Increased investment levels in under-served areas

31/07/2021

See all updates

We look at the key learnings and recommendations from the first 24 months of our Areas of Focus initiative.

Attachment	Size
PDF View Areas of Focus - year 2 evaluation report as PDF (1.06 MB)	1.06 MB

Two years into our targeted approach to increase funding for and engagement with heritage in the country's most under-served areas, **the results are broadly positive**.

We found organisations in our 13 Areas of Focus (AoF) are better able to define heritage projects, apply for funding and identify potential cross-sectoral partners.

Although the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has halted or impacted the progress of some projects, **levels of funding in all but one AoF have increased**.

The majority of areas have moved closer to the average investment per local authority area. **In Luton and Rhondda Cynon Taff, investment levels have exceeded the average local authority area figure**.

> It's really encouraging to see such positive progress in our Areas of Focus. Two years into the initiative, it's clear that our targeted support is making a real difference.
>
> *Robyn Llewellyn, Director of England, Midlands & East*

What we've learned

Our evaluation has found that:

- intensive one to one support has been particularly useful for small organisation who had not considered heritage funding, or the Heritage Fund as a potential funder
- projects that had increased collaboration with the Heritage Fund at application stage tended to be more ambitious and sustainable
- endorsement of heritage activities from the Heritage Fund helped organisations command attention with senior people and increase prioritisation for heritage projects
- co-production and the involvement and intelligence of area-based organisations has been key to building trust and generating engagement
- local government support for AoF activities has resulted, in some cases, in the appointment of heritage-specific staff to identify needs and opportunities for heritage work and potential partnerships

What works

Key drivers for heritage project applications within AoF were:

- a desire from within the community and strong community identify
- a supportive sectoral or local authority
- an understanding of wider impacts of heritage

Barriers to the development of heritage projects included:

- a lack of capacity, or risk aversion, within the local authority, VCSE organisations and/or the community
- a negative perception or lack of understanding of heritage
- mistrust or lack of relationships with local communities

Stakeholders in the Areas of Focus also wanted a better understanding of the Heritage Fund's target outcomes beyond investment, and cited the complexity of our application process and continuity of staff support as challenges.

Encouraging progress

Robyn Llewellyn, Director of England, Midlands & East at the Heritage Fund said: “It’s really encouraging to see such positive progress in our Areas of Focus. Two years into the initiative, it’s clear that our targeted support is making a real difference.

"There’s still more work to do, and lessons to be learned, but we look forward to seeing understanding of and engagement with heritage continue to grow.”

Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we are making. Read more of our insight.