

Evaluating and commissioning art, culture and heritage in Reading

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Context

In 2017, Reading was awarded £558,471 to pilot the new approach advocated by the Great Places scheme to enable cultural, community and civic organisations to work more closely together. This approach focuses on:

- Exploring new ways to include arts and heritage in the provision of local education or health services;
- Research into the contribution made by arts and heritage to local economies;
- Funding for people working in arts and heritage to build networks and increase their skills;
- Exploring and piloting new ways of financing cultural organisations;
- Encouraging the use of existing powers that allow communities to support their local culture, such as the community right to bid or listing local landmarks as assets of community value; and
- Development of local strategies that maximise the community benefit that local arts and heritage can deliver.

Following a successful pilot of this scheme in the 16 areas of England which have been awarded money (Reading being one with the Reading-on-Thames project), this scheme and funding stream will be launched across the rest of the UK. The scheme is funded through a partnership between The Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England, as a part of this project I attended a conference with these funders to understand this partnership further and find out about the evaluative process which needs to be carried out for a successful pilot.



Getting ready to speak at a conference about working in partnership with the Whitley Researchers

Working in partnership with the Whitley Researchers

Working with the Whitley Researchers was a great experience and allowed for us to understand the different areas of Reading in a way which only people who have lived and worked in this area for most of their lives can. The team has a vast knowledge base around community research and were very helpful when putting together questionnaires, choosing areas to target as participants and later with analysing data.

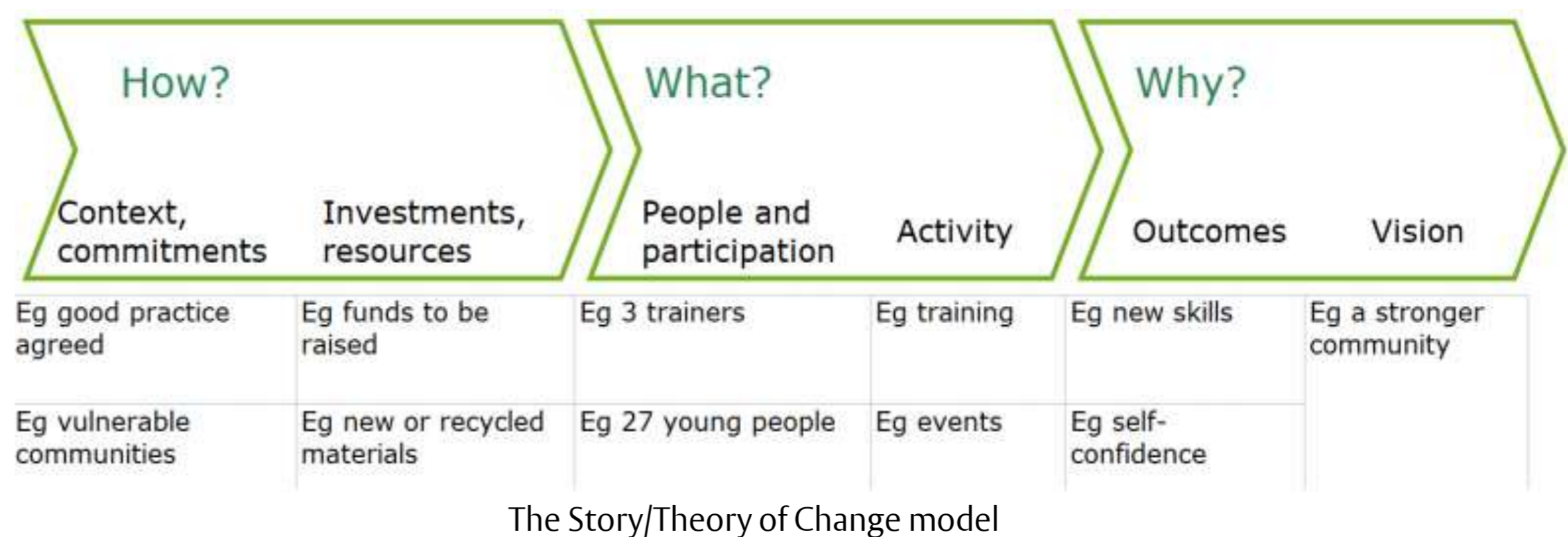
Throughout our project we had many meetings with the Whitley Researchers in order to make sure they were as involved as possible and they carried out a lot of our research with us by talking to people they know in the community and providing contacts for businesses which would have the demographics of customers we needed for a proportional sample.

Working with this team also influenced how the Great Places scheme was run as more of a focus was made to involve people in the community with major decisions such as where to grant money, which kinds of groups to work with and what kinds of projects should benefit from the grant awarded to Reading Borough Council.

Story of Change and other evaluative processes

My key focus throughout this project was to use my experience within the charity sector to set up evaluation for this project which will enable clear reporting back to the funders next year to show the real impact of this funding on people across Reading. This evaluation will also show key demographics which could benefit from more funding in the next funding round, if there are any geographical 'blind spots' and what the people of Reading really want to see happen regarding art, culture and heritage in this area.

One method of evaluation for projects funded by this scheme is shown below, this is called the 'Story of Change model'. I, along with the lead on this project, facilitated sessions with each of the groups which received funding to see what their plan was, starting with big picture thinking with an overall vision and working backwards to see how this vision will be realised in the next year and within the funding parameters set out.



This model of evaluation allows for learning by groups if their plans don't rigidly follow a more traditional budget and timeline as it allows for contingency planning while keeping in mind an overall vision. It also allows for next year's projects to be realistic about budgets.

The next steps

The research produced as part of this project has allowed for a social prescribing scheme, with a budget of £30,000 to be set up as a partnership between Berkshire Community Foundation and Reading Borough Council. I will be leading on this scheme along with the evaluation lead I worked with as part of the UROP project and the pilot for this will be launched in May 2019. Similar evaluation methods will be used for this scheme as were used in this project and it will make a real difference to the art, culture and heritage provision in Reading by allowing for people who really need help through methods such as art therapy to access this by being referred by a GP.

