

AHRC Creative Communities

Toolkit Module 1: Community R&D How to take part in R&D at a local level

AHRC Creative Communities is a major research programme funded by the **Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)** and hosted by **Northumbria University**, exploring how co-created culture can enhance belonging, address regional inequality, deliver devolution, and break down barriers to opportunity with communities in devolved settings across all 4 nations of the UK.

The **Creative Communities Toolkit** will unlock programme learning for creative communities, empowering them to tackle shared challenges through new cultural R&D and to better engage with cross-sector stakeholders in collaborative methodologies.



Arts and
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What is a Creative Community?



A Creative Community describes a place-based, cross-sector R&D collaboration that brings together diverse partners with the shared objective to generate economic and social value through the delivery of new culture activity.



The AHRC Creative Communities Deep Dive Report demonstrates the value of creative communities and how they create a sustainable R&D ecosystem through cross-sector collaboration in pursuit of a shared goal.



What are the Key Features of a Creative Community?

- ✓ Collaborative creating and structuring
- ✓ Place-based outward looking focus
- ✓ Participation of local communities with cross-sector (sometimes unlikely) allies
- ✓ Shared leadership processes
- ✓ Openness to experimentation and failure, modification and risk-taking



Creative Communities and Place

Activity often occurs around local spaces like a community centre, heritage or arts site, enabling new social, cultural, digital and economic networks between sectors and organisations that share similar interests or challenges.

What is a Creative Community?

**R&D
(UKRI) +
Community**

Government

Third Sector

Private Sector

= Creative Communities

**= Education & skills
health & wellbeing
civic pride & belonging
innovation and growth**

**= Resilient sustainable
equitable communities
across the UK**

UK Creative Communities

Five AHRC Creative Communities programme **Community Innovation Practitioners (CIPs)** were embedded in collaborative cross-sector research in devolved settings across the 4 nations in 2023/24. Read their case studies or listen to their podcast episodes to find out more.



Áine Brady used creative methods in Northern Ireland to address legacies of community trauma:



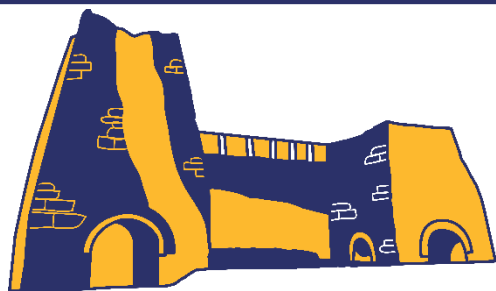
Case Study

Podcast



Create. Act. Share.

Creative Communities
PODCAST

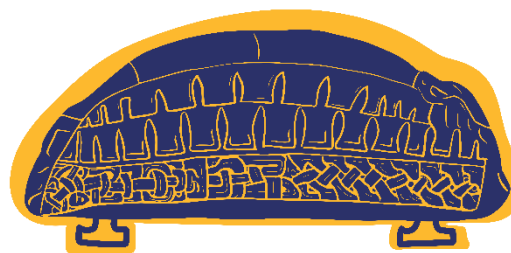


Alexander Langlands built community skills through heritage assets and sustainable place making in Wales:



Case Study

Podcast



Gaston Welisch employed design-led and partner-driven practice to form a community catalyst in Scotland:



Case Study

Podcast

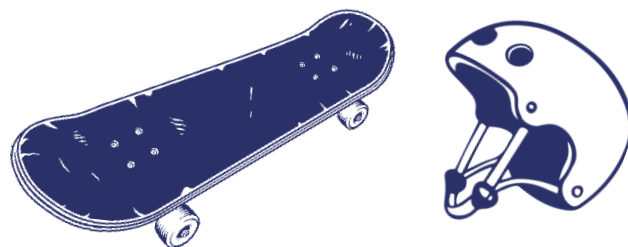


Georgina Aasgaard co-created musical performances in Liverpool for community health & wellbeing:



Case Study

Podcast



Jim Donaghey used video methods to spotlight grassroots skatepark culture in Northern Ireland:



Case Study

Podcast



What is Co-Creation?

Co-creation is a collaborative approach where the people who use something are empowered to make it. In co-creation, research is done with a community, rather than to a community; all cross-sector collaborators are of equal importance in providing individual expertise.

By harnessing co-creation methods, Creative Communities can work together to generate new cultural R&D.



The central goal of co-creation is innovation, supported by values such as equity and diversity, accessibility, mutual benefit and reciprocity between collaborators.



Our **Community Innovation Practitioners** 2023/24 applied co-creation in their creative communities to tackle shared goals across the 4 nations. Listen to the **Creative Communities podcast** online to learn more.

Co-Creation Aims

Co-Creation Solutions

Investing in overcoming these barriers – by rethinking funding, partnerships and models of development – is crucial if we are to harness the innovative potential of co-creation.

Research, development and innovation in culture are vital to address the contexts, challenges and opportunities that face the UK today.



The key features of effective co-creation are:

There can also be challenges in using co-creation:

Community:

In co-creation, research is done with a community, rather than to a community

Relationships:

Relationships take time to build and there can be uncertainty when defining roles and accountability in multi-partner collaborative teams

Collaboration:

All collaborators are of equal importance in providing individual expertise

Language:

Differences in language can alienate collaborators

Context:

Collaborators come together over shared goals to create something meaningful that is dependent upon unique contexts

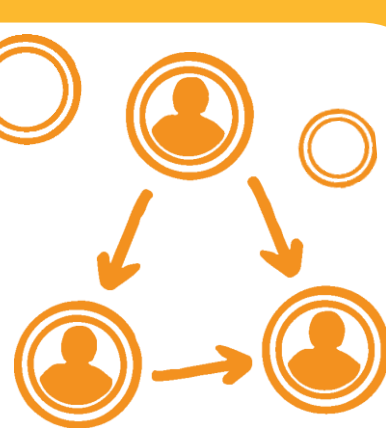
‘Community Washing’ or ‘Co-Washing’:

The exploitative adoption of terms like ‘community’ and ‘collaboration’ by those in positions of power to appear equitable



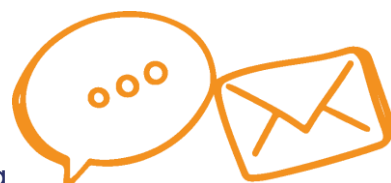
Research and Development

By facilitating closer working between communities, academics, government, third and private sector partners we can create an agile, resilient and sustainable ecosystem of R&D through creative cooperation in pursuit of a shared goal or challenge. This can be harnessed through three key actions:



Diversifying R&D

Convene: Through community engagement, participation and co-creation we can develop a more diverse base of researchers to grow and diversify cultural R&D.



Bringing communities, third and private sector partners together and engaging them in the entirety of the research cycle can bring new skills, experience, knowledge and networks to R&D and maximise our resource by working more closely together around shared challenges.

Empowering R&D

Catalyse: By placing communities at the heart of the design, implementation and evaluation of culture, the Creative Community model provides a flexible framework within which public, private and civil society organisations can participate together.

With meaningful cross-sector partnerships and a commitment to community co-creation we can create the conditions where research and innovation in culture become by all and for all.



Growing R&D

Contribute: By bringing together diverse cross-sector partners Creative Communities promote access to knowledge sources, build capacity around culture and R&D and empower communities to create new resources and redeploy existing ones.

Through sharing knowledge, resources and networks, Creative Communities create added value and generate economic, social and cultural spillovers for research partners and wider society.



AHRC Creative Communities

What would you like to learn more about?

How others have built a creative community?

Our [Community Innovation Practitioners 2023/24](#) share innovative ideas and inspiring stories from their research as part of creative communities in devolved contexts across the 4 nations, through [case studies](#), [policy papers](#), and their co-created [podcast series](#).

How to take part in R&D as a creative community?

The 2026 [Co-Lab Policy Network Awards](#) will create new capacity for cross-sector collaborative exchange of policy ideas relating to culture and devolution (regional and national) in the context of the UK Government Missions.

How to share and raise the profile of your cultural R&D?

[Creative Communities Toolkit Modules 2, 3 and 4](#): Find out how to share and raise the profile of your research as a creative community. These Creative Communities Toolkit modules can help you to understand different ways to communicate and engage diverse audiences.



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