Areas of Focus year 6 final report

14/05/2025

See all updates

This report brings together key lessons from our five Areas of Focus evaluation reports and provides recommendations for future place-based work.

Attachment	Size
PDF View The National Lottery Heritage Fund Areas of Focus year 6 final report as PDF(314.42 KB)	314.42 KB

When we launched Areas of Focus as part of our Strategic Funding Framework 2019–2024, our aim was to increase access to funding and help deliver positive outcomes through heritage for 13 identified under-served areas.

Key lessons

The report identified lessons in five key areas:

Perception of heritage

At the outset of the programme, there were challenges in relation to the perception of heritage. The impact of coronavirus (Covid-19) further restricted access and prioritisation with local authorities amid pandemic recovery. However, by year 5, evidence emerged of heritage activity becoming much more accessible and integrated into Areas of Focus at both a strategic and community level.

Collaboration with other funders changed positively

Engagement with funders and decision-makers was found to be somewhat limited at the midpoint of the programme. However, by year 5 this was evidenced as a key strength. Heritage Fund activity has been effective in raising awareness and interest in projects across other funders and, therefore, increased the Heritage Fund's influence over the role of heritage.

Staff and budget issues

Resource constraints persisted throughout the evaluation, particularly in Scotland and Wales where there is a greater resource pressure and need to spread resources. The rationale for budget and staffing allocations for nation and area teams could be reconsidered going forward.

Information and signposting

The latter stages of the evaluation indicated that the volume of information on the Heritage Fund's website can be overwhelming for organisations and could impact the confidence level of first-time applicants who may be daunted by quantity of information available. Similarly, it was reported that various stakeholders are promoting heritage in the Areas of Focus which can lead to a complicated funding landscape.

The Heritage Fund might consider taking on a co-ordinating role to simplify the landscape for future beneficiaries. A central website or depositary with information and promotional activity might help to address this.

Consistency of data collection

Availability of output, outcome and impact data was found to be inconsistent. In year 4, data regarding the number of volunteers supported across the 13 Areas of Focus and the number of projects delivered in partnership was not available. In year 5, data was limited to the number of knowledge-sharing events and funding advice sessions across nine Areas of Focus, while figures on the number of volunteers supported and strategic partnerships were not available.

It is recommended that the Heritage Fund continue to review and update data recording processes, automating where possible and aiming to align processes across all regions to allow for comparisons.

Additional learnings

The report also identified several cross-cutting themes and additional learnings.

- It takes time for places to start to leverage additional funding. For example, we started to see impact on this by year 3.
- Funding both strategic interventions and community driven projects is important.
- Enablers that were key to success included: ensuring the Heritage Fund had organisational resource and capacity to deliver; our staff taking a flexible approach to supporting places; co-ordination with other funders; tailored pre-application support and advocating for heritage and strategic partnerships.

Explore more

Read the full report in the PDF attached to this page, and find out more about some of the inspiring projects we've funded in the 13 Areas of Focus across the UK.

The lessons we've learned from Areas of Focus, will be incorporated into the delivery of our Heritage 2033 strategic initiatives, including Heritage Places.

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.