

Meanwhile, Whitechapel



Meanwhile Space CIC is the delivery arm of the Meanwhile Project. Meanwhile Space is dedicated to making the most of unused spaces for the benefit of local communities.

Location

Whitechapel, London



Aim



Make use of empty space in Whitechapel for local projects and fledgling businesses

meanwhile

SPACE

The Meanwhile Whitechapel space was immediately made available to anyone with a proposal for an idea. There were 37 projects that used Meanwhile Whitechapel over the course of the three-month period. This made for a huge range of ideas and events and some great outcomes.

Meanwhile Space Community Interest Company persuaded landlords Workspace Group PLC to allow them to use an empty shop in Whitechapel as an engagement space for a minimum of three months. However, landlords still have to pay business rates on empty properties and would have to pass these costs on to whoever takes up the lease, which would have made this project prohibitively expensive. To get around this problem Meanwhile CIC approached charity New Deal of the Mind to act as intermediary landlord because charities qualify for an 80% tax exemption on business rates. Having New Deal of the Mind as the landlord meant that the space needed to fulfil their charitable objectives. Meanwhile Space CIC also applied to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets PopUp Shops scheme, a micro-grant scheme to support projects with amenities costs. As part of the funding application the project had to promote innovation and creativity in the area; have a direct effect on people from the borough; and visually improve the streetscape.

Lead-in activities



Meanwhile Space CIC encouraged local projects and people to use the Whitechapel space by marketing directly from the shop. Information about the space was printed out and made available to anyone walking through the door and we sent information to the Whitechapel Gallery, Toynbee Hall and the Bow Arts Trust to circulate through their networks. We also undertook viral marketing through our online communities of interest such as twitter and Ning.

The cost of the space was kept to a minimum so individuals could use the shop in a relatively risk free way. The proposal process was designed to be straightforward to attract the widest range of partners, but also had to take account of considerations such as public liability insurance before they could be put into action.

The space was kept a blank canvas so people could project their own ideas upon it. Projects included community engagement, workshops, art shows, fundraising, family days, theatre performances, and a fair for local artists and retailers. This resulted in an ever-changing environment that attracted a huge variety of the community. Below is a small selection of some of the projects and people that used Meanwhile Whitechapel.



A blank canvas.

Photo by Meanwhile Spaces CIC



Space is the place

Photo by Meanwhile Space CIC

The Meanwhile Whitechapel space was immediately made available to anyone with a proposal for an idea. If the project fitted with the interests of Meanwhile Space, was safe and they had public liability insurance it could go ahead. This made for a huge range of ideas and events and some great outcomes. There were 37 projects that used Meanwhile Whitechapel over the course of the three-month period that saw approximately 200 visitors per day. The space was used for a wide range of projects, including community engagement, workshops, art shows, fundraising, family days, theatre performances, and a fair for local artists and retailers. Below is a small selection of some of the projects and people that used Meanwhile Whitechapel.

Engagement Activities



Community Engagement

Haircut Before The Party – Sam Trotman

The Haircut Before The Party set up a temporary hairdressing salon, offering free haircuts in exchange for conversations concentrating on the recent public spending cuts.

The benefits of setting up in the Meanwhile Space were huge. It was the first time Haircut Before the Party had had a chance to test out their ideas publicly; try new ways of working; get an understanding of how the local community would use the space and respond to the project as well as get a stronger understanding of the local community's needs. The support and trust from all the Meanwhile Space staff was great in providing the artists with confidence and belief in their work. The five days spent in the Whitechapel space gave the project team essential insight into how the project could work and obtain essential feedback to develop the project's next phase. The time at Whitechapel encouraged Haircut Before The Party to acquire more space in which to continue the project for another six months.



Chop and change — Haircut Before The Party

Photo by Meanwhile Space CIC

Family Activity

Cardboard City – Ruby Radburn

Ruby Radburn used the Whitechapel space to organize a three-day project to build a city out of waste cardboard with children and their parents. The low participation fee, made it possible to do something creative and temporary that lots of people could take part in. Both children and adults got a lot out of the building process and the destruction! On the final day, the project was open to the public to come and view. Radburn is already planning to do the cardboard city again as part of a summer holiday programme at a local community garden, and is developing other ideas for working creatively with families.

Exhibition Space

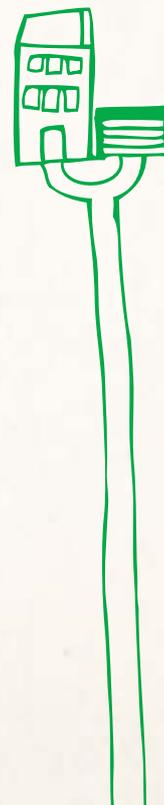
Maslaha – Polly Gannaway

The Whitechapel space was used for the launch event for a project celebrating the achievements of modern Muslim women through fine art, photography and audio. The street-front location meant that we also captured passing traffic. The organic and informal nature of the space it was very easy for us to involve others in the event, including our entertainment act and caterer, all of whom were really excited to be part of such an event in a space like Meanwhile Whitechapel.



Maslaha

Photo by Meanwhile Space CIC



Fundraising

Glitch Karaoke

Glitch Karaoke held two events at Meanwhile Whitechapel using YouTube and live streaming programmes karaoke between the space and a space in Japan. Duets were performed between the two locations with all proceeds going to a Japanese charity to support earthquake relief. The events were open to the public and free to watch remotely on the Glitch Karaoke website.

Crimes of Conscience – U4ria

U4ria used the space to build up a piece of drama focused in support of Amnesty International. Working with young people the group rehearsed from the space once a week and opened to the public in the final days of the project. U4ria totally transformed the space using it to enhance the drama.

A marketplace for small local businesses

Meanwhile at the Fair

Meanwhile At the Fair provided space for a range of small creative arts businesses and projects to promote themselves, selling everything from recycled jewellery and vintage homewares, to screenprints.



Meanwhile at the fair

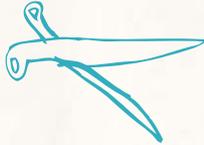
Photo by Meanwhile Space CIC



Meanwhile at the fair

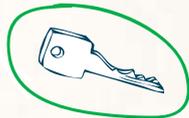
Photo by Meanwhile Space CIC

Techniques



- Use an intermediary charity when developing a meanwhile space if your organization does not have charitable status. This will ensure you benefit from reduced business rates, but make sure the charity's aims are compatible with your own.
- Allow for time to navigate through council bureaucracy.
- Market the availability of space as early as you can.
- Use existing networks and organizations to get the word out.
- Use social networks to promote your project.
- Have a database in place for contacts and queries.
- Make use of free cloud-based tools such as Google Calendar to organize your project.

Key concepts



- Finding new uses for unused spaces can transform a place and encourage people to think about the places they live and work as a blank canvas.
- Make sure it's the right space – is it flexible enough, is it the right size and shape for what you're planning?
- Make sure it's in the right place – your footfall will depend on being in the right place for your demographic. They don't have to expect to find you there, but they do need to be able to locate and access the venue easily.
- A programme of events will give your project greater longevity and provide reasons for different demographics to attend.
- Provide space for other organizations – that way you can draw on their demographic too and increase footfall.