



# Cultural Action Zones (CAZ) Pilot:

## Learnings Summary Report

### 1.0 Context

This summary report includes extracts from the full CAZ evaluation report<sup>1</sup>, carried out by Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership in March 2023. It introduces the project and sets out the learnings, which underpin Birmingham City Council 6-year Cultural Action Area (CAA) Programme.

### 2.0 Executive Summary

Cultural Action Zones convene multi-agency action and usually multi-agency funding too. They are community led cultural and arts programmes, led by local people for local priorities. GBSLEP has funded nine CAZs in this pilot programme, with each receiving between £22K to £70K in revenue grants, with varying and usually in-kind match from nil to an unusually high £100K. The average CAZ grant was £40K. CAZs can be started for many reasons:

- In response to the many challenges around the decline of our high streets and local centres
- Giving local communities a shared project and goal to bootstrap collaboration, catalyse activities and provide new opportunities
- In recognition that no two places are the same, and so a more nuanced local response is needed

At this stage these CAZs are pilot and test actions, exploring ways that the government's levelling up agenda can be actioned in practice.

CAZs are highly versatile and scalable, so can be led by anyone, so long as they are firmly rooted within a local community. In this pilot we had CAZs led by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) local authorities, theatres and Art galleries.

With CAZ there is no “doing it alone”, because the goal is collaboration and cross-pollination, all projects establish a steering/working group through which the project is coordinated and

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<sup>1</sup> GBSLEP's full CAZ evaluation report is no longer available from GBSLEP's website, as the organisation was wound up, but can be accessed here <https://app.box.com/s/vtrpv64tvvg66u8c052xhphfqyoh6791x>

where learnings can be shared and acted upon. Many have a consortium of local organisations taking the lead.

So, what does a CAZ do!? It can Reanimate and transform how people interact with local centres, by running monthly festivals, pop-up markets, trails, exhibitions, showcasing and arts or craft workshops. It can install street or public art and engage all parts of our communities, including families, children, young people and older people. It can begin to combat social isolation through meanwhile use by supporting community centres in vacant shops. It also provides a wide range of volunteering opportunities, create safe spaces, stimulate the local economy and much more.

In round 1, The first 2 CAZs funded, in Jewellery Quarter and Southside in Birmingham, were more focused on planning, engaging with the neighbourhood and working very strategically to bring about change.

In round 2, the seven CAZs were focused on supporting immediate practical activity to reanimate and begin to transform places; including Balsall Heath, Small Heath, Soho Road, Northfield and Digbeth in Birmingham, and further afield, Kidderminster and Solihull.

A key idea was to try things out and learn what activities and actions will work best for the future. For example, Solihull MBC launched its *Cultural Moments programme* because of CAZ and have learnt a lot through it, enabling them to plan a future programme outside of CAZ support. Further impacts included Southside CAZ, which leveraged in £1.23m, £350K towards new CCTV to make the area safer and £887K to start initial works on street changes that will enable regular pedestrianisation of the Chinese Quarter. 'On Our Way' focused on bus stop art to build community cohesion, and helped leverage in over £300K from Transport for West Midlands to renew the bus stops in their centre. Each CAZ has many stories and impacts to tell.

Overall, there have been at least 12,000 participants, plus a further 633 under 18, 208 businesses and organisations engaged, 208 volunteers, 178 smaller events run, 42 larger events, 2 recurring events, 10 temporary artistic displays created, 16 permanent displays and 142 artists commissioned. An economic analysis was run that showed a Gross value added (GVA) uplift could be proven as a result of CAZ activity. Alongside which, it especially generates a wide range of social value outcomes and non-quantifiable benefits.

Each CAZ delivered above its agreed targets and expectations in most measures. But what is important to remember here is that although these headline figures are impressive and show projects can deliver, these are not the only focus of our funding. What is equally important is the legacy activity, what is left behind once CAZ funding has ended. Some aspects of projects, such as a recurring festival, can carry on with the continuing collaboration and resources of local partners.

So, CAZs had important broader objectives:

- to establish a strong collaboration between local stakeholders, with a view to CAZ activities running on beyond CAZ funding
- to genuinely broaden opportunities, such as by engaging young people in confidence building activities

Even though LEP funding has now ceased, for many of these CAZs output numbers, outcomes and impacts for their local centres and citizens will continue. This is because:

- CAZ has functioned as seed money which has now established local partnerships with their own pooled resources – with 2 of the 7 round 2 projects able to continue indefinitely
- All projects have reported successes exceeding their expectations and are very interested in carrying on where possible
- another is progressing well in securing alternative funding to continue
- 5 of the 7 have established local forums as a legacy of CAZ funding to provide a platform to develop future activities

In the project evaluation section we have analysed all the various outcomes across our 9 CAZs and have come up with 6 broad outcomes that they all have in common:

- [1] Increased Pride, Cohesion and Activity
- [2] Increased awareness & Support of local artists
- [3] Business revenue & Partnerships
- [4] Visitor Experience, reputation & cultural offer
- [5] Talent Development and Engagement of young people
- [6] Repeatability, permanence & legacy

Building on this finding, a crucial aspect of CAZ is that the programme and its outputs and outcomes align very closely with the government's levelling-up agenda and the funding parameters for UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the central government funding that replaces EU monies.

### 3.0 Learnings

Through the evaluation reports and discussions with the CAZ projects a number of key learnings have been compiled that will make it easier to run future CAZs effectively, whilst avoiding some of the pitfalls that have been discovered along the way, these include:

- Successful CAZs need a strong steering group with a highly collaborative lead organisation able to develop a wider stakeholder group responsible for delivery of project goals and outcomes
- Lead organisations have significant power to influence the success of a wider project. Effective leadership of a CAZ has reciprocal responsibilities, lead organisations must hold wider group responsible for delivery of project goals and outcomes while also fulfilling a pastoral role of supporting and encouraging partners through difficulties.
- CAZ projects must have a clear rationale, outputs and outcomes as part of a larger vision. In the absence of this, projects can lack direction and struggle to gain momentum. When working with grassroots organisations the purpose of their activities must remain abundantly clear else there is a risk of project drift.
- CAZs must be shaped locally, with a clear understanding of local challenges and opportunities. CAZs should seek to directly address these while integrating the spirit and interests of the local area. There is a risk of parachuting in ideas from outside the area that

provide an imperfect solution as the local challenges and community priorities have not been sufficiently understood.

- It's imperative that businesses are engaged at inception of project to have the direct and intangible benefits outlined to them. Lack of bedrock local business support significantly hampers effectiveness of events and impairs long-term survivability of projects.
- There is a degree of ideological buy-in necessary from partnered organisations. Given inherent self-interest of sustaining a business, it is inevitable that some prospective partners will struggle to understand the value of collaborative working, these should be filtered out.
- While funding of project managers works well initially, once their funding expires, projects can struggle to exist independently. This can be a scapegoat for authentic collaboration as then stakeholders basically become delivery partners, its worse value for money as well because it makes it less personal.
- survivability is enhanced by a lead person who is funded outside of CAZ and is thus able to continue to provide support post CAZ funding to develop the broader stakeholder group and drive new activities and plans.
- A micro-grant scheme is essential to drive initial interest and engage partners - £500 grants up to £6,000 max have worked well, in various combinations.
- *Meanwhile use* of office spaces are really valuable, but can be a double-edged sword if the CAZ becomes too invested in one space, as success increases the likelihood of the space being let commercially so they lose it. Flexibility is necessary to be willing and able to bounce between available spaces.
- Collaboration between different CAZs is incredibly desirable and when done produces good results. Due to their size and relative lack of experience, CAZs can lack the impetus or determination to make collaboration happen under their own steam.
- Much greater collaboration is necessary between CAZs, LAs and the LEP in terms of removing institutional barriers to success (eg. Earmarking walls to not be painted over, connecting CAZs to relevant LA departments, on street furniture etc.)
- It is helpful to build in an element of bid writing in the CAZ funding package, to facilitate continuation of projects when the core funding ends.

The learnings from some of these key aspects of CAZ projects need expanding:

**Consortia leadership** has been an effective method of ensuring active inclusion of local stakeholders and community leaders. A key mechanism of action of CAZs is to ensure that interventions are born out of and organised within the communities they wish to serve. Consultation and/or direct involvement of key local stakeholders is essential so that activities can authentically represent the interests and priorities of local people. This is particularly

important when seeking to deliver interventions within communities which traditionally have struggled to engage with public sector support.

From our pilot learnings, an effective method of guaranteeing grassroots support has been the formation and regular meeting of steering groups with oversight for the whole project. These steering groups have been comprised of grant holders, key local stakeholders, and delivery partners. As such, evidencing this consultation and grassroots involvement on applications should be a prerequisite to receiving funding.

**Microgrants** are an effective method of bringing local creatives together and kickstarting activity, especially in areas which lack formalised creative communities. An effective microgrants model may consist of:

- An open call for EOIs for commissioned cultural work
- The establishment of a local creative network – if it doesn't already exist – to better support all local creatives, whether they applied for grant funding or not
- Microgrants awarded will typically be in the range £300-£1000, although some may be up to £6000
- A range of artistic, experimental and community works and activities will then be delivered locally, with the networks maximising the value and impact of each.

In the pilot phase, these cultural/artist network meetings have been hugely popular and have been able to continue long after the microgrants have been awarded. Other commercial opportunities have begun to be circulated in several of these groups as synergies emerge quickly through networking activity of this type.

**Meanwhile Use** has worked well when implemented during pilot phases. This is particularly true when spaces have been established within shopping centres. The temporary conversion of vacant shop fronts into community cultural spaces has symbiotic benefits to the community, the landlord and to the cultural and community organisations involved. For the community, it provides non-commercial space on their high streets which can help fulfil social needs, and it removes a vacant unit from their local centre, helping to address high street decline. For the cultural organisation, it provides a highly central, cost-effective base for their activities, increasing their profile and giving a central point to coordinate activities.

**Case study: Northfield Arts Forum, Birmingham**

*The NAF Shop is a community arts 'meanwhile space' in the heart of Northfield Shopping Centre, where we run workshops, events, community meetings and small business markets. We also rent the space out to pottery, storytelling, stitching, coding and toddlers' groups (amongst others!), and our exhibition space is used by local artists to showcase their work. The Shop has given community members access to inclusive creative activities within their locality, and we have signposted and supported many community members in accessing support with housing, food and other fundamental needs. NAF events and workshops have also invited people into the shopping centre, from Northfield and beyond, who would not usually use it. We obtained the space in 2022, with the help of East Street Arts, as part of our Making Spaces (CAZ) project. The renovation took a month.*

For landlords, *meanwhile spaces* demonstrate the value of the space to prospective future leasers, helps to increase footfall in the area, and can help reduce the maintenance burden. Where productive relationships with landlords have been established, upon a paying tenant being found, the group can transfer to another vacant unit. A large degree of flexibility is necessary to be willing and able to bounce between available spaces. Demonstrable ability to flexibly occupy spaces - and increase their rentability - can build strong relationships with local landlords.

**Artistic creation as a facilitator** is another best practice recommendation. Rather than focussing solely on the produced art itself, applicants will be invited to consider how the production and delivery of their activities/assets can impact change. Examples of this in practice include; using commissioning as a means of teaching about professionalisation for “hobbyist” artists and embedding arts activities from different cultural backgrounds into businesses and venues popular amongst other groups to help break down barriers within communities and increase community cohesion.

**Case Study: Street Culture – Hi-Vis, Digbeth, Birmingham**

*Hi-Vis provided a business support service for mural and street artists, who did not always realise there was a way to expand their hobby to become a significant income generator for them through commercialisation. This CAZ project provided bursaries to create street art, run festivals around it, and the team at Hi-Vis have now established a network for street artists, who regularly meet for support and discussion, underpinned by a simple What’s App group.*

**Final Learnings from our CAZs – including some challenges and obstacles**

There are always obstacles and issues to overcome, and the final part of this review allows our CAZ managers to set a few down. Each project had a confidential evaluation and a more public summary, with many elements to be used for promoting the CAZ idea and leveraging new monies and support for them in the future.

This CAZ programme was always about testing and experimenting, where failure was not only an option, but an essential part of learning and refining what would be a better approach to CAZ in the future.