



# A BLUEPRINT FOR DRIVING EFFECTIVE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THROUGH MAJOR EVENTS



# A Blueprint for driving effective youth engagement through major events

Spirit of 2012 is the London 2012 legacy funder, using major sporting or cultural events to harness the power and inspiration of a moment in time. Education programmes linked to these events are a vital means of delivering impact to young people and communities. One such programme is Get Set – Team GB and ParalympicsGB’s education programme inspiring young people through the power of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, athletes and Values. This Blueprint outlines the key principles needed to drive effective youth engagement through these major event education programmes.

It primarily draws on the experience of Hark, an education and youth consultancy, in delivering the Get Set programme, which Spirit of 2012 has been a funder of for the past decade. Hark’s experience has then been supplemented by stakeholder interviews from other education programmes linked to major events, including Eurovision and UK City of Culture. This document is supplemented by a Partnerships Framework as a guide to establishing partnerships which will help drive your programme forwards.

# Major events provide excellent opportunities for education programmes

Whether sporting, cultural or commemorative, the excitement and momentum built up around a major event is the perfect opportunity to capture a young person's attention. Building an educational programme around a major event allows for inspirational messages to be delivered to young people in a way which is topical and makes them feel a part of a moment in time.

There are enormous benefits to this kind of programme for young people, their families and schools. Regardless of the event, building an educational programme around it can make young people feel involved, whether that's on a local, regional, national or even global level. An event that involves role models can motivate young people with something to aspire to, and one with a strong set of values can inspire them to follow these values themselves. A sporting event may encourage young people to take up more physical activity, while a cultural event could foster a sense of belonging in their local community. Throughout the research that we conducted in producing this Blueprint, we even learned about young people who had been inspired to follow a new career path thanks to their engagement with such programmes. There are huge benefits for schools too – education programmes linked to major events stand out among a crowded resource market and can engage students with their learning in new and exciting ways. Such programmes can also strengthen the connection between schools and their local communities, meaning the benefits of activity in both spheres are enhanced and widespread.

**Back in the early days of the Get Set programme, the partnership development manager for school sport partnerships in Salford took one of his students to spend a day at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.**

This student was so inspired by what she saw that she threw herself into sport and embarked on a very successful career as a triple jumper. Her story has come full circle, and she is now hoping to compete for Team GB in the LA 2028 Olympic Games – all thanks to the inspiration of an educational experience she had as a teenager.





An education programme linked to a major event may have any or all of these benefits among its objectives, which will then become a driving force behind the content that is created and delivered.

Major event education programmes have huge benefits for young people, their families and schools:

- Heightened sense of belonging in an event or in their communities
- Something to aspire to
- Motivation to get involved in sports, arts, or other activities
- Values to follow
- Inspiration for new career paths
- Engagement in learning in new and exciting ways
- Strengthened connection between schools and local communities





**Effective youth engagement with education programmed linked to major events lies in six core principles.** Although we have focused on major sporting and cultural events in this research, these same principles could be applied to events education programmes in any sphere or at any scale.

## 1. Embed education from the start

The best major events education programmes stem from considering education right from the early stages of planning an event. This way, you can ensure that the event's messages and values are embedded and effectively communicated right from the outset. Sufficient time, resources and consideration allow you to design programmes which are high-quality and truly aligned with the needs of both the event organisers and young people.

From a practical standpoint, planning an education programme early allows for long lead times – something which is essential for schools and delivery organisations to prepare. Schools, for example, often plan their full term's activities before the term starts, meaning that they could need up to 12 weeks' notice to fully engage. This is particularly important if you are asking schools to participate in any activity around other key dates in their calendar, for example exams, which typically take place in May and June. For delivery partners, a longer planning period allows for meaningful collaboration and alignment with other organisations, as well as providing the flexibility to adapt delivery for different contexts if necessary. It also means that proper thought can be given to how to reach young people – particularly if the programme involves engaging them outside of school term times.

This has benefits to event organisers and rights holders, too. Depending on the scale of the event, there may be media interest long before the event occurs, and these events need to maintain a positive public image. Education programmes provide a pre-event platform to start telling your story, engaging young people, and creating positive narratives that counteract potential negative stories. Education becomes something that is “always on”, offering a constant flow of positive engagement even before the event begins. It can also drive excitement for the event itself – by engaging young people through education, you can develop a whole generation of fans before your event even begins.

## The Get Set programme was initially set up in 2008...

... four years before the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The initiative gave the public and the media something to talk about long before the Games, building excitement for the event itself and ensuring that there were always positive impact stories to tell in the years leading up to it.



## 2. Know your audience

Defining and understanding your target audience lies at the heart of delivering an effective education programme. It is crucial to know exactly who you want to engage with and how to reach them.

The first step here is to think about the scale of your initiative. Are you delivering a national programme, or a regional one? Focusing on the local area around your event, or reaching young people on an international scale?

Next, clearly define who you are trying to reach. Should your programme just impact young people, or their families too? Which young people specifically do you want to engage? Many of major event education programmes are keen to reach as many young people as possible, and this often means wanting to run initiatives for both primary- and secondary-aged children. This can work well, but the differing needs of each of these age groups must be considered. Children in primary schools are likely to be engaged in something which is gamified and cross-curricular, while those in Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16) will need an initiative that takes into consideration their exam dates and heavier workload. Setting clear parameters on age allows these needs to be planned for from the early stages of developing an education programme.

It is also important to consider whether you are looking to engage any specific demographic groups through your programme. Although education programmes will often be delivered through schools, and therefore reach all children universally, it is not enough to assume that your content will automatically meet the needs of all children. Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), from Global Majority or socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, may face barriers to engagement. Identifying these barriers and considering these needs from the early stages of planning will allow you to tailor your programme to ensure that it is inclusive, accessible, and meets the needs of your audience.

The idea of “looking through both ends of the telescope” is key here: find a way to get what your organisation needs from the programme but also provide value and meet the expectations of your audience. Successful engagement comes when both ends of the telescope align, creating a symbiotic relationship between your goals and your audience’s needs.

Once you know your audience, it’s important to think strategically about how to deliver your messages. You need to consider the right places and times for engagement – is your audience at school, at home, or in their local communities? If your programme is aiming to reach young people in schools, then meeting the needs of teachers will be crucial. There are countless education initiatives available, and yours needs to stand out from the crowd.

### **The Get Set programme was set up as a joint venture between Team GB and ParalympicsGB.**

One key aim was to use the inspiration of the Games and athletes to challenge attitudes and behaviours around disability sport, as well as offering opportunities for disabled people to be involved in sport and physical activity. This meant that the whole programme – not just content relating to the Paralympic Games – was designed to be inclusive and accessible for students with SEND, and to centre disabled people’s experiences. More specifically, the Path to Paris programme used a tiered approach to deliver a universal programme through schools at the same time as targeting activities to particular demographics who had been identified as being less active. This allowed them to ensure that the programme’s content was relevant, relatable and accessible to all, while also paying particular attention to the needs of specific demographic groups.

Utilising the inspiration of a major event and the brand and assets that go along with it will be a huge help here. This will help to encourage a school or individual teacher to decide to deliver content about the major event in the first place, and trusting that your content meets their needs (e.g. is high-quality, fits into the school day, and is free) will draw them to engage in your formal education programme rather than creating something themselves. Teachers are unlikely to engage with a programme which does not align with the curriculum or their school’s priorities. Curriculum pressures are a consistent priority for schools, meaning that it is essential that your programme can show how it can support the teaching of National Curriculum subjects. Other individual school priorities can be more difficult to ascertain, but will often be driven by issues such as attendance, behaviour, or the Ofsted framework; if you are able to demonstrate that your programme can improve attendance through enhancing pupil engagement, for example, then schools are far more likely to participate.



Being able to clearly articulate how your programme is meeting these needs will also help you to identify who to contact in schools to tell them about your initiative. Subject leads will be interested in a programme which supports the teaching of their subject, while heads of Personal Development may be keen to hear about how your resources will develop young people's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education.

Schools are often an easy and structured environment to reach young people, but the communities they are part of can provide an alternative approach. The key difference between a school and community approach is the balance of reach versus tailored impact; schools are likely to have a higher reach than community groups who may not engage every child, but a community approach allows your programme to meet young people where they already are, meet their specific needs, and potentially to extend the impact to their families as well.

Many communities already run high-quality initiatives for young people and their families, and this provides an excellent opportunity for your programme to build on and amplify the work that is already being done. By linking your education programme to these existing local activities and networks, you can ensure that the benefits become a natural part of the community fabric. Having the right people in place – passionate individuals who understand the local context and know how to inspire young people – is essential for delivering a programme that resonates with the target audience. Depending on the scale of your programme, you may even consider a tiered approach to gain the benefits of delivery through both schools and communities.

**In the lead up to the 67th Eurovision Song Contest, held in Liverpool in 2023, Culture Liverpool began developing their education and community outreach programmes – EuroLearn and EuroStreet.**

As part of the planning process, the organisers set up a working group to engage with stakeholders about what they were already doing, what they wanted from an education programme, and how Eurovision captured their imagination. They worked with colleagues in children's services, as well as local colleges and universities, to understand what the needs of young people were and how funding could enhance existing activity and align it with the event. This led to a programme with multiple strands, each of which reflected the needs of the community and amplified the work that was already ongoing to ensure maximum impact.

### 3. Utilise the power of your brand and assets

Major events come with a host of powerful assets that can drive engagement, and you can leverage these assets for an effective education programme.

The assets associated with major events – from Olympic rings to famous artists – are invaluable tools that open doors, build partnerships, and create goodwill with your audience. These assets are often instantly recognisable and carry a sense of authority and credibility that can bring an additional layer of engagement to your programme.

By tapping into your brand's potential, you create an experience that resonates with your audience and ensures that they feel a part of something bigger.

Whether it's through unique role models, iconic venues, or immersive experiences, your brand and its assets can differentiate your programme and give it the staying power to thrive beyond the event itself.

**The Get Set programme successfully used the power of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to connect with young people, drive participation, and inspire a sense of pride.**

The Olympic and Paralympic Values were a key driver of engagement, and resources focusing on these were among the most popular resources from the Get Set programme. Teachers said that incorporating these Values not only enhanced pupils' physical fitness but also taught them important life skills and contributed to their overall development and wellbeing. Olympic and Paralympic athletes were another asset, using their power as role models to inspire young people to eat healthily and be more physically active. This helped the Get Set programme to stand out from the crowd, driving greater levels of engagement than other healthy lifestyle campaigns.



## 4. Establish and nurture strong partnerships

Among the most essential principles is the need to establish strong partners to support you in the planning, delivery, and funding of your major event education programme. The Partnerships Framework document that accompanies this Blueprint will explore this in greater detail.

Partnerships can take a number of different forms, from sponsors to community delivery organisations, each with its own set of benefits. Strong partnerships help ensure that your programme has both the resources and the reach to be effective. Whether it's through co-delivering activities, sharing content, or helping to distribute materials, partnerships provide opportunities to stretch your budget further and expand your reach. Partners are also often experts in their fields. These experts can provide you not only with invaluable knowledge of your target audience and how to best engage with them, but with the credibility and authority to speak about key issues relating to your programme.

There are huge benefits to the partners, too. Major events offer a platform to engage with wide audiences, and aligning with educational initiatives allows partner organisations to reach young people and communities in a new and exciting way.

For delivery partners, this might mean the opportunity to amplify the work they're already doing in communities, or to benefit from learnings from across the programme. For national organisations, investing in education provides a tangible way to deliver value into communities and align with their company's values.

Regardless of the type of partnership, nurturing meaningful relationships are crucial to the long-term success of the programme. The work should feel like a joint venture between you and your partner organisations – one in which there is open communication, knowledge sharing and idea generation. The more you and your partners feel you are working towards a common goal, the greater the impact your programme will be able to make – both during the event and for years to come.



## **Get Set's partnership with Aldi led to the creation of the Get Set to Eat Fresh programme.**

This partnership aligned brilliantly with Aldi's objective of ensuring that everyone has access to healthy food. They were able to drive this objective forward by harnessing the inspiration of Olympic and Paralympic athletes to encourage young people to discover, eat and enjoy fresh, healthy food.



## **5. Make youth engagement work for you**

When designing an education programme, it's vital to align it with the event's broader priorities. These programmes will have the greatest impact when they have buy-in from across your organisation, and the best way to do that is to ensure that your programme works to support your organisation's objectives – not just for education's sake but as a powerful tool for achieving your goals.

These goals can be widespread and varied. An education programme that reaches a large number of schools and engages countless young people can bring a whole new, younger audience to your event. For events that rely on spectators, education programmes create the fans of tomorrow through raising awareness, sustaining excitement and helping to sell tickets and fill venues.

From a wider, organisational perspective, education can serve as a vital means of driving forward your social impact strategy. A major events education programme can give young people something to aspire to and support them to develop the skills they will need to get there, ultimately enhancing your pipeline of future talent. These programmes also provide numerous opportunities to engage employees in volunteering – whether at the event itself, or through delivering content directly to young people. Whether you are looking to enhance community cohesion, develop young people's cultural capital, or encourage them to live according to a set of values, education can deliver social impact – and using the power of your event can make this delivery inspirational along the way.

## 6. Set up for legacy

From the very beginning, setting up for legacy should be a consideration in the planning of your education programme. The legacy of an education programme is not just about the immediate impact; it's about creating an ongoing, sustainable impact that can be built upon for years to come. The earlier you start planning for this legacy, the more effective and enduring your programme will be. By building for the long-term, you create opportunities for sustained engagement, deepened connections, and continued benefits for the community.

Planning for legacy starts early, with the establishing of clear goals and a robust evaluation framework. Set goals and objectives mean that, regardless of shifting contexts, the strategic direction of your programme is clear. This also allows for consideration to be given to what can be realistically achieved, depending on the cycle of your event. Robust evaluation allows the impact of your plan to be measured, which not only provides learnings to evolve from, but also results in knowing the successes to share. These successes can then be used to engage future partnerships.

Partnerships themselves play a key role in securing this legacy. Whether corporate sponsors or delivery organisations, maintaining consistent partners throughout the lifespan of your programme provides a continuous presence before, during and long after an event. Creating and nurturing these connections from the outset is vital; it fosters trust, ensures long-term collaboration, and allows for a smoother handover of responsibilities as the programme matures. Open communication and knowledge-sharing allow these connections to develop. By ensuring that both the programme and its outcomes are visible and accessible to all stakeholders, you can increase the likelihood of continued support and engagement long after the event. Although this is the optimal approach, legacy can still be secured even if partners change – retaining core messaging will provide consistency for your programme and allow new partners to boost that messaging as they come on board.

Setting up for long-term legacy means recognising that the context your programme is operating in may change over time. The programme must be flexible and able to adapt to these shifting circumstances, ensuring that it remains relevant and continues to deliver impact long after it was established. This flexibility can take a number of forms. It could mean allowing delivery organisations the freedom to tailor their approach to suit local needs, pivoting to utilise different levels of online or in-person delivery, or redefining your target audience as the programme progresses. Ultimately, planning for legacy also means preparing for handover. As the programme evolves, it's essential to think about how different partners can take it forward once the event is over, continuing to drive its impact and keeping it relevant to future audiences.



## **The Get Set programme launched in 2008 as the official London 2012 Education Programme.**

It was owned, funded and delivered by the London 2012 Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), but supported by a number of partner programmes which helped to expand its reach and impact. Right from the outset, there was a plan to establish legacy and not let the programme end once the Games were over. A key part of this plan was preparing for handover. In 2012, the Department of Education funded a rebrand of Get Set and enabled the transfer of the programme's ownership to Team GB and ParalympicsGB, who took on responsibility for the programme's delivery from there. Although there were some changes to account for the new ownership, many of the partners and activities remained the same, providing a consistent experience to young people. In the years since, the Get Set programme has shifted to suit a number of different contexts. The Olympic and Paralympic Games being held across the world in different time zones led to challenges with matching the excitement of a home Games. The Covid-19 pandemic meant the programme had to pivot to a greater reliance on a high-quality digital offering and reaching young people via their families during school closures. Throughout these changes, finding a balance between flexibility and consistency has been essential in establishing a legacy successfully spanning almost 20 years.

**Major events present a unique and powerful opportunity to engage young people through education programmes** that not only inspire but also create lasting impact. By following the key principles outlined in this report – from embedding education early in the planning process to knowing your audience and utilising the power of your brand – organisers can create educational initiatives that resonate with young people and their communities.



# Appendix

This Blueprint was created following desk research and consultation with a number of stakeholders involved in the Get Set programme, or other initiatives funded by Spirit of 2012. We held nine interviews and conducted a review of documentation including:

- **Garcia, B. and Cox, T.** (2013) European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects. tech. European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270586905\\_Garcia2013European\\_Capitals\\_of\\_Culture\\_Success\\_Strategies\\_and\\_LongTerm\\_Effects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270586905_Garcia2013European_Capitals_of_Culture_Success_Strategies_and_LongTerm_Effects)
- **Garcia, B. and Cox, T.** (2013a) London 2012 Cultural Olympiad Evaluation. rep. Institute of Cultural Capital. Available at: <https://www.beatrizgarcia.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Garcia-ICC-COFinalReport-UPDATES1.pdf>.
- **Garcia, B.** (2024) Paris 2024 Cultural Olympiad Evaluation. rep. Available at: <https://www.beatrizgarcia.net/2024/11/14/paris-2024-cultural-olympiad-evaluation/>
- **Nielsen** (2012) London 2012 Education – Get Set Research. Teacher Report – Quant Phase 3
- Evaluation and impact reports for the Get Set programme and its subsidiaries
- Context shifts for the Get Set programme since 2008

Thanks for their contributions go to:

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