

LUTON *arts*

Needs Analysis



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**Funded by
UK Government**

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01 Executive summary

01 Executive Summary

The Programme has three key delivery strands:

Commissioning
Resource Hub
Celebration

The Luton Programme sought an individual or organisation with experience of the arts and culture sector to carry out a needs analysis to inform and shape the delivery of the Luton Place Partnerships Programme funded funded by Arts Council England, Luton Rising, UKSPF and Arts and Culture Strategy group partners. This is a report arising from that commissioned needs analysis. The needs analysis consultancy was awarded to Variable Matter. Variable Matter is a leading arts, placemaking and strategy studio directed by Dr David Shearing and Mathew Russell.

The Place Partnerships Programme offers Luton the opportunity to work at grassroots level with the community, understanding need and supporting local artists and makers to thrive whilst also strengthening strategic partnerships and delivering engaging work for the community of Luton to participate in and enjoy.

A number of existing data and reports were reviewed. Stakeholder interviews were undertaken with a diverse range of individuals and organisations (arts organisations, funding bodies, community leaders). A survey was undertaken, targeted at local artists and creatives. The survey was based on the initial learning from the stakeholder interviews. 71 responses to the survey were received. Two consultation workshops were undertaken at Luton Central Library. 14 participants attended the workshops.

The report gives an overview of the context in Luton and of the context for culture in Luton. It extracts from the cultural strategy detail of the offer to local artists and creatives and describes the relevant Luton Programme Theory of Change outcomes too.

The report acknowledges that some good work has already been undertaken to shape the Programme in response to the emerging recommendations. It is also noted that the recommendations inevitably extend beyond the three areas of the Programme focus originally listed.

The report includes the detailed findings arising from the stakeholder interviews, survey and workshops.

The report includes the detailed findings arising from the **stakeholder interviews, survey and workshops.**

73% of survey respondents were individuals (artist, creative practitioner, freelancer or producer/curator). When asked about easier access to commissioning or funding opportunities, a simpler application process (58%), step by step support and guidance (44%) and clearer information (39%) were the priorities most selected. Mentoring from experienced people (48%), help with finding collaborators or partners (46%) and one to one guidance (42%) would most help with the successful delivery of activity. Career development (49%), follow up funding (48%) and connections to other commissioning opportunities (41%) were the priorities in relation to longer term support.

Funding application support (46%), access to space (40%) and marketing/audience development support (28%) were the top three resources selected. When asked about sharing work with others, engaging new audiences (62%) was by far the highest result, compared to building future partners (37%) and championing Luton as a place (37%) as the next most popular answers.

The workshop discussions focused on understanding funding, accessing space, knowing about opportunities, being supported to skill up and promoting the offer.

During stakeholder interviews, stakeholders were asked to reference and suggest similar programmes in comparable communities. The main relevant comparator that stakeholders referenced, focusing on local artists and creatives, was Bradford Producing Hub. The report describes that programme and relevant learnings from its final evaluation report.

The report concludes by setting out 28 detailed recommendations, covering the programme overall, commissions, the resources hub and celebratory event.

Programme

The recommendations about the programme as a whole, focus on the workings of the Arts and Culture Strategy group, the need for a programme exit strategy, seeking clarity around the talent development offer/networks/audience development objectives etc, and associated pieces of works required such as auditing access to space and the effectiveness of the Local Cultural Education Partnership – and the relationship of these topics to the Luton Programme.

Commissions

The recommendations about commissions are mainly practical – focusing on the necessity for a framework of care, the different levels of grant giving, the importance of step by step support and the need for tailored support alongside the grant giving.

Resource Hub

The recommendations about the resources hub point towards the centrality of human resource to the offer, and suggest the retitling of this strand, the role of a website and the pooling and utilisation of existing resources.

Celebration

Finally, the recommendations about the celebratory event suggest the need to agree or prioritise the objective of the event, and address the relationship to audience development and existing event activity infrastructure.

Of the 28 recommendations, the five most significant priorities are proposed as:

Creating an exit strategy for the programme

Addressing the issue of access to space

Developing the work of the Arts and Culture Strategy Group

Focusing the hub on the offer of human resources

Agreeing or prioritising the objective of the celebratory event

2.1 Introduction

Transforming lives through Arts, Culture and Heritage is a key strand of Luton's Inclusive Economy Strategy within the Luton 2040 vision.

The Luton Programme sought an individual or organisation with experience of the arts and culture sector to carry out a needs analysis to inform and shape the delivery of the Luton Place Partnerships Programme funded by Arts Council England.

The Place Partnerships Programme offers Luton the opportunity to work at grassroots level with the community, understanding need and supporting local artists and makers to thrive whilst also strengthening strategic partnerships and delivering engaging work for the community of Luton to participate in and enjoy.

In 2020, Luton refreshed Harnessing Momentum, its 10-year strategy for Arts, Culture and Creative Industries. This strategy is delivered in partnership by creative leaders across the town through the Arts and Culture Strategy group. The refreshed Arts and Cultural vision is a town transformed by vibrant arts, culture and creativity that brightens the lives and life chances of everyone in Luton. To enable a diverse cultural offer that empowers people to dream and aspire, supports communities to grow strong and sustainable and develops a vibrant, inclusive creative economy that supports everyone in Luton to thrive.

In recent years, Luton has benefitted from substantial investment from Arts Council England and other external sponsorship to support the development of arts, culture and creatives. Over this time, the partnership has continued to grow, and we are now working towards a comprehensive Place Partnership programme, with secured funding from Arts Council England.

2.1 Introduction

£5 billion of inward investment, making it the fastest growing economy outside of London by 2024

Over the next three years, Luton will experience significant transformation, including expecting more than £5 billion of inward investment, making it the fastest growing economy outside of London by 2024. This transformation, along with significant investment in place marketing will help to cement Luton as the best transport connected creative cluster outside of London, with unrivalled links to the UK economy and Europe. Through our local creative economy, Luton has access to the benefits of an industry that contributes £111.7 billion annually to the UK economy. In addition, the opportunities created by educational pathways and participation cultural activity will help enrich the lives of our 225,300 residents and enable all of them to thrive.

Luton Borough Council has secured funding and investment from Arts Council England, Luton Council and Luton Rising to deliver a two-and-a-half-year Place Partnership for Arts and Culture with the Luton Arts and Culture Strategy group. This is a partnership Programme where the Arts and Culture Strategy group secured the investment and Luton Borough Council is holding the funding on their behalf.

Transforming lives through arts, culture and heritage is a key strand in delivering Luton Borough Council's town shared vision for Luton 2040 – a healthy, fair and sustainable town where everyone can thrive, and no-one must live in poverty.

The Programme aims are:

- **Improve access, relevance and partnership in arts and culture across Luton**
- **Grow creative development and educational pathways in the creative sector**
- **Harnessing creativity for economic and social development**



The Programme has three key delivery strands

Commissioning

Local artists will be able to apply for commissioning funds to produce artistic responses. A proportion of the commissions will be asked to respond to themes around wellbeing and cultural education. The aim is to commission a creative initiative in all of Luton's twenty wards. A wide range of creative practice that reflects and responds to local communities will be considered for these commissions.

Resource Hub

The resource hub will be created with information and tools to support artist development. This will take the form of both online resources and live sessions. We will be conducting a needs analysis to inform how the resource hub is developed.

Celebration event

As part of the programme an event or series of events will be delivered to celebrate fifty years of Luton Carnival, Hat Parade Centenary and a hundred and fifty years of Borough status.

This needs analysis aims to identify the requirements, challenges, and aspirations of local artists and creatives in Luton.

Key Objectives:

1. Understand the Needs of Local Artists and Creatives

Identify gaps in resources, networks, and opportunities for artistic and professional development. Explore barriers faced by diverse groups, including emerging, mid-career, and established artists.

2. Inform the Design of a Resource Hub

Define what resources, spaces, and facilities are most desired. Evaluate preferred models for training, networking, and collaboration support.

3. Shape an Accessible Commissioning Programme

Identify how commissioning processes can be made more inclusive. Explore interest in specific themes or types of work to commission.

4. Guide a Celebratory Event

Discover how local creatives would like their work to be showcased and celebrated. Assess interest in formats such as exhibitions, performances, or festivals.

Target Audience: Local artists and creatives in all disciplines.

Arts organisations, collectives, and independent practitioners.

Underrepresented and marginalised groups within the local creative community.

Key Deliverables:

Needs Analysis Report

A detailed report summarising findings and highlighting the needs of Luton's creative community.

Recommendations

Clear proposals for the resource hub, commissioning programme, and celebratory event, including practical steps for implementation.

Engagement Data

Quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys, focus groups, and workshops.



VARIABLE | MATTER

The Luton Programme Needs Analysis consultants

The needs analysis consultancy was awarded to Variable Matter. Variable Matter is a leading arts, placemaking and strategy studio directed by Dr David Shearing and Mathew Russell. With extensive experience, Variable Matter has delivered multi million-pound projects, organisational transformation and established strategic cultural networks, helping shape the cultural identity of several places.

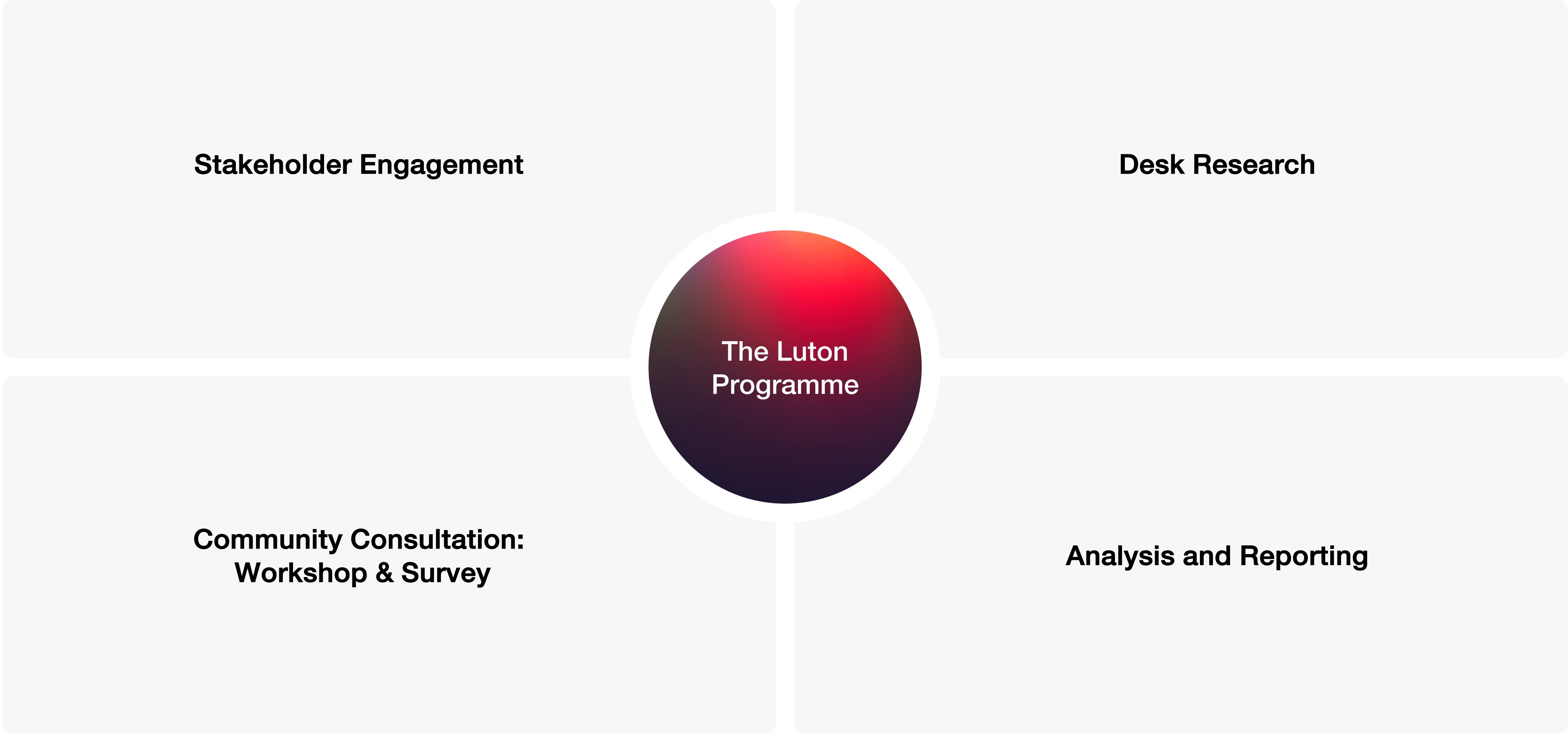
Mathew Russell is a cultural consultant, Executive Director of Variable Matter and Director of Havering London.

Dr David Shearing is Senior Lecturer in Design-led Experience and Placemaking at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Artistic Director of Variable Matter and Director of Havering London.

www.variablematter.com

03 Needs analysis methodology

3.1 Needs analysis methodology



3.1 Needs analysis methodology

1. Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were undertaken with the following diverse range of individuals and organisations (arts organisations, funding bodies, community leaders):

Emma Van Nieuwenburgh, The Luton Programme
Nathan Curry and Emily Eversden, Tangled Feet
Claudette Whittingham and Pascal, UKCCA
Lindsey Pugh, Revoluton Arts
Teela Hughes, Music 24
Marie Kirbyshaw and Ashley Bishop, Luton Culture Trust
David Lloyd, Next Generation Youth Theatre
Davina Christmas, Arts Council England
Emma Gill, University of Bedfordshire
Harriet Hardie, Full House
Karen Perkins, Bedfordshire & Luton Community Foundation
Kate Atkinson, Clore Leadership
Corey Albone, Luton Borough Council
Imrana Mahmood, independent artist
Teresa Burns, Homegrown Festival
Scott Eastwood, Luton Borough Council
Jakub Rokita, Luton Culture Trust
Matthew Jones, 1DegreeEast

2. Desktop Research

The following existing data and reports were reviewed in the process of preparing this report.

Local Insight (Arts Council England / Five 10 Twelve) Culture and Place Data Explorer Detailed Report for Luton (26 February 2025)

Harnessing Momentum - Luton's strategy for Arts, Culture and Creative Industries, 2017 – 2027

The Luton Programme National Lottery Project Grants Place Partnership project funding expression of interest

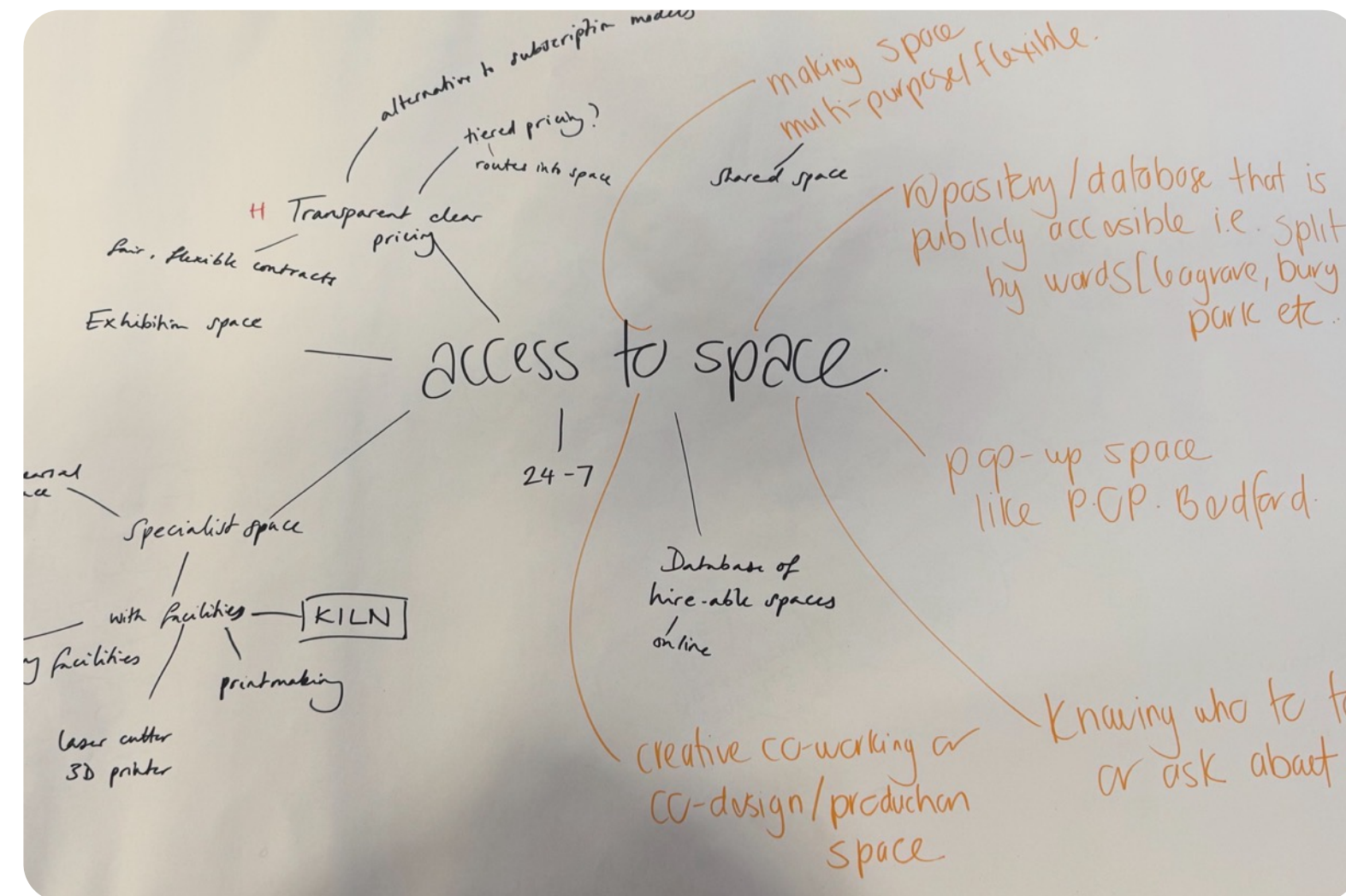
The Luton Programme National Lottery Project Grants Place Partnership project funding application

The Luton Programme Work Plan

The Luton Programme Theory of Change

Arts and Culture Ecology Needs Report 2023

3.1 Needs analysis methodology



3. Workshops

Two consultation workshops were undertaken at Luton Central Library on Tuesday 11 March 2025. These were held from 2 - 4pm and 6 - 8pm. They were facilitated by Dr David Shearing (Variable Matter), Imrana Mahmood (independent artist and facilitator) and documented by Sophie Carpenter (Designer and illustrator) and Mathew Russell (Variable Matter). The workshops were widely promoted across the promotional and social media channels of the Arts and Cultural Strategy group partners. 14 participants attended the workshops.

4. Survey

A survey was undertaken, targeted at local artists and creatives. The survey was designed by Dr David Shearing and Mathew Russell based on the initial learning from the stakeholder interviews and approved by Emma Van Nieuwenburgh. It was launched on Tuesday 18 February and remained opened until Tuesday 18 March 2025. The opportunity to complete the survey was widely promoted across the promotional and social media channels of the Arts and Cultural Strategy group partners. 71 responses to the survey were received.

DELIVERING THE LUTON PROGRAMME

We're gathering insights from **artists, creatives, and communities** in Luton to shape the delivery of the Luton Programme.

Your input will inform how we **fund and support** creative work, **develop and nurture** artistic talent, and **celebrate and showcase** local creativity. This is your chance to influence the resources, opportunities, and events that will help Luton's creative sector thrive.

The survey is designed to be quick and easy to complete, and it does not collect any personal information. We are only collecting postcodes to ensure that we are reaching the whole of Luton.

Start press Enter ↵

🕒 Takes X minutes

04 Luton context

4.1 Luton context

There are 225,261 people in Luton.

Luton's Index of Multiple Deprivation rank: 12,142

→ More deprived than both East of England (18,824) and England overall (16,356)

22.86% of adults in Luton have no qualifications, compared to 18.08% in England

54.81% of Luton's population is from non-White ethnic groups, compared to 18.95% across England

36.99% of Luton's population is Asian, significantly above England's 9.61%

23.24% of Luton's population is under 16, higher than England's 18.56%

4.2 Culture in Luton

Luton has lower levels of engagement with the arts and a significantly smaller creative and cultural sector compared to regional and national averages, with a recent increase in per-head Arts Council England funding.

1.54% of Luton's employees work in the creative and cultural sectors, significantly lower than 5.05% in England

5.84% of Luton's businesses are in the creative and cultural sectors, compared to 9.3% in England

82.88% of people in Luton attended arts activities in person, lower than 90.42% in England

525 creative and cultural businesses out of 9,030 total in Luton.

4.2 Culture in Luton

£14,135.63 was spent on Cultural and Heritage services per 1,000 people in Luton in 2022–23, up from £12,318.76 in 2018–19.

2023/24 Arts Council England Investment by Category

National Lottery Project Grants	£339,620
Music Education Hubs	£383,858
Strategic Development Funds	£14,299
National Portfolio Organisations	£890,393
Creative People and Places	£327,500
Other Investment Funds	£5,000

Arts Council England’s priority place shared objectives for Luton are:

Increase investment into the Luton cultural sector through collaborative working Accelerate the development of cultural leaders in Luton

Coordinate place activation activities that animate Luton, engages its communities and increases cultural tourism

Develop an improved network for cultural creatives and investment in resources in order to grow and retain the talent pipeline for creatives

Luton Borough Council spent £14,135.63 on Cultural and Heritage services per 1,000 population between 2022 to 2023. This is an increase from the £12,318.76 spent in Luton per 1,000 population between 2018 to 2019. Luton Borough Council spends more than the average for East of England, but less than the average for England.

Luton has received £20,000,000 from Levelling Up Funding to date.

Between April 2013–October 2023, Luton received £28,422.11 per 1,000 population of National Heritage Lottery funding.

£8.63 per head in Arts Council England funding was awarded to Luton in 2023/24 – higher than the East of England average, but still lower than England's.

Harnessing Momentum

Luton has a strategy for Arts, Culture and Creative Industries, which runs from 2017-2027, entitled 'Harnessing Momentum' (refreshed in March 2021). The vision is 'a town transformed by vibrant arts, culture and creativity and that brightens the lives and life chances of everyone in Luton'.

The three key outcomes outlined in the strategy demonstrate an ambition to welcome a new era of creative engagement and prosperity to Luton.

The ambition is that by 2027 Luton will be:

A place with a prosperous creative economy with an inclusive creative industry and an arts and cultural offer that transforms the town centre and brings investment, business, new residents and visitors to the town.

A place enriched through diverse cultural activity that supports residents and communities to be happy, healthy and to thrive and enables the development of social capital, cross cultural understanding and intercultural collaboration.

A place with a robust creative education offer that supports social mobility, prepares children, young people and adults for the jobs of the future and enables children to grow into innovative, free thinking, imaginative adults.

4.2 Strategic Context: Local Artists and Creatives in Luton

‘Harnessing Momentum’ describes the following intended activity:

‘The Culture Trust Skills and Talent Pipeline will transform how people are supported outside of formal educational settings and given genuine opportunities to access new skills in the creative industries.

The new Hatworks co-working space will provide studio and managed workshop for diverse, emerging cultural and creative industries organisations to encourage artist development and the relocation of artists, practitioners and creative industries to Luton.

Tangled Feet’s talent development programme will grow the capacity of local artists to develop innovative participatory outdoor work.

A new creative skills programme will be developed and will include training, mentoring and apprenticeships. Delivered by a range of partners this will be designed to prepare people for the jobs of the future, focussing on emerging technologies, createch and digital solutions. This offer will be accessible to adults including those that require training following redundancy.

The University of Bedfordshire will continue to offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the Creative Arts and work closely with a partnership of schools to support creative practice in the classroom.



4.2 Strategic Context: Local Artists and Creatives in Luton

A partnership with Adult Community Learning will be explored, advocating for the inclusion of creative activity within their community learning programme. This will develop employability as well as provide a lifelong learning offer which will enrich lives outside of the goal of employability. Local providers will be supported to provide this learning offer.

The Creative Forum and the newly established Luton Creative Leaders programme will support the development of local artists. Artists and arts worker development will be an important focus with diversity a key aspiration.

Artist development programmes will challenge existing definitions of the arts and be open to people working in cultural activity that is not historically categorised as art. Programmes will seek to reach new creatives and delve deep into communities to recognise what creativity means to them and how we can support it to flourish.

This strategy supports the programming and commissioning of art that is representative of Luton, has local relevance and helps achieve its outcomes.'



4.2 Theory of Change: Local Artists and Creatives



Theory of Change

The Luton Programme is intended to transform arts and culture delivery in Luton. Harnessing the energy of the creativity community, it will create and delivery activity which will grow in scale, ambition and reach so that by 2026 Luton is ready to make the most of the significant developments coming to Luton.

Within the Luton Programme Theory of Change these are the relevant outcomes:

Short-term outcomes are:

**Sector enable to be ‘commission ready’
More and wider range of people making and participating
Toolkits disseminated and training delivered**

Medium term outcomes are:

**New work presented across the community
More investment secured for projects**

Long-term outcomes:

**Increased access to cultural experiences across Luton
More relevant cultural programme leads to increased participation
Cultural sector and workforce has increased resilience and flexibility**

To note, the Luton Programme Theory of Change is currently in the process of being refreshed.

05 Findings

Professional Artist & Creative Practitioner Needs



Creative Ecology

Representation

Diverse groups don't feel represented

Audiences

Cultural and creative activity not always recognised as such by communities

Silos

People work in silos and within complex dynamics of co-operation

Disconnect

Disconnect between leadership and larger organisations, and freelancers and grassroots groups

Development

Lack of clear and transparent creatives development framework

Employment

Insufficient link between education and employment, lack of pathways, apprenticeships/training

Duplication

Concerns about duplication, actionable activity and purpose of networks – Creative Forum, Producers Network, Creative Industries Network

LCEP

Local Cultural Education Partnership not operating

Regeneration

Feeling that culture not connected to regeneration, no tourism strategy

Space

Disconnect between those expressing lack of space & those wanting to maximise use of space available/being developed

Youth Voice

Lack of youth voice

Investment

Sense Luton is under invested in, but not evidenced

Arts and Culture Strategy Group



Comparators and Learning

Underlying Perspectives

Learn

Need to learn from previous Luton projects

Others

Need to learn from other places – few have identified examples

Fairness

Work of the Fairness Taskforce

Producing

Bradford Producing Hub

Commissioning

Imagine Luton commissioning

Governance

Milton Keynes (governance)

Investment

Leicester (investment)

Consultation

A feeling of frustration, need for change, over consultation and recycling of conversations over a long period

Stop/Start

A series of stop/start initiatives and funded posts with limited long-term thinking

Sequencing

Sequencing and interdependency between programmes is key

Exit

No exit planning or clarity about who will deliver outcomes when programme finishes

Next

Need to resolve LBC Cultural Industries/Arts Development function beyond funding

Data

Unresolved issue amongst Arts and Culture Strategy group regarding data sharing

05 Findings: Stakeholder interviews

Commissioning

Existing	Existing commissioning schemes in borough which could be used
Equity	Inclusivity, equity is priority
New	Focus on the new and those who haven't previously been funded
Independent	Positivity about use of independent body to manage
Transparent	Programme needs to be transparent, easy to navigate, welcoming
Who	Need to resolve who can apply – individuals, non constituted, not self employed, is there a turnover limit
Spread	Spread of communities, characteristics and locations important
Package	Offer package of support – mentoring, signposting, space - alongside commissions
Capacity	Utilise programme to capacity build and lead to seeking funding elsewhere after
Learn	Learn from each other as commissioned parties Provide examples of what can be supported
Communication	Need extensive community communication to reach potential applicants, with lots of voluntary sector partners
Open	Build relationships - need open days, surgeries, help to develop applications
Objectives	Clarify the objectives, outcomes, expectations, what happens next for individuals but also the programme
Reporting	Needs proportionate reporting, but issues of due diligence with public money

05 Findings: Stakeholder interviews

Resource Hub

What	What it is, physical, digital, human, not to reinvent the wheel
Who	Who will host, who will maintain/keep up to date, into future too
Needs	Should respond to needs of commissioning programme as they arise
Brand	Branding is difficult – University has a skills hub
Support	Mentoring, coaching, shadowing networking, talks, peer to peer, for artists at various stages of career
Examples	Artists need to get out of Luton and learn from others and also draw on/share expertise, see examples of success in the town
Space	Offer space
Support	Consultancy to support organisations
Platform	Digital platform - make it a one stop shop, offer virtual assistance, be able to filter
Pool	Pool and link to existing resources (budget templates, contracts, insurance, DBS, PRS, policies, invoicing, risk assessments, rates of pay) locally, but also nationally (IPSOs)
Signpost	Signpost to opportunities, funding
Data	Hold latest strategic data to assist with applications and commissions
Diverse	Ensure content includes diverse examples
Childcare	Provide childcare and cover transport costs so people can access activities
Scale	Create a product to monetise elsewhere in country

05 Findings: Stakeholder interviews

Celebration

Clarity

Lack of clarity about what it is and range of varying perspectives
Sense Luton already does events well

Legacy

Clarify objective, legacy of event/s

Commissioning

Respond to commissioning programme

Present

Opportunity to bring together content made over the course of the programme, to showcase/platform, present commissions

Next

Make it about next steps, potential, invite bigger players, share evidence, use as a collective call to action

Reflect

Use for reflection and learning, including with wider sector
Some agreement about connecting to Carnival

Audiences

Some suggestion a programme over a period, an opportunity for audiences to access the Luton programme

Avoid

Avoid just town centre

Access

Ensure accessible

05 Findings:

Workshop

The workshops were widely promoted across the promotional and social media channels of the Arts and Cultural Strategy group partners. 14 participants attended the workshops.

The feedback from the workshops covered the following key themes:

- **Understanding funding** - being made aware of opportunities, obtaining support from those who had been successful sharing their stories, having jargon unpacked (a glossary of terms would be helpful), clear and simple criteria, step by step guidance, offering targeted support to first time applicants, specific access support too, workshops to support application preparation, agreeing that seed or taster funding could make a difference, support for those people who aren't successful so they still make the most of the opportunity
- **Database of space** - this is a key need, partners need to make clearer what they can offer, to make that transparent, to use empty space better, permission to work in public space, to offer within applications as in-kind support, co-working space would be helpful too, perhaps a database
- **Knowing about opportunities** - a platform sharing opportunities would be helpful (past examples referenced) particularly those outside of existing networks, a clear map of who to talk to with intros and profiles, a directory of members, effective creative led networks that avoid repetition required (online as well as physical)
- **Being supported to skill up** - with mentorship (a directory of mentors), access to business skills training, budgeting, use of social media and how to promote, physical workshops
- **Promoting the offer** - a map that can showcase the destination, a sense of open house within venues, more of a sustained offer (too many things start and then finish)



Workshop

LUTON ARTS

HELP SHAPE THE NEXT STEPS FOR CREATIVE SUPPORT IN LUTON



Help **UNDERSTANDING** funding application paperwork — breakdown of **JARGON**

JOB BOARD FOR CREATIVES
— what funding is available & where

PR & PROMO TRAINING
— get yourself heard & known!

How can you collaborate without access to **SHARED SPACE**?

CREATIVE HUB SPACE

CREATE. share work, support each other — long-term, 24/7 access

DATABASE FOR PEOPLE TO FIND SPACES

repurposing existing spaces (artist-led, like POP Bedford)

everyone thinking about **WHAT THEY CAN OFFER**

RESOURCE HUB



Step by step **GUIDANCE**

and **SUPPORT** — working with previous successful applicants, business mentor

COMMUNITY CAFE
to bounce ideas around

directory of mentors to find a **MATCH**

Access support for **NEURODIVERSITY**

inclusion for **ALL**

(NOT EVERYONE IS COMPUTER SAVVY!)

FEEDBACK FOR REJECTED APPLICATIONS — opportunity to upskill

FOLLOW ON FUNDING

Small R&D funding pots to unlock pathways to **LARGER PROJECTS**

FOOT in the DOOR FOR FIRST COMMISSIONS

building trust, making connections

COMMISSIONING PROGRAMME

Luton needs a **REBRAND!** Young, diverse, artistic population, interesting culture to tap into



Making Luton a **CREATIVE DESTINATION**

CONFERENCES, FESTIVALS

CENTRALISED PLATFORM for events in the town — **THAT EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT**

CREATIVE MAP of THE TOWN

encouraging **TOURISM**

fostering **CIVIC PRIDE**

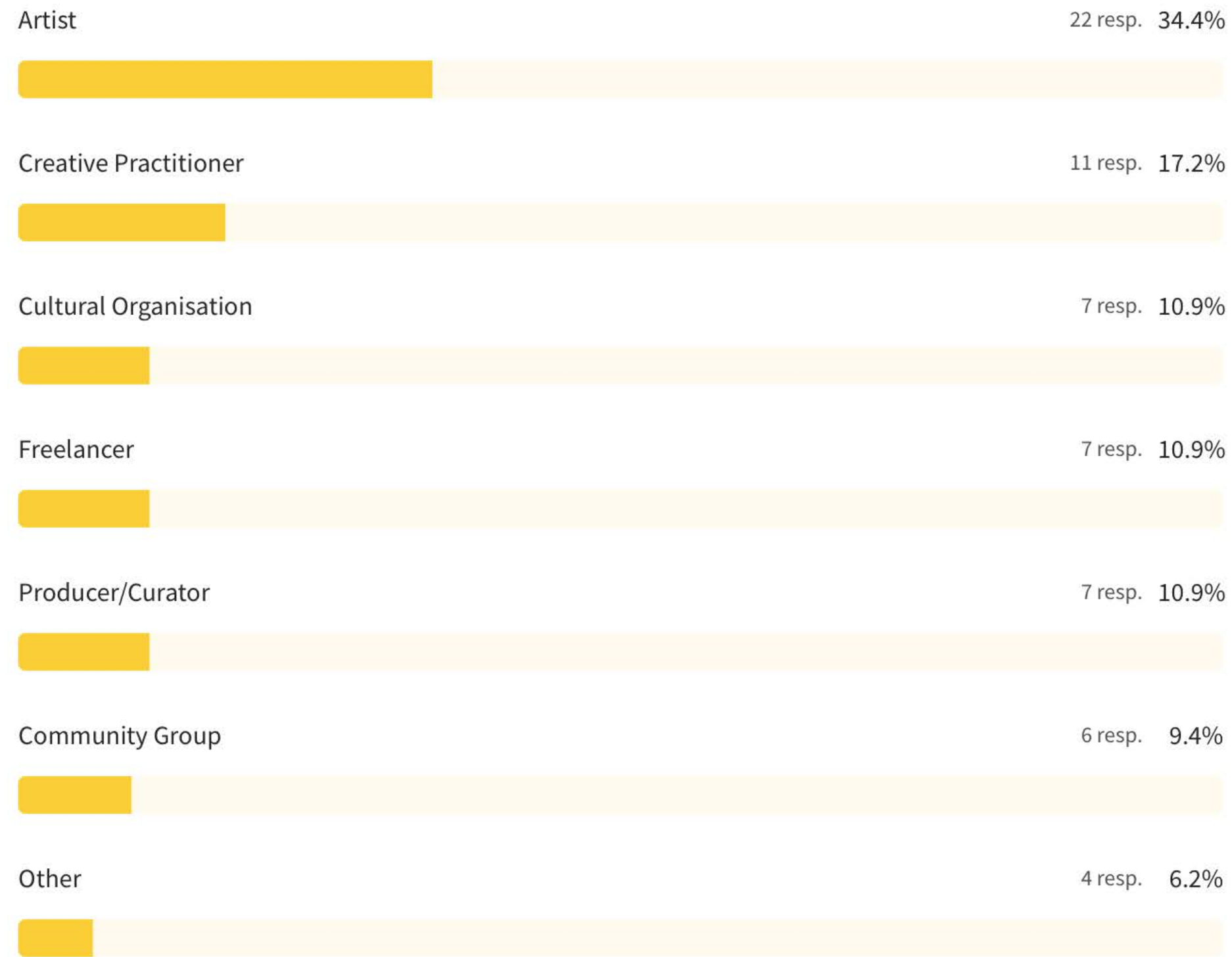
spend an afternoon in **LUTON!**

SHOWCASING

05 Findings:

Survey

How do you identify in your work?



73% of respondents were individuals (artist, creative practitioner, freelancer or producer/curator) with only 11% a cultural organisation and 9% a community group. This is a positive result in terms of the survey reaching local artists and creatives.

What would make it easier for you to access commissioning or funding opportunities?

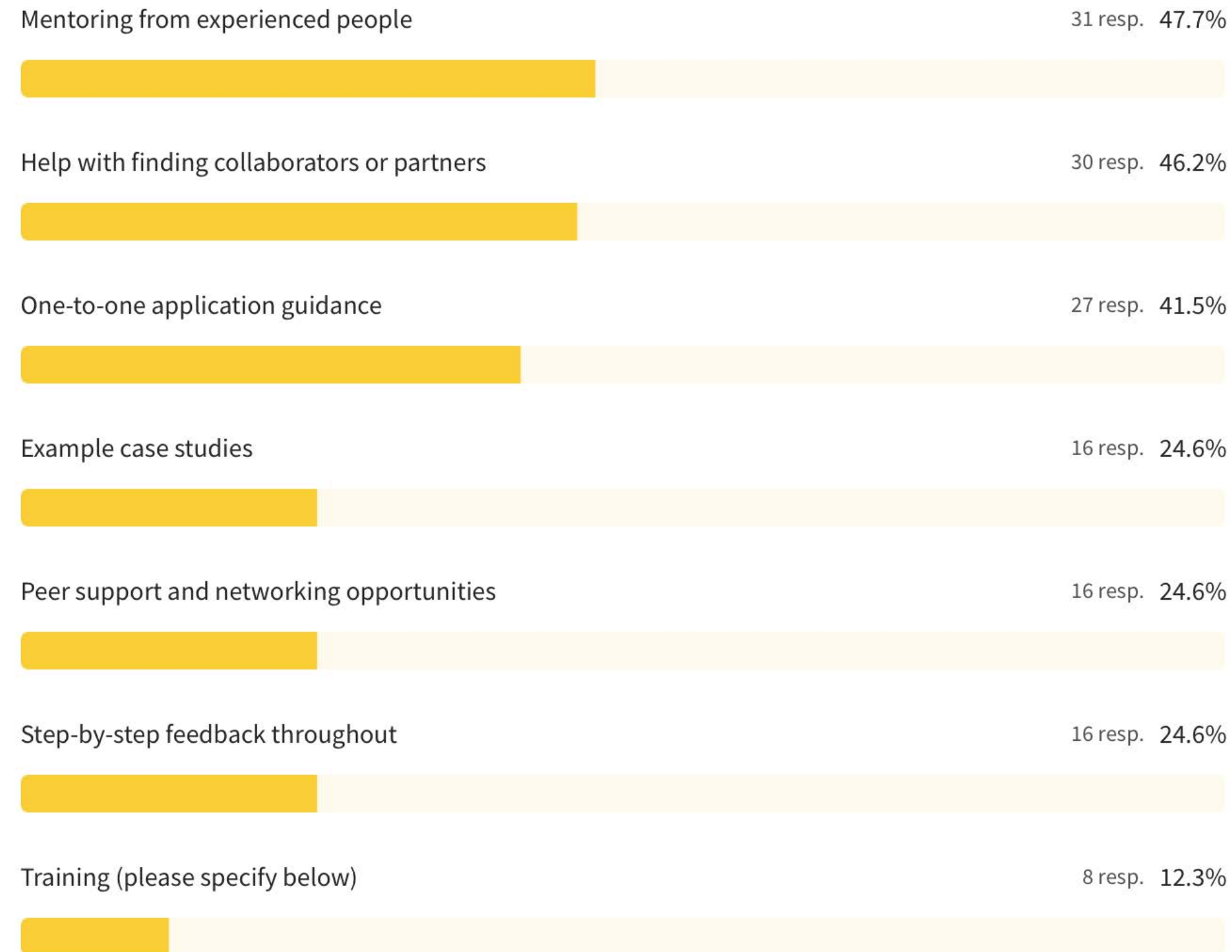


A simpler application process (58%), step by step support and guidance (44%) and clearer information (39%) were the three priorities most often selected. Time (17%) and proportionate reporting expectations (16%) were of least concern.

05 Findings:

Survey

What support would help you apply for and successfully deliver your activity?



Mentoring from experienced people (48%), help with finding collaborators or partners (46%) and one to one guidance (42%) were the three priorities most often selected, by a clear margin.

How could a commissioning programme help support you longer-term?



Career development (49%), follow up funding (48%) and connections to other commissioning opportunities (41%) were the three priorities most often selected. Skills development related suggestions, such as business and fundraising training (23%), learning how to demonstrate impact (23%) and skills development in evaluation were of less interest.

05 Findings:

Survey

What level of funding would support you in your current needs?

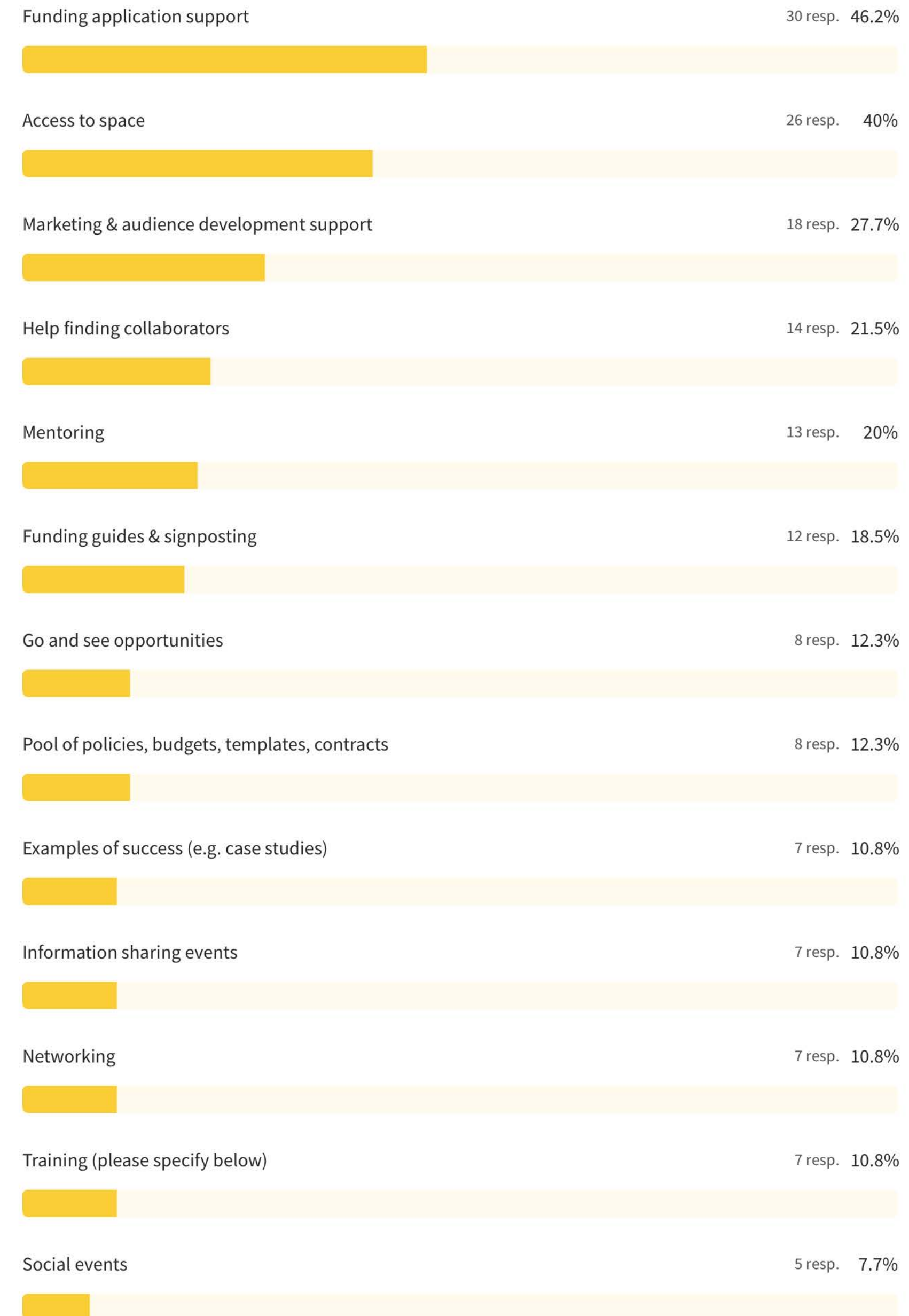
There was a significant variation in response, ranging from £250,000 to £50. The average request was circa £25,000. If you delete three higher requests (for £250,000, £200,000 and £148,000) the average request is for circa £14,000. The most repeated request was for £10,000. Only 15% of responses were for less than £5,000.

What percentage of matching funding, if any, would be appropriate for your type of activity?

The average percentage of matched funding was 25%. Only 11% suggested zero matched funding which suggests there is generally an expectation of matched funding being required.

Which resources would be most useful to help you and your work in Luton?

Funding application support (46%), access to space (40%) and marketing/audience development support (28%) are the top three resources identified. It is interesting that concepts such as Go and See opportunities (12%), pools of policies, budgets, templates, contracts (12%), case studies (11%), training (11%) are not seen as priorities.



05 Findings:

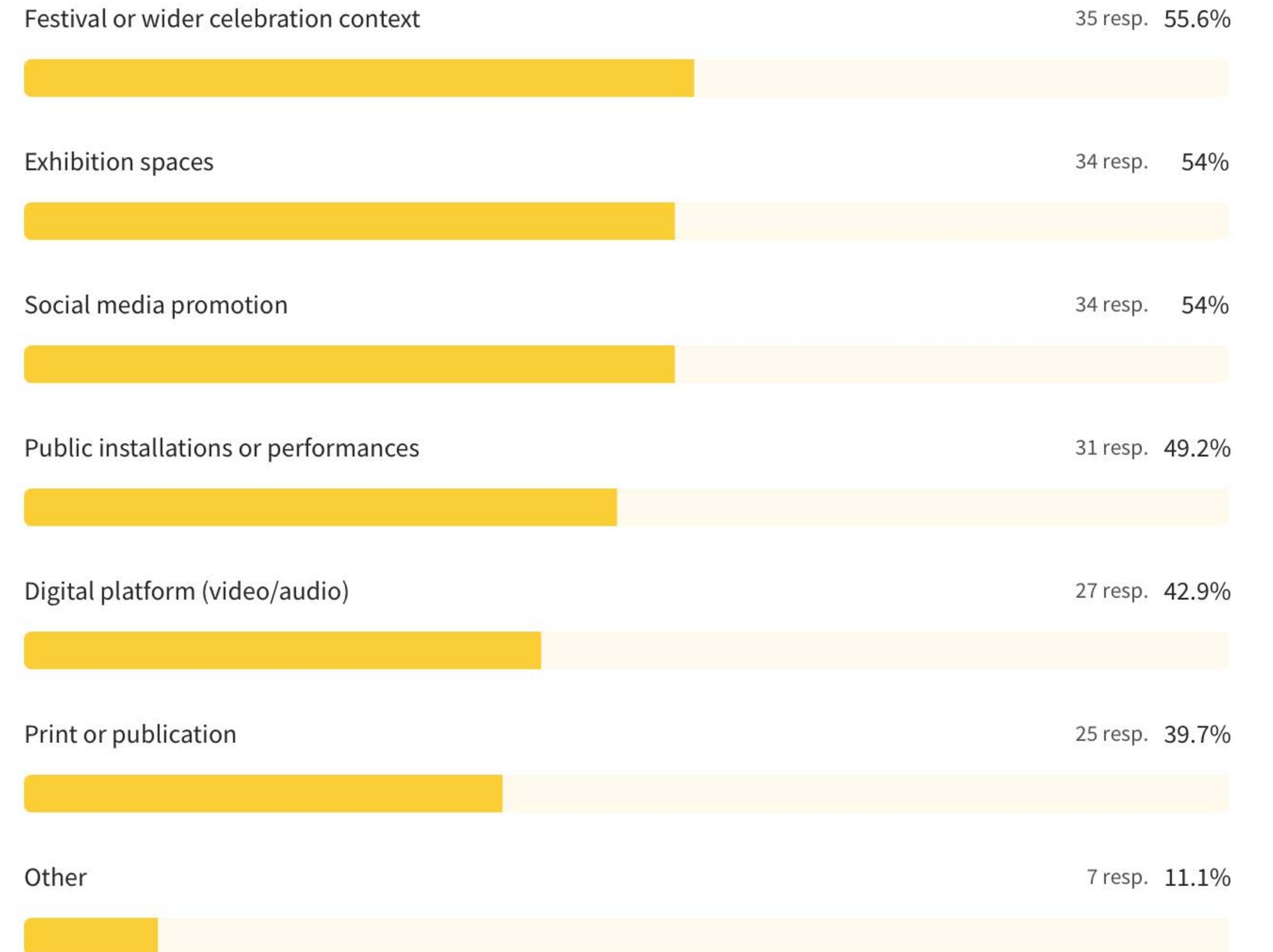
Survey

Are there any resources, support, or needs not covered by question 7, please let us know below.



There are a variety of responses, but the most common relate to space.

What platforms would suit sharing your work?

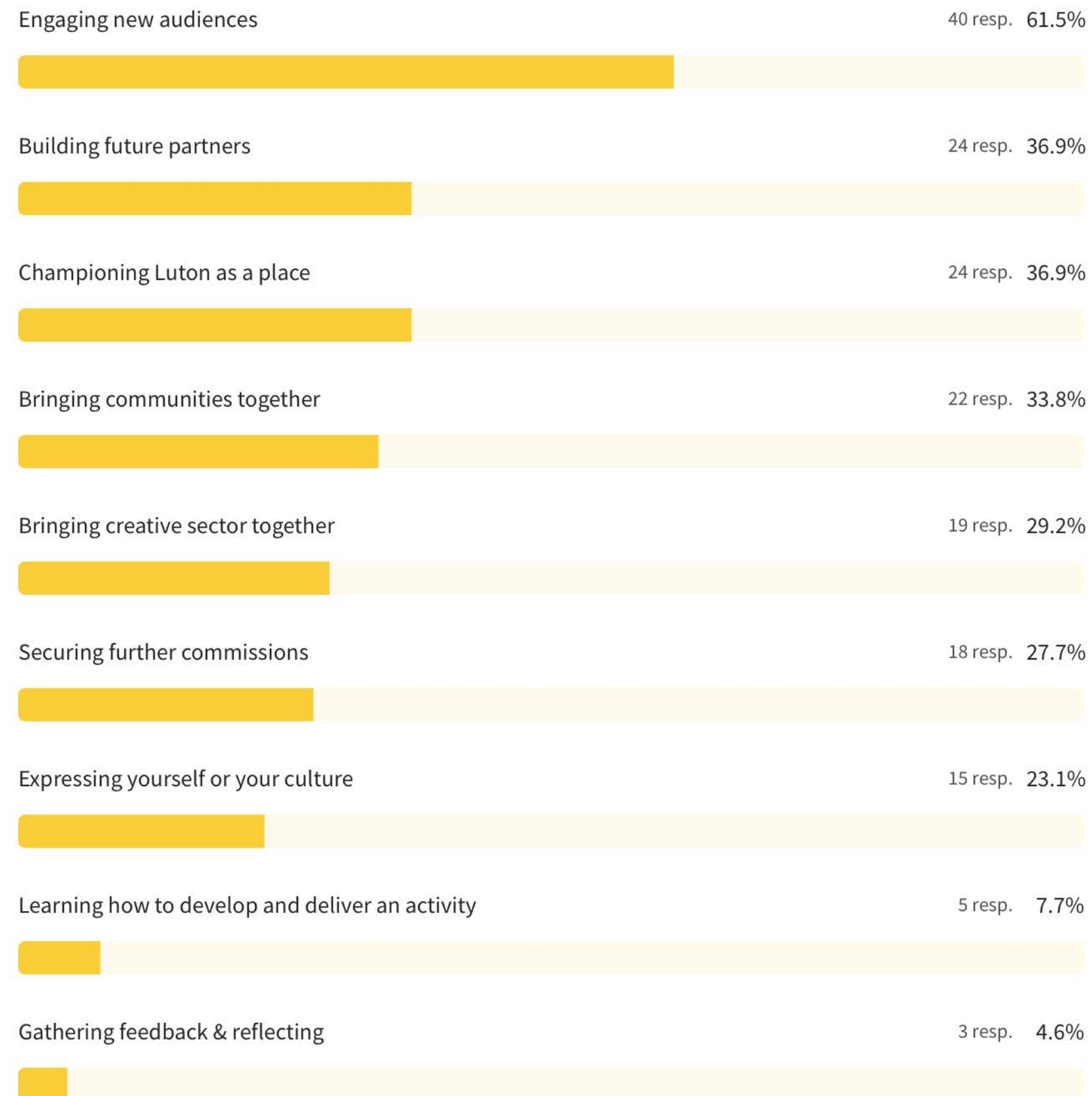


All of the platforms listed score highly, ranging from 56% for Festival or wider celebration context to 40% for print or publication.

05 Findings:

Survey

What would be your main priorities in sharing your work with others?



Engaging new audiences (62%) is by far the highest result, compared to building future partners (37%) and championing Luton as a place (37%) as the next most popular answers. Interestingly suggestions around learning how to develop and deliver an activity (8%) and gathering feedback and reflections (5%) score less well.

What is your postcode?

The LU postcode area is the Luton postcode area, and is a group of seven postcode districts in England, within three post towns (Luton 1 - 4, Dunstable 5 & 6, Leighton Buzzard 7). LU1 is Luton South, LU2 (Luton East), LU3 (Luton North) and LU4 (Luton West).

30% of respondents are from LU2, 25% from LU3, 16% from LU1, 14% from LU4, 7% from LU5, 3% from LU6 and 7% from outside of the area.

06 Benchmarking

06 Benchmarking: Bradford Producing Hub

During stakeholder interviews, stakeholders were asked to reference and suggest similar programmes in comparable communities.

The main relevant comparator that stakeholders referenced, focusing on local artists and creatives, was **Bradford Producing Hub**.

Bradford Producing Hub is a pilot project, four years in duration and funded by Arts Council England. It has a total investment of £2m in cash. Its objective is to ensure that Bradford becomes a creative city with Live Art performance 'happening all the time'. The phase of ACE funding is now complete but the journey for BPH continues. It has set up as company and is transitioning so that it has true independence.

The final evaluation report for the programme, published in September 2023, reported the difference it made to artists. It noted that artists and creatives of Bradford district are the heart of the project.

The evaluation found that BPH creatives

- Come from all backgrounds
- Face barriers to work
- Overwhelmingly like the BPH offer
- Feel increased ambition
- Feel their careers are supported by BPH
- Feel nurtured and supported by BPH

Bradford
Producing
Hub



Home About ▾ Events Training Funding & Opportunities News Resources ▾ Artist Spotlights & Case Studies ▾

About Bradford Producing Hub

Founded in 2019 as a pilot Arts Council England project - Bradford Producing Hub is now an independent arts development organisation here to nurture and support artists and creative companies across the Bradford district



www.bdproducinghub.co.uk

06 Benchmarking: Bradford Producing Hub

The report notes that the power of this organisation is in its culture, ethos, values and principles for working with creative practitioners and changing an entrenched system, not just in the programme it delivers.

It notes three components to success:

Knowing - the team of freelancers working on the project are embedded and expert in their own communities and artforms. They know the sector, its needs, its strengths and the opportunities. They invest in deep reflective and evaluative work designed for organisational growth and learning.

Caring - the team cares about the sector, about audiences, about quality art and experiences and about living in Bradford. They continue to challenge complacency and bad practice, to dismantle hierarchies and embed equality, diversity and inclusion.

Radical - the team is agile, curious, prepared to take risks and challenge poor practice - committed to positive transformation



06 Benchmarking: Bradford Producing Hub

The Bradford programme is made up of eight strands.

These include:

Needs assessment - understanding the needs the project should address

Talent development - structured and responsive training and development for all artists at any point in their career - includes working group sessions, online 'expert' discussions, one to one support, training courses, residencies and funding opportunities such as seed funding for individual development of up to £500

New work - research and development funding, commissions and creative support to enable more Live Art in Bradford and by Bradford artists and creatives. Funding has been made between £3,000 and £18,000, plus a bigger commission of £40,000.

Transforming spaces - funding of up to £2,500 to help people and organisations in Bradford to develop new spaces that will support the live arts sector. Projects can include expansion or creation of new spaces, purchase of resources, feasibility studies and business planning processes.

Shared resources - this is a selection of practical resources available on the BPH website including videos and documentation relevant to funding and research. In addition, BPH developed Bradford Performance Places website, a searchable database of Bradford's venues and spaces, and the Guide to Outdoor Arts.

“Being unashamedly focused on supporting particular groups is working well.”

Lisa Mallaghan, Director BPH

07 Creative development opportunities

07 Creative development opportunities

Homegrown Festival

Homegrown is Luton's new writing festival, which first took place in 2024 and showcased local talent by staging an evening of original short plays, featuring local writers, directors and actors. Local writers, regardless of age or experience, were invited to submit their work. Pieces were read by a panel and those selected performed in front of an audience at the Luton Library Theatre in July 2024.

There are plans for a second call for submissions and festival in 2025.

homegrownluton.wixsite.com



Platforms
Acting
Writing
Direction

Music 24

Music24 is a leading community music charity, working to support people affected by ill-health and/or disability across Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. It specialises in working with people living with mental health issues, learning disabilities, older people, and people living with dementia and their carers.

Music 24 runs a programme called Creative Collaborators, which supports local artists by offering skills exchange, artist residences and learning opportunities.

music24.org.uk



Skills Exchange
Artist Residences
Learning Opportunities

Luton Culture Trust

The Culture Trust, Luton connects communities through culture. It does so through accredited museums, theatres, galleries, creative workspaces and an arts centre, animating six sites: The Hat Factory Arts Centre, Luton Library Theatre, Hat House creative workspace, Storefront Gallery, Wardown House Museum & Gallery and Stockwood Gardens & Museum. The Trust presents a year-round programme of events, exhibitions, workshops and performances.

TAP (Talent, Alumni, Progression) is a three-year programme offers creative industry support through monthly meetings, TAP talks with leading professionals, an entry level apprenticeship, a directory and list of opportunities and a 12-month Creative Pioneers package of support for emerging entrepreneurs, including mentoring, workshops and workspace access.

culturetrust.com



Monthly Meetings
Talks
Mentoring
Workspace Access
Workshops

Next Generation Youth Theatre

Next Generation Youth Theatre was set up in early 2012 with the purpose of providing high quality, accessible and inclusive theatre, dance and arts opportunities to the young people of Luton.

NYGT's award winning Theatre and Dance companies are made up of young people aged 14-25 who are studying Drama or Dance in school, or studying similar subjects at College or University, as well as graduates, semi professional and professional actors/dancers. Both companies meet weekly to develop original or commissioned work, to be performed at local and regional venues, community platforms and festivals.

ngyt.co.uk



Drama / Dance
Weekly Sessions
Showcases & Platforms

07 Creative development opportunities

Revoluton Arts

Revolution Arts matches artists, communities and ideas to create high quality, ambitious creative projects, produces workshops, activities, events and performances that are led by artists and made with residents in their neighbourhoods, supports young creators aged 16-30 to gain new skills, start making and developing creative careers and supports artists to develop their practice working with people and place.

Revolution Arts Producer Hub is a regular event for creatives in and near Luton. Part workshop, part networking, the Hub supports high-quality work, helps practitioners develop their creative practice, and connect with other local artists and creatives. Creatives can book 1:1 sessions with industry experts to receive bespoke advice on project ideas and ongoing support to turn creative vision into reality.

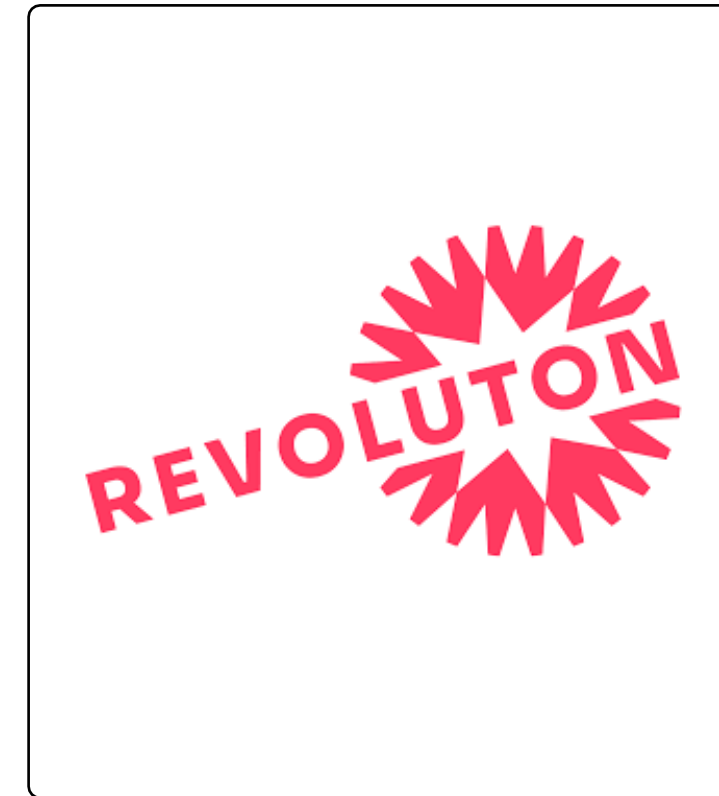
revolutonarts.com

UK Centre for Carnival Arts

UK Centre for Carnival Arts (UKCCA) is a dedicated organisation and centre promoting excellence within carnival arts. It supports and champions the work of Carnival Groups across the UK and facilitates carnival education in Luton and the surrounding areas. It also hosts the annual Luton International Carnival.

UKCCA's Foyle Foundation Artist Development programme supports artists to develop their carnival arts and creative knowledge and skills. The programme also provides arts administration and business support so that participants can become established working artists. Those involved receive a programme of masterclasses, 1:1 support and independent working at UKCCA's studio space, and also visit renowned carnival artists across the UK to learn about the various carnival arts practices.

carnivalarts.org.uk



**1:1 Industry Sessions
Project Advice
Networking**



**1:1 Industry Sessions
Studio Space
Business and Admin
Support**

Tangled Feet

Tangled Feet is a theatre ensemble that creates original, visually stunning performances, sometimes in theatres but often in public spaces. They create thrilling and memorable atmospheres and experiences for audiences and love sharing the creative process with new people and younger artists as an integral part of the production process.

Tangled Feet offers a structured year long mentoring programme for emerging companies which aims to equip them with the skills and confidence to establish themselves and informally mentors and advises young artists. It has identified local young people who benefit extensively from its paid Steel Foundation funded internship programme.

tangledfeet.com

University of Bedfordshire

The University of Bedfordshire is an internationally recognised and award-winning institution. Its Luton campus includes a STEM building, a seven storey Library and a Postgraduate and CPD Centre. Its School of Art and Design is based within the Alexon Building, in the heart of Luton's Hat District.

The Faculty of Creative Arts, Technologies and Science is home to three academic schools that deliver courses for the Creative Industries, a supporting research institute and the Arts and Culture Projects team. This team partners with many local, regional and national cross sector organisations to widen participation into and support the sustainable growth of the local cultural sector.

beds.ac.uk



**Skills Programme
Internships
Mentoring**



**Knowledge
Partnership
Professional Development**

08 Recommendations

08 Recommendations

THE PROGRAMME

Whilst this set of underpinning **Programme** recommendations are outside of the scope of the original three areas of focus, they are informed by examples such as the Watford Cultural Leaders Group, developing Hub and Spoke Model in Sheffield and Havering London Partnership Panel, as well as some recent Local Cultural Education Partnership research undertaken.

1. Need for an Exit Strategy - there is a fear that the Luton programme will be another short-term intervention, with no transparent plan beyond March 2027. This needs to be developed, agreed and published now so that there is an agreed understanding of how the work will be continued and by who (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, supported by the Programme Manager).

2. Access to space - is a repeated concern. Lack of space, making good use of existing space, awareness and cost of space available, using space to build cohesion across the cultural ecology. Some of the Resource Hub budget should be used to engage someone to practically co-ordinate a range of activities to resolve this, including an audit of space, a database of availability, co-ordinating partner offers (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, facilitated by a Space worker)

3. Disconnect between larger cultural organisations and freelancers/community groups - this is often repeated. Larger cultural organisations should have a clear and agreed function in each of the three programmes of work and this should provide an opportunity for them to build sustainable relationships with new freelancers and community groups (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, delivered by the Programme Manager).

4. Current talent development offer is unclear - cultural organisations are offering a range of vital support to cultural and creative practitioners, but not everyone is aware of the offer. This should be made transparent, kept up to date and cross promoted across the ecology and to those currently under served (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, delivered by the Programme Manager).

08 Recommendations

THE PROGRAMME

5. Networks – whilst there is significant value in regular networking events, which are important to the collaborative advancement of the Luton programme, there is some uncertainty about the clarity of purpose of each of the networks within the ecology - Creative Forum, Producers Network, Creative Industries Network - and a fear of duplication and competition. This should be collectively mapped, agreed and published to ensure transparency to those currently underrepresented or uncertain (Arts and Culture Strategy Group).

6. Local Cultural Education Partnership - this needs to be up and running effectively in order to work alongside the development of the professional cultural ecology - particularly in terms of the link between education and employment and the need for a strong talent pipeline (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, delivered by the Programme Manager).

7. Arts and Culture Strategy Group - is essential to the successful delivery of the programme and the legacy of the work. This group needs to be performing effectively and cohesively and needs a development plan and support to ensure that's the case (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, supported by the Programme Manager).

8. Need to clarify where audience development objectives for the programme intersect with artist development programmes - particularly for commissioning and events. And if these artist development initiatives do have audience expectations too, what is this priority? (Arts and Culture Strategy Group)

9. Clarity of a sustainable programme brand - need to have a clear brand for the programme and an understanding whether this is expected to out last March 2027 and understand whether the resource hub digital presence is the Luton programme website for all purposes. (Programme Manager)

08 Recommendations

COMMISSIONS

10. Delivered by an independent body - the intention for this programme of work to be delivered by a body independent of Arts and Culture Strategy Group partners is well supported and should be progressed (Programme Manager).

11. Framework of care - an approach to ensuring care (Collaborative, Ambitious, Respectful, Empowering, Supportive) for artists is at the heart of this programme should be prioritised and all ideas tested against this to ensure high levels of positive satisfaction pre, during and post commissions (Commissioning Manager).

12. Openness to different types of applicants - there should be the minimum of barriers to individuals, people not registered as self-employed, unconstituted groups applying, alongside any essential governing or audit requirements, to ensure the programme is as genuinely open as possible (Commissioning Manager).

13. Decision making arrangements - whilst community voice would be valuable here, if the focus here is on opportunities for artists and building the capacity of individuals and groups as creative practitioners, this should be of less of a priority and applicant needs the focus (Commissioning Manager).

14. Taster grants - of up to £500 should be available. These should be prioritised to those who have not received funding in the past, but not exclude those who have. The focus should be on the difference made to the applicant and there should be no requirement for a public output. These grants might support a go and see, training activity or equipment purchase. There should be no requirement for partnership funding and a light touch, swift process for applicants to access (Commissioning Manager).

08 Recommendations

COMMISSIONS

15. Larger grants - the average level of support sought is almost £15k, so care should be taken to ensure these grants should be able to make sufficient impact. The grant range might be £3k to £15k. Partnership funding of 25% would be required. Applicants should be supported with match making so that they can incorporate larger organisations as partners within these applications too. The focus here would be on activity that delivers in and for specific communities, but is supplemented by a bespoke package of tailored support for the individual or group delivering that enables them to use the opportunity to capacity build and progress to a further post project stage. Depending on the budget resources available and approach it might be best to ring fence one grant opportunity as specific to health and wellbeing and one education (Commissioning Manager).

16. Step-by-step support to apply is vital. This should include simplified guidance packs, including video explainers, an example of an application, a glossary of terms, running ideas sessions for potential applicants to work together on developing applications in as wide a range of settings across the borough as possible, specifically in under represented postcodes LU1 & LU4, and by the commissioning team working in a community setting to help write applications for those underserved or less likely to use a computer (Commissioning Manager).

17. Unsuccessful applicants - in the context of the framework of care and encouraging new applicants, there should be a package of support available to those who aren't successful, including written feedback, the offer of a one to one follow up development session, clear signposting to other opportunities, an ongoing connection (Commissioning Manager).

18. Tailored support - should be offered alongside each of the larger grants, co-created with the successful applicant. Applicants would be asked to explain which parts of the package they might benefit from and why as part of their application. This could include mentoring, but not automatically. It could often include support with bids for next step funding support, which is commonly sought (Commissioning Manager).

08 Recommendations

RESOURCE HUB

19. Needs a title other than Resources Hub - as this is pointing towards a digital platform in many people's eyes rather than a programme of support which is most needed. For this purpose, redescribe as 'Support and Resources Hub'. (Programme Manager)

20. Focus on the human resource provision - as this is most often what's needed from findings. A part time individual or company with experience of supporting artists who's time can be booked by individuals to offer the necessary support required, including advice and guidance alongside practical support including with the writing of fundraising bids, marketing advice, mentorship if required etc. (Programme Manager)

21. A website - is required to hold the support and resources function together. This should be industry and artist rather than public focusing in concept and execution. It should include functions such as an opportunities board and signposting functionality. (Programme Manager)

22. Exit strategy - in terms of the website and the resources/functions to be made available on it, need a plan from the start in terms of how this will be managed post March 2027. (Programme Manager)

23. The pooling, uploading of and sign posting to a variety of existing resources, toolkits or guides, supported and suggested by the Arts and Culture Strategy Group, rather than creation of new resources or toolkits which are not a priority for respondents. (Arts and Culture Strategy Group and Programme Manager).

24. The provision of expert one to one training or sharing sessions using Arts and Culture Strategy group member - an opportunity to support the programme in kind and built new relationships with the sector (Arts and Culture Strategy Group and Programme Manager).

08 Recommendations

CELEBRATION

25. Need to agree or prioritise the objective of the event - is it develop artists, develop audiences, celebrate the programme to stakeholders? This clarity will unlock what the event should most likely be (Arts and Culture Strategy Group).

26. Audience Development - if a key objective is to develop audiences, even if artist focused, given this being a clear priority for artists, ensure there is sufficient audience development resources and budget (Arts and Culture Strategy Group, Programme Manager)

27. Utilise existing event activity infrastructure in the town to associate the Celebratory event to, rather than investing in infrastructure from scratch (Programme Manager)

28. Create a map of cultural opportunities to promote the offer and open house activity (relate to increasing and promoting better utilisation of space) (Programme Manager)

Most significant recommendations:

- Creating an exit strategy for the programme
- Addressing the issue of access to space
- Developing the work of the Arts and Culture Strategy Group
- Focusing the hub on the offer of human resources
- Agreeing or prioritising the objective of the celebratory event

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Images: Shaun Armstrong