

# Increased investment levels in under-served areas

31/07/2021

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

**Attachment**

**Size**

[Areas of Focus - year 2 evaluation report](#) 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.](#)