



Bradford-based dancers representing a mix of cultures come together to mark the opening of Bradford Arts Centre. Credit: Guzelian.

From contractors and funders to local communities and trustees, Alex Croft, CEO of Bradford Arts Centre, reflects on why communication is key to delivering a successful redevelopment project.

About the project

During its hometown's year as UK City of Culture in 2025, [Bradford Arts Centre](#) reopened following a £7.9million renovation.

The work – which we supported with £2.8m in funding – has transformed the Grade II listed building into an accessible, state-of-the-art venue that reflects the heritage of all its communities.

What advice would you give to someone applying for funding for the first time?

Don't be daunted by what looks like a big application. It's there for a reason. And actually going through that development process. We'd do this?

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doing



The entryway has been transformed into a bright and welcoming space. Credit: Bradford Arts Centre.

What would you recommend organisations spend more time on when developing their application?

I wish we'd spent more time with our board of trustees. We're a small organisation and it's been a big ask of those amazing volunteers. We've all come to learn a lot about capital funding. But I wish right in the very beginning we'd had the forethought to do a skill set audit and brief them about how regularly they'd be meeting, to help them to get up to speed.

What advice do you have for others about managing multiple funders on a single project?

Be really clear about the reporting requirements and try to streamline that process so you're collecting data for multiple funders at the same time.

Also don't be afraid to talk to them. I think it was really important for us that we were honest with our major funders, so when we hit a period of crisis – when we found things that we weren't expecting to find – we were able to go to them. They also talked to each other and helped us to solve challenges that we might have had about things like cash flow,

releasing income and securities.

When delivering your project, what surprised you?

Working with architects and mechanical and electrical contractors felt like learning a different language, a different way of working. Before, so they and the ship



The centre full of people on its opening weekend as it hosted Bradford South Asian Festival. Credit: Bradford Arts Centre.

What advice do you have for other projects about what it takes to get buy-in from the local community for your project?

Centre your local communities in your design and your decision-making right from the off. For us actually, that was enabled by the Heritage Fund's two-stage process. In that development phase, we were encouraged to embed ourselves within our local communities, to talk to them about the capital element – “what do you need this building to do and to be? How should it work for you to feel welcome within this space?”

That's been critical for us. We built it to address their needs, which meant that from the point of opening, they've come back and used this space because they've been on that journey.

This is part of [a series of Q&As with successful grantees](#) – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.



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Lowry recorded and presented the stories of those who have seen and been part of Salford's cultural regeneration. Photo: Lowry.



from running a community grants scheme

Bradford-based dancers, representing a mix of cultures, celebrate the opening of Bradford Arts Centre. Photo: Guzelian Ltd.

Putting communities at the heart of Bradford



How to apply