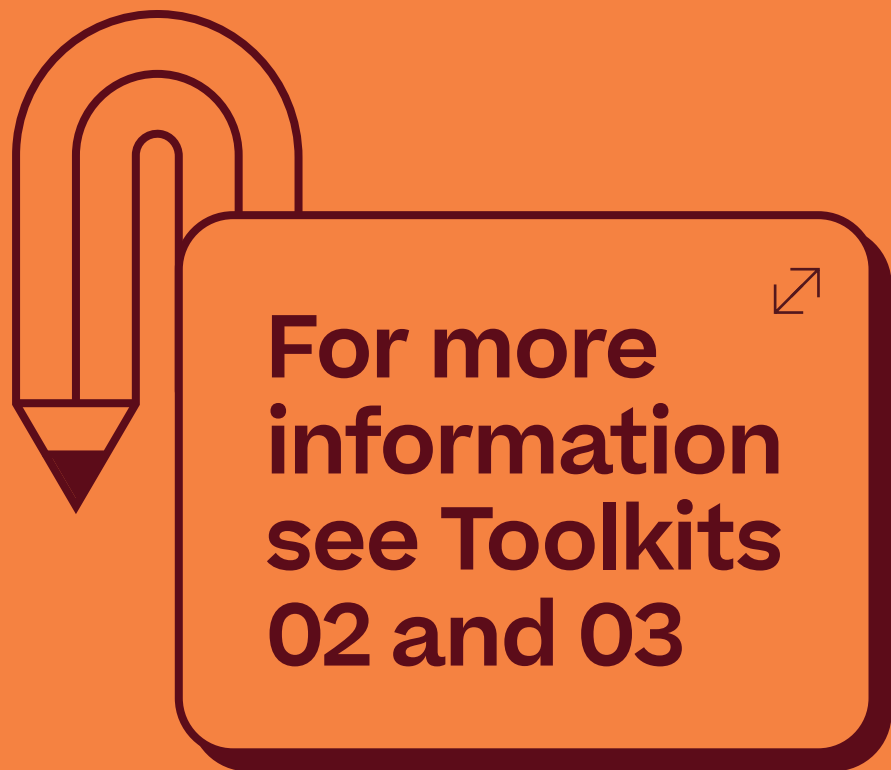
What makes good programming?

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What drives your programming?

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Who aren't you—what would you not programme?

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Is your programming in line with your artistic vision and/or your organisational goals (where you want to go)?

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How much of your programming reflects your identity?

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Does your programming have a point-or-view?

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Does it need one?

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Are you operating at 'arm's-length' from your audience?

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How 'audience centric' are your programming choices?

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Do you schedule your programming
for each year, or go project to project?

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Would you say your programming is ad hoc and
depends on what comes to you, or do you set
themes and look for performance/workshops/
gigs/exhibitions that align with the theme?

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What sort of conversations do you
want your work/events to generate?

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Is your current programming the
spark for these conversations?

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Do you bring big picture thinking to your programming?

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What would happen if you were to think of where you want to be in 5 years time and your programming reflected this and moved you there?

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Do you connect with what else is happening in your community/the world?

Matariki for example, or World Poetry Day or
broader social or environmental considerations.

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If not, do you want to?

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How does your programming relate to the place/community within which it exists— and is this relevant /important to you?

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Does your programming address attendance barriers in any way and is this important/relevant to you?

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What do you want your programming to say about you/your organisation? Over a year, over 5 years.

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Whatever you're doing, is it working?

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What would you change if you could?

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