

The Busking Project CIC's "Social Mission"

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To see how we limit our ability to earn profits, read: "[Articles of Association \(pdf\)](#)"

To see our company page on the Government's website in the UK, [go here](#).

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Thanks,

The Busking Project CIC's team

Our Mantra

Buskers are buskers; there is no difference between one and another, regardless of discipline, reputation or number of years spent busking. **Everyone gets an equal say.**

However, **we will endeavour to ensure balance** by having more or less the same number of circle show and non-circle show performers as members and board directors.

We will not show preference for the needs of “our” buskers over the needs of other buskers – **we are here to help the entire busking community.**

We are not a union or a “busker association”. We do not want, seek or claim any form of political power in any location. **We are simply a membership organisation.**

We will keep all members informed of our actions and our plans, we will ask members for help in making decisions, and **we will endeavour to meet our members’ needs.**

We are 100% transparent about how money is spent and raised, how we use our time/resources and who’s involved, from employees to clients to members.

We hope street performers will approach us to ask for help. But, when we see anti-busking policies, we may approach local buskers to see if they want our help.

We will never speak FOR street performers, but we will give street performers help in having a voice, and having their voices heard.

We do not get involved in local pitch disputes between buskers – local buskers sort out local issues.

Value Proposition

What we're trying to do (i.e. "our Social Purpose")

- We help buskers survive the transition to a cashless society, sell music after the death of the CD and get hired for events.
- We help buskers get discovered (if they're looking for promotion).
- We help buskers feel proud about their careers (if they don't already).
- We dispel the negative preconceptions people have of buskers.
- We get more people off the couch, away from their TV screens, out of the house and into town to see a great live show.
- We influence local authorities in cities worldwide to begin treating busking as a creative endeavour, rather than as a criminal matter.

The social impact of busking

Due to various myths around busking, street performers are variously seen as failed artists, glorified beggars or self-interested opportunists. Dispelling these myths is just as important as helping buskers adjust to cashless payments or stopping governments banning the art form. With that in mind, here are some truths about busking:

- Busking is one of the few art forms not controlled or managed by corporates
- It is immensely varied and truly popular, as in 'people to people'
- It provides entertainment, colour, life and vitality outside of the uninspiring world of TV
- It brings a sense of freedom, pleasure, amusement and community to passersby
- It adds spontaneity to the rat race
- It's democratic, funded voluntarily by an appreciative audience
- It enables artists to find out where their strengths and weaknesses lie
- It alleviates poverty, and helps people pick themselves up from broken or dysfunctional situations
- It gives people inspirations and aspirations
- It's good for business and tourism
- It has started countless careers
- And it is accessible to everyone

The wider good for cities

Busking is not just good for the arts and the lives of the artists. It has huge knock-on benefits for cities as a whole:

- By increasing cultural tourism and foot traffic, busking benefits local businesses
- By bringing more people onto the street, and watching over them, buskers make the streets safer and more welcoming to all
- And by giving their art away for voluntary donations, they provide entertainment to the entire cross-section of the population, where those who can afford to tip subsidise those who can't

How we Work

The things we do are intended...

- (1) primarily to promote and support street performers, financially, practically and emotionally
- (2) to help local authorities – when asked by street performers – to reduce arbitrary restrictions
- (3) to promote busking as a formal placemaking tool to make cities safer and more pleasant to live in, and to increase the number of pitches upon which buskers can perform

Company outputs (i.e. what we create)

Websites, apps, events, books, media, festivals and community networks

Commercial purpose

To generate social and commercial returns required to sustain the company, in a way that benefits our community.

How We're Run

Board of Directors' general authority

The directors are required to ensure that the Social Purpose is given due regard in any decisions relating to the pursuit of the commercial purpose. The directors are responsible for the company management.

Management

We have a flat management structure – i.e. our staff works with some autonomy, they don't simply do as they're told. However, we do have an executive team, in the form of a CEO, COO and CTO. It is the responsibility of Management to keep both the board and members fully-informed of how things are going.

Membership

We have paid members who can vote on regular issues, such as where we spend our money or what features we develop next. Their votes inform decisions the company makes.

What we do with our money

Distributing revenue

We pay our staff, online services (i.e. web hosting and domains), accountants and office space, plus all the minor necessary items that keep our company running. We do NOT distribute profits to shareholders. Nobody's getting rich off this.

Surplus assets upon winding up

Any surplus assets of the company upon its winding up shall be distributed or donated to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd, Charity #SC002995.

Keeping the company in check

There are strict conditions on our way of working. The company will have to continually serve the social purpose and our community.

Restrictions on how we conduct ourselves

We are committed to achieving our goals under the following conditions:

- Our decisions are busker-led – in other words, the products and services we provide will be based on input from street performers themselves
- We reinvest profits back into the company, or into busking-related social good projects; profits do not go into the pockets of our management or shareholders
- To be clear; we do not pay our shareholders dividends
- We have a “flat management structure” – our employees have some autonomy
- All of our basic tools and services will always be available for free (so any busker from any country can access them)
- “Premium” (i.e. paid) services will only ever be optional extras; the majority of our features will always be free
- We never show on our websites or apps a non-industry 3rd party logo (i.e. a sponsor's logo) anywhere that a busker's face might appear
- We do not display advertisements
- We pay artists competitive rates in all our events
- We never give, donate, share or sell personal data
- We pay our employees a fair wage
- We never pay our managers more than 10x the median company salary (that may sound like a lot, but the Standard & Poor *average* is over 200x)
- We do all of the above within the financial constraints of staying in business

Why The Busking Project is a “Community Interest Company” (CIC) Limited by Shares.

We never meant to be a company at all – we started out as an art project. But, once we found that buskers face the same problems all over the world, we decided to try to tackle the issues, which meant creating an official body to govern our actions.

We first set up as a Social Enterprise, limited by shares. This means we were a for-profit company that could have investors. It was the fastest, easiest and cheapest way to set up (it took about a week and cost £15).

Also, after a lot of research, it didn't seem like grantmakers had any interest in busking. We didn't find any significant grants – ever – that had been awarded for a busking-specific activity. So, it seemed the only people we could convince to fund something like this would be “social investors” (which is a fancy way of saying “people with a ton of money, looking to do something good with it, but hoping to make their money back so they can do more good”).

Unfortunately, we were wrong. Social investors would need just as much convincing as grant makers, and were more interested in profits than we'd expected. Their money came with too many strings attached. So, we decided to switch to a CIC. We would have a Board of Directors pulled straight from the community itself, and members voting on what we do and where we go next. Hopefully, this would make us more grantable.

What is a Community Interest Company (CIC)?

This means two things; first, that we are a company that has a community (in our case buskers); and second that we have to serve their interests. In other words, we couldn't make money from things that don't go towards benefitting buskers.

When did we become a CIC?

We became a CIC on February 14th 2018. By then, we had been trying to become a CIC for *eight hundred and twenty four days!!* In fact, it took the help of some amazing lawyers to finally break free from our old business structure – not least because the CIC regulator in the UK had some serious misgivings about street performers!

The Pros & Cons of CIC limited by shares

This is one of the biggest decisions we have made as a company, because it has changed how we operate. So, what are the pros and cons?

Positives

- **Non-profit status.** CICs are recognised as grantable bodies by grantmakers.
- **Nimbleness.** CICs have a limited amount of admin work, so we won't be held back by the same administrative baggage that charities have.
- **Speed.** As a company, we can make quick decisions and take risks.
- **Ethical guarantees.** Our social mission is embedded into our articles of association!
- **Self-reliance.** As a "company", we can make money without having to rely on grants. This means we don't always have to ask for money, we can earn it.

Negatives

- **Newness.** CICs are a relatively new structure in the UK, not recognised by some grantmakers, and recognised by very few international grantmakers.
- **Shares.** Shares means shareholders, who are traditionally people who just want to make money. Our social locks prevent this, and, thankfully, we have no outside shareholders that we are beholden to. However, the fact that we even have shares might make some grantmakers uncomfortable.

“Embedding” our social mission

Our social mission is built in to what we do. Our research, our advocacy work, our documentary, our books, the tools we provide buskers, the events we hire them for; this all goes towards helping buskers out in their day-to-day lives. And, our social mission is now in our Articles of Association – the governing documents of our CIC.

Reinvesting profits

For how long, and for what percentage is unclear. But, we are bound to reinvest profits back into the company. We might hire more developers, a fundraiser, and more full-time staff, making us able to build a better product for buskers.

Employee pay ratios

There is no agreed-upon “right” salary pay ratio between the CEO and the median employee wage. Salary ratios in other companies can be over 1,000:1! At the opposite end of the scale, CEOs taking home only 10 times that of the median employee. So, that's what we'll do. Our CEO's salary + bonuses cannot equal more than 10x the median employee's salary + bonuses.

Constructing a working environment conducive to co-creation

This doesn't really need mentioning, but this is not a top-down company. All employees are expected to be able to work somewhat autonomously, and to use their imaginations and research prowess to choose what our next steps should be. In other terms, we have a "flat management structure" – we're not too hierarchical.

Measuring our social impact

It's difficult to get an estimate on how many buskers there are in a single city, let alone the world. Second, measuring the happiness index near a newly opened busker pitch would require resources we simply don't have at the moment. These are two areas where our social impact is most obvious: busking makes people happy, and busking gives people an alternative source of employment. They're just particularly difficult figures to gather "Return on Investment" stats about.

Still, we will be able to measure how many buskers we are helping with our tools, and get user feedback both from them and their audiences. We can show that buskers are enjoying increased business, and being discovered more easily. We will also show our reach, which will go towards educating people, dispelling some of the myths around busking.