



2019 -2022 & 2022-2026

Creative People & Places Project for Somerset

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Our impact

After six and a half years, Seed Sedgemoor’s Creative People and Places programme, funded by Arts Council England and the National Lottery, has come to an end. The programme was initially funded for three years and was extended twice by the national funder. Since 2020, despite being hampered by the Covid pandemic, the programme delivered **190 creative projects**, which enabled **16,716 people across Sedgemoor to directly take part** in the activities. Primarily due to its successful public art projects, including murals in Highbridge, Burnham-on-Sea and Bridgwater, pictures from the National Gallery displayed across Bridgwater, Cheddar’s Individuality walking trail and temporary works on buses and railway stations, as well as ongoing events like the Front Garden Music Festival, and the 18-month programme in the Angel Place Creative Popup, Seed achieved **more than 700,000 audience engagements** since 2020. The programme also garnered a significant volunteer labour force who provided **11,105 volunteer hours** to the endeavour, an average of nearly 60 hours per project – demonstrating the depth of connection to the activities, and support from the community of Sedgemoor.

Seed Stats



Powered by the first Creative People and Places grant in the South West of England in 2019, we came together as a consortium of local grass roots organisations in order to improve the lives of people living and working in the district of Sedgemoor, Somerset, through creative arts-based activities. The focus of the programme was to build on the existing cultural strengths of Sedgemoor to reach and involve those who have little or no engagement with the arts, and on empowering them to become co-creators of our strategy, programme and artistic outcomes.

We believe that arts, culture and creativity should not only be for the privileged, but should be part of everyday life for all. People will always find ways to express and celebrate their local culture, but are often held back from taking their aspirations further through lack of access and opportunity.

By investing in and building on art created by, with and for the people, by responding to aspiration and imagination, and by reflecting the things that are important to our local communities, Over six and half years we have worked with them to:

- Deliver a community-led programme in an under-served part of Somerset, providing new opportunities to take part in and enjoy the arts in direct response to community needs, interests, strengths and opportunities
- Co-develop high-quality activities across the region at a local level that recognise and celebrate the multiplicity of local identities, cultures and communities
- Increase local awareness and support for the arts and heritage
- Nurture the local infrastructure that supports the arts in Sedgemoor, including local artists and creative social enterprise.

In addition to the benefits of simply being creative, and enjoying the creativity of others, the communities we have worked with over the past six and half years have demonstrated that arts, culture & creativity bring about positive changes and benefits to their lives and the places in which they live. We have worked with them to demonstrate this by:

- Bringing a shared sense of identity and community, and a positive sense of place, enabling greater community cohesion
- increasing wellbeing through the reduction of loneliness and isolation by increasing interaction and connection to others, and
- Improving mental and physical health through creativity as an early intervention strategy which promotes self-expression, enjoyment.



[click to see the Story of Seed Film](#)

“It brings the community together. We don’t have much stuff like this round here so I think it’s a really positive thing.”
 – *Journey Exchange project participant*

Original programme Objectives

Our Mission

To make creative arts, culture and heritage part of everyday life in Sedgemoor by growing new opportunities for its people to participate, create and celebrate.

*In partnership with the people of Sedgemoor, we built a programme to embody **Our Values***



We sought to be **stewards** for local culture and creativity, and to promote **increased** and **inclusive opportunities** for people to participate in and **co-create** the highest possible **quality** creative arts, heritage and culture in the (now former) district of Sedgemoor, in a way that can not only be maintained, but can become self-perpetuating and not only sustainable, but **regenerative**, leading to ongoing activity and also minimising harm to the environment and the natural world.

Our Vision

By 2030, everyone living or working in Sedgemoor has new and accessible opportunities to engage with, participate in and appreciate creative arts, heritage and culture in all its many forms, and many more people take advantage of those opportunities. Creativity and local community cultures have been nurtured. They are thriving, exciting, inspiring and regenerative and reveal highly valued connections to the wider environment and natural world.

Unfortunately, our project was not supported by ten years of funding to realise this ten-year vision. After six full years we can't expect to see this vision achieved in full, but significant progress has been made on our mission. Year on year, we have reached more and more people of low engagement (three times per year or less) with the arts, including many Illuminate survey respondents who have told us their encounter with Seed was their *first* engagement with the arts.

[click to see the Glowhome event](#)

The Story of Seed

Over six and a half years, the Seed programme set out to do something simple but ambitious: make arts and culture part of everyday life in Sedgemoor, especially for people who hadn't previously felt that the arts were "for them."

Looking across the 190 projects delivered between 2019 to 2026, a clear story emerges. Seed didn't just run projects; it built relationships, tested ideas, learned from what worked (and what didn't), and shaped a model that brought more people into creative activity, raised the quality of what was on offer, and gave communities agency over what happened next.

Starting out (2019–2021): testing ideas and learning fast

Seed began in a challenging moment. The early years were shaped by Covid-19, which meant that many of the original plans—especially those based on face-to-face activity—had to be paused or rethought.

Even so, the programme quickly showed its potential. Consultations and Creative Accelerator sessions where project ideas were generated by community members were held on line and were very well attended.

Projects like *Glow Home* and *Window Wanderland* reached hundreds of people, many of whom said they had never taken part in anything creative before. In one case, 500 activity kits were taken up in just a couple of days—clear evidence of appetite, even in difficult circumstances.



[click to see the Moments of Stillness film](#)



At the same time, Seed learned an early and important lesson: **online activity alone wasn't enough**. While digital projects helped keep things going, they often missed the very people the programme most wanted to reach—those without access, confidence, or interest in online engagement. The *Creative Conversations* project was conceived and delivered as a way to ensure the most vulnerable of these were not left behind. This project led to the *Mosaic* book, devised and co-created by the participants who were non-internet users, experiencing increased social isolation and loneliness during the pandemic.

Critically, right from the outset Seed had great success in recruiting **Sowers and Growers**. These were the members of the community who wanted to take the lead in ensuring the programme was reflective of the strengths, interests and opportunities that they and their fellow community members identified, and in helping bring the ideas to life and make them happen as decision makers, volunteers, promoters and participant recruiters. The Sowers and Growers were essential to ensuring that the fledgling Seed programme was not creating new online communities but was simply using online tools to reflect and maintain connection among the existing actual communities of Sedgemoor.

So even in these early stages, the direction of travel was becoming clear:

- People respond best when activity is **local, visible and easy to join**
- **Face-to-face connection matters**
- Engagement needs to feel **relevant to everyday life**, rather than separate from it

These insights helped shape everything that followed.

[click to see the Mosaic film](#)



Finding what works (2021–2022): refining a community co-created model

As restrictions lifted, Seed moved decisively into public and community spaces—and this is where the programme really began to take off.

A simple but powerful idea sat at the heart of this shift:
instead of asking people to come to the arts, let's take the arts to them.

This showed up in all sorts of ways:

- Music performed in gardens, streets and parks
- Art displayed on buses, flags, shop windows and public spaces
- Activities held in village halls, churches and community hubs
- Events appearing unexpectedly in places people already regularly used

The impact was immediate and consistent.

At the *Front Garden Music Festival*, for example:

- 75% of people said they had never attended anything like it before
- Around half had not taken part in any arts activity in the previous year

People's reactions said it all: **"We need more of this"**

"Music coming to me rather than having to travel to hear it."

"Kids, this is live music. You've never seen it before"

This pattern repeated across projects. Whether it was art on buses (*Art First*), creative workshops in local halls (*Create the Future*), or performances on estates (*Journey Exchange*), the same principle held true: **When creativity appears in familiar places, people who don't usually engage start to take part.**

Another key learning was about *how* to reach people. Seed found that:

- **Personal, direct contact** (talking to people, visiting communities, local networks) worked far better than mass marketing
- **Free and informal formats** lowered barriers
- **Local partners** helped build trust and open doors

At the same time, the programme began to experiment with quality—bringing in professional artists, offering skills development, and encouraging participants to push themselves creatively.

Community members also helped staff to test and evaluate the conceptual framework for the programme. The Plough-Sow-Grow-Yield model utilised Action Research and Asset Based Community Development approaches to ensure that as the programme progressed, learning was continually applied to new and renewed activities, and the level of community direction and control over them steadily increased. The model made two things clear – participants were empowered to turn their ideas into reality and that the activities were not one-off events or artists parachuting into areas of low engagement only to leave again and allow the fertile ground to lie fallow once again. Projects like the Front Garden Music Festival, originally planned as a one-off lockdown event, were taken up by audiences, participants and community organisers to become ongoing, continually growing and developing events.



HOW WE WORK: OUR MULTI-YEAR DEVELOPMENT CYCLE



Building momentum (2023–2026): scale, quality and community leadership

From 2023 onwards, the programme reached a new level of confidence and impact.

More people were taking part. The numbers tell a clear story of growth:

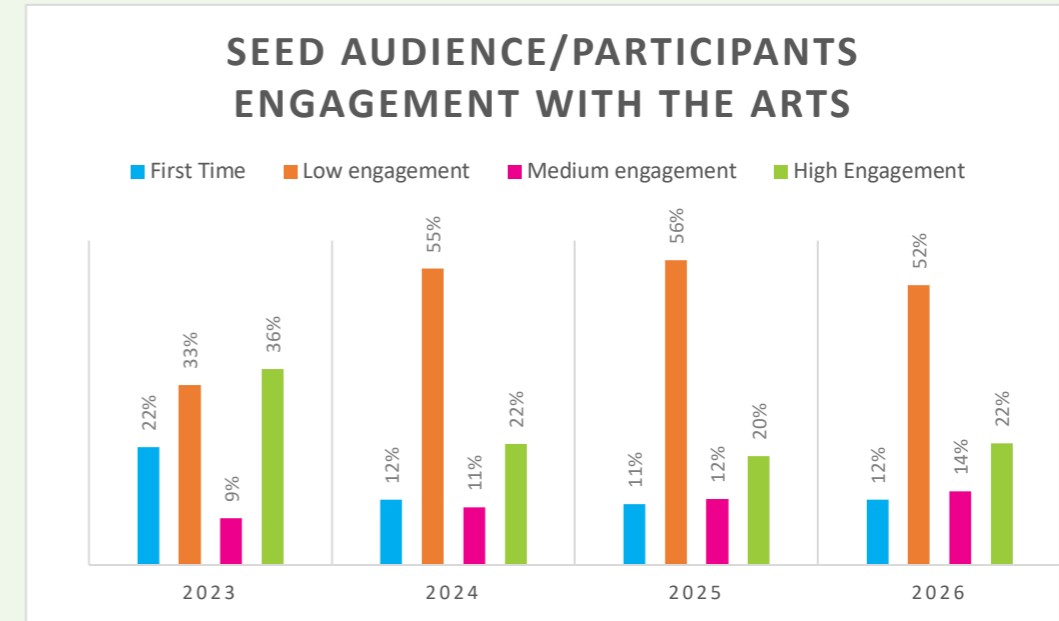
- Annual audiences rose to over **100,000 people**
- Active participation consistently reached **4,000 people per year**
- Many individual quarters reached audiences of **40,000–70,000**

But the most important point isn't just scale—it's *who* those people were. Large proportions of audiences were **first-time or infrequent attenders**. Many said they attended **once a year or less**. Significant numbers said it was their **first-ever arts experience**.

In Quarter four 2024/25 for example:

- Only 9% were regular attenders
- 69% attended once a year or less
- 19% said it was their first time participating in the arts

This is exactly the audience Seed set out to reach. Illuminate data (available since 2023) shows Seed's consistency in reaching low arts engagers, and first-time engagers.



Higher quality work

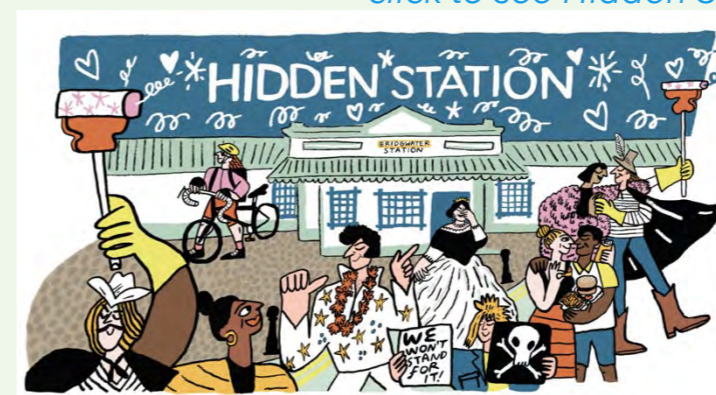
At the same time, our quality evaluations demonstrated that the quality and ambition of the work itself improved, achieving our aims of excellence. Standout examples include:

- **Hidden Station** – an innovative digitally enhanced artwork nominated for a national award
- **Cheddar Individuality Exhibition** – with 100% positive audience feedback
- **Empirical Popup Jazz Lounge** – described as transformative by audiences
- **Creative Popup** – achieving near-universal “very good” ratings over more than a year
- **National Gallery partnership** – bringing world-class art into local spaces
- **Sounds of Sedgemoor** – people who started engaging with Seed as inexperienced or even non-musicians were now empowered to write, record and release their own original music

What's striking is that these high-quality experiences didn't put people off. Quite the opposite. When barriers were removed and work was presented in accessible ways, audiences responded enthusiastically—even when the work was ambitious or unfamiliar.

The highest quality offers didn't exclude people—they inspired them.

[click to see Hidden Station or Empirical](#)



190 projects 2020 2021 2022 2023

Cheddar Window Wanderland
 Creative Accelerator Highbridge
 Creative Arts in Everyday Life
 Creative Isolation
 Creative Lives Under Lockdown
 Glowhome
 Joyful Noises
 Let's Dance Sedgemoor
 Moments of Stillness
 Shelfies of Sedgemoor
 Sketchbooks Unlocked
 Social Arts Practice & Me

Axbridge History Trail
 Axbridge Pageant Audience Development Project
 Blues in the Pews
 Bridgwater Guitar and Bass Group
 Bridgwater Together
 Burnham Literature Festival
 Burnham Winter Warmer
 Burnham-on-Sea life Mural
 Cheddar Folk Banners
 Cheddar Frequencies
 Cheddar Individuality Project
 Cheddar V. Window Wanderland
 Cheddar Youth Theatre
 Cheddar Youth Theatre
 Chilton Polden Music Making Group
 Clashmob
 Clay Club
 Creative Accelerator Polden Hills
 Crystals Vardo
 Desire Lines II
 Front Garden Music Festival II
 Glow Lights
 Godot is a Woman
 Herstory
 Highbridge Community Book
 Highbridge Lights
 Highbridge Podcast
 Highbridge Youth Arts
 Highbridge Youth Theatre
 Inside Out
 Mind Wellbeing Group
 Right Royal Jubilee Events
 Seed Stage @ Quayside
 Sound of the Streets
 Warm Spaces
 Welcome Back Flags
 What If?
 Zoom Clubs

2021

All the Colours
 ArtFirst
 Blues in the Pews
 Cheddar Valley Window Wanderland
 Come Together
 Create The Future
 Creative Accelerator Axbridge
 Creative Accelerator Cheddar
 Creative Conversations
 Desire Lines
 Front Garden Music Festival
 Glow Lanterns
 Highbridge Podcast
 Highbridge Youth Arts
 Highbridge Youth Theatre
 Journey Exchange
 Mind Art Group
 Mosaic book
 Stepping Out
 The Nornen Project
 Zoom Clubs

Ai Wei Wei (go see)
 All Hands
 Ariel Posen (go see)
 Blues in the Pews
 Bridgwater Guitar and Bass Group
 Bridgwater Together Burnham
 Literature Festival
 Burns and Doran Live
 Cheddar Individuality Project
 Cheddar Individuality Walking Trail
 Cheddar Youth Theatre
 Clashmob II
 Clay Club
 Creative Accelerator Bridgwater
 David Eagle
 Eclectic Collective
 Emerge
 Empirical Jazz Popup Lounge
 Front Garden Music Festival III
 Glow IV
 Grandfather Jem's Tent of Wonders
 Hags
 Herstory
 Hidden Station
 Highbridge Youth Arts
 Highbridge Youth Theatre
 Lost in Blue
 Meet the Funders
 Moments on Mendip
 Pewfest
 Reach for the Stars
 Speed Crafting
 The Nornen Project
 Wellbeing Fair
 Woolavington Story Telling Project

2024

Arnolfini (Go See)
 Art Road Trip
 Blues in the Pews
 Bridgwater Guitar and Bass Group
 Bridgwater Together
 Christmas Concert
 Christmas Sparkes
 Clashmob III
 Create the Future Cannington
 Create the Future North Petherton
 Creating Connections
 Creative Accelerator Cannington
 Creative Accelerator North Petherton
 Doodle With Cleds
 Eclectic Collective
 Front Garden Music Festival IV
 Individuality Creative Writing
 Individuality Exhibition
 Individuality Project
 Individuality Project Comes Home
 Mischievous Masterpieces
 Painting with Wool
 Pewfest II
 Picture Salon
 Print Folk Jams
 Reimagine the Alleyway
 Seed Creative Popup
 Sound of the Streets
 Speed Crafting
 Super Saturday
 Thirsty Bear Forge
 Tree of Life Mosaic
 Winter Welcome
 Women in Music
 World Diversity Mural Young
 Somerset National Youth Week

2025

Artscape
 Blossoming Bridgwater
 Blues in the Pews
 Born on the Wheels of a Waggon
 Bridgy Guitar & Bass Group
 Bridgwater Together
 Cannington Village Festival
 Celebrating the Voices of Bridgwater
 Ceramics workshop
 Clashmob IV
 Co-creation forum Create and Chat Cultivating
 Creativity Doodle Project
 Eclectic Collective
 Everyone can be Creative
 Flags of the Forest
 Front Garden Music Fest. V
 Jessie: Horse for Bridgwater
 Liquid Sounds
 Making with Me
 Martyrdom of the 10,000
 National Gallery (Go See)
 Pewfest III
 Printing Together
 Pulse of the Earth (Go See)
 Seasons
 Singing for the Slightly Terrified
 Somerset on Film
 Songwriting workshops
 Sounds of Sedgemoor
 Street Beats
 The Big Frame Game
 The Story of Invention Tshirt
 Typography Utopian
 Chemistry
 Void: Laboratory of origins
 What Lingers
 What's Next, Bridgwater?
 Young Somerset early years

2026

Axevale Creative Accelerator
 Clashmob V
 Crafty Monkeys Individuality on Tour
 Grow Your Own workshop
 Jam Factory
 People & Places Exhibition
 Rethreads
 Seasons 2
 Sounds of Sedgemoor Album
 Sounds of Sedgemoor Launch Concert
 Stamp Carving
 The Big Frame Game
 The Journey (Doodle project)



Action Research Learning Outcomes

This part of our final evaluation report focuses on our findings against the key research questions of the Creative People and Places programme. For more in depth qualitative analysis of our programme which focuses on project case studies, participant interviews and longitudinal research, please see our external evaluation report, provided by Annabel Jackson Associates.

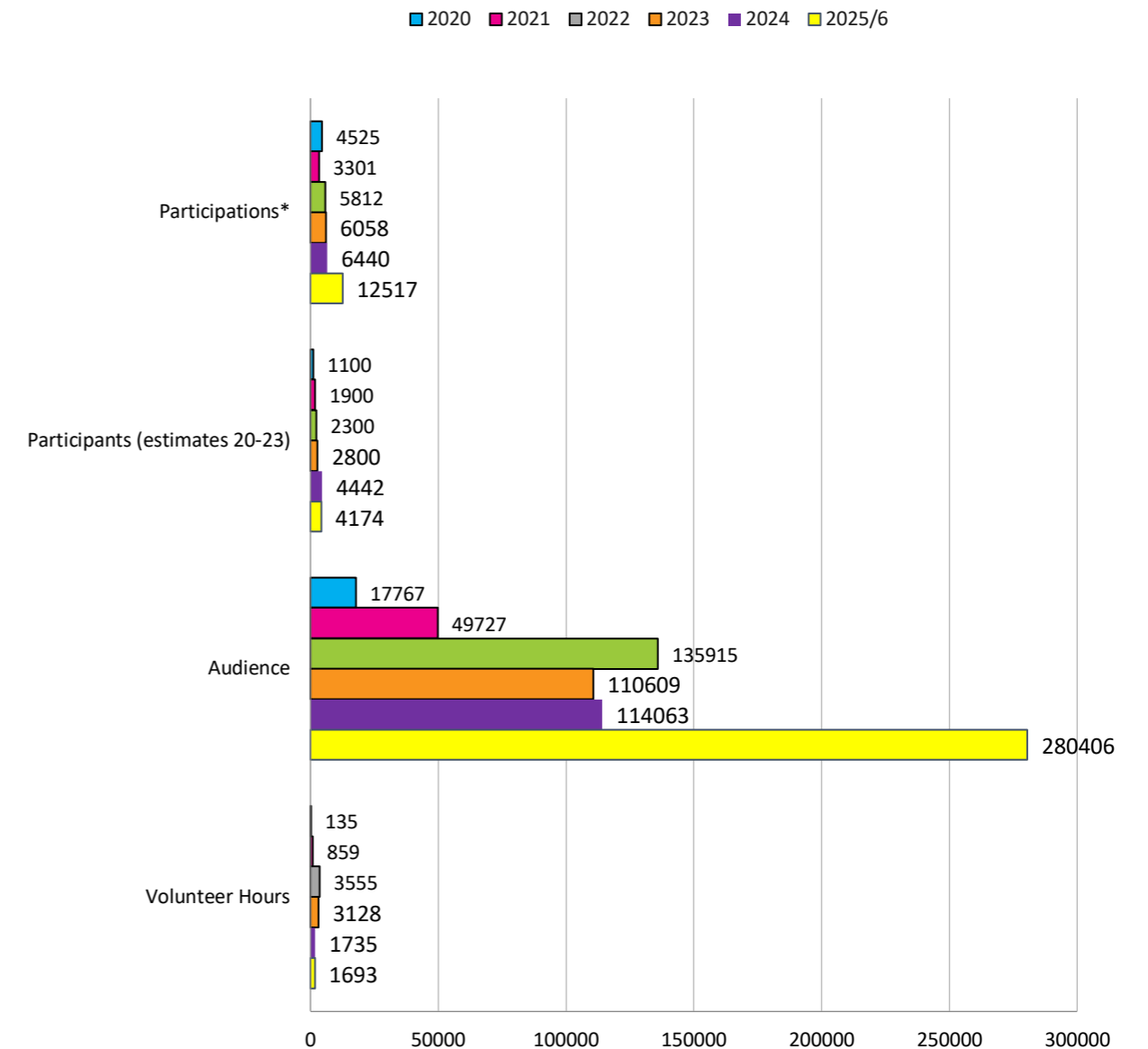
Q1. Are more people in Sedgemoor experiencing arts & culture as a result of the Seed Programme?

The overall answer is yes, and convincingly so. Seed’s data shows a marked increase in scale and consistency of reach over the full six years of the Seed CPP programme, particularly between 2022 and 2026. For the 2022-2026 financial years (the period covered by Seed’s ACE CPP NPO Portfolio funding) 153 projects were delivered involving 13,716 individual participants, garnering over 30,000 participations and reaching a large audience with over 640,000 engagements.

The evidence is particularly strong that Seed reached people with low prior arts engagement. In 2022, Audience Finder data showed 81% of respondents were first-time attendees at a Seed activity, and more than one third had not taken part in any listed cultural activities in the previous twelve months. In 2023–24, 39% of Illuminate respondents said they attended arts events once a year or less, and 29% had not previously attended a Seed event. In 2024–25, the Creative PopUp alone attracted 6,557 visitors, with 65% of respondents identifying as low or non-engagers and 17% saying it was their first engagement with the arts.

There is also persuasive evidence that people were not only attending but being inspired. Across the final two years of the programme, **89%** of respondents answered yes to Seed’s question about whether activity **excited them about the arts and inspired them to do or attend more**, while only 6% said no. **97% of Creative PopUp attenders said the experience inspired them**, across that period, with not a single survey respondent selecting no. The **Seasons Fashion Show** reached **97%** agreement to the statement that it made people **want to see more arts events**.

Year on Year comparison: Annual totals



Note: calendar year is used, with 2025/26 including activity from Jan-Mar 2026, and all 4 quarters of 2025

We also consistently found that arts participation was strongest when activity was taken into local communities eliminating the need to travel. Early learning identified transport, connectivity, lack of local provision, and weak identification with “Sedgemoor” as a whole, as major barriers to participation and engagement. Seed’s response was to work hyper-locally, and the evidence suggests this was the right strategy. Highbridge is the clearest example: by 2022–23, participant interviewees described the town as having gone “from being a proper desert to saturation level,” and by 2024–25 some Highbridge projects had reached the “Yield” stage, becoming regenerative, and continuing beyond Seed’s direct commissioning activities. Illuminate data shows that **85% of Seed’s audience travelled less than 10 miles** to attend across all activities compared to a national average of 62%.

Most effective approaches for increasing participation

The single most effective tactic was putting arts activity into non-traditional, familiar and everyday spaces. Across Seed's evaluation activities this appears repeatedly as the strongest route into low-engagement audiences: shop units, parks, churches, railway stations, streets, warm spaces, pubs, bus routes, and installations in streets and shop fronts. The Creative Popup in Angel Place shopping centre provided the clearest proof of concept. It reduced psychological and practical barriers by meeting people where they already were, and making crossing the threshold into an arts experience feel safe. The same principle underpinned Artscape and other outdoor public artworks, which converted everyday passers-by into audiences. In Q4 2024–25, when the first stage of the National Gallery reproductions were installed, the project achieved an average engagement rate of 20% of passers-by, close to double the average for Seed's previous temporary public art installations.

Effective partnership working was essential to this, and also clearly amplified reach. The National Gallery partnership brought visibility, media attention and a quality "stamp," while local partnerships opened access to communities and sites that Seed alone would have struggled to reach. Working with Severnside Community Rail, for example, made working with their partners such as Great Western Railways possible. Effective partners helped Seed reach non-engagers, eliminate cost and travel barriers, and gain access to trusted venues and networks.



[click to see Artscape BBC coverage](#)

A third highly effective approach was hyper-local programming shaped by consultation and then delivered close to home. We found that the combination of listening first, co-designing with residents, and then delivering locally was central to success because it directly addressed the barriers of travel, cost, confidence and relevance. The *Front Garden Music Festival*, local workshop programmes designed directly in response to local need and interest, particularly in village settings proved successful precisely because of this.

A fourth effective method was building progression over time rather than a series of one-off projects. Seed's four-stage model, **Plough, Sow, Grow, Yield** ensured engagement with the programme that evolved from consultation, to participation, to leadership, to self-sustaining activity. That evolution was in response to what participants and audiences liked most about the earlier iteration, and what was missing.

Evaluations including Impact and Insight Surveys continually showed repeated engagement in the same places increased both attendance and community ownership. The decision to slow rollout into new places and deepen work in places such as Highbridge and Cheddar improved these outcomes on a consistent basis.

"I have loved being a part of this. I had been out of music performance for 20 years and had struggled to get involved – it's so much harder when you are over 30! Seed's Clashmob and Guitar and Bass group activities were the springboard to help me get back into music performance & creation." – Alan Hardcastle

Least effective approaches for increasing participation

The least effective approaches were those that relied on people opting into arts activity when there was not enough local relevance, support or prior relationship-building. We discovered that simply moving a model that worked in one part of Sedgemoor directly into another did not always succeed. We learned that each geography and local identity, required different access, recruitment and other strategies. Each community, although similar on the surface, operated differently and required a different approach. In Bridgwater, for example, locating activities in smaller localised venues as had worked well on more rural areas was not successful. Even at Creative Accelerator sessions in the Plough phase. Establishing and programming a single central venue model had been ruled out in consultations elsewhere, but was the key to reaching large numbers of people in Bridgwater and sustaining engagement.

We also found that trying to work across too many places simultaneously diluted impact and created expectations the team could not effectively meet with our small size, limited resources and the travel distances involved. By 2024–25, it was clear Sedgemoor was too large, disconnected and diverse in need for a small team to cover at multiple stages of the cycle at once. This led to a deliberate narrowing of Grow-phase activity to the activities most ready to progress, and the slowing down of our rollout of the programme to new parts of Sedgemoor.

Q2. To what extent was the aspiration for excellence in art and culture, and excellence in community engagement, achieved?

The evidence demonstrates that this aspiration was achieved to a high degree, and more fully as the programme matured. Seed's strongest achievement here was not simply presenting high-quality art, but building a model through which communities increasingly chose, shaped and produced higher-quality work than they might initially have imagined possible, with the culmination of the Sounds of Sedgemoor project providing a strong example. Throughout the 2022-2026 period the reports show a clear pattern: increasing artistic ambition, stronger quality metrics, and deeper community control were advancing together. Here are some examples:

The artist call out for **Hidden Station** was nationally advertised, attracting 20 proposals including international artists. A community panel supported by expertise in augmented reality and visual arts selected project to be commissioned. The final work was highly engaging, innovative and accessible, was nominated for a National Community Railway Art Award, and 90% of survey respondents rated it "very good," Seed's highest proportion of that top rating at the time.

Cheddar Individuality is another landmark project. In 2023–24 it produced Seed's strongest Impact & Insight results to that date, with all five key dimensions exceeding 87%. In 2024–25, the subsequent Individuality Exhibition saw 100% of respondents rate it good or better, 92% choose very good. It received public endorsement from Antony Gormley at the launch event.

Empirical's Popup Jazz Lounge was perhaps the highest-quality live music performance of the programme. Audience feedback described it in transformative terms, with 100% rating it good or higher and 88% very good, despite 44% of respondent's saying that the event was their first ever experience of live jazz. Importantly, the event also attracted a much more ethnically diverse audience than Seed's previous activities, with 33% of the audience identifying as something other than White/White British, despite that being 97% of the Sedgemoor population.

"Who knew I liked Jazz? It was one of the best live music experiences I've ever had"
- **Callum Pattenden, audience member**

The **National Gallery** projects **Art Road Trip**, **Picture Salon** and **Artscape** are another major quality marker. The partnership brought high-quality reproductions, skilled educators, workshops and an augmented reality app into Sedgemoor. We found that that this external "stamp of quality" significantly strengthened public response and awareness, while the exhibition itself achieved 100% positive ratings in reported survey results. The National Gallery's own external evaluation of the national Art Road Trip partnerships found that the partnership with Seed was more multi-faceted and achieved a greater depth of engagement than other iterations across the country. This was in part due to the design process of Seed's project. At the beginning of the project design, Seed was the only partner to include participants (drawn from our **sowers and growers** in online workshops with the Gallery's education team to sample programmes, develop ideas and explore the possibilities for Art Road Trip. All of the elements of Seed's partnership with the National Gallery were co-created by community members.

The **Creative Popup** at Angel Place shopping centre became both a reach and quality success. In 2024–25, 98% of respondents rated it very good and the remainder good, producing a net promoter score of 95.2.

All of these successes were built upon the quality milestones in the first phase of the Seed CPP programme including **Journey Exchange** which brought experienced European outdoor arts practitioners into direct collaboration with local practitioners and community members in Highbridge, and the first touring play Seed brought to Sedgemoor, **Godot is a Woman**. These two projects in particular established high levels of artistic ambition from then on, which could be seen directly in the high quality of projects such as **The Nornen Project** which became the play **All Hands**.

"Seed's initial commission of the project gave me hope, and the means to make the play not just a reality, but a huge success. But much more than that, the relationships and networks Seed fostered here, and the belief shown in me have made a world of difference."
- **Corinne Curtis, The Nornen Project** [click to see on ITV](#)

Similarly, programming high quality professional performers at the **Front Garden Music Festival** such as award winner Jo Harman, seasoned international session musicians Redtenbacher's Funkestra, and Slackrr who previewed their full Isle of Wight Festival show in Bridgwater, set a much higher bar for local performers and even our music participation groups to aspire to, directly leading to the various stages of the ambitious **Sounds of Sedgemoor** original music project which brought participants from across Sedgemoor together in a way not originally thought possible.

[Click to see the Front Garden Music Festival Film](#)



Most effective approaches to co-creation

Near the end of the CPP programme, Seed partnered with Bath Spa University on a knowledge exchange dialogues project. Researcher Dr Judith Robinson facilitated a workshop with people who had previously participated in a Seed activity involving co-creation elements.

The findings included that essential features for a co-creation project include:

- Removing fear of failure – ensuring no contribution is ‘wrong’
- Ensuring accessibility - removing financial, physical, social & cultural barriers, and ensuring inclusive language (‘art’ might be an intimidating term, with participants favouring ‘creative’)
- Clear and easily understandable language and expectations
- Participants feeling they have genuine agency
- Having a variety of ways to be involved
- Alignment of the project with the community’s needs and interests

Participant concerns to be addressed in designing a successful co-creation project include:

- Feeling insecure or anxious about taking part
- Encountering barriers to participation
- Feeling alienated by content or views expressed by other participants or artists
- Worries about the unfamiliar including doing something new and encountering people we usually do not interact with
- Lack of time to take part with the busy-ness of modern life

“I really enjoyed the process. There aren’t many opportunities in day-to-day life where you have the chance to let your creative brain just go wild and it was such fun having that dedicated time to come up with ideas in a safe and encouraging environment. Being able to bounce ideas off other people means you come up with all kinds of things you would never come up with on your own.

– Jo Middleton, project participant

Seed utilised a wide-range of different co-creation activities across the programme, and these can be categorised by the level of agency that the community participant has in the process. Where the artist leads, the community has less agency. Where the artist provides skills development and other support to assist the participants in their own creativity and decision making, they have the most agency. While all six of the categories are valid ways of working in co-creation, The Seed programme found that different participants engaged and enjoyed the processes that suited them, meaning that having a range of activities with different co-creation offers was key to holistic and successful co-creation offer.

Co-creation mode	Description	Example	Artist roles	Decision Making
Listening focused	stories & idea contributions are responded to &/or incorporated by commissioned skilled socially engaged artists. This is particularly effective when participant engagement is short & community contributions can be elevated by artists skills	Hidden Station – people contributed their stories in story telling workshops. These were illustrated by artists and then animated by Zubr Curio	Artist Curator/Producer	Artist
Idea focused	Community participants generate the idea, then develop it into the final artistic expression with the support of artists and facilitators	The Individuality project, Creative Conversations, What If? Art First,	Artist Facilitator Coach Guide	Shared between artist and participants
Production focused	participants actively engaged in the myriad tasks and choices required to bring an artwork/works to life	The Nornen Project/All Hands Front Garden Music Festival, Mosaic Booklet	Artist Facilitator Coach Guide	Shared between artist/curator/producer and participants
Curatorial focused	Artist created the work originally, Curator/producer provides alternatives, participants collaborate on which artistic elements are to be presented & how, often need skills development/education to enable this	National Gallery Picture Salon project, Artscape, Rural Theatre programming	Artist (original creator) Facilitator Teacher Curator/Producer	Shared between Participants and curator/producer
Skills focused	artists imparting knowledge & skills, enabling participants to achieve beyond their expectations & previous skill level	Various music participation groups – leading to Sounds of Sedgemoor – the creation of original songs for an album by our various groups including many who were not musicians 6 years ago	Facilitator Teacher Coach Guide	Participants
Place focused	local people directly involved in transformative local activities, actively creating artistic elements &/or ensuring community ownership & agency in selection of competing ideas	What’s next mural Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea Seawall artwork	Artist provides a proposal – when selected creates and delivers the artwork	Participants

Q3. What else was learnt through the Seed programme that facilitates better public engagement in creativity and culture?

Beyond the core findings on participation and quality, the Seed programme generated a set of deeper, transferable insights about *how* public engagement in creativity and culture can be strengthened. These insights reflect a maturing understanding over time, moving from initial experimentation (2019–21) to refined, evidence-led practice (2022–26).

1. Engagement is driven by context, not just content

One of the most important lessons is that *where and how* activity is experienced matters as much as *what* is presented. We consistently found that participation increased when activity was embedded into everyday life — shopping centres, streets, transport routes, housing areas and public spaces — rather than requiring people to enter formal cultural venues.

This insight goes beyond simple accessibility. It shows that engagement improves when cultural activity feels:

- familiar rather than intimidating
- incidental rather than planned
- socially shared rather than individually chosen

The implication is that cultural engagement strategies aimed at non and low engagers with the arts should prioritise *integration into daily life* rather than relying on audiences making a deliberate choice to engage with the arts.

2. Trust and relationship-building are prerequisites for engagement

We consistently found that sustained engagement rarely happens through one-off events. Instead, it is built through:

- repeated presence in the same communities
- visible responsiveness to local input
- continuity of people, partners and programme
- empowering participants to co-create the next activity

In 2022-2026 our shift toward deeper, place-based work (rather than spreading activity thinly across Sedgemoor) arose from this learning. Places like Highbridge showed that when trust accumulates over time, participation increases and communities begin to not only lead activity themselves, but increase their ambition.

This suggests that engagement, particularly on an ongoing basis is less a marketing challenge and more a *relationship challenge*, requiring long-term investment.

“I see the National Gallery paintings practically every morning and it makes my day” – Indy Burt

3. Low-risk, informal entry points remove barriers to first-time engagement

Across the Seed CPP programme people with low or no prior engagement responded best to:

- free or low-cost offers
- drop-in formats
- outdoor or open-access environments
- activities that allow observation before participation

For example, public artworks, popup spaces, and festivals consistently generated high proportions of first-time attenders. Crucially, these formats reduce both **practical barriers** (cost, travel) and **psychological barriers** (fear of not understanding, not belonging). The broader learning is that engagement pathways should begin with **opportunities to engage lightly, before expecting deeper participation.**

“I attended *Come Together* and didn’t know what to expect – I saw what I now know is a sousaphone being played for the first time. I asked my mum if I could learn the tuba, and discovered I could learn new instruments really fast. I attended an Easter course for musicians, and was invited to join Somerset County Youth Band. We undertook a tour of the Netherlands and I finally got to play a sousaphone in front of hundreds of people at Bridgwater Carnival.” – Jack Richardson



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to
see
I.P. on
BBC
TV
news



4. Progression pathways are essential to sustaining engagement

Seed’s “Plough → Sow → Grow → Yield” model highlights a key structural insight: engagement is not a single event but a **journey**, or even a series of journeys.

In delivering the programme over six years using this model Seed found that:

- initial exposure leads to curiosity
- repeated participation builds confidence
- confidence enables co-creation
- co-creation leads to community leadership

Throughout the 2022–2026 programme, more than a dozen projects reached the “Yield” phase, meaning they are continuing and will evolve further, independently of Seed support. The projects that achieved this were those that featured:

- intentional progression design
- project design in response to identified need and strengths, enhanced by continual improvement and redesign in response to feedback
- opportunities to deepen involvement over time, including co-creation mechanisms and participant involvement in evaluation, not just feedback
- visible routes from audience to participant to leader
- skills development and information exchange enabling participants to take the lead

These elements are key to avoiding engagement that remains shallow, short-lived and dependent on professional organisation.



5. Community decision-making improves both relevance and quality

A key learning is that involving communities in shaping activity strengthens rather than dilutes quality.

Seed’s model of using local “Sowers and Growers,” community panels, and participatory commissioning led to:

- programming that reflected local identity and interests
- stronger attendance from target groups
- increasing confidence, skills and knowledge among community members to shape their own cultural offer
- increasing awareness of the arts among community members potential to play a key role in community building and regeneration.

Over time, communities became not just consultation participants but decision-makers, influencing both artistic direction and delivery methods.

This demonstrates that **co-creation is not only inclusive but strategically effective** in driving engagement and in increasing artistic appetite and ambition among participants and previously low or non-engaging audiences.

6. Quality and engagement reinforce each other when properly aligned

A related and equally important finding is that high-quality artistic work does not deter low-engagement audiences — provided it is:

- well contextualised
- accessible in format
- introduced through trusted environments

Seed’s experience with projects such as the National Gallery partnership and high-quality live performance shows that audiences with little prior exposure can respond very positively to ambitious work.

The key learning is that the barrier is not *quality*, but *framing and access*. When these are addressed, audiences are open to more challenging or unfamiliar work.



[Click to see What If? exhibition](#)

7. Partnerships significantly extend reach and credibility

Seed repeatedly found that partnerships:

- opened access to new audiences
- enabled use of trusted local venues
- increased perceived legitimacy and quality

High-profile partnerships (e.g. with national institutions) brought visibility and credibility, while grassroots partnerships enabled access to communities that might otherwise remain disconnected. Consortium partners were particularly effective at referring service users and other connections on the margins into opportunities to engage, and in making connections between the programme and other organisations and community groups in their network.

This strongly supports the premise at the heart of consortium working and the partnership approach embedded in the Creative People and Places programme, that engagement is most effective when delivered through a **networked ecosystem**, rather than a single organisation acting alone.

8. Data collection is better when it is active, local and relational

By trial and error we learned that passive data collection methods, particularly online surveys that might work well in other settings were met with suspicion and low among low-engagement audiences.

More effective approaches included:

- face-to-face surveys
- volunteer-led data collection
- completion incentives
- integrating feedback into activity itself

This reflects a broader insight: **evaluation methods must match the behaviors of the audience being engaged**, rather than assuming digitally engaged or survey-responsive users.



[click to see Clashmob 1](#)

9. Identity and place matter, but administrative boundaries don't

Seed identified early that "Sedgemoor" was not a meaningful identity for many residents. This was reinforced on 1 April 2023 when the district of Sedgemoor was abolished, just as it was created on 1 April 1974, and the name first came to be used. Local identity, even within villages that saw 'the other' part of the village as not part of their identity, varied significantly across Sedgemoor, and was inextricably entwined with what activity would appeal to a community. This was a key determiner in how programmed activity should take shape. Engagement was most successful when activity aligned with:

- Town and Village -level identity (Highbridge, Cannington, Cheddar)
- existing social and cultural networks
- developed with an understanding that the local people are the experts in their culture and local creative needs and strengths

Hyper-local programming and branding, was more effective in building participation than rolling out broader iterations of successful programmes. Even Sedgemoor wide activities such as *Individuality* and *Front Garden Music Festival* were successful because each iteration was co-created with local people and took a totally different form to the same activity elsewhere.

The implication is that engagement strategies should be designed around *lived geographies*, not administrative ones.

10. Sustained engagement requires organisational adaptability

Finally, Seed's trajectory shows that effective engagement depends on continuous learning and adaptation. Key examples include:

- narrowing geographic focus to increase depth
- evolving programme models (e.g. Creative Popup)
- refining governance to strengthen community voice (establishing CIO, recruiting Trustees and adding organisations to the Consortium)
- adjusting partnerships and funding strategies in response to external change

This adaptability enabled the programme to respond to both internal learning and external pressures (e.g. funding changes, local authority restructuring).

This embodies Seed's success as an Action Learning programme, successfully operating as a **learning system**, not a fixed delivery model.

Legacy

As the Seed Creative People and Places programme comes to an end in March 2026, the evidence shows that its impact will continue well beyond the funded period. What has been created is not simply a body of work, but **lasting cultural networks, ongoing activities and shifts in behaviour** that will continue to shape creativity in this part of Somerset for years to come.

A lasting shift in cultural participation

One of the most significant elements of Seed's legacy is the **change in how people engage with arts and culture**. Over six years: **16,716 people directly participated** in activities and over **700,000 audience engagements** were recorded. Of these people:

- many participants (between 11% and 33% each year) were **first-time attenders**
- a high proportion reported being **inspired to do more** (averaging 89% positive responses in 2022-2026)
- repeat engagement demonstrates first-time audiences becoming **regular attenders**
- deepened engagement showed audience members becoming participants, and then becoming **creators, volunteers, organisers and leaders**
- the majority of those engagements with arts and culture were as a **normal part of their everyday life**, rather than a special trip to an arts venue for the purpose of engaging with arts and culture.

This transition from access to habit is one of the most important long-term impacts of the programme.

Life-changing individual journeys

The legacy is also visible in the personal transformations for many participants including:

- Individuals returning to creative pursuits after decades and becoming active creators and performers
- Participants progressing into higher education in ceramics or music
- People overcoming isolation and developing new creative identities
- Volunteers moving into leadership roles within the programme and community

Their stories demonstrate:

- increased confidence and wellbeing
- stronger social connections
- the development of new skills and identities

Seed's impact is beyond cultural. It is social and personal, with lasting effects on individuals' lives.

A strengthened local creative ecosystem

Seed has made a lasting investment in artists and creative practitioners. Over the programme:

- emerging artists gained their **first commissions**
- practitioners developed **new skills and confidence**
- many expanded their practice into **sustainable careers or businesses**

Examples include:

- artists and new organisations securing their own funding
- facilitators developing touring work
- creatives building viable workshop offers and new social arts practices

This has increased the capacity, confidence and quality of the local creative workforce, leaving stronger foundations for future cultural activity

A particularly strong legacy is the number of **projects that will continue independently** including **Music participation groups** such as *Bridgwater Guitar and Bass Group* (now self-organising and containing several spin-off ensembles), *Jam Factory* (an evolution from *Blues in the Pews*), *Eclectic Collective* and *Singing for the Slightly Terrified*, and our strong multi-year partnership with Somerset Youth Theatre has led to the establishment of ongoing **new youth theatres** in *Bridgwater*, *Cheddar* and *Highbridge*. The **Creative PopUp** in Angel Place is continuing to operate under the management of the shopping centre in partnership with Young Somerset and Mingle Café.

Several now **recurring events** will continue beyond the programme without ongoing support including community led and organized *Front Garden Music Festival* and *Clashmob* and *Seasons* which has financial support from Bridgwater Town Council. The *Individuality Exhibition* is also now available as a self-contained **touring product** with optional workshops.

Seed's commissions and partnership working has also strengthened the cultural offer and capacity of local organisations and venues, including Mingle Café, St John's Church, Highbridge, Axe Vale Arts and Our Highbridge who now host ongoing creative activity, support cultural participation groups and events, and act as **local cultural hubs**, demonstrating a shift from programme-led activity to new locally embedded cultural infrastructure.

These self-sustaining grassroots groups and activities enhance the local cultural ecosystem, providing ongoing pathways for participation.

Seed's CPP programme has also **built connections** between artists, organisations, volunteers and communities and enabled collaboration across sectors through establishing informal and formal networks that continue independently. These relationships generate new activity without direct intervention, increase resilience across the cultural sector and support ongoing innovation and collaboration.

Seed's legacy includes a better connected local cultural eco-system capable of generating and sustaining future activity.



click images for more on film



A visible and lasting public art legacy

Seed has created a significant body of **long-term public artworks** that are now owned and maintained by local organisations and will remain in place for **10–50+ years** including:

- murals in Bridgwater, Highbridge and Burnham-on-Sea
- the *Little Jessie* sculpture (lifespan up to 100+ years)
- the National Gallery Artscape trail (lifespan up to 100+ years)
- community-created artworks in public and shared spaces

These artworks ensure that Seed's programme outcomes remain visible in the landscape, continuing to inspire everyday encounters with art.

New approaches to governance and leadership

The programme has also influenced how cultural activity is organised and led, including:

- increased **community representation in decision-making**
- participants taking on **leadership and governance roles**
- organisations adopting **co-creation and asset-based approaches**

The Seed development model (Plough–Sow–Grow–Yield) has:

- provided a structured framework for project development
- been shared for wider use beyond the programme
- influenced partner organisations and groups approaches, including consortium members' approach to socially engaged arts practice
- ensured the Seed CIO will continue beyond the CPP programme.

This represents a lasting shift toward more inclusive, community-led cultural governance.

The legacy of Seed is multi-layered and enduring, including:

- **People** – more confident, creative and connected individuals
- **Practice** – stronger artists and creative professionals
- **Projects** – activities that continue independently
- **Places** – visible public artworks and cultural spaces
- **Partnerships** – networks that sustain future activity
- **Processes** – models of co-creation and community leadership



click to read

The Seed CPP programme demonstrates that successfully growing public engagement in creativity and culture by low and non-arts engaging communities is not achieved through isolated interventions, but through a coherent system that focuses on combining:

- **accessibility** (meeting people where they are)
- **relationships** (building trust over time)
- **progression** (creating pathways to deeper involvement)
- **co-creation** (sharing power with communities)
- **quality** (striving for high artistic standards)

When these elements are aligned, engagement becomes both broader and deeper — reaching more people, while also enabling them to participate more meaningfully. The Seed CPP programme:

- reached more people, especially the least engaged, at increasing scale across the programme.
- improved both artistic quality and engagement practice over time
- developed a robust, transferable model of community-led cultural development
- demonstrated that accessibility, quality, and community leadership can reinforce each other

The programme's greatest contribution lies not only in what it delivered for the people of Sedgemoor, but in also demonstrating that sustained, **locally embedded, co-created cultural activity can transform engagement in places historically underserved by arts and cultural provision.**

Conclusion

The Seed Creative People and Places programme achieved its aims of increasing engagement with the arts by people who were not previous engagers, exciting them about the arts, and inspiring them to do, see and hear more. The success of the programme shows that public engagement in arts and culture works best when it is:

Local – rooted in real places and communities

Visible – part of everyday life, not hidden in specialist venues

Welcoming – easy to access, with low barriers to entry

High quality – ambitious and inspiring, not diluted

Shared and Relevant – shaped by the people it is for

Sustained – built over time, not delivered as one-off events

Over six and half years, Seed moved from testing ideas to delivering a mature, confident, effective and regenerative programme.

It reached more and more people, especially those who had previously been low or non-engagers with the arts.

It raised the quality and ambition of local cultural activity.

It showed that communities, when given the opportunity, will not only take part—but shape, develop and continue to undertake activity, beyond the life of the programme.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the programme is this: **Genuine ongoing engagement doesn't happen because people are invited to participate in the arts.**

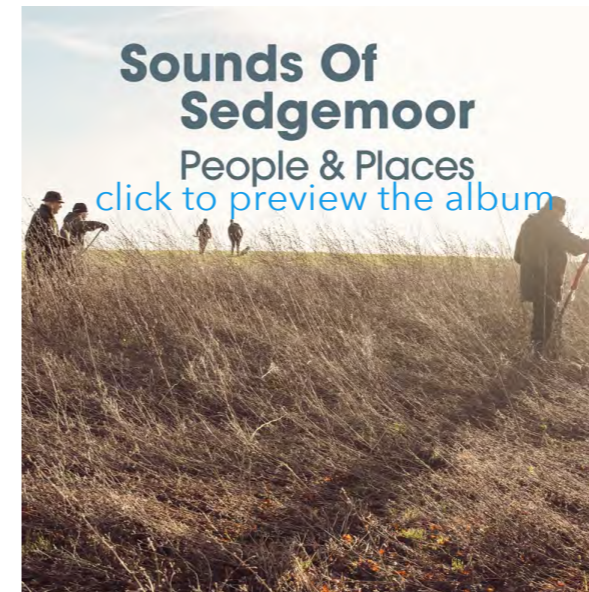
It happens when the arts become part of people's lives.

Seed made that happen in Sedgemoor.

Thank you to all of our partners

Thank you to all of our artists, volunteers, consortium members, trustees and staff who have made this programme both possible, and successful. We'd particularly like to acknowledge the very many organisations and community groups who provided financial and in-kind support, and who worked actively with us on designing and delivering the Seed Creative People and Places programme including:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ActionTrack | Cheddar Artists |
| Angel Place Shopping Centre | Cheddar Parish Council |
| Arnolfini Gallery | Cheddar Pavilion |
| Arts Quarter Cheddar | Chestnut Cottage |
| Axbridge Good Neighbours Scheme | Churchfield School |
| Axvale Arts | Citizen's Advice Bureau |
| Bath Spa University | Cobblestones Hotel |
| Berry Family Sporting & Cultural Trust | Community Council for Somerset |
| Blackmore Farm | Contains Art / East Quay |
| Blossom in Somerset | Coopers Arms, Highbridge |
| Blue House | Court House Retirement Home |
| Brent Knoll Primary School | Create You |
| Bridgwater & District Trades Union Council | Crown Inn, Catcott |
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | Department of Workplace & Pensions Diversity Voice |
| Bridgwater Community Arts Centre | Drive to Survive |
| Bridgwater Cultural Partners Bridgwater | Edington Community Hall |
| Men's Shed | Fairfield Charitable Trust |
| Bridgwater Post Office | Farmyard Circus |
| Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum | Fine Memorials, Bridgwater |
| Bridgwater Together | Finis Scott |
| Bridgwater Town Council | First South West |
| Bridgwater Town Deal | Friends, Families and Travellers Fuse |
| Bridgwater Transport Forum | Outdoor Arts |
| Bridgy Gallery | Global |
| Bristol Watershed | Golsoncott Foundatio |
| Brymore Academy | Gravity |
| BoS&H Town Council | Great Western Railway |
| Burnham-on-Sea Retail Group | Highbridge Youth Arts |
| Burnham-on-Sea Library | Homes in Sedgemoor/Somerset |
| Buses of Somerset | HOZAH |
| Cannington Court | HPC Community Trust |
| Cannington in Bloom | In Charley's Memory |
| Cannington Parish Council | Jobcentre Plus |
| Capture Burnham | |



- Karma Café
- King Sound Reinforcement
- Longleat
- Lost Lady Society
- Maritime Capital
- Maudril's Farm
- MD Group
- Mendip Area of Natural Beauty
- Mercure Hotel, Bridgwater
- Mind in Somerset
- Mingle Café
- Morland Community Hub
- Morrisons Foundation
- My Day Care
- National Centre for Academic & Cultural exchange
- National Trust
- NHS
- North Petherton Parish Council
- Our Highbridge
- Palace Nightclub
- Pirates of the Carabiner
- Platform Stage
- Princess Theatre and Arts Centre
- PurpleSpoon Café
- ReCreation Community Hub
- Rusty Road to Recovery
- Sedgemoor District Council
- Sedgemoor FM
- Sevenside Community Rail Partnership
- Sidmouth International Jazz & Blues Festival
- Sightlines
- SLaMs Men's Shed
- SIAt Concept Store
- Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership



- Somerset and Exmoor Coast Festival
- Somerset Art Works
- Somerset Community Foundation
- Somerset Council
- Somerset Film (at the Engine Room)
- Somerset Youth Theatre
- Sound of the Streets
- South West Heritage Trust
- Spark Somerset
- St John's Church, Highbridge
- St Mary's Church, Bridgwater
- Staked Wonky
- Take Art
- The National Gallery
- The Space
- The Travellers' Times
- Thrive Somerset
- U3A
- Victoria Park Community Centre
- Watershed
- West Huntspill Primary School
- Westfield United Reformed Church
- Window Wanderland
- Woolavington Village Hall
- Woolavington Village Primary School
- YMCA
- Young Somerset
- Your Guitar Academy
- Zubr Curio

donors & trusts who prefer not to be named