

Data in Practice: Challenges and Opportunities

A case study of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture and Bradford district's cultural sector



Bradford's Ramadan Pavilion © Clare Daněk

February 2026

Clare Daněk, Ben Walmsley and Martin Zebracki, University of Leeds
Stephen Miller, The Audience Agency

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	4
Methodology.....	4
Literature review.....	5
Evaluating cities of culture	5
Evaluation methodologies.....	6
Data observatories.....	6
Findings.....	7
Understanding Bradford's cultural sector.....	7
Bradford 2025.....	8
Evaluation within the wider Bradford 2025 team.....	9
The Story of Change.....	10
Data gathering and management	11
The qualitative/quantitative balance.....	12
Bradford District's data infrastructure.....	12
Messy, intangible and creative data.....	13
The problem of too much data	14
The value of logistical and operational data.....	14
Data and technology.....	15
Data and funders	16
A Data Observatory for Bradford	17
Conclusion	19
Implications for the National Cultural Data Observatory	20
Acknowledgements	21
Appendix 1: References	22
Appendix 2: Research Participants	24
Appendix 3: Demonstrator Mock-up.....	25

Executive summary

This case study examines the challenges and opportunities relating to cultural data within the Bradford area and considers how qualitative and quantitative data can work together at scale to inform cultural management, evaluation and policy. It does this by capturing the activities and experiences of the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Evaluation team and by interviewing representatives of 21 other cultural organisations and/or about Bradford district. The interviews explored data processes, the opportunities and challenges that arose in the process of managing evaluation of a mega-event, and the experiences of cultural organisations working with data in a UK City of Culture.

The case study culminates in the development of a Demonstrator to illustrate what a cultural data observatory for Bradford district might look like and explains how this might inform a national cultural data observatory for the sector (the NCDO).

Key findings

Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team:

- Every City of Culture requires new solutions to new or repeated problems.
- Expectations of the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team were significant in both volume and ambition.
- While a small team had the advantage of focus and autonomy, it also had to serve many masters: the wider team, partner organisations, funders, as well as local, regional and national governments.
- There was significant focus within Bradford 2025 on the quantitative aspect of evaluation activity: during programme delivery, the eyes of the senior management team were largely on the numbers, both to reconcile the ambitions set out in the project bid, and because big numbers make for positive PR. This offered both challenges and opportunities: challenges through the high expectations placed on a small team, and opportunities because the challenges provoked innovation, particularly in working with data partners.
- Responsibility for an extensive programme of evaluation required working with multiple partners, which, again, offered both opportunities and challenges. Relationships were formed and strengthened, but risks increased through dependence on data collection and sharing from an extensive network of partners.

Across Bradford district:

- The case study revealed that more data is generated than is used and confirmed that while data required for reporting to funders is relatively standard, the small but significant differences between funder requirements duplicates effort, and lengthy audience surveys place demands on both organisations and participants.
- Organisations reported having insufficient time to address the potentially rich insights hidden within mountains of qualitative data. For example, audience questionnaires are generally created to fulfil monitoring and reporting requirements rather the organisations' own questions, which hinders the production of bespoke insights, and little of the significant data gathered is actually used.
- More work is needed to ensure greater data confidence and understanding across the sector: some organisations are not currently able to fully exploit the potential in

the data they gather and struggle to clearly identify the questions they want to answer in the first place.

- Cultural organisations are struggling with people and infrastructure limitations and many organisations have inefficient tools or ways of managing, understanding and using their data.
- Lack of a shared data infrastructure makes data sharing difficult: for example, there are currently no established mechanisms for sharing audience insights between organisations across the city, and this limits strategic opportunities for collaborative planning and programming.
- There is a hunger for more qualitative data among Bradford’s cultural organisations: people want to share people-centred stories and to draw out narratives that explain and enrich their quantitative data.
- Organisations are often working to perceived funder requirements rather than for their own use. For example, audience questionnaires are created to fulfil monitoring and reporting requirements rather than the organisations’ own questions, which leads to missed opportunities to gather insights.
- Cultural practitioners know that data is both useful and important for their organisational decision-making, but they generally lack the resources to fully seize the opportunities it can present.
- Analysis of our observations and stakeholder interviews in Bradford informed our core finding that a national data observatory has the potential to achieve three key functions:
 1. Curating national cultural datasets
 2. Ensuring interoperability and standards
 3. Enabling research, analysis and innovation
- Related to and underpinning this, our research highlighted the need for better data literacy across the arts, cultural and heritage sectors to secure more robust data.
- Our analysis suggested that a national cultural data observatory should adopt a federated stewardship model to enable data owners to retain rights and responsibilities, while ensuring common standards and privacy-preserving access. Intellectual property rights should be respected through clear licensing and contributor agreements, ensuring organisations receive reciprocal value when sharing data.
- A data observatory should ensure efficiencies by centralising and automating repetitive tasks: dataset profiling, schema mapping, anonymisation, and disclosure control. This would reduce costs across the cultural ecosystem, as individual organisations would no longer need to reinvent pipelines for each project or funding requirement. Instead, the observatory would provide a reusable framework, comprising a core spine of quantitative data complemented and qualified by qualitative insights, enabling more resources to be directed toward analysis, interpretation, and policy impact.
- Finally, we determined that a national cultural data observatory should be independent of local and national government and of national arts councils so that it can support cultural policy and management while simultaneously holding them to account.

Introduction

This revelatory case study uses the context of Bradford, and specifically Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture (Bradford 2025), to explore opportunities and challenges in relation to cultural data. It builds on previous research undertaken by the Centre for Cultural Value at the University of Leeds (Walmsley et al., 2022) to explore ways in which the cultural sector might better collect and harness its data, and work commissioned by Bradford Producing Hub to examine the data landscape in Bradford (Lee et al., 2024).

Bradford is a fascinating site for a case study on cultural data because it has one of the youngest and most diverse populations in the UK, and via Born in Bradford (the largest cohort study in Europe), it is at the forefront of methods to make use of the large and varied data sets. Although Bradford's current cultural data infrastructure is relatively under-developed, Bradford 2025 offers a unique opportunity to rapidly scale it up.

The core research questions addressed in the case study were as follows:

1. What cultural data is gathered across Bradford, why, and for whom?
2. What are the challenges with the existing data infrastructure?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges faced by Bradford 2025's Evaluation team and cultural organisations within Bradford district in relation to cultural data?
4. What is the potential for data sharing, locally and more widely?
5. How are quantitative and qualitative methods used and what is the balance between them?
6. What are the implications of learning from Bradford 2025 for developing a national cultural data observatory?

These were developed and refined following a systematic review of academic and sector research on cultural data, evaluation and data observatories, and how these relate to cities of culture in specific.

Methodology

Following the literature review, this case study took a qualitative and ethnographic approach to investigate data needs and opportunities within Bradford district, with particular focus on the Evaluation team of Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture. Data collection methods included participant observation of the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team within the project office, in team meetings, and at events, using a 'deep hanging out' method (Walmsley, 2018). This took place over seven months, between January and August 2025, during which time the City of Culture was underway. A postdoctoral researcher spent time developing close and trusted relationships with the Evaluation team and gathering data through informal conversations with the wider Bradford 2025 team. In addition to this, she conducted semi-structured interviews with nine participants in leadership roles within arts, cultural and heritage organisations in Bradford district. The case study was developed through thematic analysis of findings, as reported in the respective sub-headings in the Findings section below.¹

To illustrate the opportunities for learning from Bradford to inform the development of a future national cultural data observatory, a Demonstrator was developed for Bradford district.² This was led by The Audience Agency, working in close partnership with MyCake

¹ N.B. Participants from Bradford district's arts, cultural and heritage sectors have been anonymised for this report. Interviewees are listed in Appendix 3.

² See <https://ncdo.org.uk/>

and the University of Leeds. The development of the Demonstrator involved extensive consultation with the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team and included a further 12 semi-structured interviews with cultural organisations across Bradford district and West Yorkshire Combined Authority. These focused specifically on data infrastructure, data challenges and potential use cases to support national to hyper-local insights.

The Demonstrator is being developed and rolled out in iterative phases rather than as a single, completed product. The initial phase involved the launch of a public-facing microsite, setting out the project's aims, methodological approach and early outputs. The [microsite](#) functions as both a dissemination and engagement platform, including a manifesto and newsletter through which stakeholders can register interest and receive updates as development progresses.

Subsequent phases involve the staged release of Demonstrator functionality via secure user access. This secure access allowed us to trial functionality and gather feedback, while maintaining oversight of how the Demonstrator was being used. Rather than presenting a finalised observatory, this approach enables structured testing of data integration, interface design and analytical use cases, while supporting ongoing feedback from partners. Further development work is underway in collaboration with a data scientist at the Leeds Institute for Data Analytics (LIDA), focusing on the integration and modelling of commercial datasets alongside Bradford 2025 data.

Throughout development, the emphasis has been on answering questions aligned with stakeholder use cases, rather than simply displaying metrics. Interfaces are designed to guide users towards exploration of themes such as need, opportunity and community wellbeing, encouraging interpretation and contextual understanding rather than passive consumption of data. Datatables are accompanied by narrative framing, explicit assumptions and clearly stated limitations, supporting data literacy and responsible use.

Behind the scenes, significant technical design work has focused on ensuring scalability across future phases. This includes testing the feasibility of incorporating additional cultural datasets, assessing interoperability between commercial and public data sources, and evaluating how new indicators can be added without compromising coherence, governance or interpretability. Ongoing collaboration continues to extend integration and modelling capability as further datasets become available.

Literature review

Evaluating cities of culture

The evaluation of Cities/Capitals of Culture must be understood not only in terms of data collection but also as a process of negotiated and contested governance, constructed to support policy outcomes (Oancă et al., 2024). Within cultural data gathering activities, there are often wider political and economic agendas at play, for instance city promotion, which can influence considerations of what is measured, and how. Accordingly, O'Brien (2010) notes the use of evaluation processes as sites for competition and questions how visions for the cities and their cultural development are negotiated.

In focusing on Cities/Capitals of Culture, single-year evaluations tend to be dominant, with medium and long-term evaluations less common; Oancă et al. (2024) note a dearth of examination of longer-term impacts, with the notable exception of Garcia and Cox (2013). This longer term or repeated evaluation is important to understand the role of culture in developing places over time and to distinguish City/Capital of Culture contributions from wider urban developments, especially regarding socio-economic claims (see Evans, 2005).

Jung et al. (2015) discuss the importance of partnership-building in culture-led regeneration and support longitudinal evaluation to track and differentiate the ways in which different outcomes are achieved in different timeframes – including what could be termed ‘impact creep’. Indeed, reflecting on their experience as researchers with Impacts ‘08, an academic study set up to examine longer-term effects of Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008, Crone and Ganga (2023) note this risk of ‘inflationary’ effects over time, whereby impact claims are steadily ratcheted up to increase longer-term perceptions of cities’ ‘success’.

There is a danger that evaluation can be used to support narratives of ‘boosterism’ around Cities/Capitals of Culture (West, 2022). This promotional evaluation can exaggerate civic pride narratives, exclude different or ‘dissenting’ voices, and overshadow complex local dynamics to meet predetermined policy objectives and claims (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004; Evans, 2005; Howcroft, 2023). Crone and Ganga (2023) note the risks around ‘policy-led evidence’ rather than ‘evidence-led policy’ and Oman (2021) demonstrates the limits to data rigour in analyses driven by both sector and policy priorities.

It is also vital to acknowledge the challenge of balancing navigation of expectations of different stakeholders with the obligation to ensure analytical integrity, if meaningful learning is to take place. Otherwise, evaluation risks measuring for the sake of measuring (Evans, 2005).

Evaluation methodologies

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods not only supports the reporting of outcomes, but can also help to reveal decision-making processes. Qualitative methods can be used to probe further into the latter, exposing which power relations are at play (Crone and Ganga, 2023) and can assist in providing deeper insights into how short-term events may produce long-term legacies. Crone and Ganga (2023) advocate for multi-faceted, mixed-methods approaches and critique methodological designs that perpetuate the instrumental desire for ‘killer stats’ (Gilmore, 2014) or valuation techniques (Oman 2021) in their evaluation processes. There is also a risk that quantitative metrics foreground official narratives at the expense of local lived experience. This is where mixed methods can be useful, with qualitative data revealing how narratives differ and are related across cultural participation models and social and political backgrounds (Kajdanek et al., 2024).

Creative and participatory methods, including visual data and action research, offer potential to reflect the lived experience and situated meanings beyond self-reports in interviews. McDowell (2024) notes the particular ability of creative methods to enable respondents to tell their own stories on their own terms. However, the use of creative methods can present methodological, resource, and ethical challenges for decision-makers (Owen et al., 2023), including the complexity involved in interpreting them independently.

Data observatories

There is a range of interpretations of what actually constitutes a data observatory, including a data repository, a research hub, a portal for datasets and/or sample visualisations; but there is some consensus in the literature that data observatories are culturally and politically specific (Owen et al., 2023, p.9). Observatories can offer vital space to foreground qualitative voices, provide dynamic connections between sources, and support crowd-sourced citizen and co-produced community data (Marsh et al., 2024). Observatories can also offer cross-sector collaboration and promote shared values, meaningful user engagement and best practice (Capurro et al., 2024; Poirier and Costelloe-Kuehn, 2019).

However, while participatory methods offer opportunities for communities to engage more fully with – and retain ownership of – data (Marsh et al., 2024) issues remain: for instance, to

what extent did participants have agency in defining questions, evaluation, and interpretation? Protocols for navigating community-generated content must be clearly established and carefully navigated (ibid.).

Previous research has identified risks for observatories around inconsistent data, ethics, and accessibility and it is important to acknowledge that users of data have different levels of experience and need. Complex platforms and data illiteracy are both issues that can present barriers for users (Owen et al., 2023) and it is therefore important to consider modes of presentation that preserve the richness of qualitative data; Marsh et al. (2024) offer data visualisation as a solution.

Findings

Understanding Bradford's cultural sector

Understanding the communities that make up the wider Bradford population and gaining insight into the complex relationships between organisations within its cultural sector are central to understanding Bradford's culture, people's engagement with its cultural sector, and the impact of the city's cultural sector on the local and regional population.

While Bradford is the tenth largest city in England by population, its cultural sector is small: there are fewer Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations than in other similarly sized cities, and a disproportionate number of small arts organisations. For instance, one cultural organisation director observed that their organisation, with fourteen employees, is the third largest arts organisation in the city, while the director of an arts development organisation reported that 94% of the cultural organisations in the city have fewer than four employees. However, the city is also rich in community-led cultural initiatives that do not always reach the radar of or fit into established reporting mechanisms, so risk being overlooked by national cultural policy organisations (Lee et al., 2024). As an example of this, one interviewee expressed frustration at a recent report that had implied a significant lack of cultural activity in the city's Manningham area; this area has a large Pakistani population, and the thriving cultural activities here did not fit within the definitions of the DCMS Participation Survey, so were not captured.

Bradford is home to the National Science and Media Museum, part of the Science Museum group and described by some as the city's 'jewel'. It also has the Alhambra, a large commercial receiving house theatre presenting touring shows and musicals. Regardless, Bradford lacks the cultural infrastructure of many other similarly sized cities such as its neighbours Leeds and, across the Pennines, Manchester and Liverpool: mid-scale venues, mid-scale art galleries, a dedicated arts university. The wider district encompasses large rural areas, including Haworth, a key heritage site as home of the Brontë family.

Bradford is home to many long-established multi-ethnic communities, including a population that is 25% of Pakistani origin. It is the youngest city by population in the United Kingdom, and several areas of the city rank highly on indices of deprivation. Because of these distinctive factors, the city has been used as a 'test case' for various initiatives, with much of them leading to little lasting change, so there is a degree of suspicion about external researchers and initiatives such as the City of Culture. Accordingly, some interviewees perceived Bradford 2025 as offering huge opportunity for the city, while others were more cynical about its potential longer-term impact. Much of this frustration was focused on what

was felt to be a lack of transparency around legacy planning incorporating organisations across the city.³

Power dynamics within the district are complex; many significant figures within the district's arts, culture and heritage (ACH) sectors are either from the district or have worked in roles within the district for many years. This can present both opportunities and barriers in introducing new initiatives and processes. The district's cultural sector relies heavily on freelancers and volunteers, with employees of cultural organisations juggling significant workloads that limit time for reflection and experimentation. As the director of an arts development organisation noted:

People [...] don't have the time to think bigger about their impacts and their data ... they just don't have the capacity in terms of time and energy and focus and all of those things.

There are currently few mechanisms for data sharing across the city. However, Bradford Producing Hub has run an annual cultural and creative sector workforce survey since 2022, which enables benchmarking in some areas of the district's cultural sector. With so many small, or 'under-the-radar', organisations, there are challenges in developing simplified or streamlined data streams. There is a very strong grassroots arts scene in Bradford that exists largely independently of formalised structures and that focuses mainly on community engagement. As examples, The Leap exists to facilitate community-led culture, and Bradford Cultural Voice Forum offers a collective platform for these small organisations and individual creators, but these organisations are not designed as, or intended to be, data conduits.

There is a strong sense of community in some areas of Bradford, and 'community researchers', recruited from and researching within these areas, are increasingly used as a means of gathering qualitative data within and about particular wards and communities. One initiative was developed between Bradford 2025 and the University of Bradford, with initial training support provided by the University of Southampton, and the use of community researchers within the district is becoming more established. The Leap also works in partnership with the University of Bradford, and their lived-experience researchers help artists and organisations to connect with people within the district's diverse communities.

Every place has its unique aspects, and in summary, Bradford can be viewed as an anomaly in a national context because of its small publicly-funded cultural sector and seemingly low cultural engagement levels. It is also a particularly young city, and has a more ethnically diverse population than most other cities in the UK. However, the city also benefits from a strong [Cultural Voice Forum](#), the Bradford Producing Hub and a dedicated cultural strategy, and the challenges encountered by its smaller arts, heritage and cultural organisations in resourcing, understanding and using data are likely to be shared across the UK. Insights from Bradford are therefore likely to offer useful learning opportunities for other regions and for the development of a national data infrastructure.

Bradford 2025

Bradford 2025 was the fourth UK City of Culture, following Derry/Londonderry in 2013, Hull in 2017 and Coventry in 2021. While by July 2025 the Bradford 2025 team numbered approximately 150 people (including freelancers), the Evaluation team remained small, comprising just four full-time team members with various other participants drawn in through partnerships, collaborations and placement schemes. The team aimed to collect a broad array of quantitative and qualitative data, including: economic and social value data;

³ It is important to note that interviews took place just prior to the Bradford 2025 'Futures' legacy programme being launched in August 2025.

audience feedback and experience; audience and participant numbers; artists' perceptions and experiences; environmental impact; and many others. The scope and scale of the evaluation necessitated commissioning external organisations to deliver key pieces of work, including an ambitious Economic and Social Value Impact Assessment (ESVIA) (outsourced to Amion and Making Impact Matter); and projects involving qualitative and creative methods to support the evaluation of heritage, community engagement, community-led and artist-led projects. Meanwhile SAIL developed a bespoke framework for to capture the programme's carbon footprint.

The programme for Bradford 2025 was released to the general public in phases over the year. While the Evaluation team had an overarching understanding of the overall programme, details about the outcomes, scope, scale, location and timeframe for each event were confirmed on a project-by-project basis. While this approach offered benefits elsewhere in the company, particularly through the opportunity to evolve and refine the programme in an iterative way, it did create challenges for the Evaluation team in planning and allocating resources. The Director of Evaluation used the analogy more than once that the team were 'building the plane while flying it': for example, in gathering data at the more complex non-ticketed events, such as the multi-location 'Bradford Progress' performance, the team had to be highly agile and quickly respond to whatever they were presented with.

Prior to the start of the City of Culture, Bradford 2025 engaged in a knowledge exchange programme with Leeds 2023 (Hatton, 2024). Bradford 2025 did not begin with an existing data infrastructure – it had to be set up from scratch, learning from models used in Leeds, Coventry and elsewhere. The Evaluation team noted that Bradford exists in a different context from other cities and years of culture, operating at a different scale, scope and within a specific local and national context and politics. While Bradford 2025 was able to draw on very recent data from Leeds 2023, there were moments where the lack of agreed metrics and indicators was challenging. For instance, when reporting on volunteer activity for a funder, one of the team noted that the most active volunteer group for Bradford 2025 was Black people in their mid-twenties to early thirties. This was noteworthy, as large volunteer cohorts are often either retired people or those in their early twenties. They could not, however, compare this data with information from Leeds 2023, as this was not a metric included in Leeds's data-gathering.

Evaluation within the wider Bradford 2025 team

As the delivery year progressed, there was increasing demand from the wider Bradford 2025 team for outputs from the Evaluation team, particularly to report audience numbers against key milestones. Audience targets had been set in the planning stages of the year, and a mid-year press release offered an opportunity to announce that these had been exceeded. The senior management team within Bradford 2025 was, however, cautious about sharing too much data publicly, conscious that the organisation might be "setting itself up to fail". Data dashboards developed by Open Innovations for the Evaluation team were kept out of the public domain because of internal concerns that publishing 'work in progress' figures might be misinterpreted as under-achievement when compared with Bradford 2025's ambitious overall targets.

The expectation within the wider team was that data for every event taking place as part of Bradford 2025, from a small event in a church hall to a large showcase event, would be recorded, including audience and participant numbers. This raised questions about the purpose of so much data being gathered across so many aspects of the programme: How would it be used, and was it all necessary? This exposed a tension between the emphasis placed on gathering data (in which numbers are everything, even if the target metrics had been developed through somewhat 'finger-in-the-air' techniques) and the resource within the

team to manage the acquisition and processing of this data in a timely way. This challenge was certainly not distinct to the City of Culture: a director of a community-focused grassroots arts organisation within the district described knowing that data is important, so must be gathered, but then wondering how to use this glut of information to its full potential.

The Story of Change

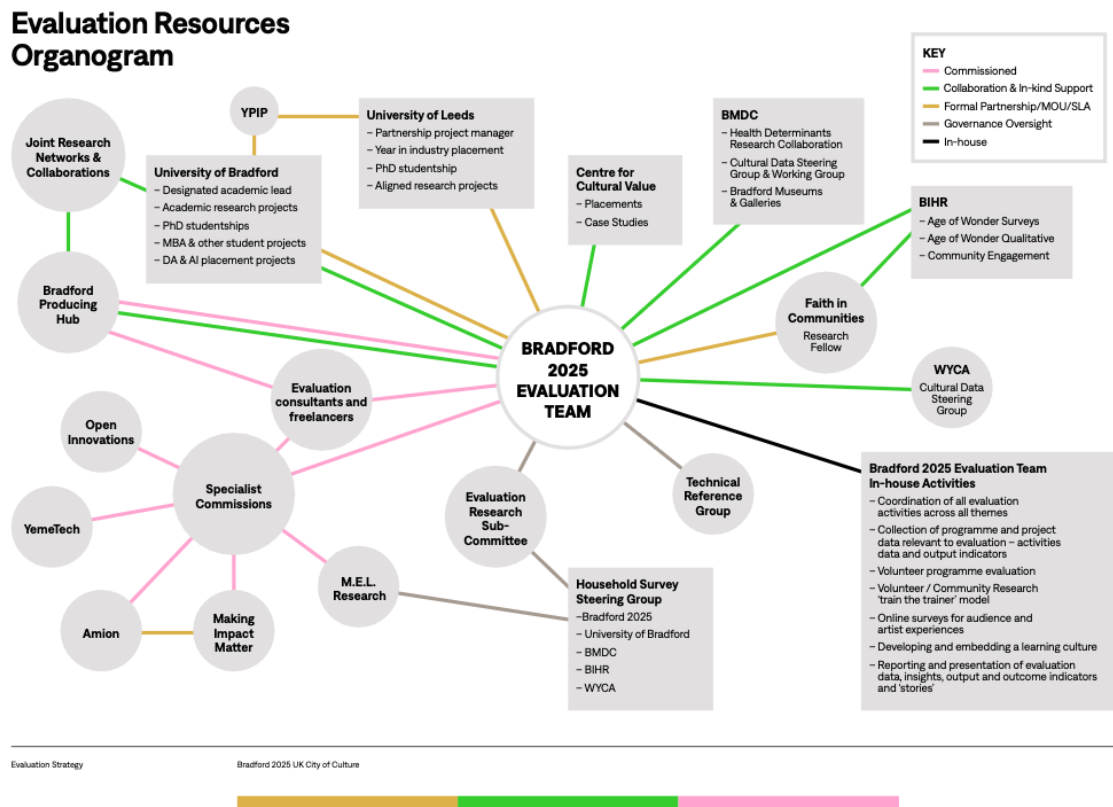
In common with Coventry City of Culture 2021, Bradford 2025's Evaluation team developed a '[Story of Change](#)'. This is an evaluation model used to plan and communicate desired change, starting with impacts and outcomes to envision the desired end point and considering and which stakeholders, processes and activities will deliver this change. This model supports reflective practice by creating opportunities to learn and adjust activity as the programme evolves. However, although moments of reflection were built in, the pace of work meant that significant reflection could only occur intermittently and as the pace of work slowed towards the end of 2025.

The Director of Evaluation developed a comprehensive [evaluation strategy](#), building on the learning from Coventry, Hull and others, and incorporating the Centre for Cultural Value's [Evaluation Principles](#). The evaluation framework was tailored and adapted to align with Bradford 2025's ambitions as outlined in its City of Culture bid (including its story of change) as well as what would work in the context of Bradford 2025 as a delivery organisation and Bradford's organisations, places and people. The evaluation strategy set out the overall evaluation approach, principles, governance, story of change, key evaluation questions, proposed output and outcome indicators, evaluation methods, resources and timeframes. This document has essentially steered the direction of travel for the Evaluation team.

The team constantly monitored and developed the methods used to gather data, acknowledging where things had, and had not, worked. For example, when re-examining the Evaluation Team Organogram, developed at the start of 2025 (see Figure 1) in July 2025, the team observed that while some aspects had mushroomed, others had withered and died. Acknowledging that some evaluation activities had been more or less successful than expected was an important part of the Story of Change, illustrating how both methods and data must be monitored, reviewed, evaluated and documented as part of the story of the year.

The Director of Evaluation also noted the challenge of capturing experience and learning within the Bradford 2025 team as part of the Story of Change: much of the data gathered by the Evaluation team was outward facing, concentrating on events, but the internal experience of the City of Culture organisation, such as ways of working or decision-making processes, was difficult to capture in ways that could be shared for future learning.

Figure 1: Bradford 2025 Evaluation organogram



Data gathering and management

The quest for metrics that matched or even exceeded those proposed in the bid at times masked the complexities of accruing such data. For instance, venues where footfall or visitor data was not collected as a standard practice or where exhibiting artists were not in favour of displaying QR codes for audience feedback presented particular challenges. In these cases, data was gathered stealthily, through more resource-heavy, analogue means such as volunteers using clicker counters and distributing manual questionnaires, which placed additional resource needs on the Evaluation team to analyse.

The Evaluation team strived to give multiple teams in Bradford 2025 access to meaningful data. This meant that errors had to be spotted and unpicked before data could be shared and there were frequent discussions about what constituted a data point (e.g. whether an 'event' referred to an entire multi-day event or a single day of that event). Such issues were largely resolved through the collaborative development of a glossary of terms, but again this created additional work for the Evaluation team. For example, data recorded on the organisation's Airtable platform for project management purposes had to be restructured for the purposes of data analysis and visualisation. The team's Data Analyst described 'messy data' coming in from partners, right down to different definitions of what constituted 'partners'. Data was sometimes poorly structured, inconsistently categorised or even completely missing. The common factor in these challenges was the human element related to discrepancies in data entry and/or categorisation.

The qualitative/quantitative balance

The Bradford 2025 evaluation framework supported a balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative data. Data collected and analysed included Household Survey data, Mosaic data, audience data, focus group transcripts, social media data, and data captured via creative methods such as artistic outputs from cultural participants and artists. One qualitative strand explored creative careers for young people; two placement students from the University of Leeds developed qualitative projects exploring the Youth Pass cohort, refugees and sanctuary seekers; and the Young Creative assigned to the Evaluation team incorporated a sketchnoting strand into the team's work. Elsewhere, the Our Patch community arts strand of the programme was captured through photographs as a means of storytelling.

The ESVIA⁴ also incorporated a significant focus on understanding social value from a grassroots perspective using innovative, participatory and creative methods of data collection, reflection and feedback. These examples demonstrate a consistent commitment to pursuing creative opportunities in qualitative research where possible. Whether through free text boxes in the audience survey sent out after every ticketed event, or through the activities described above, qualitative research – stories from and about people, and about experiences – was placed at the heart of evaluation activity as a means of capturing meaning: a Story of Change needs stories in order to articulate change in a people-centred way.

Most of Bradford 2025's team were contracted to finish at the end of December 2025, but the 'core' Evaluation team (Evaluation Director, Manager, Data Analyst and Officer) have been contracted until December 2026. The 'live' data, shared via dashboards, was never going to tell the whole story of Bradford 2025. While some (generally quantitative) data could be analysed within the City of Culture year, the scope and scale of data collection during 2024, 2025 and 2026 meant that the final evaluation could not happen until 2026, and the interpretation of qualitative data takes time.

Bradford District's data infrastructure

One interviewee described Bradford as "a patchwork quilt of organisations", and other interviewees reiterated the interconnectedness of organisational knowledge within the city. However, there was significant scepticism among some interviewees about the extent to which sharing data can or does happen. This is perhaps linked to a city-wide wariness of 'outsiders', coming to the city armed with new proposals and salves for long-term issues. According to interviewees, Bradford's specific cultural and demographic context has led to years of it being used as a test-ground and then being abandoned at the end of each testing period, so this suspicion is not wholly unwarranted.

The director of an arts development organisation observed that the Bradford Way strategic programme, a two year partnership between Bradford Producing Hub, Bradford Cultural Voice Forum, The Leap CIC and Bradford Metropolitan District Council, launched in April 2024 with funding from Arts Council England, was intended to improve capacity for support infrastructure, joined-up strategic thinking and data sharing within the city and district. By September 2025, this partnership, which was funded to focus primarily on the needs of the city's freelancer and micro-business creative community, had still not established a clear presence within the city, although a conference drawing together the district's creative and cultural organisations was announced for March 2026.

⁴ The Economic and Social Value Impact Assessment

Assumptions about data-sharing across Bradford are not straightforward, with some organisations unclear about the extent to which improved data infrastructure might be of use to them. From two sides of the cultural coin, an interviewee from a commercial theatre reported that:

Occasionally there might be a call about reciprocal data swap, but that's as far as it goes and I'm now kind of thinking that, you know, that's a big gap there [...] we're not having those conversations with the cultural organisations in the city. There's a huge amount of small arts organisations... Bradford district's huge, you know, but it's a very rural area as well.

Meanwhile, the director of an established community arts initiative said that while they would share data in principle, they weren't clear exactly *what* they would share and *why*. This confirmed other indications that the practice and purpose of data sharing was not yet familiar within the district. The director of the arts development organisation drew out this tension further:

Nobody is telling us they need the Bradford Data Review, or the data, and... we can see the gap and we can see that need, even if people don't know that they have it... we can see the weakness in the sector of that lack of understanding of data and that lack of use of data.

The Bradford Data Review (Lee et al., 2024) was developed thanks to established relationships, despite some resistance from elsewhere in the city, as some of the data contained within it was perceived as commercially-sensitive and so not appropriate for sharing. The main form of data gathered by organisations in the review was quantitative and related to audiences – who they are, where they come from, how much they spend, how often they attend, etc. The interviewee from the commercial theatre noted that their audience data was gathered via the Spektrix box office ticketing system, and as such, only captured details of the booker – who might be bringing ten people with them. Other organisations described capturing quantitative data as an “obligation” to support reporting. While many agreed that qualitative data offers rich stories about engagement, they acknowledged that this data needs to be interpreted within the particular contexts in which it is gathered; is challenging to process in different ways; and is not generally scalable to other contexts.

Arts Council NPOs are required to use the Illuminate⁵ reporting tool for audience surveying. While this facility is available to other organisations, the lack of obligation, together with the lack of staff and financial resources within organisations, means that this opportunity for sharing and benchmarking audience data is missed across many of Bradford district's non-NPO arts and cultural organisations that make up the mainstay of its cultural portfolio. Although Bradford Producing Hub has developed an annual survey of the creative and cultural sector in the district to provide baseline data, this relies on voluntary participant engagement rather than statutory reporting.

Messy, intangible and creative data

Data is sometimes misconstrued as purely quantitative data (or numbers) and this can both alienate cultural workers from engaging with it and recue its potential scope and impact for evaluation. For instance, the director of a long-running community arts initiative suggested that their organisation didn't collect much data, but then observed that they had a rich archive of interviews. Similarly, the director of a community arts organisation elsewhere in

⁵ Illuminate is Arts Council England's audience data platform. It is free for organisations to use, but its use is a condition of funding for all Funded Organisations (see <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/illuminate/illuminate-faqs>)

Bradford district noted the rich mass of qualitative data contained within films made as part of the organisation's work with communities. This data, which can offer deep insights into participant and community experience, is time-consuming and resource-intensive to analyse and quantify – so it is often set aside in favour of data that is more easily measurable.

Cultural data is often messy and as we've seen already in this case study, it can be generated via creative methods. A good example of this is when the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team hosted a focus group with volunteers who participated in the City of Culture launch event in January 2025. Some of these participants learned acrobatic skills, while others shared magic tricks with the audience. While participants created visual timelines on rolls of wallpaper to reflect their experiences, this creative output was translated into quantitative data, because there was no facility to share the data in its original form. This indicates the challenges of incorporating non-standard data into traditional data platforms.

Bradford 2025's Our Patch community strand provides an excellent example of using arts-based methods to gather data. Such approaches offer rich potential for community ownership of data and for telling stories. An interviewee from a community-based arts organisation, whose work focuses on community-led culture within Bradford, noted that in their experience, approaching participants with clipboards and lists of questions was not always positively received. Information accrued through lived experience cannot be easily recorded within the boxes on the organisation's current form, so it is missed. Bradford 2025 endeavoured to capture intangible participant and audience experiences via qualitative recordings, which they described as "the icing on the cake". They believed that these data stories, which can resonate with other cultural organisations and participants within the city, may have a longer life than the purely quantitative data that often exist without narrative context.

The problem of too much data

The director of an arts development organisation noted that too much data is being generated. This data can be labour-intensive to gather and process, and is often accumulated out of obligation to others rather than being of use and value to the organisation itself. This observation enhances the argument for streamlined and simplified data requests from funders and local authorities: is what is being gathered of actual use, or is it gathered because it's what's always been gathered (and then never used or requested)? There is a wider point here around organisations being both receptive and having the capacity to embrace change, particularly in relation to the development of new funding protocols and data storage and sharing systems.

The director of a local arts organisation described collecting significant amounts of data relating to projects but then not having sufficient time or resources to use it to its full potential, despite being the 'go-to' organisation locally for connections within the local community, particularly for arts and health initiatives. Community-embedded arts organisations are often experts in their own populations, but it remains unclear how this situational data and "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) can be recorded and usefully shared more widely. The predominance of quantitative data means that vital, more representative and people-centred data is currently being missed across the district – data that could be usefully shared to capture cultural value in a more holistic way.

The value of logistical and operational data

Bradford 2025 offers an opportunity to not only record data for benchmarking, trend analysis, and so on, but also to document the context and logistics relating to cultural data. A good example of this is the challenge of gathering non-ticketed data. Valuable time was taken up in one Bradford 2025 Evaluation team meeting by working out how to record non-ticketed

audiences for an open-air event that took place over several days. The challenges were both logistical, in considering how to create a tool that audiences could engage with in all weathers, and geographic, in addressing the requisite granularity of postcode or ward data. These issues are shared by many other cultural organisations running non-ticketed open-air activities but are not part of information currently shared between events. This presents an opportunity for the Observatory to share knowledge around data collection processes as well as sharing and analysing the data itself.

Another form of data involved in evaluation is the documentation of business processes and decision-making. In common with previous Cities of Culture, the short employment contracts at Bradford 2025 meant that staff turnover was a perennial risk: in a hands-on environment and in small teams, a staff member departing can disrupt the stability of key processes such as management of data dashboards. In this instance, the Data Analyst for the Evaluation team left at the end of August 2025, with four months left of the year of culture to run; her handover notes became a vital resource in understanding the decisions she had made in creating particular processes and dashboards and maintaining business continuity. A data observatory could offer space to share data of this nature, to further understand how and why decisions were made.

Data and technology

Technology can offer rich opportunities for gathering and managing cultural data, and indeed a common mantra within Bradford 2025's Evaluation team soon became: "dashboards over reports!". However, the use of this technology is not foolproof, relying as ever on the accuracy of what is inputted and on positive communication and managed expectations between a complex range of stakeholders.

There had been hope in some quarters that Bradford 2025 would offer a solution to the disjointed data landscape in Bradford district. However, as the chair of a creative advocacy network noted:

[Bradford] 2025 tried something new there, but it's still not right. You know, we've got these funders, we've still got this requirement to get data, but actually there's no fit-for-purpose tool that works. Illuminate doesn't work. Every single organisation is changing it. You know, there's massive barriers. We're filling it in, you know, people who have not got English as a first language, people who don't want to share.

This reflects just some of the obstacles to creating a 'one-size-fits-all' tool. Another interviewee mentioned a previous attempt to create a city-wide cultural data observatory, led by the city council, prior to the Bradford Data Review in 2022, but this has not progressed.

Each organisation represented in this case study was running its own version of a consumer data capture tool, either alongside or instead of the ACE Illuminate platform. One organisation described having a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system to track engagement with participants, but conceded that they didn't use it to its full extent. This was essentially a resourcing issue for an organisation with few paid staff who depended on volunteer support, and where new ways for the organisation to do things required training and time. Another organisation that was a strong advocate for data-led decision-making nevertheless used spreadsheets instead of a CRM. They acknowledged that this was a problematic and limiting solution, but said that they could not currently fund the bespoke CRM that would enable them to usefully track participants across their programmes. Two other organisations interviewed both used the Illuminate platform; one supported theirs with

additional spreadsheets, and said that they, too, could not afford the CRM that would best serve their needs.

The existence of a CRM is not a panacea: there are resourcing challenges around training, inputting data, and checking the accuracy of what is added. Organisations recognised the value of being able to access information and to be able to draw on this to inform decision-making, but acknowledged that the capacity required both to set up and to ensure that this remains a useful resource is often lacking.

The Bradford 2025 team used innovative techniques to record audience data, particularly for non-ticketed events. AI sensors were mounted on a selection of outdoor art installations, with the intention of capturing activity as people moved around the work; and through a partnership with the University of Bradford, a triangulated approach using footage from drones and cameras was used to estimate numbers at larger non-ticketed events. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, volunteers and members of the Bradford 2025 team were still needed to attend events and installations with clicker-counters to record visitor numbers manually.

Conversations with the Bradford 2025 team revealed issues with technology that related to users' relationship with tools; specifically, early in the year, that members of the wider team were struggling to find time to review and update the Airtable⁶ platform (from which raw data relating to events, venues, audiences, etc. could be extracted and transformed into data visualisations or dashboards). This was partly resolved through the creation of separate dashboards for the Evaluation team and partly through an agreed organisational process of regular "evaluation amnesties" in which the data quality of all projects and events were reviewed by project leads. This organisation-wide 'ownership' of data was a key element of Bradford 2025's learning culture, one of the core strands of its Story of Change.

Later in the year, the team reported that the Bradford 2025 Audience Experience Survey, through which the majority of audience feedback was gathered, was "broken", with venue data relating to activity outside Bradford 2025 no longer visible. Although this was quickly resolved, it offers a learning point for future events of this nature regarding the stability of cloud-based resources. Frequently, missing data or data inputting errors such as double counting or incorrect event start and end dates in Airtable resulted in incorrect figures in the data dashboards developed by Open Innovations. These dashboards were vital in surfacing some of these errors so that data could be corrected at source.

Data and funders

The relationship between data and funders arose repeatedly in interviews with Bradford's cultural organisations. The overwhelming sense here was that data was gathered to satisfy the needs of funders, and that this was very much a one-way process; the organisations were not collecting this information for themselves as a priority and did not have time or resources to fully use, analyse and learn from their own data.

Other observations from conversations within Bradford district included that funder-led data requests often felt onerous and that evaluation was very much funder-led. One interviewee noted that:

⁶ Airtable is a platform that enables users to transform data into interfaces. Within Bradford 2025, data relating to projects, events and budgets is uploaded to this for use by various teams including Programming, Audiences and the Evaluation teams: see <https://www.airtable.com>

...a lot of the work that we've been able to do since becoming a charity has been through individual project funds, and that still remains the case. So because of that, we have a huge amount of evaluation monitoring that we do, but it is specifically tailored towards the requirements of the funding bodies.

Another interviewee described the sense that funders had a low risk-tolerance: "You are required to generate data that kind of justifies your funding" – with the consequence that organisations felt less able to experiment with work that might fail. This was in notable contrast to the accounts of the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team, who described many funders, including Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Esmée Fairbairn in particular, as being more light-touch in their expectations around reporting from Bradford 2025. However, the existence of a dedicated evaluation team, comprehensive evaluation strategy and designated evaluation budget gave the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team the opportunity to combine 'routine' data collection across multiple projects and deploy more creative evaluation methods for particular projects.

There is opportunity for funders to offer more information to recipients by sharing data on their decision-making. This would help organisations understand funding processes in more transparent ways. A reduced reporting load from funders – through, for example, simplifying data requests, or working to an agreed framework so that one set of data can satisfy multiple requests – would ease pressure on organisations, potentially creating more time for reflection and development within arts, cultural and heritage organisations.

One interviewee noted that data can be manipulated to favour particular outcomes, and that the glut of data and lack of transparency increased this risk. In her examples, an activity could be promoted to global majority audiences within a particular area through distribution of free tickets; people attended the activity, and when the organisation reported on participation, they would be able to say that there had been a significant attendance from this global majority population, without having to disclose the information about the free tickets. Similarly, an organisation wanting to attract funding for a disability project could facilitate participation for a series of highly focused events, thus shuffling their metrics to suit a specific end, namely the opportunity to access that particular funding pot. This supports the argument for increased data transparency, more robust quantitative evaluation and a mixed-methods approach to ensure there is always context behind raw data.

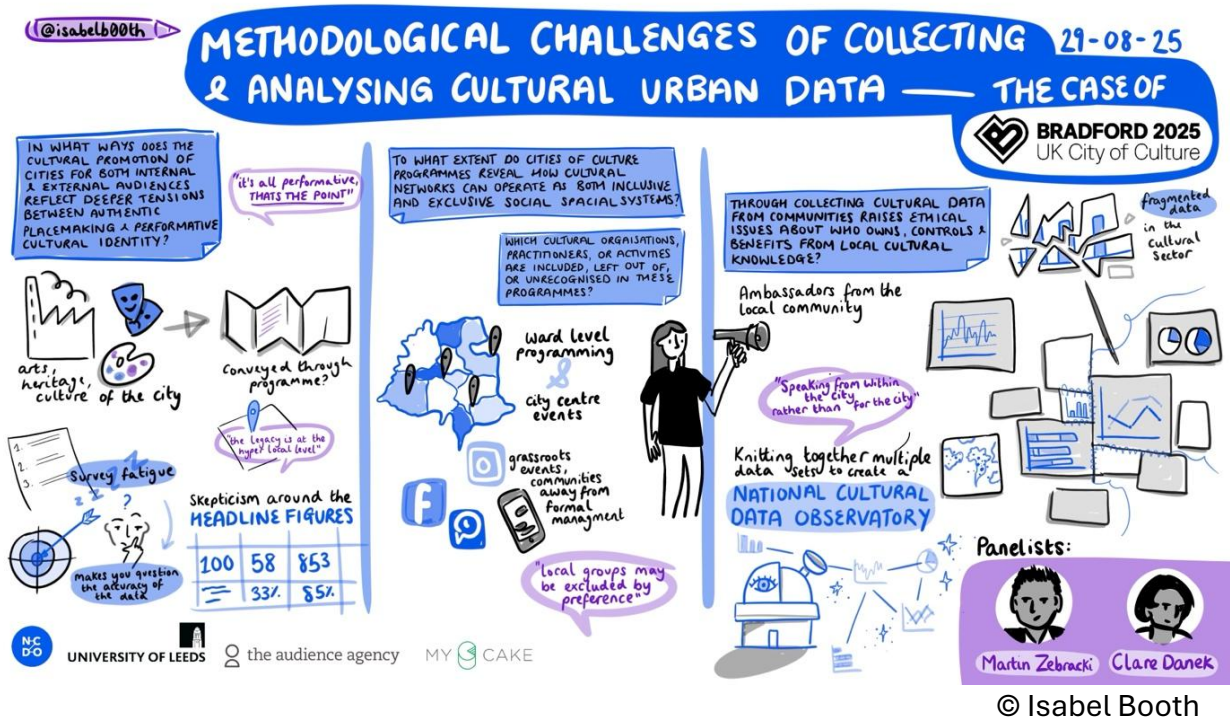
A Data Observatory for Bradford

The Demonstrator developed as a key part of the Bradford case study provides a limited-functionality version of the Observatory's external facing digital platform.⁷ It is deliberately modest in scope, but it illustrates the feasibility of integrating datasets, the challenges of scaling such work, and the value of making insights accessible beyond research specialists.

The development of the Demonstrator was rooted in close collaboration with the Bradford 2025 Evaluation team and cultural organisations across the district. This partnership ensured that local perspectives and lived experience informed the model, revealing needs and priorities that mirrored those observed nationally, but expressed at a different scale. For example, while workforce inequalities and gaps in cultural participation appear across England, the Bradford work showed how these patterns manifest differently in highly diverse local communities. It also highlighted how the vibrancy of local cultural life may not be recognised in regional or national statistics, with gaps in data collection leading to under-representation of grassroots activity, community-led creativity, and informal participation.

⁷ Please see Appendix 3 for a mock-up visualisation of the Bradford Data Observatory

Figure 2: Graphic illustration of tensions between diverse data collection methods⁸



The Demonstrator therefore set out to show how cultural data can be understood at a local level, while still providing comparisons that policymakers and funders require. Given that much national data is not yet available in a clean, consistent or sufficiently granular format, the Demonstrator focused on exploring Bradford within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the local authorities within it. This meso-level framing provided a realistic basis for testing how cultural evidence can support devolved policymaking and strategy, while demonstrating the need for investment in data quality and integration at national scale.

The Demonstrator brought together a diverse set of datasets, including:

- **Population and demographics:** Census 2021 data, Population Profile Reports, and ONS indicators provided baseline demographic and socio-economic statistics. These enabled ward-level comparisons and benchmarking against West Yorkshire.
- **Cultural participation and engagement:** The Audience Agency's Audience Spectrum segmentation data was included, alongside local qualitative material. Bradford 2025's volunteer evaluation data, including personal accounts and creative outputs, provided a way of calibrating statistics with lived experience.
- **Footfall and mobility:** Data from Huq supplied geolocated footfall and spend information, offering a proxy measure of audience behaviour and local economic activity around cultural assets.
- **Funding and finance:** Financial data included grants and investment flows from MyCake. Analysis of cultural organisations' financial resilience was incorporated, linking to broader economic trends.
- **Events and infrastructure:** Listings and venue data were ingested from DataThistle, providing information on formal cultural events and organisations. This was

⁸ Based on the research team's presentation and the ensuing discussion at the Royal Geographical Society conference in Birmingham in August 2025.

complemented by ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) data, creating a picture of funded cultural infrastructure.

- **Education and skills:** Education data, including attainment and school-level indicators, were aligned where available. This was essential for exploring the relationship between cultural engagement, talent pipelines, and local skills development. By assembling these diverse inputs, the Demonstrator illustrates how the observatory can move beyond a static list of indicators towards a dynamic evidence base that blends quantitative and qualitative perspectives.
- **Commercial datasets** were supported by the [Leeds Institute for Data Analytics \(LIDA\)](#), to understand the potential infrastructure to store, link and analyse them alongside public, open datasets, under appropriate governance and security.

Conclusion

Bradford is, in some ways, an anomaly, when compared with other cities of its size: it has few large arts organisations and arts council investment has been significantly lower than in other comparable cities (Lee et al., 2024). Much of Bradford's cultural activity takes place within communities and outside the remit of national-level reporting mechanisms (ibid.). While cultural evaluation is a widely interrogated process (Oancă et al., 2024), there is still scope for both cultural organisations and funders to better understand the role of this evaluation, demonstrating its use beyond a PR device (West, 2022) as a powerful reflective learning tool.

This case study highlights the value of mixed-methods and creative approaches to data gathering within arts, cultural and heritage organisations, and also of people-centred evaluation models that allow these data to speak on their own terms (Crone and Ganga, 2023). Alongside accommodating more diverse approaches to data gathering, there is scope for improving systems to share knowledge between 'mega events' such as Cities of Culture, including the more operational and logistical aspects of cultural work. Little scholarly attention has been paid to these aspects of knowledge transfer; and while every event will rightly contain its own contextual nuances, placing greater focus on knowledge exchange could allow the 'plane that must be built while flying it' to at least arrive part-built, to extend the metaphor.

Conversations with arts, cultural and heritage organisations within Bradford District indicate ongoing opportunities for improved data literacy through bespoke training and engagement. This finding is supported elsewhere through work on community data observatories (e.g. Owen et al., 2023; Owen, Marsh and Ashton, 2025).

This case study advocates for a data approach based on a model of 'fewer, better things': organisations describe overwhelming workloads or simply "avoiding the data mountain", particularly for what is recognised as 'rich' qualitative data. As a consequence, much data that is collected is never actually used, despite the toll its collection and analysis can take on evaluators and audiences alike. The case study highlights opportunities for funders to work more closely with smaller organisations to better understand their experiences of reporting and evaluation – there is currently a sense of a wasteful one-way information flow upwards that needs to be resolved. There is certainly scope for funders to work together to reduce overlap in reporting, thus reducing pressure on smaller ACH organisations relying on modest resources and streamlining demands for data (Owen et al., 2023).

While Bradford presents its own particular set of circumstances, both positive (such as its rich and established community-led cultural scene) and less positive (the modest scale of and funding for its formal arts and cultural infrastructure), this case study identifies valuable

lessons to share: if there is scope for data to be scalable from the local to the national, then so too is there similar scope for scaling up the learning from challenges experienced at local and hyper-local levels.

Implications for the National Cultural Data Observatory

While not all facets of this case study have direct relevance for the development of the National Cultural Data Observatory, several aspects are of particular note:

- While reports can offer an insight into a particular moment in time, the ability to use dashboards to interact with up-to-date data and examine it through comparison alongside sector, artform and demographic data would offer significantly richer insights for users of the Observatory.
- There is potential for the NCDO to offer arts, cultural and heritage organisations greater agency over the data that they generate; several organisations describe a current sense of data being gathered and distributed in an upward direction towards funders and authorities.
- Similar but distinct data requests from multiple funders leads to duplication of effort and places an unnecessary burden on the sector which could be mitigated by a more joined-up approach advocated by an independent observatory.
- If they had better access to data, ACH organisations would become more independent and empowered in their strategic planning and decision-making.
- In regions such as Bradford district, where large NPOs make up a small proportion of the cultural ecology, a regional data observatory would enable a city-wide picture and support the longitudinal analysis required to map changes and tell stories that draw on a deeper pool of information.
- Similarly, the creation of a resource that draws data from more sources and more voices at ground level would build a more nuanced picture of a place: while every area has its own particularities and idiosyncrasies, this rich body of data about a place can, in turn, be used to draw out comparisons and contrasts with other locations across the United Kingdom and beyond.

There are, however, challenges for a National Cultural Data Observatory to consider:

- Most participants shared a desire to use more qualitative data alongside quantitative data, and felt that this is where the rich insights lie. To what extent can the NCDO accommodate this in ways that remain meaningful for smaller organisations?
- Data gaps remain, leading to distorted reporting. There is ongoing data illiteracy, an ongoing lack of resource in the sector, and the aforementioned duplication of effort across multiple funders. The NCDO obviously cannot address or resolve systemic issues, but these challenges must be acknowledged alongside the development of such an entity if it is to reach its full potential.
- There is appetite across Bradford district for data sharing that has local meaning and which can be used to effect local change. Will the NCDO be able to facilitate data-sharing at city and organisation level, especially if data is perceived to be commercially sensitive?
- To what extent can data gathered in one location or one context be meaningfully scalable to other locations or contexts?

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the UK'S Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and of the University of Leeds for supporting the policy engagement strand of this research. We would like to thank the Evaluation team at Bradford 2025 led by Helen Bewsher for their generosity in engaging with this research in such an open and collaborative way, and the Leeds Institute for Data Analytics (LIDA) for supporting a dedicated project intern.

Appendix 1: References

- Capurro, C., Plets, G. and Verheul, J. 2024. Digital heritage infrastructures as cultural policy instruments: Europeana and the enactment of European citizenship. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 30(3), pp. 304–324.
- Crone, S. and Ganga, R. 2023. Revisiting the impact of Liverpool as ECoC 2008: the lost opportunity to reconcile cultural policy and evaluation. *Arts and the Market*, 13(3), pp. 121–137.
- Evans, G. 2005. Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration. *Urban Studies*, 42(5–6), pp. 959–83.
- Garcia, B. and Cox, T. 2013. *European Capitals of Culture: Success strategies and long-term effects*, Brussels: European Parliament.
- Geertz, C. 1983. *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gilmore, A. 2014. Evaluating Legacies: Research, evidence and the regional impact of the Cultural Olympiad. *Cultural Trends*, 23(1), pp. 29–41.
- Hatton, N. 2024. Spirit of 2012, Bradford 2025 and LEEDS 2023 Shared Cultural Futures: Knowledge Transfer Exchange. [Online]. Available at: <https://spiritof2012.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/181-Shared-Cultural-Futures-evaluation-report-FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 4 August 2025].
- Jung, T. H., Lee, J., Yap, M. H. T. and Ineson, E. M. 2015. The role of stakeholder collaboration in culture-led urban regeneration: A case study of the Gwangju project, Korea. *Cities*, 44, pp. 29–39.
- Kajdanek, K., Błaszczuk, M. and Banaszak, E. 2024. Breaking open the black box of narratives on European Capital of culture: Social positioning, cultural participation, and success and failure stories (case of ECoC Wrocław 2016). *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 30(5), pp. 647–66.
- Lee, D., Ranson, R. and Melville, R. 2024. Bradford Data Review. Bradford: Bradford Producing Hub. Available at: <https://bdproducinghub.co.uk/resource/bradford-data-review/> [Accessed 20 February 2025].
- Marsh, N., Owen, J. and Ashton, D. 2024. Lived experience and decision-making: An applied approach to using, connecting and representing qualitative evidence. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/culture-and-devolution-series-think-pieces/lived> [Accessed 24 February 2025].
- McDowell, E. 2024. How are UK Cities and Capitals of Culture evaluated?. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/evaluation-learning-space/resource/how-are-cities-of-culture-evaluated/> [Accessed 4 August 2025].
- Oancă, A., Bianchini, F., Simpson, J., Tommarchi, E. and Wright, D. 2024. The uses and misuses of the evaluation of cities and capitals of culture. *Arts and the market*, 14(1), pp. 1–13.
- O'Brien, D. 2010. 'No cultural policy to speak of': Liverpool 2008. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 2(2), pp. 113–128.
- Oman, S. 2021. *Understanding Well-being Data: Improving social and cultural policy, practice and research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Owen, J., Holdway, K., Marsh, N., Ashton, D., Jones, S. and Sofaer, J. 2023. Opening the Observatory: A neighbouring data interim report. [Online]. Available at: <https://andtowns.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Opening-the-Observatory---A-Neighbouring-Data-report.pdf> [Accessed 24 February 2025].

- Owen, J., Marsh, N. and Ashton, D. 2025. Understanding the Observatory: A neighbouring data analysis. Southampton: University of Southampton.
- Poirier, L. and Costelloe-Kuehn, B. 2019. Data sharing at Scale: A heuristic for affirming data cultures. *Data Science Journal*, 18(48), pp. 1–7.
- Walmsley, B. 2018. Deep hanging out in the arts: An anthropological approach to capturing cultural value. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 24(2), pp. 272–91.
- Walmsley, B., Comerford Boyes, L., Garcia, B., Hayton, S., McAndrew, S., Mantell, O. Neelands, J., Thelwall, S. and Wray, L. 2022. Making Data Work: A scoping survey to develop a mixed-methods evaluation framework for culture. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Making-Data-Work-180823.pdf> [Accessed 4 August 2025].
- West, T. 2022. Liverpool's European Capital of Culture legacy narrative: A selective heritage? *European Planning Studies*, 30(3), pp. 534–53.

Appendix 2: Research Participants

Bradford 2025 Evaluation Team and Associates

- Helen Bewsher, Director of Evaluation
- Gail Smith, Evaluation Manager
- Amber Hollis, Data Analyst
- Matthew Maslen, Evaluation Assistant
- Isabel Booth, Project Assistant (Evaluation)
- Professor Karina Croucher, University of Bradford Academic Lead for Bradford 2025
- Abby Dix-Mason, Cultural Institute, University of Leeds – Partnerships Development Manager (Bradford 2025)
- Giles Dring, Associate Data Architect, Open Innovations

Bradford District Cultural Sector, Artists and Associates

- Shabina Aslam, Director, Theatre in the Mill – *Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation, located within the University of Bradford, with focus on artist development.*
- Fozia Bora, Professor, University of Leeds/Somali Project – *research into Somali community in Lister Park, Bradford, as part of 1903 exhibition.*
- Vicky Clifton, Co-chair, Bradford Cultural Voice Forum – *member-led knowledge-sharing network of around 500 cultural sector workers within Bradford District.*
- Alex Croft, CEO, Kala Sangam – *Arts Council NPO, opening (and rebranding as) Bradford Arts Centre in September 2025, following £8m capital development programme.*
- Mary Dowson, Director, Bradford Community Broadcasting – *community radio station running since 1991.*
- Liz Hall, Marketing Manager, Alhambra – *large commercial ‘receiving house’ theatre; one of four performance venues in Bradford run by Bradford Council.*
- Lisa Mallaghan, Executive Director, Bradford Producing Hub – *set up in 2019 support and develop Bradford’s creative and cultural sector.*
- Riaz Meer, Director, Keighley Creative – *arts organisation in Bradford District, with studio spaces, gallery, events programme and creative projects.*
- Akinwale Ogundipe, Evaluation Manager, The Leap CIC – *Arts Council England ‘Creative People & Places’ funded organisation whose focus is on strengthening support for community-driven cultural activity in Bradford district.*

Appendix 3: Demonstrator Mock-up

NCD-O National Cultural Data Observatory

Data Hub Resources About

Turning cultural data into actionable insights - nationally, regionally and locally

[Explore the Data Hub](#) [Learn how it works](#)

Cultural Datasets
Democratise access to curated cultural datasets and analytics spanning national trends down to neighbourhood.

Ethics & Privacy by Design
Rigorous governance, "Human-in-the-Loop" validation and federated data controls ensure privacy and trust at every step.

Actionable Insights
From policy makers to local arts organisers, extract ready-to-use dashboards, benchmarks, and scenario-modelling tools.

A Cultural Data Platform Built for the UK

Arts, culture, and heritage fuel innovation, wellbeing, and economic growth, yet data remains fragmented, inconsistent, and often inaccessible. NCDO bridges those gaps by **aggregating, cleaning, and harmonising** data from national (macro), regional and district (meso), and ward-level (micro) sources.

Drill from **big-picture UK trends** all the way **down to your street**. Whether you're a **national policy advisor** or **regional analyst**, NCDO equips you with the evidence you need to make **data-driven decisions**.

CASE STUDIES

National policymaking / funding

Compare need and opportunity to focus policy regionally and locally



Regional programme evaluation

Evaluate social/economic impact - to inform 'what works' & legacy planning



Holistic view of locality

Understand the role of culture in the social fabric of places



Local Authority Cultural Manager

Track library footfall, venue usage, and programme effectiveness – fulfil statutory reporting requirements and boost engagement



New sector insights

Access secure micro-data for advanced analytics – train AI on cultural text/images, while ensuring ethical compliance



NCDO Architecture



Find Data

Discover, download, and share curated data products – composite indicators, synthetic datasets, thematic packages – each peer-reviewed and ready to do business for arts participation, creative industries, health outcomes, and more.



Work Across Datasets

Navigate seamlessly between Geography, Time, Indicators, Organisation, and Venue dimensions. Built on a robust star-schema for efficient querying, our data model lets you ask questions like “Which Bradford ward saw the biggest year-on-year uptake in library visits?” in seconds



Put Data In

Automated data profiling, semantic mapping, and metadata tagging accelerate the onboarding process—without sacrificing quality. Human-experts then validate every step to guarantee data integrity and privacy compliance



Work Securely

Our federated governance model ensures privacy-preserving access to micro-level data for accredited researchers. Launch Jupyter notebooks or R scripts in-platform and run analyses on sensitive cultural datasets under strict SLAs



Barncliffe District Deep Dive



Barncliffe's youthful demographics and rich cultural heritage present both challenges and opportunities. By leveraging fine-grained data, ranging from school engagement with arts programs to audience data at heritage sites, local stakeholders can design targeted interventions that boost wellbeing, spur economic growth, and strengthen community cohesion.

[View full Barncliffe Data Review](#)

Technical & Governance

- How is Data Onboarded & Validated?
- What Licensing & Access Controls Exist?
- How Frequently is Data Updated?
- What Privacy & Ethical Standards Apply?

Get Involved & Stay Updated

Subscribe to NCDO Updates

Monthly newsletters keep you informed about new data releases, tool enhancements and peer use

Submit your dataset

Are you a data provider such as university, local authority, library? Upload your dataset to the Data Hub (subject to cleaning governance review)

Quick links

- Home
- About
- Data Hub
- Documentation
- API Reference
- Contact

Resources

- Bradford Data Review
- API Terms & Conditions
- FAQs
- Privacy Policy
- AI Policy
- Terms & Conditions
- Governance

Contact & Social

info@ncdo.org.uk

LinkedIn

Phone: +44 2020 202 202
Website: ncdo.org.uk

LED BY



FUNDED BY



POLICY PARTNER



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



WITH THE SUPPORT OF



STEERED BY



Data Hub



National Cultural
Data Observatory

Data Hub

Resources

About



Data Hub

Discover, download, and share curated data products—composite indicators, synthetic datasets, thematic packages—each peer-reviewed and ready to do business for arts participation, creative industries, health outcomes, and more.

YOUR SAVED DASHBOARDS

★ Barncliffe | Need and Opportunity ▶

★ Barncliffe 2024 | Programme Evaluation ▶

★ Barncliffe | A Journey ▶



Ask anything

e.g. How has Cultural Engagement changed in the past 5 years and how is that reflected in the general happiness of the population?



BROWSE & CREATE BY THEME

Need & Opportunity



Focus on regions with the greatest potential for arts and culture impact

Cultural Pulse



Get the national facts on the current situation for Arts and Culture Organisations

Sector Trends



Monitor how demand, funding, and public engagement have changed to detect emerging risks and guide strategy

Future Focus



Compare past funding flows and projected need

BROWSE & CREATE BY...

Geography ▶

Funding ▶

Infrastructure ▶

Participation ▶

Deprivation ▶

Wellness ▶

Education ▶

Economy ▶

Demographics ▶

DISCOVER THE AVAILABLE DATASETS

Featured Dataset

DCMS Participation Survey ▶

Continuous household survey covering arts, heritage, libraries, museums, digital and sport engagement

Arts Index ▶

Heritage Action zones ▶

Government Grants Info System ▶

Artquest Artist Panel ▶

Community Life Survey ▶

ACE National Portfolio ▶

Doore Open Days ▶

Sport England Active Lives ▶

Co-op Community Wellbeing Index ▶

Understanding Society (UKHLS) ▶

Ordnance Survey Data ▶

Audience Answers ▶

Connected Bradford SAIL Databank ▶

MyCake Financial Benchmark ▶

Taking Part Survey ▶

Data Thistle Events ▶

Indices of Multiple Deprivation ▶

See more ▶

Use National Policymaking / Funding



[Data Hub](#)

[Resources](#)

[About](#)



UK | Need and Opportunity

Pinpoint areas of greatest need and opportunity

Go straight to a place:

Select a Local Authority ▼

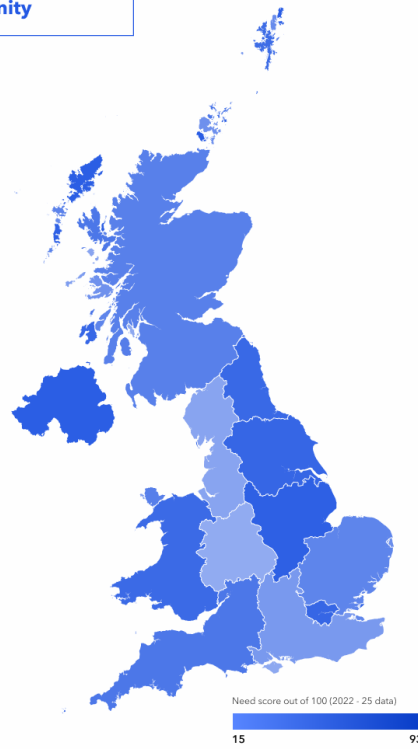
Focus on:

Need Opportunity

? How do we calculate need and opportunity?

Highest ten local authorities:

- 93 West Devon ▶
- 91 North Norfolk ▶
- 91 East Lindsey ▶
- 89 Torridge ▶
- 87 Fenland ▶
- 87 Eden ▶
- 85 Forest of Dean ▶
- 84 Boston ▶
- 84 Barncliffe ▶
- 83 Copeland ▶



Explore more ▶



Pinpoint an area

e.g. Suggest an area with low infrastructure and poor health that would benefit from arts investment



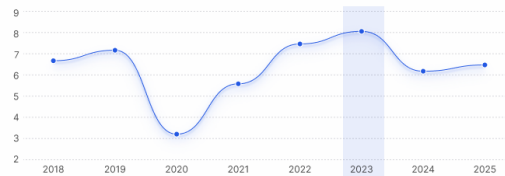
Nationwide trends

Compare trends across the UK for insight into how things are changing over time.

Showing:

Sector Resilience ▼

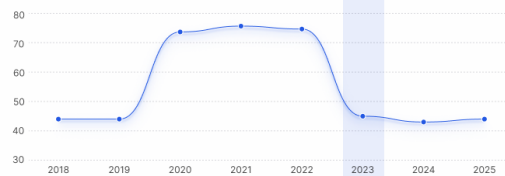
? About Sector Resilience



Showing:

Grant funding per capita (£) ▼

? About Grant funding per capita (£)



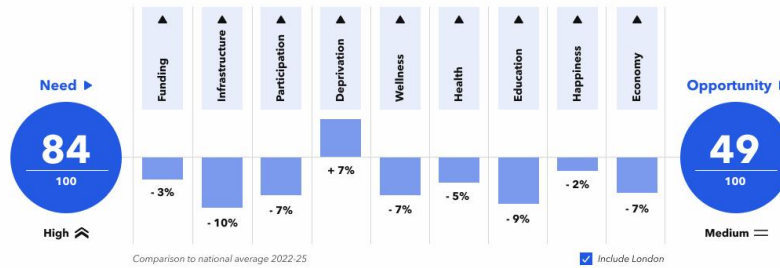
Nationwide trends show that while cultural participation has broadly recovered since the pandemic, recent years have seen a **notable drop in grant funding per capita.**

Explore more ▶

Local Authority

Barncliffe | Need and Opportunity

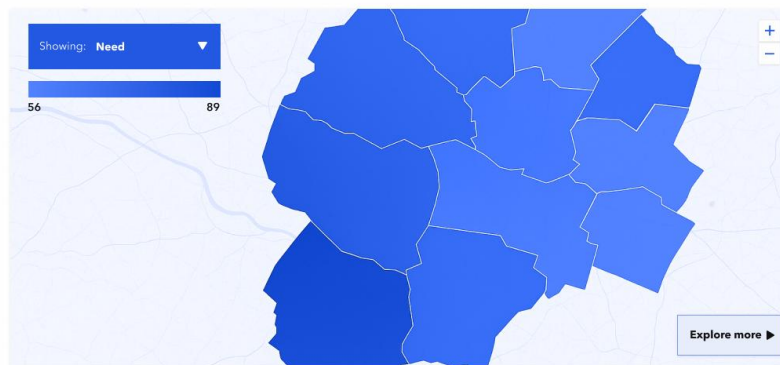
[? How do we calculate need and opportunity?](#)



Barncliffe shows **high overall need and only medium opportunity**, with **above-average deprivation** and **consistently lower scores across key wellbeing, participation, and economic indicators**, suggesting that targeted cultural investment could help address significant structural challenges.

Ask something about Barncliffe:

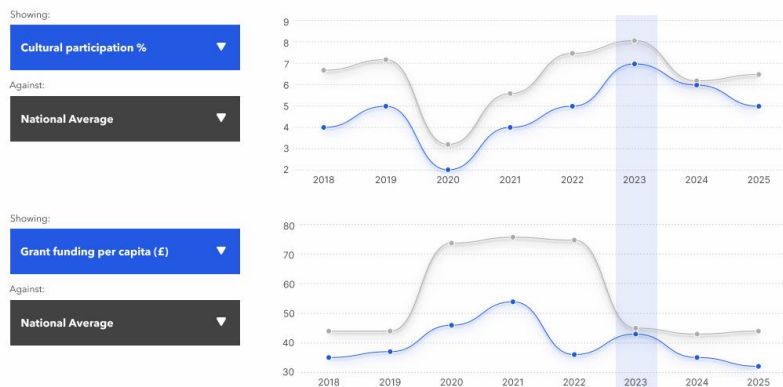
e.g. What is the age demographic in Barncliffe? How much impact would improving the infrastructure likely have on arts participation?



The wards of Barncliffe, by relative need out of 100 (2022-25 data)

Change over time

Compare trends in Barncliffe across multiple metrics with the national average or another area for context.



Cultural participation and grant funding in Barncliffe have both consistently **lagged behind national averages**, with only **modest post-pandemic recovery** and a **recent downward trend in funding** that may risk stalling participation gains.

[Explore more](#)

Regional Programme Evaluation



[Data Hub](#)

[Resources](#)

[About](#)



Barnclyffe 2024 | Programme Evaluation

[Configure Dashboard](#)

Measure the impact of the Barnclyffe City of Culture 2024 programme

Barnclyffe 2024 is a bold celebration of creativity, community and contrast in one of Yorkshire's most surprising places – where proud traditions meet fresh voices, and every street has a story to tell.

Barnclyffe | A Journey Explore Barnclyffe's cultural ecosystems from city centre to countryside – one bus stop at a time.

Barnclyffe 2024 Headlines

Select any of these metrics to see detailed breakdowns and compare to other programmes:

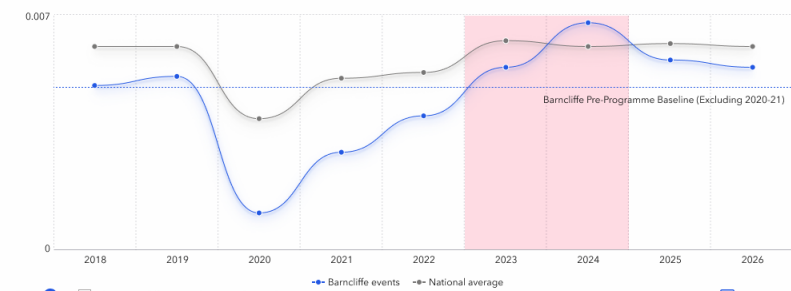


Key Outcomes

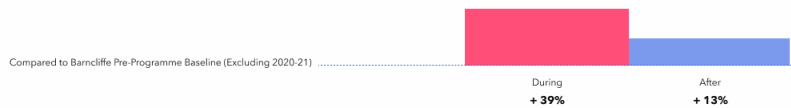
Explore the legacy of Barnclyffe 2024 in terms of outcomes for cultural participation and the cultural sector

Compare to: **National Average** Fine-tune your comparison by selecting similar regions or refining the national average by area type

Events per capita Explore further by segmenting by sub-sector, locality, organisation size and more [Explore](#)



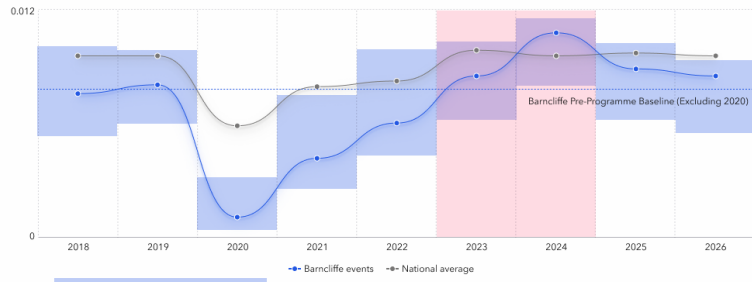
View Data [Export](#)



Cultural participation per capita

Explore further by segmenting by sub-sector, locality, organisation size and more

[Explore](#)



About Show Barnclyffe regional variance by ward [View Data](#) [Export](#)

Compared to Barnclyffe Pre-Programme Baseline (Excluding 2020-21)

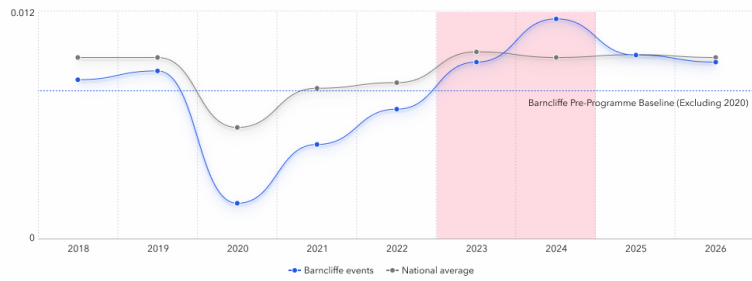
During **+39%**

After **+13%**

Sector resilience

Explore further by segmenting by sub-sector, locality, organisation size and more

[Explore](#)



About Show Barnclyffe regional variance by ward [View Data](#) [Export](#)

Compared to Barnclyffe Pre-Programme Baseline (Excluding 2020-21)

During **+39%**

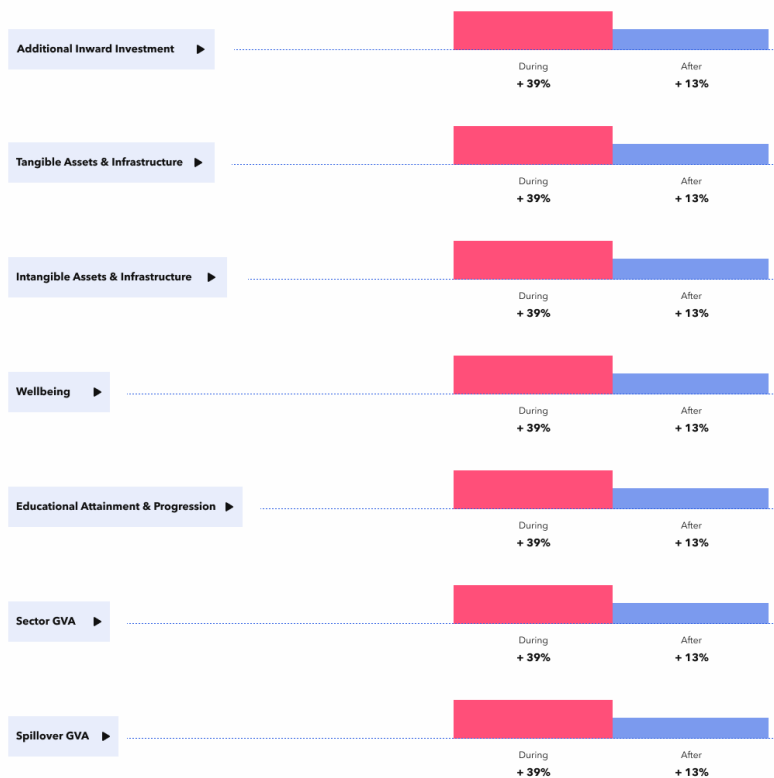
After **+13%**

Impact

Explore the impact of Barnclyffe 2024 on key economic and social indicators.

Refine how you view change by selecting absolute change or percentage and choosing what you are comparing against, from Barnclyffe's baseline, national trends or another region's change in the same period:

compared to



Holistic View of a locality



[Data Hub](#)

[Resources](#)

[About](#)



Local Authority

Barncliffe | A Journey

Explore Barncliffe's cultural ecosystems from city centre to countryside—one bus stop at a time.

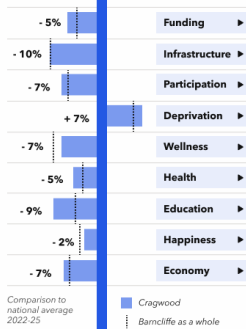
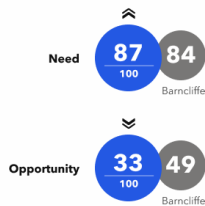
This interactive dashboard uses the Ridings 256 route as a storytelling device to reveal how cultural participation, economic contribution, and wellbeing correlate across Barncliffe's diverse communities.



Cragwood

Cragwood is a densely populated, working-class suburb on the edge of Barncliffe, characterised by higher levels of deprivation, lower cultural participation, and a predominantly younger, ethnically diverse population.

Overview of Cragwood



Voices from Cragwood

- "Volunteering at Unity Hall has helped me feel part of something again."
- "Most things happen in town – there's not much round here unless you drive."
- "I loved the Eid lights in the park last year – that felt really special."
- "Costs add up – tickets, bus fare, food... it's not realistic every month."
- "It feels like it's not for people like me, to be honest."

Cultural Assets in Cragwood

- Cragwood Unity Hall**
Public Funded | Small | Community Centre
- Cragwood Lane Library**
Public Funded | Small | Library
- The Sidings**
Earned Income | Small | Music
- Al-Noor Cultural & Education Centre**
Contributed Income | Small | Religious Centre
- St. Aidan's Fellowship Centre**
Contributed Income | Small | Religious Centre
- Whinshaw Park**
Public Funded | Small | Open Air Space

Ask about Cragwood
e.g. How have volunteer rates changed since 2022?

Cragwood Case Study



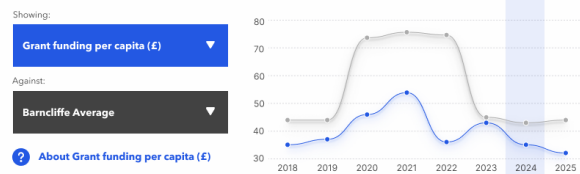
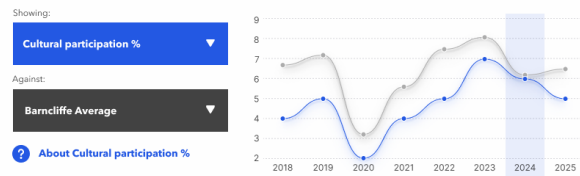
Increasing participation in Cragwood Unity Hall

Discover the results of a specific program to engage at this community centre

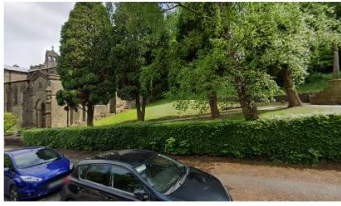
[Find out more](#)

Change over time

Compare trends in Cragwood across multiple metrics with the national average or another area for context.



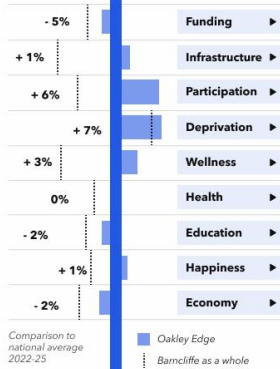
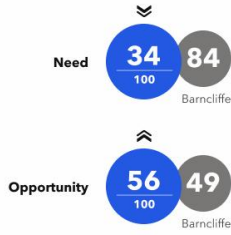
[Explore more](#)



Oakley Edge

Oakley Edge is an affluent, predominantly White British suburb of Barncliffe, characterised by high home ownership, older residents, and strong cultural participation through established arts and heritage groups. ✨

Overview of Oakley Edge



Comparison to national average 2022-25

■ Oakley Edge
⋯ Barncliffe as a whole

Voices from Oakley Edge

- “The book festival is always a highlight of the year. It brings the whole village out.”
- “It can feel a little exclusive if you don't already know someone involved.”
- “The theatre group has been part of my life for 20 years. It's like a second family.”
- “I love the gallery – it's small, but the quality is excellent.”
- “The events are lovely, but it's the same faces every time.”

Cultural Assets in Oakley Edge

- Oakley Arts Guild**
Earned Income Small Community Group
- Edgewood Theatre Society**
Earned Income Small Amateur Dramatics
- The Oakley Heritage Centre**
Public Funded Small Museum
- Oakley Book Festival**
Public Funded Small Festival Literature
- Barncliffe Chamber Ensemble**
Earned Income Small Music
- The Old Mill Gallery**
Contributed Income Small Gallery
- St. Mark's Church Hall**
Contributed Income Small Religious Centre

Ask about Oakley Edge
e.g. How have volunteer rates changed since 2022?

Oakley Edge Case Study



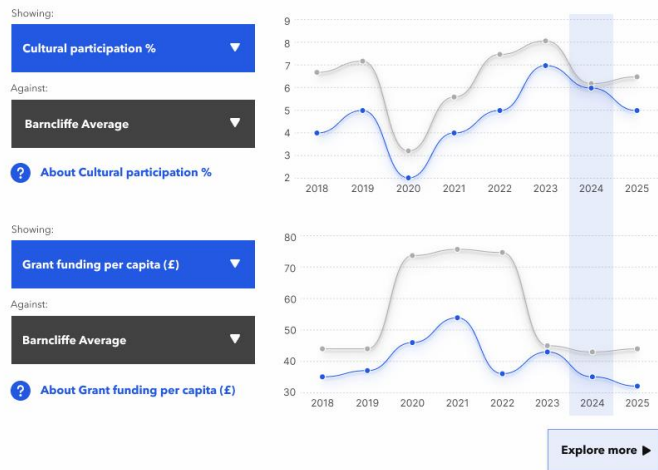
Broadening the reach of Edgewood Theatre Society

Discover the results of a specific program to engage more broadly by this amateur dramatics society.

[Find out more](#)

Change over time

Compare trends in Oakley Edge across multiple metrics with the national average or another area for context.



[Explore more](#)