



## **PRODUCTIVE CONNECTIONS**

### **SURF'S HERITAGE AND CREATIVITY ALLIANCE TWO YEARS ON**



**A survey of partners in SURF's Heritage and Creative Alliance shows continued strong support for the benefits of facilitated collaborative working.**

**Despite the constraints of the pandemic, all partners reported:**

- **A better understanding of shared purpose and goals**
- **Increased learning on good practice and process**
- **A better understanding of shared priorities/capacities**
- **Improved relationships between national agencies**

## **BACKGROUND**

SURF initiated the Heritage and Creative Alliance (SH&CA) two years ago in response to a survey of national heritage and creative organisations where participants agreed there could be tangible benefits to closer partnership working.

SURF 's experience is that heritage and creativity are essential tools in successful regeneration. We have long advocated the crucial role that can be played by heritage and creativity in regenerating communities struggling with historic and contemporary inequalities. These productive connections have been consistently evidenced in SURF's place-based Alliance for Action collaborations. Scotland is fortunate in having many effective organisations which already use their skills, experience and resources to successfully support regeneration across communities. The purpose of SH&CA was to further

enhance inter-agency cooperation and link national policy and resources with local place based knowledge, assets, challenges and priorities.

## THE FIRST SURVEY

Nine national organisations<sup>1</sup> which had expressed an interest in the potential benefits of a facilitated alliance took part in the baseline survey in January 2019. The original survey found the following:

**When asked to describe their current working relationships with each other, everyone agreed that there could be mutual benefits to working more closely with other organisations.**

Although all the organisations said they had adequate or strong relationships with at least one or two others, all of them additionally had relationships with other organisations which were weak or non-existent.

**When asked about the possible benefits of enhanced collaboration between them, all of the organisations believed that would result in a better targeting of resources.**

Two thirds of them thought it would additionally lead to cooperation on shared priorities and more than half of them thought it would result in sharing investment, avoid duplication and increase learning on good practice and process.

**When asked what would enable organisations to achieve enhanced cooperation, organisations agreed that a better understanding of each other's goals, priorities and target recipients would help facilitate collaboration.**

There was general agreement that opportunities for open discussions and more chances to 'meet round a table' would increase collaboration.

SH&CA was formally set up in response to the survey findings. Its inaugural meeting was held in March 2019. Since then SURF has facilitated place-based meetings and site visits to two Alliance for Action communities. Last year during the pandemic, SH&CA partners were given an opportunity to share their COVID experiences<sup>2</sup> and also to participate in a 'virtual' site visit to Langholm in

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<sup>1</sup> Architecture and Design, Scotland (ADS) - Arts and Business, Scotland (ABS) - Big Lottery Fund, Scotland (BLFS) - Built Environment, Scotland (BEFS) - Creative Scotland (CS) - Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) - Historic Environment Scotland (HES) - Museums and Galleries, Scotland (MGS) - Regional Screen, Scotland (RSS)

<sup>2</sup> SURF HERITAGE & CREATIVE ALLIANCE: Notes from COVID learning exchange sessions.

Dumfries and Galloway. Throughout the process, feedback from SH&CA partners and community participants has been consistently positive.

## NEW SURVEY LEARNING

SH&CA partners completed a second 'feedback' survey last month (January, 2021). Responses to the Alliance events and processes have remained positive.

Even the partner who reported 'only' modest benefit from their participation, identified that three relationships with other partners had improved as a result.

The survey's main findings were:

- All partners said they had a better understanding of each other's roles, priorities and capacities
- A minority of partners additionally reported that SH&CA membership had enhanced cooperation over shared time and resources and an improved understanding of each other's target recipients
- There were 25 identified incidents of improved relationships between partners

*"The sharing of information has been helpful but especially beneficial to better understand the skills and insights that individuals bring."*

*"As an organisation which actively aims to reach out to build links beyond our own sector, this is a very helpful forum."*

- SH&CA membership had increased learning on good practice and process
- More than half found that membership had reduced the chance of duplication and increased cooperation on shared priorities
- Two partners said they had enjoyed better targeting of investment and resources

*"It was helpful to focus on a particular community and discuss the support that organisations could provide together."*

*“The main benefit has been keeping abreast of priorities and activity of other partner organisations.”*

- All partners described their membership as worthwhile, interesting, useful and/or educational
- While recognising the benefit of SH&CA to partners, participants additionally noted the obvious benefits to the communities which were able to present to multiple agencies and enlist support and resources as a result

*“SH&CA helped me to gain insights particularly around the creative industry partners.”*

*“I would recommend participation in SH&CA to others. “*

*“The platform and engagement opportunity was useful. Going forward that would likely remain the case especially as we try to understand how we can all support communities in unpredictable times. So maintaining a set of connections to share plans, ideas and questions feels like a valuable opportunity.”*

*“A useful network which I expect to become more useful in the years ahead.”*

*“Connecting up these different partners is incredibly useful, especially during the pandemic and recovery period.”*

*“The focus on the 'local' which is at the core of SH&CA is becoming a central Government policy post-COVID. Ideally, any community should be able to seek the kind of integrated response and support which your [SURF’s Alliance for Action] selected communities have been able to benefit from.”*

## **WHAT NEXT?**

The evidence is that participating national creative and heritage agencies believe that the enhanced shared understanding and practical cooperation encouraged by SH&CA added value to their work and investments.

Going forward, partners are keen to continue their engagement with SH&CA. While they welcome ongoing, place-themed, input from communities, they have suggested the following additional ways in which the shared benefits could be optimised.

- Facilitate development sessions where partners can ‘team up’ on issues with relevant SH&CA colleagues to pursue mutual goals
- Identify strategic priorities that are common to the group and scope the potential for practical collaborative work to meet specific community needs
- Recording and sharing learning about the application of national agency policy and processes within communities
- While the focus should remain on Heritage and Creativity, ensure that new models of good and innovative practice can be quickly rolled out across the widest possible audience to the benefit of other sectors.

SURF welcomes the opportunity to continue facilitating SH&CA and is confident that it will continue to be a catalyst for ever more successful, inclusive and sustainable community regeneration.

**SURF thanks all the organisations which have taken part in this review and looks forward to encouraging and facilitating future, effective collaboration.**

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Elaine Cooper, SURF, February 2021.

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