



Department for  
Digital, Culture  
Media & Sport



NATIONAL  
LOTTERY FUNDED



# Place Based Social Action Learning Review Executive Summary

Rencisi July 2018



## 1. Introduction

Launched in 2017, the Place Based Social Action (PBSA) programme is a joint initiative between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Big Lottery Fund (the Fund). The PBSA programme is about getting local people and communities to work together with a range of non-statutory organisations and local authority services towards securing a shared vision of their place's future. The programme aims to enable communities to address their own place-specific priorities and challenges, whilst providing them with tools and resources to deliver impactful and long-lasting change.

### The purpose of this review:

- Explore previous approaches to place-based strategies and existing literature on the subject;
- Highlight evidence of their success and the factors that contribute to that success; to consider some of the challenges encountered in delivering and evaluating place-based initiatives;
- Suggest the ways in which the DCMS and the Fund's PBSA programme can best draw upon, and contribute to, this learning.

The objective of this learning review is to **inspire, share examples of good practice, and encourage discussion** around how to develop and deliver place-based solutions to local challenges – amongst grantees, and those interested in place based social action. As part of the review we have brought together examples of PBSA from across the UK, with their own evidence of successful implementation and strategy. A number of these are included as case studies in the full literature review. To complement this, we have also created a **live database of examples of PBSA** from the UK and beyond to help provide further inspiration and insight. This database will be updated throughout the PBSA programme so that everyone involved can learn from and contribute to it as they want.

We reviewed a variety of literature to gain a greater understanding of the place-based landscape. This included government and funder reports, evaluations, and other sector-based literature reviews. As much research already exists into place-based policy, our

effort has gone into complementing and building on this knowledge, rather than replicating it. Lankelly Chase's 'Historical Review of Place-based approaches' provides a thorough and readable background to the subject, and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) document 'Working in Place: a framework for place-based approaches' provides an excellent overview of UK-based learning from national funders, and includes an evidence-based model to help design and implement place-based approaches. This executive summary is intended to provide an overview of the longer document that follows and highlight important learning and recommendations. It includes:



- A discussion of the theoretical aspects of place-based approaches and social action;
- A practical section drawing on case studies and learning from existing place based social action approaches;
- Key findings around how to measure impact and capture learning.

## 2. The theory

### Defining PBSA: what is place?

Place is a popular, but problematic, concept in public policy: the term is frequently used, but conspicuously undefined. The longer version of this review that follows explores this problem in more depth, but for the purposes of PBSA it is helpful to remember that it is the local stakeholders and partnerships themselves who are required to articulate what makes – or could make – their 'place'. Ultimately, to be successful, this 'place' should be somewhere people want to be, somewhere they can benefit from, and feel obligated to give back to. The boundaries of a place should be meaningful for the people living and working within them.



Place-based approaches focus on place-specific priorities, context, community dynamics, strengths and challenges, which should all be considered in the design and delivery of the project. From a practical perspective, place-based delivery is just another type of strategic approach to funding projects: it provides a clear framework to determine the development, organisation, management and delivery of an intervention.

### Defining PBSA: what is social action?

Social action is defined by The Office for Civil Society as 'people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities'. DCMS believes that the embedding of social action in communities is the best way of ensuring the sustainability of public sector service design and delivery. Social action goes beyond volunteering and has been categorised by DCMS into nine broad categories: formal volunteering; time credits; peer support; advocacy and social movements; co-production; community asset ownership; co-operatively owned services; community organising; befriending and helping. There are other ways of defining social action, but this serves as a useful reminder of the many ways people can get involved in their local communities.

Social action is also related to civic participation and activism. The government uses the national Community Life Survey to gauge attitudes and engagement in civic activities. The most recently published figures (for 2016-17) show that while 41% of respondents had engaged in a civic activity (signing a petition, attending a public rally, etc.), only 27% felt

they could personally influence decisions affecting their local area. This points to challenges in creating awareness and opportunities for influencing and delivering decisions and services locally. As this document will illustrate, there are many common barriers to civic engagement in local social action, which include: high volunteer turnover; too much bureaucracy; and a perceived lack of time, skills and knowledge from participants; distrust in certain agencies and public bodies; and limited awareness of local issues and civic activities.



## Power in place

Although PBSA is currently used to describe a range of approaches, they are unified by a recognition that the conflicting strategies and priorities of charities, government, and the private sector do not always produce solutions that serve the best interests of local communities. PBSA works to develop open and reciprocal relationships that can begin to address underlying causes of community challenges. At the heart of PBSA's objectives are enabling communities to advocate for themselves, to build social capital, and increasing their capacity to take charge of the future.

With this in mind, effective PBSA approaches will actively shift power away from traditional decision-making bodies and towards the local. Place-based approaches put the community's capacity to **take charge of its own future**, to advocate for itself, and to build social capital, at the heart of its objectives. Genuine co-production – with local people and organisations shaping the design, delivery and evaluation of projects collaboratively – requires acknowledgement of how power dynamics in partnerships either help or hinder social action ambitions. Much of the literature reviewed considers strategies to describe and manage power relations, and we have found the Institute of Development Studies' 'Powercube' model to be particularly helpful tool for understanding power relations and thinking about strategies to navigate them to bring about social change.

The model, discussed in more detail in the longer version of this review, encourages users to think about different forms or demonstrations of power (*visible, hidden* and *invisible*) alongside consideration of the different *levels* at which power resides and the different forums (or 'spaces': *closed, invited, and claimed/created*) within which decisions are made or debate takes place (or not as the case may be with *closed* spaces). Given that a focus of this programme is on creating new opportunities for public engagement and involvement and about sharing power and control over local decision-making this model may serve as useful tool for places and their relationship managers: as a tool for facilitation and considering local context; for developing strategies for social action and advocacy; and/or for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

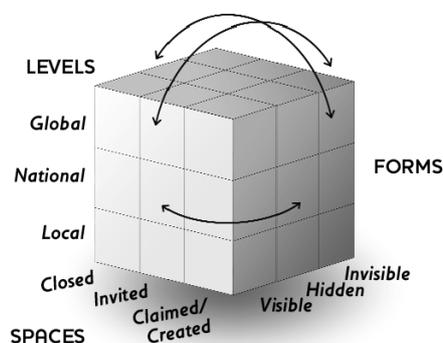


Figure 1. Institute of Development Studies (IDS) 'Place, Space and Power Framework' (aka Powercube mode). For further explanation see full literature review and visit <https://www.powercube.net/>

### 3. Practice: existing approaches to PBSA



#### A database of examples

To help grantees find learning most relevant to their projects, we have compiled a live database of PBSA examples. Available online, each project is organised by four categories: (i) **social action typology**; (ii) the intervention’s **issue or theme**; (iii) **partnership structure**; and (iv) type of **place**. Our intention is that the database is accessible and useful to anyone exploring PBSA, and can provide insights and inspiration for future delivery models. In this literature review, we have also included four case studies in more detail.

#### Live examples of existing approaches to place-based social action

#	Place and Title	Date	Description	Place Type	Social Action Typology	Theme	Partnership
3	Angler's Rest Pub in Bamford Village	2013	Angler's Rest Pub: The Angler's Rest became first community pub in Derbyshire in 2013 when it was purchased collectively by over 300 people. It is now run for the benefit of the community by the Bamford Community Society and houses the Angler's Rest pub, a café and the Post Office.	Community hub	Community asset ownership	Community hub	Community asset (shareholders)
4	Manchester Chinatown	2015 - 2018	Manchester Chinatown: A community organiser helped people living in Manchester's Chinatown to organise themselves and set up projects such as a Councillor Question & Answer for the Chinese community and non-English speakers to engage with local and national decision-making. City Centre Councillors came to Chinatown to meet the community half way, which helped shift power towards residents. For the first time, the Chinese residents had a chance to meet their local political representatives, and its success led to meetings becoming a regular fixture.	Neighbourhood	Community organising	Political engagement	Resident collective Civic partnership (i.e. they had support from a community organiser)
5	North and South London	2010 - present	North and South London Cares: North and South London Cares is a community network of young professionals and older neighbours coming together for social connection: friendship, to share experiences, to seek and give help and advice. It has grown out a local challenge of social isolation and loneliness in two social groups: young professionals and their elderly neighbours.	Borough	Befriending and helping	Social isolation	Local Authority Local people and volunteers Charitable foundation Charity

## Starting a PBSA project

The literature and existing examples have highlighted some key lessons and recommendations to think about when **designing, developing and starting a place-based social action project**, taking into account the link between civic-mindedness and social action participation.



### Recommendations for designing, developing and starting PBSA:

- **Communicating local initiatives effectively**, making sure they are transparent and accessible to everyone who wants to contribute and participate.
- **Investing in volunteers:** training them to build their confidence and capacity, and providing opportunities that align with their skills and interests.
- **Being flexible**, and offer people a range of ways, times and locations to participate; there are many barriers to engagement, which need to be mitigated before a genuinely community-led place-based approach can be discovered.
- **Building trusting relationships:** Successful partnerships are those in which roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, communication is regular and open, and where power is evenly distributed across all parties. Local people and their concerns are at the heart of PBSA – they should know that they are genuine stakeholders in the design and delivery of the services being produced.
- **Considering context and scale:** There are a lot of factors that will impact on the social, economic and physical wellbeing of people in their 'place'. Individuals and organisations rooted in a community are best placed to identify and understand local issues, and should therefore be the ones developing tailored solutions. However, it is important to recognise that some place-based projects will operate at scales or with resources that mean they cannot expect to enact change at the neighbourhood level through that intervention alone. Similarly, it is crucial to remember that place-based initiatives do not take place in a vacuum, and local and national context over the course of a programme can have a considerable effect on impact and involvement over the lifetime of a project.
- **It takes time:** The literature suggests it can take between seven and ten years before a place-based intervention can begin to demonstrate impact. Time is needed to raise awareness and understanding of local people; develop meaningful, productive and trusting relationships across stakeholders and delivery partners; and to design, implement and deliver the programme.
- **Building in legacy and sustainability from the start:** there is a real challenge of sustaining programmes beyond their initial funding period, so it is important to consider how additional sources of revenue or investment can be obtained and what the appropriate legacy vehicle is to sustain or expand operations.

# Enablers and barriers to successful PBSA projects

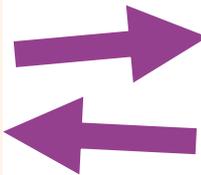
Having **community infrastructure already in place** can ensure successful development and implementation of place-based social action. This might include a history of community engagement or an existing regeneration strategy and partnerships. **Support from partners** is also vital to success, both for development and implementation, and sustainability. The ethos and culture of some partners can have negative impacts on the progress of place-based social action programmes.



Many examples show how a **lack of risk culture** in public sector partners can lead to stagnation in growth and projects struggling to get off the ground. This can also be impacted by **local authority cuts**. Finally, **employment is crucial**: finding the right person for the job can help drive a project that otherwise might not succeed. High staff turnover can effect the continuity and credibility required to build partnerships and maintain community engagement.

## Barriers

- Community engagement
- Competing culture/ethos/priorities between partners
- Local authority cuts
- Lack of risk culture in public sector partners
- Staff turnover effecting continuity and credibility



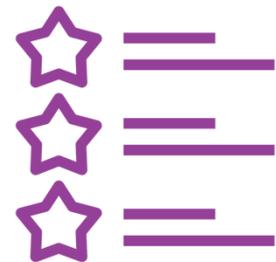
## Enablers

- Having community infrastructure already in place
- History of community engagement
- History of successful partnership work
- Long-established community-led regeneration/project work
- Buy-in and support from partners
- Finding the 'right person'



## 4. Practice: existing approaches to evaluation

A range of methods have been employed to evaluate place programmes in the past, which include: case studies; interviews; statistical analysis; the use of and comparison of national indicators; participant numbers or take-up rates; and policy analysis. Some evaluation approaches have been subject to considerable criticism - most commonly for treating the projects as 'complete', failing to take a long-term view and not assessing the viability of a project's sustainability. The most common challenges for evaluators cited in the literature are:





### Challenges in evaluating PBSA:

- **Things change:** Even when positive impact can be recorded, the systems and policy landscape that delivered those successes are always changing, especially over the long timelines required by PBSA approaches. This issue is further complicated by the challenge of evidencing an outcome when evaluations do not extend beyond the lifetime of a programme.
- **Attribution:** Similarly, the economic, social and policy changes that occur over the lifespan of the programme make it difficult to prove direct causation between positive outcomes and the intervention.
- **Engagement:** balancing power relations and distributing responsibilities evenly is crucial to PBSA success. It is important, therefore, to involve people throughout, rather than one off consultation.
- **Complexity:** Working in partnerships can be challenging, particularly when a range of funders are involved. Priorities and personnel change and over the duration of a programme different stakeholders may also want different things and there may be a tension between national and local objectives.

## Learning from evaluation strategies

As the PBSA is a joint government/Big Lottery funded project being delivered on a national scale we have also looked to similar large-scale initiatives for insights that may inform this evaluation. These include the: Our Place, Big Local and Fulfilling Lives programmes funded by either the government or Big Lottery Fund. Reviewing these evaluations showed us that:

- **Early support is appreciated.** The Our Place evaluation highlighted stakeholders' appreciation for relationship manager support, and valued the initial funding to help places collaborate and form a plan.
- **Community priorities are project priorities.** Where the programme and its evaluation had been successful it had more commonly been led by community-led organisations rather than the local authorities. The programme tended to be most successful when the services or propositions being developed had been identified as a priority by the community.
- **Shared visions need close relationships.** Where statutory partners (health, policy, local council, etc.) had been closely involved, the programme acted as a catalyst to bring a range of organisations and stakeholders together to pursue shared objectives, which can then be more effectively measured and evaluated.
- **Sustainability needs funding.** Financial pressures brought about through austerity measures, and a perception that it could take some time for providers to change well-established funding and commissioning processes, meant places would require funding from other sources to continue to pursue their ambitions. Evaluators and partnerships need to work together to understand the project's sustainability and legacy strategy.
- **It takes time.** Echoing earlier discussion in this literature review, the evaluators found that a 12-month window was not sufficient to understand the 'whole process' places went through, and this should instead be viewed as the start of a journey that could take five or more years. The Our Place evaluation cites some



projects that took 24 months to begin implementing their plans – particularly when a range of partners are involved, or where buildings/assets are involved.

- **Stories are powerful.** Big Local has an evaluation called Our Bigger Story: a multimedia evaluation of Big Local which aims to record positive change, understand how those changes come about, and how they can be sustained. The evaluation supports residents in Big Local areas to record their experiences, through community research, blogs, photos, digital stories, films and other media. This approach will serve as a unique digital record of change in communities over a ten-year period and offers an alternative to more traditional qualitative and case study approaches – something that may appeal to places on the PBSA programme keen to capture the impact their service is having on individuals and parts of their communities.
- **Active participation is key in delivery and evaluation.** Participatory action research has been an important strand of Big Local evaluations, which included focus group discussions with Big Local areas, facilitation of meetings between Big Local areas themselves and agencies, and the provision of advice, information, resources and ideas to areas.

## Capturing impact and learning

**Learning and monitoring needs to be built into the programme from its inception**, both with individual places, and at a programme level. Lankelly Chase recommends adopting a theory of change process that involves all stakeholders, including the community, in both setting the learning objectives and planning and capturing learning. Workshops can be used to establish what success or positive change looks like for all parties, and how they can work together to achieve this. These will be the **collectively owned outcomes**, and clear responsibilities for capturing and storing data and insights should also be agreed from the outset.

**Ongoing reflection and adaption** is very important, and should be made fun and interesting. As mentioned above, there are many creative and participatory approaches to evaluation. It is vital to celebrate successes along the way, and revisit priorities and the theory of change as programmes develop. This iterative approach also presents an opportunity for peer learning; sharing insights, and a sense of connectedness to others undertaking a similar journey can be an invaluable resource. Similarly, assigning one or more partnership members as a Learning Champion to liaise with evaluators on behalf of the partnership may be an effective way to manage limited time and resources.

## 5. Conclusion

We hope that this document will be a useful resource to places and projects. **Our approach to evaluation and learning on the PBSA programme is a realistic one** - we want to understand how, when, and why approaches work, because this insight will enable to inform and improve the PBSA approach.



To be best placed to learn from, and provide support to, the places, we need places to feel they have some ownership over the evaluation process and the questions and areas we will explore. We hope to work with places to foster an environment of trust and peer support - encouraging places to share what is not working well, alongside what is.