



## ***The Bristol Approach: artist brief***

**December 2015**

### **(i) Introduction**

Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC) is an NPO digital arts charity. Since it was set up in 1996, KWMC has used the arts and digital technologies to support people to imagine and develop ideas about social change, prototype new approaches, and share the learning across the UK and beyond.

People need to have a leading role in imagining, designing and building their future. But at the moment there is too much focus on the role of large corporations and government, with the future too often cast as something determined by 'Big Tech'. There is a danger that a "control centre" vision of the 'Smart City' will swallow large swathes of public life - from transport and housing to health and energy - with little space left for the aspirations, emotional intelligence and agency of individuals and communities.

To try to counter the 'Big-Tech push' trend, KWMC, working with Ideas for Change and Bristol City Council, is piloting a new project called *The Bristol Approach to Citizen Sensing*, which starts with people, their everyday lives, needs and aspirations. Local people will work as part of creative teams of artists, activists and technologists to prototype sensor technologies that they actually want, need and can generate value from.

The overall aim is to create a new participatory urban commons, where citizen-generated-data is held in the common good and at the service of its citizens.

KWMC is currently seeking two lead artists/ and or an artist collective to support *The Bristol Approach*, and also to reflect on their own practice and develop new work, in the form of an exhibition, installation, performance or film, that responds to some of the issues and opportunities explored through the research.

### **(ii) About the project**

Urban participatory sensing means citizens using lightweight and accessible sensor technologies to gather and share data in order to collectively monitor their environment. Urban sensing technologies range from specific sensors or applications that augment mobile phones to increase their functionality, to 'smart' and connected devices.

A citizen-centred sensing programme could bring about benefits. For example, by collecting and sharing data about environmental factors citizens can become aware of

how their lifestyles affect the ecosystem, identify local issues such as noise or air pollution, and learn more about and act on their environment.

However, there are challenges. Previous experiences have shown that citizen engagement with sensing initiatives can be hindered if people lack the skills required to configure, use and maintain the technology, and struggle to make sense of the data collected. Moreover, there is a need to better reward participation, incentivise community connectedness, and foster a shared sense of purpose.

*The Bristol Approach* seeks to engage with these issues and develop a citizen-led response.

*The artist commission for this project comprises [x] parts:*

### **1) No-tech sensing: discovering the passions and the people who care (Jan-Feb 2016)**

The participatory urban commons already exists- it is there among the chatter and everyday interactions that happen in community urban 'hot-spots' such as: the chicken shop, nail bar, launderette and barbers.

This phase of the project would focus on immersive research at a range of these urban commons 'hot-spots' located in two neighborhoods in Bristol: Easton/Lawrence Hill and Knowle West. At this stage we envision research taking place in three 'hot-spots' in each area.

Supported by the team at KWMC, the commissioned artists would select the 'hot-spots', work with the staff in these locations, and devise an engaging process to open conversation with the communities that use these spaces. Through this process the most important issues, stories and interests of people encountered would be creatively captured and documented.

The process could be performative, participative, and/or dialogical and should seek to go deeper than the first layer response people often give when asked about where and how they live. It could have a clear visual or theatrical identity to mark this experience out from the everyday. Something that people are intrigued to engage with when waiting in/using these hotspots, that encourages open conversation and may end up gathering attention over time spreading through word of mouth in the community.

The aim of this phase of the project is to surface a range of issues people care about, the individuals who would be willing to be part of the longer project, and the narratives that have the power to engage. This phase would be spread over 2-3 weeks in January, with the artist scoping out 'hot-spots' and then spending one day in each community 'hot-spot'.

### **2) Creative Workshops (Feb- March 2016)**

From phase one between 3-5 issues will be chosen as having the most community energy behind them and being the most appropriate to sensor

technology. Citizen-focused teams (between 3 and 5) will be formed, each concentrating on one of these issue. The teams will be made up of local people, creative technologists, designers and the commissioned artists. The artists will work with and move between these teams to help explore the citizen sensor possibilities for each issue and develop creative prototypes.

An example of a citizen-led issue could be: the poor quality of rented properties in the city- both private landlords and council stock. Sensors could be used to measure damp, air quality and draughts. This could be useful for individual renters, and also be used for collective action at particular problem landlords. The artists, technologists and designers would help find creative, practical ways of working on this issue with sensor technologies and helping to make people feel inspired to actually use.

This phase will include each team engaging in a series of fortnightly workshops, spread over two months (Feb-March). At this stage we envision four co-designed workshops that will include the following themes:

- **Mapping the issue:** understanding the issue and exploring different perspectives
- **Unpacking the tech:** introduction to sensors and open data
- **Sense-making and story-telling through data**
- **Incentivising participation and creating shared value**
- **Design & build:** fabricating the citizen sensor prototypes
- **Installation, feedback and maintenance**

The workshops will be designed and led by a range of practitioners/specialists. The commissioned artists will not lead the workshops, but instead work within and as part of the teams, helping to cross-pollinate ideas, learning and different perspectives. The aim of this phase will be to create a set of prototype citizen sensors ready for deployment in test sites, and citizens armed with the know-how, tools and motivation to continue using these new tools.

### **3) Deployment, testing and reflecting (April-May 2015)**

The aim is to deploy the prototype citizen sensors at a range of sites, with testing, analysis of how effective they are and their potential for mobilising participation and change. This will be followed by a review session with all the teams, which the commissioned artists will participate in.

### **4) Developing an artist –led response (April-June 2016)**

The commissioned artists are invited to reflect on how the issues raised through the project relate to their own practice, and to wider cultural, social and political ideas and realities about relationship between the ‘smart city’ and the ‘smart citizen’. Emerging issues include:

- Big data and the common good
- Ownership, access and agency
- Data economies and the individual
- Narrative and authorship
- Surveillance and privacy

## **5) Presentation of responses (June-September 2016)**

The aim is to create an artist-led response to this emerging agenda in the form of a publication, installation, performance, or film which would be shown/shared between June and September 2016, including the possibility of an exhibition in the studio space at KWMC.

### **(iii) Call for artists**

The Bristol Approach offers the opportunity for the commissioned artists to immerse themselves in a live and emerging debate about open data, technology and participation in an unfolding landscape of the new urban commons, contribute to prototype a citizen-led response, and create their own new work in response to this new agenda.

KWMC is seeking to commission two artists/and or an artist collective to help design and deliver *The Bristol Approach*.

We are particularly looking to commission artists with skills and experience in some of these areas:

- Engaging and collaborating with local people and communities in socially engaged arts practice;
- Experience of different research methodologies and approaches, including ethnography and behavioral science;
- Creative documentation of material, including images and stories;
- Participative approaches to developing story-lines and engaging the social context in which a work is produced;
- Mixing art, technology and participation.

There is a budget of £4500 for artist fees to support phases 1-3 of the project, and £3000 for artist fees to support phase 4-5 of the project. There is an additional materials budget for each phase.

KWMC will be able to provide producer assistance for the project, including project management, community engagement, technical support, research assistance, press and communications, and studio space.

If you are interested in this commission, please make a submission in a single Word or pdf document outlining the following:

- Describe your practice and the way you work in no more than 300 words.
- Outline a project, exhibition, commission or work that has pushed your practice forward and your key highlights in no more than 200 words.
- Include up to four jpeg images to illustrate your work and/or up to three links to websites that show your work.

- Outline why you are interested in this project and your approach in no more than 300 words.

Send your submission to: [martha.king@kwmc.org.uk](mailto:martha.king@kwmc.org.uk) with “The Bristol Approach” in the subject line no later than **5pm on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January**.

Interviews would be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January, for phase one to begin w/c 11<sup>th</sup> January.

**(iv) Contact**

If you would like any further information about this project or have any questions, please contact Martha at the above email, or on 0117 903 0444.