

***RADICAL
ECOLOGY***

**A Framework for
Environmental
Justice**

Foreword

A Framework for Environmental Justice, expertly brought together here by Dr Katie Natanel for Radical Ecology, reflects two years of conversations held under the banner of the Black Atlantic Innovation Network (BAIN), an initiative originally funded by UCL Innovation & Enterprise through UCL's Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation and subsequently continued through core grants to Radical Ecology from Open Society Foundations, Lankelly Chase and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Through BAIN, we have sought to bring practitioners together from across some of the UK's leading cultural and heritage organisations and to facilitate a shared understanding across these sectors about how through programmatic work as well as through attention to the operational culture of our public institutions, we can begin to confront the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Within and across organisations, we've explored developments taking place in siloed strands of work including equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), sustainability and decolonisation, identifying common objectives and challenges as well as best practices that shine through across the UK cultural and heritage sectors.

We have further considered that when seen not as separate siloes but as a unified whole, this work begins to reveal what we call here a framework for environmental justice - a joined up strategy for facing the future from the heart of our cultural institutions. Through it, we glimpse how, even in a time defined by cost of living crises and environmental breakdown, by social fragmentation and global inequality – above all in a time like this – our cultural lives and our public institutions are not a luxury to be stripped away but rather the fundamental driver of our wider transformation and renewal. I hope you will find the pages that follow a useful space for learning from the experience that has been so generously shared here by our case study partners - The National Trust, Southbank Centre and Plymouth Culture – and that the lessons that emerge from these examples can serve as a source of inspiration and a catalyst for action.

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A Framework for Environmental Justice

The Black Atlantic Innovation Network (BAIN) Framework for Environmental Justice builds on experiences shared by leading UK organisations as they navigate change and align their structures, values and practices with visions of a just and sustainable future. By integrating work across sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and decolonisation, a framework for environmental justice enables organisations to deliver a robust response to deepening crises and calls for transformation.

As this report details, environmental justice is the process and outcome of pursuing social justice and climate action together at an organisational level. Rather than separating sustainability, EDI and decolonisation as frameworks for change, environmental justice recognises how an integrated approach accelerates progress and amplifies impact, benefiting organisations and their communities.

Grounded in two years of dialogue and coordination among leaders in the UK heritage, cultural and education sectors, the BAIN Framework advances a practicable model that can be adopted and scaled by diverse organisations, including charities, arts venues, public bodies, festivals and local authorities. Our report takes stock of the present moment, drawing lessons from organisational journeys in-process that can support growth and change for the future.

Rationale: Making the case for an integrated approach to change

The 2020s have presented unprecedented challenges for leaders across the UK cultural and heritage sectors. From a global pandemic to sharp increases in the cost of living, ongoing crisis can focus attention on the financial 'bottom line' and direct action to the daily struggle of staying in business. While this reactive mode might ensure short-term survival, it comes at the cost of longer and broader organisational futures. Rather than being forced to choose between today and tomorrow, organisations require an approach to change that enables them to meet immediate challenges while moving confidently toward the future.

The BAIN Framework for Environmental Justice offers a way forward through a programme of integrated change. From accelerating climate change to deepening social inequality, we anticipate that the condition of crisis is unlikely to be halted or reversed anytime soon. Rather, pressure on systems, institutions and services will be maintained, if not increase, as reactive decision-making determines which organisations and sectors receive continued funding and investment. If culture and heritage are to have a meaningful place in the future of UK public life, it will be due to the emergence of contemporary leadership that can articulate a vision for culture aligned with the wider societal need for transformative action.

Rather than being solely subject to the powerful forces that shape our world, cultural and heritage organisations can develop and lead uniquely effective responses to crisis and injustice. These sectors play a key role in shaping the relationship between people and politics in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, creating positive public spaces for learning, connection, innovation and growth. Put simply, culture and heritage are world-making.

Yet existing approaches to organisational change remain limited in their scope and efficacy. By dividing sustainability and net zero from EDI and decolonisation, prevailing models create ‘siloes’ that prevent organisations from responding or adapting comprehensively. At best, they deliver only partial change. At worst, they risk reproducing or deepening inequalities by failing to address how harms intersect. From the perspective of organisational futures, a siloed approach to change can mean decreasing visitor and membership numbers, weakening internal cohesion, waning external influence and stagnating or declining economic growth.

To meet this challenge, we propose an integrated approach for leaders in the cultural and heritage sectors that benefits organisations and the communities they serve. Environmental justice takes connection as its starting point, recognising how innovations and achievements

in sustainability and net zero can benefit from improved representation, opportunity, transparency and accountability. At the same time, organisational practices and policies linked to EDI can be strengthened by attending to environmental rights and harms. The success and durability of transformation is further enhanced through the historical grounding of decolonisation, which enables organisations to better identify the roots of barriers to engagement and address legacies of injustice through setting achievable targets for social and environmental transformation today.

As evidenced by our case studies, an integrated approach to change positively impacts productivity and performance, visitor experience, membership numbers, internal culture, financial growth and external influence. Further strategic benefits include deepening and strengthening connections with local stakeholders; enabling coordination among existing internal advocacy and/or advisory groups; and facilitating collaboration across organisations and sectors, with the potential to drive change on broader levels. This work aligns organisational cultures with the values of their employees and diverse stakeholders – and supports organisations in renewing and reinforcing their sense of purpose in a time of social and political upheaval.

Methodology: Positioning the framework

Drawing from the experiences of three leading organisations in the UK cultural and heritage sectors, our report presents recommendations for developing, supporting and implementing change at an organisational level. The National Trust, Southbank Centre and Plymouth's cultural sector have entrusted BAIN with their stories of organisational growth and transformation, generously sharing challenges, innovations and adaptations. These organisations do not claim to have 'successfully' designed and delivered integrated approaches to change. Rather, they invite others to learn from their unfinished journeys, enabling us to understand how environmental justice is at once a value, a process and an outcome.

This openness to sharing work-in-progress reflects BAIN's broader effort to bring together leading cultural, heritage and educational organisations in spaces of mutual support and learning. The network's strength lies in providing opportunities for exchange, imagination and action oriented toward tangible change. Our Framework emerges from more than two years of investment in dialogue across sectors, where leaders from within organisations identify challenges, share approaches and envision alternatives. By voicing experiences that might otherwise feel isolating or individualised, BAIN members work together to address inequalities, confront crises and build new futures. With participation open to people at all levels of the member organisations, BAIN offers an 'antidote' to vertical hierarchies and enables organisations to share imperfect and unfinished work. The outcome is a qualitatively different sense of these interconnected sectors, and a unique view of approaches to change developed and pursued by their leading organisations.

Taken together, the experiences of the National Trust, Southbank Centre and Plymouth's cultural sector demonstrate the benefits and opportunities of pursuing environmental justice as a uniquely responsive approach that enables organisations to meet the needs and concerns of diverse stakeholders in a rapidly changing world. Our report necessarily reflects the pace of work being done within organisations as discussions shift, initiatives develop, challenges arise and approaches evolve. These case studies portray different journeys of organisational change, which provide insight into how integrated approaches vary across scales, sites and sectors – no single process or mechanism fits all. Rather, organisations and their leaders continually navigate and adapt to challenges and conditions.

The National Trust story provides insight into how an integrated approach to change can be pursued through a single organisational strategy, with inclusion and sustainability framed as "cross-cutting" priorities. The Southbank Centre narrative raises the question of how degrees of integration might vary within a single organisation, highlighting differences between public programming and internal structures. The Plymouth experience asks us to shift our view from an organisational level to a city level, sharing learning from the process of connecting sustainability, EDI and decolonisation through inclusive (economic) growth.

Our key recommendations emerge from the synthesis and analysis of these diverse experiences, underlining the urgency and necessity of the Framework for Environmental Justice.

A note on language

Written by Radical Ecology¹ as a partner with UCL Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation² in coordinating BAIN, this report upholds a collaborative commitment to its member organisations while also maintaining critical distance. This position enables us to ask questions and engage tensions that leaders within organisations might not be empowered to address in their roles. It also compels us to consider how change is spoken about within organisations and across sectors – which terms are used, when and why? Open conversations with BAIN members reveal shifts in language that enable our report to reflect the process of change as ongoing or evolving. At the same time, these discussions point to areas of discomfort and sensitivity that persist as organisations confront inequality and crisis.

A tension within BAIN's work has been the explicit presence – or absence – of *decolonisation* within organisational approaches to change, whether siloed or integrated. In practice and policy, decolonisation acknowledges how colonial ties implicate organisations in perpetuating structural and everyday racism. At the same time, it is also an invitation to reflect and redress. Decolonisation provides opportunities to create a more just future, not by forgetting or erasing the past, but by understanding how it shapes the present. While organisational commitments to antiracism and decolonisation surged in response to the Black Lives Matters movement in 2020, enthusiasm waned with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening economic hardship and the rise of “culture wars” in the UK. The effect has been a wariness to explicitly frame organisational work as ‘decolonial’ or ‘decolonising,’ instead folding antiracism into equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

While we mark the omission of decolonisation within approaches to change, we note that this work has quietly continued, if under different names and at a slower pace, through the commitment of leaders within organisations. We also note that decolonisation is not a single set of rules or processes, and that not all organisations understand or use the term in the same way. Recent BAIN dialogues have attuned us to new shifts and currents, where directives to avoid the language of decolonisation are giving way to questions about how a policy or programme can take up these critiques and imperatives.

By reflecting the current state of organisational transformation – what is present, absent and emergent – our report underlines the significance of approaching change as a process capable of responding to urgent crisis and requiring a long-term commitment to dialogue, self-evaluation, learning and adaptation.

Key Recommendations

Drawing from our case studies, the BAIN Framework for Environmental Justice advances recommendations for cultural and heritage organisations intent on delivering structural transformation that meets the challenges of our times. Divided into stages of developing, supporting and implementing change, we offer tangible mechanisms and processes that support organisations in integrating sustainability, EDI and decolonisation – in policy and practice. These recommendations can be taken to organisational leadership, departmental teams, governing bodies and diverse stakeholders to illustrate how environmental justice can be concretely actioned across sites and scales.

Our key recommendations are relayed below, indicating relevant case study/studies where experiences and examples can be found.

Developing change

- 1** Share *how language is currently used* within sustainability, EDI and decolonisation – Encourage teams to ‘own’ and explain their terms and concepts as a step toward building an integrated vocabulary. Bringing together existing languages enables people to explore differences and overlaps across area of work, and understand how all areas of change are a priority. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 2** Link environmental justice to an *organisational story* – Share how the organisation’s history provides a foundation for pursuing integrated change today, whether through mission statements, founding values, architectural design or more. How does this narrative shape the future?
Case Study 1, 2, 3
- 3** Design *structural opportunities* to ensure participation and representation across the organisation – Establish roles specifically tasked with developing and guiding integrated change, supported by dedicated budgets.
Case Study 1, 2
- 4** Develop *mechanisms for setting benchmarks and monitoring progress* – Build on the scientific approaches advanced in sustainability and economics to establish systems for measuring change, including organisational targets and interim assessments. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 5** Frame change as *iterative growth* – Support learning and a sense of process in communication to all stakeholders, including workforce, general public and governing bodies. An integrated approach requires a long-term commitment to self-reflection, dialogue, experimentation and adaptation.
Case Study 1, 2, 3

Supporting change

- 1** Create mechanisms that *facilitate dialogue* across the organisation – Encourage collaboration across workstreams and internal networks, while providing opportunities for engagement with organisational leaders. Meaningfully and structurally involve stakeholders in the project of change. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 2** Provide *space for discomfort, uncertainty and mistakes* – Develop a culture that normalises the expression of tensions as part of organisational change, valuing these experiences in the process of learning and growth. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 3** Establish *metrics* that measure the rate and extent of change from within departments, rather than monitoring from above – Empower teams and their leaders to develop benchmarks and report on progress, for example in the form of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the teams themselves. *Case Study 2*
- 4** Consistently and transparently provide *funding for positions and initiatives* related to delivering organisational change – Take seriously the need for financial support to drive change structurally and programmatically. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 5** *Welcome all* into the project – Ensure that everyone within the organisation is along for the journey, across levels, and feel positively that it is their responsibility. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 6** Prioritise and share the *process of learning* – Acknowledge that organisational change is an ongoing journey and create opportunities for both peer- and facilitator-led exchanges that create a sense of shared investment. *Case Study 2, 3*

Implementing change

- 1** Develop and communicate ***tangible process change*** – Be guided by the question “If we do this differently, how will it work?” Ground new systems and programmes in reality (rather than hypothesis) and provide clear steps for teams and leaders to follow. *Case Study 2, 3*
- 2** Adopt a ***comprehensive view*** of change – Embed change across organisational operations, planning and culture, pursuing transformation of internal structures and public programming together. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 3** Build ***new structural mechanisms*** – Identify where change needs to happen within an organisation and shift structures to prevent siloed work (i.e., separate workstreams and/or portfolios). *Case Study 3*
- 4** Synthesise and ***share progress toward targets*** – Ensure that change can be seen across and beyond an organisation, in the interest of transparency and accountability. Make the results of (self-)monitoring publicly accessible, while providing an adequate budget for establishing and measuring targets. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 5** Provide ***training*** to teams and leaders empowered to deliver change – Ask “Which tools can we use to support change?” including education, influence and impact. Make it an organisational goal to ensure that people understand the meaning of environmental justice and how things connect. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 6** Encourage the ***development of networks*** – Pursue and provide opportunities to share learning within, among and beyond organisations with the aim of providing mutual support and ‘mainstreaming’ the work of integration. For those organisations struggling with change, emphasise that others are grappling with challenges, meeting regularly and exchanging experiences – make connections. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*
- 7** Foster ***public engagement*** – Bring all stakeholders into the project of integrated change. Provide open access, seek feedback and meaningfully include local communities. *Case Study 1, 2, 3*



Case Study 1: The National Trust

National
Trust

Background

Founded in 1895 by Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley, the National Trust emerged as a response to the threats posed by rapid industrialisation to the UK's heritage and natural landscape.³ From an initial request to help save Sayes Court garden in London, the organisation grew through raising awareness and generating support for preservation as an act of care – for places and people.

Over 125 years, the National Trust has grown to become the largest conservation charity in Europe. Today's Trust is supported by 5.37 million members, 10,000 staff and thousands of volunteers who care for 780 miles of coastline, over 250,000 hectares of farmland and more than 500 historic houses, castles, parks and gardens across the UK.⁴ Since its inception, the Trust has been guided by the belief that the country's heritage and natural landscapes belong to everyone.

The National Trust has flourished through an approach that brings people into the project of heritage preservation and responds to the challenges of our changing world. Protecting historic and natural places does not mean isolation from contact or freezing in time – rather, heritage preservation requires education, engagement, access and adaptation. The organisation's role as a custodian has evolved to support increased interest and open access; provide opportunities for enjoyment and engagement; and generate investment in care and protection.

In the 21st Century, the Trust must lean into deepening social and economic inequalities in order to make good on its commitment to increasing awareness, access and investment. In demographic terms, the organisation's membership, volunteers and staff are a long way off reflecting the growing diversity of the UK. With membership numbers and revenue only slowly rebounding from a decline prompted

by the COVID-19 pandemic,⁵ urgency around inclusion is a matter of public relevance, charitable accountability and financial viability. Accelerating climate change is another key challenge confronting the National Trust today, as environmental harms threaten the organisation's core mission to protect historic sites and ensure that people and nature can thrive.⁶ In an environment of climate volatility and social inequality, the organisation must respond with a programme of mitigation, risk reduction and adaptation that enables it to navigate crisis on a long-term basis.

With the stakes undeniably high, the National Trust is taking steps to safeguard its future by developing a people-centred integrated approach to change. Grounded in a commitment to telling stories of everyone's heritage in the UK, the model created by the Trust brings inclusion and sustainability together as twin pillars that drive and support a single organisational strategy – and moves towards a framework for environmental justice.

Situating an organisational response

As a leading conservation charity, the National Trust cares for and preserves the UK's places of heritage from natural landscapes to historic sites and buildings. Engagement is central to this commitment to protection – the Trust invites visitors and members to actively explore history as a way of understanding the present and building new futures, together. Through programming and practices that facilitate access to nature, beauty and history, the National Trust tells the story of the UK's heritage as the story of everyone.

Rather than collapsing the complexity and diversity of our histories into a single 'national story,' the National Trust engages in a heritage practice of reflecting multiple meanings, perspectives and experiences. This requires a willingness to revisit stories previously told about who we are and where we belong, along with the role of organisations in creating and sustaining narratives of people and place.

Over the past ten years, the National Trust has invested significant energy and resources in developing content that addresses legacies

of power that result in erasure and exclusion. However, investment has been sporadic, leading to stops and starts in progress. Recent sustained funding responses to the threats and responsibilities of the climate crisis have been helpful for highlighting the importance of steady investment. By starting to reckon with its own role and story, the Trust is delivering structural, cultural and programmatic change that strengthens its relevance among diverse communities, with the work of environmental justice emerging as integral to all facets of work at the Trust. These actions create a more dynamic, influential and resilient national heritage organisation, whose values and activities respond to the challenges of our times – driving interest and investment in the work and legacy of the National Trust.

Approaching change: Initiatives & emphases

The National Trust's strategy to 2025⁷ conveys the core value that underpins its journey toward organisational change: "For everyone, for ever." Starting from this principle, the National Trust case study illustrates how a process of self-reflection, dialogue, development, implementation and adaptation can increasingly integrate EDI, sustainability and decolonisation as drivers for transformation.

Everyone Welcome

The national programmes on inclusive histories⁸ mark a significant moment in the National Trust timeline, when reflection on the story – or stories – told by the organisation prompted a change in both public programming and institutional structures. From 2017 through 2019, the Trust's renewed commitment to telling "stories of everyone" and serving the whole of society was made tangible through initiatives that explore the role of place within previously marginalised narratives, communities and experiences. Thematic curation of properties and collections highlighted the significance of women's, LGBTQ+, Black, disability and protest histories to heritage and its preservation in the UK, signalling a shift from omission to engagement. This programme laid the foundations for the 2020 Interim Report into Colonialism and Historic Slavery,⁹ which details how histories of slavery and legacies of colonialism are linked to National Trust properties and people.¹⁰ No longer "hidden aspects of the places in our care,"¹¹ diverse and complex stories of who we are generated dialogue and debate – within the organisation and among its visitors.

Identified as a "cross-cutting strategic priority" along with Climate Action, the Everyone Welcome principle establishes a language and metric through which progress relating to EDI can be monitored and evaluated.¹² Importantly, this principle guides the organisation's internal or workplace culture, structures and practices as much as public access and engagement – seeking to benefit its community in the broadest sense. Change is measured through performance indicators that track representation and feedback among staff, visitors and members, as well as financial spending and growth.

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Published every two years, the organisation's Progress Reports ensure accountability to its principles and commitments, compiling data that tells the story of learning, development and change, as well as work to be done. The Everyone Welcome Inclusion and Diversity Progress Report 2023¹³ relays findings related to public service and internal culture and structures, underlining the National Trust's comprehensive approach to transformation. This first assessment shares steps taken by the organisation since 2021 in its public-facing work, including:

- 1** Investing £5.5 million in increasing physical access to over 150 sites for people with disabilities
- 2** Creating initiatives that facilitate greater access to the land and heritage, including among under-served communities (e.g., Ramadan Hike, Walk Leaders Training)
- 3** Developing city-based work that responds to the relevance of place (e.g., Castlefield Viaduct)
- 4** Overcoming barriers to engagement among children and young people by piloting new events and activities in designated 'hubs'
- 5** Telling fuller stories of heritage through research priorities, arts programmes and curatorial work (e.g., 'My Adornment is My Power' at Kedleston, Derbyshire)
- 6** Raising awareness and promoting engagement through targeted and inclusive communication (e.g., media campaigns for Black History Month, Pride).

Internally, the report tells a parallel story of change and growth, including:

- 1** Gradual increases in diversity among the Trust's workforce since 2020
- 2** Compilation of baseline data (beginning in 2017) through which to evaluate and reduce pay gaps
- 3** Development and evaluation of "strengths-based" recruitment/hiring practices
- 4** 85% completion of 'Everyone Welcome' training among staff across the organisation
- 5** Increased agency and influence of internal staff support networks LGBTQ+, Workability and the Race Equity Network, through the creation of an Inclusion Council that holds quarterly meetings with senior leaders.

Climate Action

Work toward the second strategic priority, Climate Action, follows a similar process of self-reflection, assessment, planning and implementation with changes benefitting its landscapes, properties, members, visitors and employees. The Trust's 2020-2025 strategy document clearly frames action on climate change as intertwined with its commitment to inclusion:

Access to nature, beauty and history enriches our lives. That's why we must work to remove the barriers that stop everyone experiencing and enjoying them. To ensure that future generations are also able to enjoy these benefits, we must also play our part in tackling climate change, which threatens the future of the places in our care.¹⁴

As detailed in the 2023 report 'A Climate for Change: Adaptation and the National Trust', the Trust's response to climate change is grounded in an established record of commitment and action. Since 1998, the organisation has developed a programme of monitoring and adaptation, resulting in a holistic approach to climate action.¹⁵ A focus on adaptation enables the Trust to move from evaluation to implementation in a way that is driven by research, evidence and experience – and recognises that climate change is an ongoing process.

In practice, adaptation requires identifying and measuring the changes that impact the National Trust, its properties and communities, from rising sea levels and increases in average seasonal temperature to disturbance of habitats and conservation challenges. Experience of monitoring, learning from and responding to change has yielded a focus on six core areas in which adaptations are designed, applied and evaluated: coastal communities, visitor operations; historic buildings and collections; nature restoration; gardens and parklands; and water in the landscape.¹⁶ Adaptations are supported by the development of innovative tools for identifying, communicating and addressing risk, such as the 2021 Climate Hazard Map¹⁷ and partnerships with other heritage organisations to create sector-wide guidance.¹⁸

Parallel to its work toward Everyone Welcome, the National Trust's approach to Climate Action faces both the public and its workforce. Climate adaptation is achieved through dialogue and coordination with local communities; sharing learning within and beyond the organisation; raising awareness and encouraging engagement; and committing to continual self-evaluation. The Trust's response to climate change is strengthened by its implementation through structural initiatives like:

- 1** The Climate and Emergency Management System,¹⁹ which enables the organisation to articulate its environmental aims and deliver on internal and external responsibilities. The work of adaptation also takes shape as policy, enabling the Trust to design, capture and convey internal progress on climate and environment objectives – and push for decisive government action in the form of targets, investment and legislation.
- 2** The project 'Withstanding Change: Heritage amongst climate uncertainty',²⁰ which focuses on the effects of climate change on built heritage in the Middle East and Africa, and will restore six historic sites threatened by climate change. The project sits under the umbrella of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO)²¹ and works in the spirit of creating international environments of collaboration and learning over 2.5 years – moving the Trust towards a better understanding of the global and practical considerations of environmental justice.

Toward integration

The National Trust experience is unique in providing an approach to organisational change that situates inclusion and diversity ('Everyone Welcome') and sustainability ('Climate Action') as "cross-cutting strategic priorities" within its strategy to 2025.²² In explicitly framing these areas of action and transformation as intersecting, the Trust publicly acknowledges that progress in one area is dependent upon investment and advances in the other. While organisational inclusivity initiatives may have a distinct historical background, they increasingly inform the National Trust's approach to climate and environment through highlighting differences in access and vulnerability. Likewise, a critical approach to conservation and promoting engagement with nature raises questions about the interlocking inequalities that shape human relationships to land, plants and animals.

As recounted above, the Trust's transformation timeline reveals a parallel development of work in EDI and sustainability. Going forward, learning within areas of growth, challenge and innovation can be shared across priorities, enabling the teams tasked with monitoring, reporting, adaptation, engagement and progress to bring their work more closely together. This means creating a language of change that is shared between 'Everyone Welcome' and 'Climate Action' and reflected in internal and external communications. The process of developing this language must recognise how academic concepts and activist terminologies carry associations when

moving into practical application within the management of organisations. Care and due diligence are crucial to understanding how a shared language of change takes shape and is articulated. Mirroring the framing of the Trust's organisational strategy, this shift can encourage coordination across workstreams and initiatives being undertaken in parallel at present. While efficacy and impact will be determined through long-term processes of dialogue, development, implementation and evaluation, an integrated approach can deliver systematic change and influence government – underlining the position of the National Trust as a leader within and beyond the heritage sector.

Since its establishment, the National Trust has demonstrated an enduring commitment to preserving and providing access to the UK's heritage and natural landscapes. The organisation has maintained this promise to places and people through times of uncertainty, cultivating engagement, adapting to challenges and finding positive opportunities. The task today remains unchanged, though the stakes have never been higher. In pursuing an increasingly integrated approach to organisational change, the National Trust case study reveals an organisation equipped to confront the complex crises that shape our world – and guarantee its future for generations to come.

Case Study 2: Southbank Centre

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Background

From world-class concerts, literary events and performances to internationally acclaimed art exhibitions and festival seasons, the Southbank Centre showcases a world leading creative community. Established in 1951 as a centre for the musical life of London, today the Centre provides cultural programming, creative learning and immersive experiences that engage and inspire local and global audiences. It is indeed “the cultural heart of the city,” driven by a commitment to collaboration, innovation and invention.²³

In 2023, the Southbank Centre was the UK's fifth most visited attraction, hosting on average 3.2 million annual visitors.²⁴ The programmes, events and initiatives designed to grow and maintain this engagement contribute substantially to London and the UK, socially and economically.²⁵ From its role as an employer, purchaser and visitor attraction to its commitment to opening access, improving health and wellbeing, driving regeneration and supporting cultural and creative industries, the Southbank Centre is a leader in the UK's cultural sector and beyond.

After 73 years, the Centre has unveiled a refreshed artistic vision that unites its work across sites and art forms.²⁶ As outlined by Artistic Director Mark Ball, the Southbank Centre aims "to become an engine of creativity" and "be the nation's most culturally democratic and expressive space for artists and audiences."²⁷ Yet working toward and fulfilling these intertwined ambitions also means grappling with deepening inequalities and accelerating crises. While the Centre's prominent riverside location facilitates access to arts and culture for a broad range of visitors, Lambeth and Southwark are characterised by relatively lower social mobility and higher unemployment.²⁸ What does it mean to be a "deeply inclusive space"²⁹ and create a feeling of belonging among all its artists and visitors, considering disparate conditions of privilege and opportunity? The climate crisis drives a further need for response and transformation, on both programmatic and structural levels. While the

Southbank Centre has developed a robust plan to be a net zero carbon organisation by 2040, how can it address climate vulnerability and harms as they directly impact the lives of its artists, audiences and employees?³⁰

These questions point to the significant, interlocking challenges that confront the Southbank Centre today. With funding primarily provided by Arts Council England (ACE), whose 2023 vision reaches toward a future "where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences,"³¹ how the Centre responds is central to its continuing existence, relevance and influence within and beyond the cultural sector. At the same time, efforts to 'future-proof' the organisation must remain accountable to its charitable objectives and show care for those who animate the Centre at the most immediate level – its workforce and local community.

Situating an organisational response

At the core of the Southbank Centre's work is a clear ambition and commitment: to bring people together through cultural experiences.³² Historically, this has meant showcasing design and creativity through its public programming and initiatives, with the aim of enabling everyone to engage with/in artistic moments.³³ In these efforts, the Centre has become central to the cultivation, preservation and communication of intangible heritage in the UK – through music, dance, literature and visual arts we learn who we have been, explore who we are and envision who we will be.

This vision continues to drive the Southbank Centre's response to a changing world, supporting an approach that recognises how innovation, creativity and engagement might emerge through – not despite – challenge and crisis. Yet a further factor underpins this orientation: the Centre is guided by its charitable objectives. As a registered charity, the Southbank Centre's governing document outlines aims that inform its mission and values, ensuring that the organisation provides public benefit. The Centre's charitable objectives stipulate that its work in developing, supporting and promoting the arts must remain grounded in its London (South Bank Estate) location and community, while also benefitting the city and people of Great Britain more broadly.³⁴

This framework generates tangible goals and processes to deliver transformation, as detailed below. However, charity status presents both opportunities and challenges for organisational change. While the Southbank Centre's artists enjoy freedom in developing work that engages with historical violence, representational exclusion, climate crisis and social inequality, as an institution the Centre must couch its responses and interventions carefully. Charity status requires precision with words and actions, as well as accountability to the UK Charity Commission. Rather than pointing to an obstacle or contradiction, the Southbank Centre experience reveals how a leading organisation navigates its responsibilities in the context of urgency and constraint.

Approaching change: initiatives & emphases

The Southbank Centre case study offers insight into the earlier stages of developing and implementing an integrated approach to organisational change. Instead of positioning themselves as a model of success, the Centre carefully couches their experience in terms of what they are striving toward – learning happens as much through lessons-in-progress as lessons completed. Their narrative emphasises more advanced programmatic work while indicating unfolding structural work, drawing our attention to the relationship between areas of change.

As evidenced below, the Southbank Centre leads the cultural sector in substantive progress toward organisational sustainability, with a focus on achieving operational net zero. Named alongside equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), wellbeing, creative engagement, and innovation within the Centre's values,³⁵ these elements are crucial to building a different, better future. Programmatically, the Southbank Centre has consistently worked to improve access to and representation within the arts, again modelling sector-leading transformation. From providing free events and promoting youth engagement to investing in the careers of artists from historically marginalised backgrounds, the Centre offers content and experiences that underline the theme of its 2024 summer season: "You belong here."³⁶

Organisational change can thus be tracked across the Southbank Centre through its internal structures and public-facing programmes. However, comprehensive transformation is limited by the degree to which work in each area informs and reflects the other. Put simply, structural and programmatic change have followed parallel paths, shaped by differing concerns and constraints. To break this boundary, the Southbank Centre has begun a process of internal dialogue that enables initiatives to grow together and learn from each other within a shared organisational culture, initiating coordination across previously separate strands of work.

Programmatic change

Shifts in the Southbank Centre's public programming illustrate how art and culture can catalyse transformation, enabling an organisation to work across often-siloed areas of action. As outlined above, the Centre's refreshed artistic vision emphasises its role as "an engine of creativity" and its aim to become "the nation's most culturally democratic and expressive space for artists and audiences."³⁷ These ambitions are underpinned by a commitment to unlocking creativity, improving wellbeing, and practicing and promoting environmental responsibility.³⁸ Taken together, these ideals and initiatives express the Southbank Centre's approach, providing pathways to public impact and benefit.

In the summer of 2023, the Southbank Centre developed a programme of events for Planet Summer as the highlight of its festival season. Across art, music and dance, Planet Summer invited visitors to participate in a "season of climate care, hope and activism," responding to and inspiring calls for change that address the climate crisis.³⁹ While a focus on the environment shares a language with sustainability, decolonisation and antiracism were also at the heart of the Centre's summer of programming. Supported by Apple, Reframe: The Residency Exhibition⁴⁰ brought together 77 emerging Black artists around an invitation to respond to climate change, combining film, photography, music and sound design. This collective body of work remained grounded in the cultural heritage of

individual artists as they differently experience the climate emergency, highlighting the disproportionate impacts on global majority communities. Further invitations and provocations complimented Reframe as the centrepiece of Planet Summer, encouraging public engagement with the question of how climate vulnerability and harms intersect with race, location, generation, gender, sexuality, wealth and more. From pop-up artwork to family activities, Planet Summer made connections across sustainability and inclusion in ways that are unique to art and culture – reaching and moving visitors through experience, encounter and sensation.

The overwhelmingly positive public response to Planet Summer resulted in a legacy that now shapes the Southbank Centre's organisational commitments and future programming. To conclude the summer of 2023, the Centre hosted a town hall assembly in partnership with Culture Declares Emergency.⁴¹ Cultural Assembly: Together We Ask⁴² invited participation in a day of "creative inspiration" and dialogue that encouraged inclusive and imaginative approaches to confronting the planetary emergency. Attended by over 100 people, the Assembly explored pathways to climate justice and their intersection with colonialism and racism. Following this event, the Southbank Centre began drafting an "emergency statement," joining other arts and culture organisations in committing to "truth-telling, care-taking, and change-making" in pursuit of environmental justice. The Centre's Culture Declares

Emergency statement will be published in 2024, opening a space for dialogue that compliments the organisation's work toward established sustainability targets detailed in the section that follow. These moves recognise that climate vulnerability and crisis are driven by historical and contemporary injustices – and signal a commitment to confronting and transforming interlocking forms of oppression.

The Southbank Centre's 2024 summer series again drew these threads forward, placing inclusivity and belonging at the centre of artistic programming. While Planet Summer positioned the climate crisis as an entry point to confronting racial and social in/justice, You Belong Here deepened and extended public engagement with questions of voice, representation and access. From Tavares Strachan's exhibition 'There Is Light Somewhere' to Disco Neurotico, Stopgap Dance Company, Silent World, Majazz Project and Moving the Image,⁴³ You Belong Here insists that all are welcome. Inspired by Strachan's artistic vision and practice, the summer series invited audiences to engage with the "unsung stories" and "forgotten trailblazers" that have been marginalised within or excluded from culture, heritage, collective identity and public space. Artists and audiences explored omissions and their effects, creating community in ways that do not escape or deny the past but acknowledge its faults and harms. The imprint of the summer 2023 season is unmistakable: You Belong Here carries forward the work of envisioning and building a future in which racial, social, environmental, gender, dis/ability and economic justice entwine and prevail.

As evident in the summer seasons of 2023 and 2024, the Southbank Centre's curators and artists reflect and respond to our changing world, grappling with crises and challenges. Supported by organisational practices that facilitate access and broaden engagement, their work makes connections across sustainability, EDI and decolonisation in ways that inspire audiences to ask questions and take action. With 52% of the Southbank Centre's 5,054 events and performances offered free of charge in 2023/24,⁴⁴ the public impact and benefit of this programming is significant. As shown below, innovation in cultural and artistic programming also paves the way for internal organisational transformation, catalysing conversations and practices that shift structures and policies.

Structural change

New internal roles, mechanisms and initiatives demonstrate the Southbank Centre's commitment to immediate and enduring action. At the same time, the Southbank Centre experience highlights how constraints differently shape the pace and scope of structural change, with uneven transformation potentially reinforcing the separation of sustainability from EDI. The Centre's response and continual development highlights the importance of dialogue across organisational teams, along with the role of goals and metrics in developing, implementing, supporting, monitoring and assessing change.

The past five years have been pivotal in the story of how the Southbank Centre rises to meet the urgency of deepening social inequality and accelerating climate change. The Southbank Centre's work in environmental sustainability was catalysed by a period of consultation in 2022, during which dialogues and workshops led to the development of organisational targets and the appointment of a Sustainability Advisor. The role of the Sustainability Advisor is to develop, communicate, implement and monitor the robust processes and structures that enable the Southbank Centre to achieve incremental and overall targets. As part of its strategy to reach operational net zero by 2040, the Centre established interim targets through which progress can be measured across all buildings and the estate. These benchmarks have enabled the organisation to achieve a 68% reduction in carbon from its buildings, surpassing its goal to reduce carbon by 50% before

2025 and putting an 80% reduction by 2030 well within reach.⁴⁵ Beyond its built environment, the organisation has set additional sustainability targets that bring performance and visual arts, employees and visitors, and commercial activity into the project of sustainability. 2025 marks when the Southbank Centre will finalise its Artistic Sustainability policy (all shows, exhibitions and performances will be produced in line with this policy by 2030); all employees will receive sustainability training; the organisation will reach a 75% recycling rate; food waste will be reduced by 25%; and 50% of tenants will have set their own sustainability targets.⁴⁶

Tasked with "driving environmental change across the whole of the Southbank Centre," the Sustainability Advisor works to embed the organisation's sustainability strategy within its operations, planning and culture. Along with advising on artistic programming, this has meant establishing further structural roles such as Sustainability Champions – advocates from each department who empower their teams to enact change on a local level and shape the broader strategy. These initiatives are supported by the communication of sustainability targets and progress to external partners and visitors, including through Learning and Development initiatives. The Southbank Centre's Annual Reviews⁴⁷ relay progress toward organisational change to date, and recent consultation with specialists regarding water, biodiversity and ecology point to future areas of sustainability investment and structural change.

The Southbank Centre's internal work in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) follows a similar approach, as the organisation regards 'progress' in this area to be a matter of tangible change. 2022 again stands out as a watershed year, when the Centre established a Culture Team that brings together its work on EDI, Learning and Development, and Internal Communications. As with sustainability, the Centre seeks to embed inclusion across its operations, planning and culture. This translated to new roles, including the appointment of a Head of Culture, Internal Comms & Engagement Manager whose work integrates communications, equity and culture as they face the organisation's workforce. The team is led by the Director of People and Culture, whose role was introduced in 2020. These structural developments follow the Centre's stated commitment to greater transparency and accountability, measured through voluntary workforce demographic data. The organisation's 2023 Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap report indicates a changing workforce, which grew by 66% between 2021 and 2022.⁴⁸ Recruitment since 2021 has seen 61.7% of new staff self-identify as women and 27.9% as Black, Asian or Ethnically Diverse (BAED).⁴⁹ Yet addressing disparity remains a priority, with a mean pay gap of 5.5% between men and women and a mean pay gap of 21.8% between white and BAED employees.⁵⁰ As the Centre itself notes, while representation of women and BAED colleagues is increasing across the organisation, workforce diversity decreases in higher paid positions.⁵¹

New roles, self-reporting and voluntary publication make progress and work to be done visible as the Southbank Centre strives to become more inclusive. However, change is also motivated by the initiatives developed, commitments made and benchmarks

set by the Centre's principal funder, Arts Council England (ACE). The Creative Case for Diversity provides a framework through which ACE and recipients of its funding align their work with the ideals of diversity and equality, from programming and representation to leadership and workforce. From 2015 onward, ACE has required its National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) – including the Southbank Centre – to contribute to the Creative Case for Diversity, providing ratings that assess their programmes of work.⁵² The Creative Case ratings measure the extent to which funded creative organisations actively advance diversity in both structural and programmatic terms.⁵³ Failure to achieve "met," "strong" or "outstanding" rating jeopardises an organisation's future admission into the portfolio.⁵⁴ The Southbank Centre achieved a 'strong' Creative Case rating in the most recent disaggregated data report (2018-19) published by ACE,⁵⁵ indicating how change from above – in this case mandated by a funding body – can compliment and even accelerate change already in motion.

The Centre's efforts to respond and adapt to both climate crisis and social inequality clearly underline the importance of planning, implementing and monitoring transformation. Yet whereas programmatic change has enabled the Southbank Centre to identify and address the links between crises and inequalities relatively rapidly, due in part to the freedom afforded to artists, integrated structural change follows more slowly. How might dialogue and coordination across areas of work create a shared language and generate deeper, more enduring organisational change? This question is key to the steps being taken by the Southbank Centre today.

Toward integration

The uniqueness of the Southbank Centre experience rests not only in willingness to share lessons-in-progress, but also in the ability of an organisational process to highlight how multiple axes of change intersect. The story of the Centre's approach demonstrates how integrated change evolves, drawing attention to the necessity of pairing programmatic (external) innovation with structural (internal) development. Based on this case study, an effective approach to organisational change might be located at the intersection of these two axes.

Taking seriously the Centre's hesitation about being depicted as a model of success, this case study looks to what we can learn from an organisation's commitment to becoming "an engine of creativity" and "the nation's most culturally democratic and expressive space for artists and audiences" in the face of crisis and inequality. While leading the cultural sector in sustainability, the Southbank Centre recognises that having a "good environmental footprint" cannot be an elitist pursuit and requires addressing past, present and future harms. Likewise, leaders in the organisation acknowledge that the steps taken to align with ideals of inclusion, diversity and equity must centre its workforce as well as its audiences and visitors.

Public programming like Planet Summer and You Belong Here makes the crucial connections that drive an integrated approach to organisational change. With 52% of events free and over 3.4 million visitors in 2023/2024, the potential of these initiatives to reach new audiences, inspire reflection and motivate action is undeniable.⁵⁶ How this learning is shared and adapted within internal structures will be crucial to the organisation's ability to remain a place where people want to work – where they see themselves reflected and feel that they can grow, thrive and invest. This begins with creating opportunities for communication and developing a shared language of change across teams, supported by mechanisms that ensure representation

and accountability. At the same time, the push for structural development must be driven by tangible processes, as seen in the Centre's net zero strategy and its contribution to the Creative Case for Diversity. Illustrating and understanding how change will work is key to generating support and galvanising action toward a horizon that at times feels distant and uncertain. The ability to deliver this structural change and 'future-proof' the organisation internally will animate further public programming that asks difficult questions, makes space for diverse voices and helps to create a better future – ensuring the Southbank Centre's local and global relevance for generations to come.

Case Study 3: Plymouth, Culture & Inclusive Growth

PLYMOUTH CULTURE

Powering Arts & Culture

Background

The Plymouth experience tells the story of culture-driven change as a process of inclusive growth, grounded in the significance of place. Rather than seeing culture as solely the beneficiary of a city's development, this case study highlights how the cultural sector and its organisations are central to economic growth and stability. This approach moves away from an understanding of culture as the knowledge and practices that reflect our identities, values and ways of life – and towards culture as a force for transformation. As detailed below, culture-driven inclusive growth enables Plymouth to develop and deliver its strategies across scales, improving the lives of residents while strengthening its regional, national and global reputation. At the same time, the Plymouth experience makes visible new questions and tensions, highlighting how lasting change requires a commitment to learning and adaptation.

For more than a decade, capital investment in culture has positively shaped Plymouth's social, economic and spatial landscape. The city's creative and cultural sectors now account for £150 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) per year,⁵⁷ and many individual organisations work in wards and neighbourhoods with hard-to-reach or historically under-served communities.⁵⁸ On an individual level, the growth of cultural initiatives opens access, generates engagement and creates opportunities. On a city level, a flourishing arts, cultural and creative sector attracts further funding from external stakeholders and places Plymouth firmly on the UK's cultural map. Together they make the city a place of potential pride and investment.

Yet Plymouth continues to be faced with challenges that require the vision, bravery and optimism that the city is historically known for. While its population skews slightly younger than the national average, residents are more likely to have "bad" or "very bad" health; to provide unpaid care; and to find employment in "skilled manual" or "semi-skilled and unskilled manual" occupations (C2/D/E social grade).⁵⁹ Though audiences engaging with arts and culture are more diverse than the city's overall population, Plymouth is less ethnically diverse than England as a whole – and adults in Plymouth are less likely to attend almost all areas of arts and culture than those elsewhere in England.⁶⁰

These demographic trends and baseline data indicate where work is needed, on city and organisational levels. At the same time, they alert us to broader challenges and crises – how might climate change drive poorer health across Britain's Ocean City, exposing certain areas and communities to increased vulnerability? How can the city address the impacts of its industrial past and present when responding to calls for environmental sustainability? To what extent does Plymouth's future depend on its ability to acknowledge historic ties to slavery and colonialism, yet not be defined by this legacy?

Situating a response

As detailed in the Plymouth Plan (2014-2034), the city has developed an economy-led vision of transformation that aims to ensure that “[...] the benefits of growth are experienced by all Plymouth’s people, and that a fairer, healthier, safer and greener city is achieved.”⁶¹ This approach is made tangible by the language and objectives of inclusive growth, which crosscuts the Plymouth Plan, the Plymouth Economic Strategy (2024-2034) and the Culture Plan (2021-2030). As one of four interconnected “Pillars” identified in the Plymouth Economic Strategy,⁶² inclusive growth ensures that “growth in prosperity is achieved in a way that reduces inequality, and is sustainable.”⁶³ This framing expands the scope of economic policy to account for social drivers, meaning that any claims to increased prosperity and productivity must also be measured against deprivation, wellbeing and environmental responsibility.⁶⁴

While the marine, medical / healthcare and advanced manufacturing sectors are highlighted as “key strengths” of the local economy,⁶⁵ the Plymouth Plan explicitly notes the significance of culture: “Part of this [inclusive growth] agenda is to optimise the benefits to be derived to the city from its cultural offer, and to nurture businesses in the creative sector.”⁶⁶ Arts and culture are framed as “the vital spark,” reflecting the city’s commitment to long-term strategic investment in culture.⁶⁷ However, the Plymouth experience suggests that culture is much more than a spark needed for growth – without culture, the city’s vision of the future simply cannot be achieved.

Approaching change: initiatives & emphases

By acknowledging the links between productivity and in/equality, inclusive growth locates the drivers for development and prosperity at the point where business, civic organisations and social infrastructure meet.⁶⁸ The Plymouth case study provides insight into how investment in culture – as a sector uniquely positioned at this meeting point – can deliver inclusive economic growth through a programme of integrated change.

As a Pillar of Plymouth's Economic Strategy (2024-2034), inclusive growth aims "to increase equality, reduce inequity and create the economic conditions that work for everyone."⁶⁹ Rather than solely expanding investment in areas of the city and economy that are highly developed and flourishing, this approach acknowledges that productivity and prosperity are achieved through addressing engrained issues and endemic problems. Plymouth boasts a range of businesses that model "good growth," including social enterprise – businesses that "trade to tackle social problems, improve communities, people's life chances, or the environment."⁷⁰ In recognition of the city's strength and leadership in this area, Plymouth was named the UK's first Social Enterprise City in 2013. Today over 200 social enterprises work across education, health, arts, environment, housing, social care and more.⁷¹

The success of these businesses and their networks speaks to the values that drive the city's approach to growth and development, along with its vision of the future. As outlined in the Plymouth Plan, five core values anchor the city's planning and shape its transformation: roots, opportunity, power, flourish and connections.⁷² Taken together, these principles and priorities shape the city's Culture Plan, yielding a novel mechanism for pursuing collaborative culture-driven change, supporting social enterprise and delivering inclusive growth.

The Culture Plan

The development of Plymouth's Culture Plan (2021-2030) commenced at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, resulting in a strategic vision that recognises the necessity of pairing short-term recovery with long-term ambition.⁷³ The Plan charts a ten-year course for the city's cultural and creative industries that models the systemic change required for "reimagining and recreating a better, fairer, greener, more sustainable and equitable world."⁷⁴ Reflecting the values-driven culture described above, the Culture Plan links behavioural change with structural change, and highlights how the cultivation and sharing of values can support diversity, resilience and flourishing across the sector.⁷⁵

However, this is not solely a vision for a single sector or industry – rather, the Culture Plan positions culture as "the driving force for economic and social prosperity in Plymouth."⁷⁶ Starting from the uniqueness and importance of place, the strategy embeds culture within a wider ecology, requiring us to "move away from the view of culture as a sector only, and move towards culture as a mechanism and driving force for addressing our civic agendas."⁷⁷ Grounded in the city's cultural identity and shaped by its connection to the sea, the Culture Plan joins with the Plymouth Economic Strategy (2024-2034) and broader Plymouth Plan (2014-2034)⁷⁸ in advocating for an approach to change that shares and celebrates Plymouth's unique story – deepening the city's local roots and strengthening its global reputation.

As part of a broader place-making agenda, the Culture Plan compliments "non-arts agendas" and integrates with existing city strategies to achieve ambitions for Plymouth as a whole.⁷⁹ The Plan draws on the strengths and needs of the cultural sector to define key priorities that will enable the city to realise its vision of economic and social prosperity:⁸⁰ people (our communities), place (our spaces) and sector (our creatives).⁸¹ These strategic priorities provide a framework for decision-making and pathways for resource allocation, creating the conditions in which culture can drive city-wide growth and development.

What emerges is a dynamic creative economy that supports inclusive growth and aligns local strategy and ambitions with national policy and thinking.⁸² Importantly, the approach developed and promoted by the Culture Plan models the collaboration needed to reduce inequality and maximise prosperity across the city. Coordinated and authored by Plymouth Culture,⁸³ the strategic lead for the city's creative and cultural sector,⁸⁴ the Plan is the result of artists, creatives, business and entrepreneurs working together to envision and deliver a better future. Yet rather than yielding a framework that is limited to the realms of planning and policy, the collective approach advanced by the Culture Plan reveals a tangible mechanism for pursuing culture-driven change.

The Plymouth NPO Collective

Ten Plymouth organisations were granted National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status for 2018-2023, identified by Arts Council England (ACE) as “leaders in their areas, with a collective responsibility to protect and develop our national arts and cultural ecology.”⁸⁵ Eight local NPOs are funded from 2023-2026, with a total investment of more than £12 million across the three years.⁸⁶ While the NPOs develop and pursue individual programmes of work, Plymouth Culture has sought to foster connections across communities, sites and areas of specialisation. This effort resulted in the formation of the Plymouth NPO collective – a collaboration among the ACE-funded NPOs who pool resources, support activities and undertake learning in ways that align with the city’s Culture Plan objectives.⁸⁷

From public events to internal learning, the initiatives created and supported by the Plymouth NPO collective demonstrate precisely how culture can drive inclusive growth. At the same time, the collective advances an innovative approach that integrates equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), sustainability and decolonisation within a single framework for change. This integrated approach uniquely enables culture-driven change to work across scales, sites and communities, reducing inequality and maximising prosperity.

In Autumn 2023, the Black Atlantic Open City season saw Plymouth welcome artists, activists and thinkers from across the southwest for a season of decolonial

art and public programming. Local NPOs KARST, The Box and Real Ideas Organisation partnered with Radical Ecology and other organisations to explore – and actualise – how inclusive civic spaces can create just and sustainable planetary futures.⁸⁸ Centring on the *Against Apartheid* exhibition at KARST,⁸⁹ the season of events encouraged audiences to interrogate the connections between histories and legacies of colonialism, forced migration and climate breakdown. While the exhibition traced links to global trends and processes, the Open City Night School offered opportunities to explore these dynamics and relationships at the community level with local leaders and organisers. The season culminated in the Black Atlantic symposium,⁹⁰ a weekend of programming at The Box, KARST and Market Hall that concluded with a workshop and silent walk departing from the Mayflower Steps – grounding environmental justice in the landscape of the city and its connection to the sea.

The Black Atlantic Open City season illustrates how culture drives change and growth in Plymouth by stimulating interest, increasing access and creating impact across the city in ways that also strengthen its global reputation. Guided by the Culture Plan and animated by members, Plymouth NPO collective initiatives prompt public engagement, foster civic pride, and generate investment by residents, visitors and external stakeholders. Yet they also highlight how grappling with uncomfortable histories and contemporary crises poses not a risk or a liability

– but presents an opportunity for learning and adaptation that enables an organisation, sector or city to define its own future.

As a loose constellation of place-based organisations, the Plymouth NPO collective devotes significant energy to providing space for its members to value and share the process of learning. Through its Cultural Investment Fund (CIF), Plymouth Culture has drawn local NPOs together to seed fund cultural initiatives, allocating support for the development of new ideas that advance the creative sector and the city. The CIF buys time for grant recipients “to think, test, research and pilot,”⁹¹ as central to the process of growth. Yet time and opportunity are funded not as solitary endeavours, but in the interest of sharing experience and knowledge. As the CIF states, “The intention is that this research generates a range of shared learning that can be disseminated to the cultural sector for others to learn from and adopt best practices.”⁹²

This commitment to the value of process and shared learning extends to NPO grant beneficiaries and members of the Plymouth collective alike. The theme for applications to the 2020-21 CIF fund – “Togetherness” – reflected work undertaken by members to improve inclusion in the arts and culture sector.⁹³ A second round of funding extended the collective’s work in this area, supporting the efforts of three selected organisations to explore, research and test ideas relating to racism in Plymouth’s creative sector.⁹⁴ This focus on race and anti-racism action aligns grant recipients and funders, enabling organisations to connect learning between the projects and the NPOs, and supporting inclusive growth across the sector.

Beginning with anti-racism (2020-21), the NPO collective developed a programme of “action learning sets” that enables members to come together around a theme relating to in/equality and change – not as experts but as peers. Based on research into the city profile and challenges, facilitator-led

dialogue and learning provides the foundation from which organisations can address “engrained issues” and “endemic problems”⁹⁵ in increasingly holistic ways. The NPO collective’s action learning sets recently shifted from a single-issue focus to themes that recognise how inequalities and futures are interwoven. As with anti-racism, collective learning about intersectionality (2023-24) and environmental justice (2024-25) does not prioritise producing public outputs, but “taking action, sharing learning and embedding change as cultural leaders.”⁹⁶

Importantly, these dialogical spaces make room for tensions, obstacles and uncertainties within the city’s strategy of inclusive growth. Rather than constituting a weakness, this commitment to valuing and sharing learning in progress enables organisations to work toward transformation with confidence by removing the pressure of needing to ‘get it right.’ This practice is crucial not only to the health and longevity of Plymouth’s creative ecology, but its ability to drive social and economic prosperity for the city as a whole. Following the collective’s initial work on anti-racism, member organisations developed and implemented an Accountability Commitment Table to identify the actions, leaders and timelines to build a more inclusive organisation and sector.⁹⁷ Their shared experience also contributed to the development of a broader Inclusion Action Plan that supports the individual and collaborative work of organisations. In these ways, the NPO collective’s learning drives tangible systemic change, moving Plymouth toward a “better, fairer and more sustainable future.”⁹⁸

Approaching change: initiatives & emphases

The Plymouth experience reveals how culture can drive inclusive growth in policy and practice, enabling a city to address and reduce inequality as central to creating the conditions for economic prosperity. It also compels us to consider what it means to pursue an integrated approach to change on a broad scale, shifting from the perspective of organisations to the concerns of sectors and communities. Rather than presenting a finished model, the case study emphasises the importance of transformation as a long-term process that requires learning, adaptation and commitment. In doing so it highlights the significance of place to visions of growth, prosperity and productivity – to the health and future of a city and its people.

The story of Plymouth is central to its strategy for inclusive growth, enabling leaders to identify how present-day inequalities are linked to histories of slavery and colonialism; increase the exposure of audiences to issues of climate vulnerability and environmental harm; and present barriers to building a truly inclusive city. At the same time, this story tells residents, visitors and stakeholders of a city that can rise to the challenge of imagining and realising an inclusive and sustainable future.

Organisational and city-wide efforts to generate culture-driven change in Plymouth answer important questions about how decolonisation, inclusion and sustainability might be drawn together within a single framework. Grounded in the local community and connecting to global concerns, initiatives like the Black Atlantic Open City season invite engagement,

prompt dialogue and galvanise action about the pressing issues of our time. Culture uniquely moves people, “[...] reach[ing] and transform[ing] communities in ways that other agendas and organisations can’t.”⁹⁹ On an individual level, this means seeing oneself reflected and included in the city’s events, spaces and stories. On an organisational level, this means pursuing opportunities and developing networks that support systemic change through shared learning. On a sector level, this means collaboratively funding and promoting work that addresses the drivers of social inequalities and the climate emergency. On a city level, this means recognising how culture-driven change can not only compliment but animate inclusive growth, enabling a local authority to deliver on targets for inclusion and sustainability.

Yet the Plymouth NPO case study also raises new questions about scaling an integrated approach for organisational change. How can learning be shared across sectors as well as organisations, enabling heritage, education, business, healthcare and manufacturing to develop and implement aligned initiatives and frameworks? How can tensions, mistakes and failures be treated with sensitivity when a commitment to process means disclosure to public audiences and local authorities? When inclusive growth requires systems change, how can the city redeploy resources and rethink funding in a way that enables culture to effectively drive transformation? What does a culture-led city make possible?

- 1 <https://www.radicalecology.earth/>
- 2 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/>
- 3 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/our-founders>
- 4 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/the-history-of-the-national-trust>
- 5 See membership figures published the National Trust's Annual Reports from 2020/21 through 2023/24; accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/annual-reports>
- 6 See 'A Climate for Change: Adaptation and the National Trust'; accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/nature-climate/adapting-for-climate-change>
- 7 'For everyone, forever – Our strategy 2020-2025'; accessible at <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/our-strategy.pdf>
- 8 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/people>
- 9 See 'Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery'; accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/research/addressing-our-histories-of-colonialism-and-historic-slavery>
- 10 Between 1 September 2020 and 4 November 2022, the Trust recorded 32,328 downloads of the Report; data shared with Radical Ecology via email on 21 October 2024.
- 11 See the 'Challenging Histories' pilot programme; accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/history-heritage/challenging-histories-public-programme-2017-19>
- 12 See the 2022 'Inclusion and Diversity at the National Trust Report'; accessible at <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/inclusion-and-diversity-at-the-national-trust.pdf>
- 13 Accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/our-commitment-to-inclusion-and-diversity>
- 14 'For everyone, for ever – Our strategy 2020-2025', p. 3.
- 15 See 'A Climate for Change', pp. 3-5.
- 16 See 'A Climate for Change – Executive Summary', p. 4; accessible at <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/a-climate-for-change-executive-summary>
- 17 Accessible at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/research/climate-change-adaptation-guidance>
- 18 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/research/climate-change-adaptation-guidance>
- 19 <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/our-climate-and-environment-policy>
- 20 <https://www.into.org/withstanding-change-project/>
- 21 <https://www.into.org/>
- 22 As Director-General Hillary McGrady stated in February 2022, 'We're now able to refocus, with renewed emphasis on two priorities spanning all we do: making everyone welcome, and taking action on climate change.' See the National Trust Strategy 2020-25 document ('For everyone, for ever'), p. 3.
- 23 Ginanne Brownell, 'Where Culture Flows Along London's River Thames', The New York Times, 17 February 2023. Access at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/17/movies/london-southbank-center-bafta.html>
- 24 As measured by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA): <https://www.alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=423>
- 25 See the Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Southbank Centre (2020) report by Hatch Regeneris; accessible at https://bynder.southbankcentre.co.uk/m/1d-d3852977471c14/original/Southbank-Centre_Economic-and-Social-Impact-Report_Nov-2020.pdf
- 26 An Engine of Creativity – The Year in Review 2022/23, p.9.
- 27 A Sustainable Future – The Year in Review 2023/24, p. 9.
- 28 See the Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Southbank Centre (2020), pp. 29-30.
- 29 An Engine of Creativity – The Year in Review 2022/23, p. 9.
- 30 <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/about/mission-values/environmental-sustainability>
- 31 In 2018-19 ACE was the Southbank Centre's principal funder, providing 37% of its income through a £18.6 million grant; see the Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Southbank Centre (2020) report by Hatch Regeneris (p. 4). Annual funding from ACE between 2023-2026 is listed as £16.8 million; see the '2023-2026 National Portfolio, Investment Principles Support and Transfer Organisations' report accessible at <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/how-we-invest-public-money/2023-26-Investment-Programme/2023-26-investment-programme-data>
- 32 <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/about/mission-values>
- 33 See 'Looking After Our Heritage – A Conservation Plan for Southbank Centre' (April 2015) and 'A Sustainable Future – The Year in Review 2023/24.'
- 34 See 'Charitable objects' as listed on The Register of Charities, Charity Commission for England and Wales; accessible at <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/298909/governing-document>
- 35 These values are evident in the Southbank Centre's annual reports and also articulated by its staff; see the Annual Reviews for 2023/24 and 2023/24, along with the 'How we work' webpage accessible at <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/about-us/how-we-work/>
- 36 <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/you-belong-here-public-art/>
- 37 An Engine of Creativity – The Year in Review 2022/23, p. 9.
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- 66 Plymouth Plan, p. 18.
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- 86 Data provided by Plymouth Culture; email communication, 8 October 2024. The NPOs funded from 2023-2026 are Plymouth Culture, The Box, Real Ideas, KARST, TRP, Barbican Theatre, Literature Works, and Beyond Face.
- 87 <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/cultural-investment-fund/>
- 88 <https://karst.org.uk/open-city-season/>
- 89 <https://karst.org.uk/exhibitions/against-apartheid/>
- 90 <https://karst.org.uk/black-atlantic/>
- 91 <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/cultural-investment-fund/>
- 92 <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/cultural-investment-fund/>. We note that this initiative is evolving; future investment and development schemes may take a different shape.
- 93 <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/cultural-investment-fund/>
- 94 <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/anti-racism-commitment/>
- 95 See the Plymouth Economic Strategy (2024-2034).
- 96 From Plymouth Culture’s ‘Anti-racism Action Plan, Facilitator/Critical Friend Brief.’
- 97 The NPOs engaged in the anti-racism commitment include Plymouth Culture, The Box, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Barbican Theatre Plymouth, Literature Works, KARST, Plymouth Music Zone, Take A Part and Real Ideas. See <https://plymouthculture.co.uk/anti-racism-commitment/>
- 98 Culture Plan, p. 46.
- 99 Culture Plan, p. 46.

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