



## International Case Study

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# Building & leading teams

## Rachel Roger – Reform Radio

### Manchester, UK & Global

Reform Radio is a multi award winning radio online station using engagement in music and radio to work with young people looking for employment. Reform is a not-for-profit company that delivers employment and creative workshops and traineeships alongside genuine opportunities to develop and practice new skills within our industry standard radio studio set up.



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Rachel Roger is one of the co-founders of Reform Radio. Rachel is a social entrepreneur with a background in arts and maths. She studied maths at University, then moved to Manchester and did temping in Sure Start, linked to community support work and then arts intervention with young people. This led to me co-founding Reform Radio as a way to tackle chronic unemployment in Manchester. Born in the UK, living and working in Manchester, UK.

### **What sort of creative entrepreneur are you?**

There are three of us as the co-founders and together we have a hybrid of backgrounds in employability, arts, and culture. I met Gemma whilst working with Contact Theatre gaining experience in applied theatre and theatre in education. Then Sam moved up from London and he had a radio experience, that he gained by starting off in volunteering. Then the recession hit and with it widespread unemployment, which hit badly in Manchester. What shifted the situation was the roll out free Wi-Fi which gave us an idea that we could set up a free radio station, and work with unemployed people who could make the shows.

### **What made you start up - how important was relationship building to getting going?**

The dynamics are Sam was my boyfriend at the time, Gemma lived across the road, and we had the same landlord. Through knowing each other because we were neighbours, we started sharing food, sharing conversations and idea went from there. In 2013 we set up and at that time our main outgoing was rent. Since we started off, we always make sure it is even, we get the same pay, all working as many hours as possible to start up and pay rent. We all did freelance work around the edges to keep things going. The strong dynamic has been there from the get-go, it is incredibly lucky we have each other. I like the partnership to boost me when I am on a low motivation day and some else will lift mine up. We really bootstrapped to start off with. We did it ourselves and bought biscuits and it was DIY.

### **How key are relationships and networks to keeping going?**

Hugely important. We say this to all the young people coming through our programmes. Manchester is a big city but within the networks of arts, media it is actually quite small, so it is quite easy to meet new people. And important to keep the connection going especially if you share the same values; try and make work together. It is important to join forces, make partnerships and find project

### **How has your approach to build a team developed?**

All our core team have come through our outreach programmes, our volunteering pool, then into a freelance pool, on into paid employed. This means each employee has a strong understanding of the young people who come through the door after them, and the real world challenges the young people have coming into the door especially During the Covid 19 times. The resilience and motivation of our young people are incredible.

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We count Allied London as our key partner. I was doing maths tutoring via the Apprentice Academy and via a contact I met there a person who he was renting space. We worked out an exchange for some workshops and tutoring in exchange for rent. This came at a good time as we were running the business out of our shared house. Eventually we got in over the road from the office, and in the corridor there was a spare office. We did a crowd funder to raise £5,000 for DJ equipment and sound proofing. This was a brilliant way to build the community and eventually get into the old Granada TV studios, we got a space there. Started to make a bit of noise about what we were doing the landlord (Allied London) came to see what we were doing. Through this we got offered the old TV/radio studios downstairs for the same rent because of the clear social enterprise and social chance being made to happen via Reform. We are now in Bonded Warehouse because the old Granada Studios was in the process of redeveloped. All tenants moved over to the Bonded Warehouse. With Allied London we got a £50,000 grant to create new studios including all the up to date production equipment. This new setting is in the basement, it is very cool. Manchester City Council is our cultural partner who pay our annual rent, with the provided that that Allied London matched the grant available which is a significant £18,000

### **How important is finding the right team?**

The most important and I think we are bit of a funny one, some of our young people may not have worked before, we have a wellbeing manager to support our young people. He is a psychology therapist, and each team member has a check in with him 1-2-1 every 3 months plus group supervision every month. We also offer personal mental health support as they are over eighteen years old, sometimes leaving care. Some team have trauma that they have not spoken to about this ever and having the wellbeing staff role is really shifting the dynamics. We know what we are equipped to deal with the deeper challenges - he has kept us from stepping into potential safeguarding issues.

### **Temp workers linked to projects**

We work with a lot of freelancers who come through out programmes DJs and artists that we work with thorough accessing funding and pushing it back into our communities. This is more project based, not so trained in the company values, although it is key alignment is there. Working with freelancers allows us to work on different contracts that can come and go, plus it really supports the ecosystem. Let the young people use Reform as a stepping stone to get into BBC, other media companies

### **More permanent teams linked to the business growing**

With are permanent team, we like to know them through the different routes we offer to people coming through the company. We offer lots of training especially linked to values of Reform so then they can communicate the values to young people Our core staff are trusted to take the lead on core jobs.

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## How have incubators or accelerators been part of growing yourself, your team?

- ✚ Right at the beginning we did Future Fires via Contact Theatre.
- ✚ We have been part of different training programmes including School for Social Entrepreneurs North West Start Up and Scale Up courses.
- ✚ UnLtd Thrive course.
- ✚ EY Accelerator via Ernst and Young.

## What would you say about working with and trading within different cultures and countries is important to know when starting out?

- ✚ We have a lot of shows in different countries. We do this by reaching out to people; they do bilingual shows with listeners across the global.
- ✚ Be curious, don't assume that you know stuff you do not.
- ✚ Don't patronise people and do your thing.

## Looking back what advice would you give yourself when you were starting up

- ✚ I would say if you get into two years of doing your business and it still in the same position it was in at day one, but if you get to two years and it takes off it will very likely succeed. We had just to hold out before it got to two years we got a big contract and this enabled us to go forward.
- ✚ Align with people who have your values.
- ✚ Do what you love to do otherwise you will get sick of it, surround yourself with people who do similar things and push your further.
- ✚ Just go for it, do not think too much about what could go wrong.
- ✚ Keep it simple, ask yourself what do you want to do? Who do you want to do it for? What the big social problem in your city, town or area and that you can obviously help solve.
- ✚ Just start it even if you are the only person, keep it small. other people will come to you once you do one thing. You will learn.

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