

# Cultural services in rural economy: driving inclusive growth

Laura Dyer  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Places, Engagement & Libraries  
Arts Council England

Hullabaloo in the Park @ Adam Walker, Hubspoke Media



# Why rural culture matters now

- The creative economy is present and networked in rural England:  
**25,547** rural creative & cultural organisations;  
**86** rural micro-clusters;  
**4,879** organisations in the largest connected rural network
- Arts and culture are important to people living in rural areas  
**69%** of adults in rural areas attended an art event in-person (DCMS Participation Survey 2023-24)





## The value of culture & the creative industries to the rural economy

- Creative Industries
- Creative clusters
- Value of local authority investment
- Culture and Heritage as a visitor economy engine

**#LETSCREATE**

See Monster Sodium Films - News substance

**artscouncil.org.uk**



---

## Keeping young people in rural communities

---

- Pathways & pride in place: Local publicly funded culture underpins **inclusive growth, skills and social mobility**
- Music Education hubs: **23%** are in rural areas
- Skills access matters: local cultural offers help reduce **leakage of young talent**



## Innovative practice supporting creative businesses

- Arts Council England **touring** programmes: Strategic Touring increased the share of rural performances from **11.1% to 18.1%**, and audiences from rural postcodes from **15.8% to 23.9%**
- Arts Council England place-based programmes: We have invested over **£28 million to rural projects** through our NLPG programme strand since 2023. This represents over **13%** across the rural/urban applicant split.
- **Cultivator:** Boosting Cornwall's Creative Economy
- **The Space**

# Creative People and Places

- **Super Slow Way** Since 2015 Super Slow Way has sought to put East Lancashire on the map as a cultural hot spot contributing to the social, cultural and economic regeneration of the area, engaging over 375,000 people in a wide range of free activities from canoeing to growing projects and art and music.

# Creative People and Places

- **Outside Arts** community arts programme created by and for the people of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Local residents, working with professional artists, are co-curating arts and cultural activities and events celebrating life in the rural landscapes, villages and market towns of the Moorlands.

#LETSCREATE

[artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)



## Tourism: day & overnight stays (with heritage crossover)

- Domestic overnight *heritage-related* trips and spend are significant and regionally distributed-South West area is highest by trips/spend.
- A strong proxy for culture-led rural stays.
- Since 2016, domestic heritage-related spend has been c.£4bn/yr (2023 prices)



## Skills development (pipelines for rural creative growth)

- Institutes of Technology & FE / apprenticeships
- Determinants of rural creative clustering and skills priorities e.g., HEIs as drivers
- Prioritising the workforce in a high-productivity sector
- Devolution



## Rural libraries – access, inclusion, skills

- Arts Council England is **national development agency** for libraries in England
- **Coverage vs proximity:** Rural LAs have more libraries per capita but fewer residents within walking distance
- Ageing and access risk
- Delivery mix
- **Demand up, real term local authority spend down**
- What to do: Treat libraries as **rural anchor hubs**

## ACE investment in rurally based organisations

- Our Develop Your Own Creative Practice fund for individual practitioners has supported 422 projects valued at **£4.8 million since 2023**, representing **14%** of all applications across a rural/urban split.
- Investment in rurally based National Portfolio Organisations represents 3% of the total portfolio value, up from 2.6% from 2018-22.
- Rural organisations make up 5% of all NPOs.



# Opportunities

# Risks

Leverage <i>existing rural networks</i> of creative orgs	Local authority funding pressure
Leverage rural libraries as anchor hubs for skills, enterprise, digital inclusion and cultural participation	Connectivity & access: rural broadband/mobile gaps and transport costs and infrastructure constrain participation and business growth
Convert heritage-motivated visits into <i>overnights</i> with culture-rich programming; align with local brand/identity.	Mind the access gap: distance, mobility and funding pressures on rural libraries can widen exclusion for older and low-mobility residents
Tie culture to regional skills strategies/education provision, apprenticeships, and local employer pipelines.	Productivity gap: predominantly rural areas contribute 15% of GVA with 17%+ of population



# Working with partners on the ground

- **With councils:** position culture in Local service, spatial and regeneration Plans; use planning/licensing to support venues and festivals; align with health, education and economic strategies; convene Cultural Compacts.
- **With cultural orgs:** use Arts Council England investments to deepen reach, test new ways of working in rural areas, and support IP/digital innovation skills via The Space/Digital Culture Network -style support.

#LETSCREATE

[artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

# What can Arts Council England do?

Our offer to places: ACE can

- Help to align cultural investment to **Rural Prosperity & other public funding**
- Support the convening of **Cultural Compacts**
- Extend rural reach via **touring**
- Co-evidence outcomes (**skills, GVA, pride in place**).