



Bristol Community Ferryboats



Location
Bristol

Founded
2013

Legal structure
Community Benefit Society

Description of services
Operates ferry service in Bristol Harbour

Overview of the business

In December 2012, unfortunate circumstances led to the Bristol Ferryboat Co going into liquidation. A group of local people raised money to buy the boats at auction and, in 2013, alongside others with a long-term association with the ferry, established a new community benefit society to run Bristol Community Ferryboats.

Today, timetabled ferry services link the harbour 364 days a year and the company works with many local organisations, festivals and events. There is an outreach programme to involve people from nearby disadvantaged communities, and a volunteer programme. There is also a range of trips on offer including well-established river and gorge trips, a comprehensive curriculum-based educational commentary, interactive tours, wildlife spotting and story-telling trips, along with hen, stag, birthday and wedding parties.

There are nearly 900 shareholders, the majority of whom are Bristol residents.

Why is community accountability important?

'Community accountability' as a term did not particularly resonate with those involved in Bristol Community Ferryboats; they talked more about 'community responsibility' and the sense of ownership people of Bristol felt towards the ferryboats.

'There's a feeling that 'this is our ferry' – people have reverence... ownership – yes, but separate for the ferry – a greater sense of ownership. So we feel we have to live up to them [on Spike Island].'

The business saw itself as responsible to its 900 local shareholders as well as the huge number of people who use their services daily: 'We've contact to lots of people in Bristol... it can be scary! Need to treat people well and respect them...'

'It's a responsibility... When you are "owned" by so many people... it keeps you on your toes.'



There are strong formal and informal links and co-operation with other local organisations – community and commercial – that operate in and around the harbour.

What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast; there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

Structures

- Shareholders
- Volunteers – *'Lots of goodwill makes us more accountable... it is not just paid for a job, volunteers are donating time and energy – it's different...'*
- A network of intertwined links – including tie-in deals with cultural organisations (harbour heritage, museums and businesses)
- Regular linkage with community groups in disadvantaged areas and schools
- Daily face-to-face contact with customers who use the ferry and other users for themed trips

Relationships

They see themselves as having a responsibility to a wider group than shareholders and ferry customers/passengers – *'It's not just members [of the share issue], it's schools in the area, stakeholders in isolated pockets are important too, we do outreach, so we don't want people to not be able to afford the ferry so prices are kept low.'*

Communications

- A newsletter for members
- Website and social media presence
- Daily personal contact with people who use the ferry for leisure, work or education
- Press coverage
- Strong visual and iconic presence in the waterside economy