

AFRICAN HERITAGE RESILIENCE PROJECT

Research Summary
and Evaluation Report
January 2024 to March 2025





Thank you to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the national lottery players for making this project possible.



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01. PROJECT OVERVIEW

AHRP is an exploratory research project to determine the feasibility of collaborative work with African heritage organisations across East and West Midlands regions.

The project received grant funding of £159,867.40 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver a fifteen-month' project from 5 January 2024 to 31 March 2025.



1.1 Objectives

The objectives set a strong foundation to continuously review on-going work in order to bring a focus to the project.

- ▶ To collaborate with the 12 African heritage organisations in developing a strategic approach that fosters a collaborative framework grounded in trust, participation, and engagement from the Black community.
- ▶ To assess the interest in African heritage among diverse communities and their willingness to engage in its preservation and celebration.
- ▶ To identify and cultivate beneficial relationships with the external community, other heritage organisations, funders, and agencies that provide infrastructure support.
- ▶ To explore the potential for heritage to become economically viable.
- ▶ To disseminate the research findings.

1.2 Expected Outputs

- ▶ Stakeholder Lists/Map /Database.
- ▶ Grant-Making Strategy
- ▶ Environmental Strategy
- ▶ Updated Highlife Centre Governing Document
- ▶ AHCN Governance Document and Collaborative Framework
- ▶ Research Report
- ▶ Evaluation Report

1.3 Expected Outcomes

- ▶ A wider range of people involved in African Heritage.
- ▶ People will have developed skills.
- ▶ The funded organisation will be more resilient

02. APPROVED PURPOSE

ONE: Appoint a team of Researchers and develop a sound research methodology to support the project.

TWO: To carry out 12 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups with Black-led organisations to understand the needs of diverse audiences, and the impact of small grants and collaborative working.

THREE: Carry out 240 surveys with members of the public from diverse backgrounds to measure knowledge of, and interest in, African heritage.

FOUR: Conduct a governance review and skills audit, a review of the business and operating model, and review the existing environmental framework.

FIVE: Evaluate the project in line with the National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance and make this publicly available to all stakeholders.

SIX: Form a collaborative working group involving up to 12 Black-led Heritage organisations and develop an understanding of barriers to accessing heritage.

SEVEN: High visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities as well as using your project to acknowledge and thank National Lottery Players.

EIGHT: Take proactive measures to be inclusive, remove barriers to access and reach new and diverse audiences.

2.1

Approved Purpose One

Appoint The Project Team

The team was recruited through a fair procurement process and contracted for the project activities. The project team included the Project Manager, Lead Researcher, Research Associate, Research Support Officer (RSO), and Evaluation Consultant. This was a research-intensive project with a limited timeframe for delivery, necessitating the avoidance of mistakes and waste during task execution. Management ensured that planning, orientation, teamwork, diligence, initiative, and efficiency were prominently featured in project delivery. The team's passion and interest in the project—specifically, the research leading to a network—motivated them to continue developing and evolving and updating their skills in the process.

“The team in place was exceptional, working diligently to anticipate problems and find ways to mitigate them. The team's efficiency was outstanding, as they consistently went above and beyond to ensure that the work was completed.”

Given the successful outcome of the project, particularly considering that the researchers were unfamiliar with one another and had not collaborated previously, the level of efficiency achieved was outstanding.

“We allocated sufficient time to prepare for our roles and dedicated time to establish our orientation around them. Everyone understood how to communicate effectively, holding frequent and regular meetings. In my case, consistent repetition enhances my understanding.”



2.1.1 Delivery Through Work Streams

Work Stream One:

Conducting desktop research to identify appropriate individuals and organisations for inclusion in the AHCN.

A comprehensive review of existing literature and online sources to identify African heritage-related networks across the Midlands and beyond. Further desktop research was conducted to analyse the population demographics in the Midlands, which highlighted the diverse ethnicities and cultures present in the region.

Work Streams Two and Three

Conducting stakeholder interviews to explore the perspectives and opinions of relevant stakeholders on how an AHCN could function to address the needs of participating individuals, organisations, and communities.

Conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with organisation and individual heritage practitioners from various regions across the Midlands and a few other areas of England. The objective was to explore the potential for establishing a collaborative network focused on African heritage in the Midlands.

Work Stream Four

Develop a collaborative framework and establish appropriate governance to support the working practices of the AHCN.

The final work stream involved facilitating ten workshops with organisation and individual heritage practitioners who participated in work stream two and expressed a strong interest in joining the African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN) in the Midlands.



"We were all confident in each other's strengths and knew and trusted each other to bring good data."



2.2 Approved Purpose Two

Conduct 12 in-depth interviews and 6 working group workshops with Black-led heritage organisations to determine the potential for a collaborative network and to understand the impact of small grants to their organisations.

2.2.1 Methodology

The Logic Model

The research team approached the development of the methodology in the context of the logic model that was developed at the initiation of the research project. The research team worked with an Evaluation consultant to develop the logic model as detailed below.

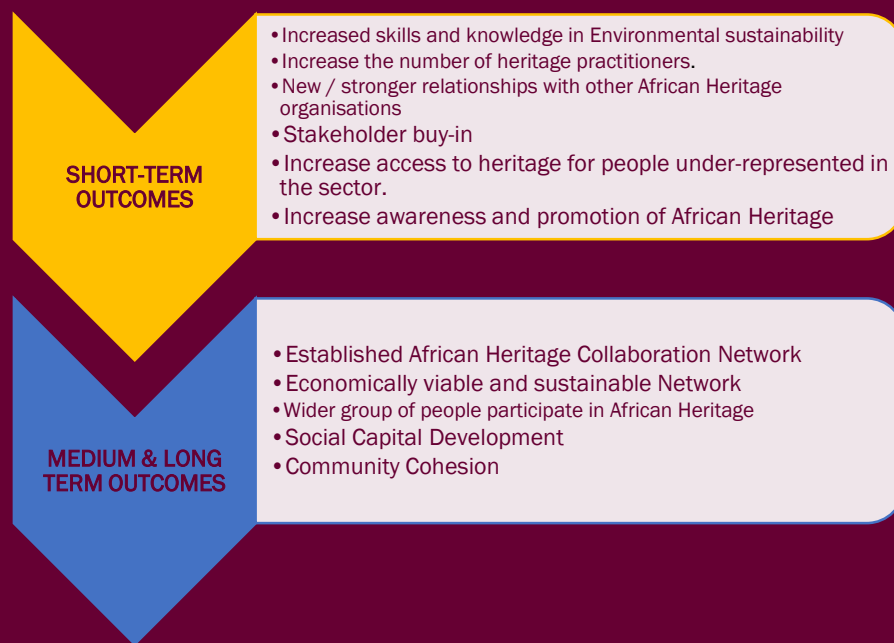
The logic model informed the research project specifically using semi-structured interviews. By providing a structured framework that links inputs, activities, and outcomes, it helped clarify the research objectives, guiding the development of specific questions for the interviews that aligned with the broader research goals. By understanding the desired outcomes, the research team could develop appropriate interview guides, ensuring that the data collected is directly relevant to answering the research questions.



Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews: Qualitative methods were appropriate for this research to explore stakeholder perspectives on developing an ACHN in the Midlands. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for addressing poorly understood areas such as African Heritage, as it enables the extraction of rich data and offers a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena.

Online and In-Person Surveys: The research team developed a concise online questionnaire in consultation with the project manager and the evaluation consultant to conduct the survey. The survey was created using Microsoft Forms and was intentionally designed to be brief to encourage higher participation rates, recognising that one of the barriers to obtaining responses can be the length of the survey.



2.2.2 Work Stream One

Conducting desktop research to identify appropriate individuals and organisations for inclusion in the AHCN.

The objectives of the desktop research were to:

- ▶ Identify the existence and functions of African heritage-related organisations in the Midlands and surrounding regions of the UK through online searches.
- ▶ Examine the African heritage and broader demographics of the population in the Midlands – this would help us understand more about the potential for an African heritage network by considering scope and possible demand for establishing a network.
- ▶ Explore theoretical and practical approaches to collaboration consider applicability to an African Heritage Collaborative Network through review of literature – this would support the development of a collaborative framework, alongside discussions with network members, which was one of the broader objectives of the research project.

Approach

- ▶ Developed a data collection tool in Excel to record organisations identified online that represent African heritage in some capacity, either exclusively or as part of an African-Caribbean heritage organisation.
- ▶ Conducted Google searches using a combination of keywords, including 'African', 'Afro-Caribbean', 'network', 'heritage', 'culture', 'organisation', 'collaboration'.
- ▶ Examined demographic data using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data from the 2021 census.
- ▶ Utilised Google Scholar, along with standard Google searches to investigate both theoretical and practical approaches to collaboration.

Literature Review

The desktop research identified the presence of African heritage-related networks across the Midlands, highlighting existing gaps and the potential for establishing a new network in this region. Additionally, the research provided insights into the population demographics of the Midlands, revealing a significant African community residing there. This demographic presents increased opportunities for organisations and individuals to engage with the network. The study also uncovered existing models of collaboration from academic literature in fields such as organisational development, education, and technology. Key features of effective collaboration include bringing together individuals who can agree on a shared set of values and goals, supported by strong leaders who articulate a clear vision.

Understanding African Heritage in the Midlands

The research team identified several organisations across the country that demonstrated a presence and focus on African and/or Caribbean culture.

- ▶ African Community Heritage Hub - <http://www.africanoheritagehub.org/about-us/>
- ▶ African Heritage Centre - <https://www.africanheritagecenteruk.com/>
- ▶ Royal African Society - <https://royalafricansociety.org/>
- ▶ African Centre - <https://www.africacentre.org.uk/>
- ▶ African Cultural Association - <https://www.africanculturalassociation.org/>
- ▶ National Association of Nigerian Communities UK [https://www.nancuk.org/Ghana Union Midlands](https://www.nancuk.org/Ghana%20Union%20Midlands) - <https://ghanaunionmidlands.co.uk/>

However, these organisations:

- a) Are focused exclusively on a single African country or heritage, such as Ghana, rather than adopting a Pan-African perspective, which would align with the objectives of an African Heritage Collaborative Network in the Midlands.
- b) Do not function as a network for business or individual practitioners seeking opportunities for collaboration and the development or growth of a business.
- c) Are based outside the Midlands and serving a different region, or serving the entire country without focusing on the specific needs of a region (e.g., the African Centre in London).

Furthermore, when approaching organisations, it became evident that they were not very responsive, as multiple attempts to contact them via telephone and email were unsuccessful. The research team concluded that there was no active African heritage collaborative network operating in the Midlands, indicating a gap and the potential for establishing one in the future.

Demographics of Individuals of African Heritage in the Midlands

The population of individuals of African descent in the UK has increased over the years, according to census data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). For instance, in England and Wales, the proportion of the Black African population rose from approximately 990,000 (1.8%) in 2011 to around 1,500,000 (2.5%) in 2021. In the Midlands, the population identifying their ethnicity as Black African is 225,250. An analysis of the census data reveals a significant number of individuals identifying as African in the Midlands, highlighting the potential for a network in the region that could address a clear need and support a substantial population. In the Midlands, those identified as Black/Black British numbered 379,078 out of a total population of 10,830,800, constituting 3.5%.

Collaboration

The research team identified several models from the literature that support collaboration. Three models, in particular, appeared to be especially useful for discussing approaches to collaborative work within an African heritage network. These models could also inform methods of operation and the components of a cooperative framework that the network could utilise to enhance its collaborative nature. The various models are presented below:



The full research report can be accessed here:
[2 African Heritage Resilience Project - Research Report.pdf](#)

2.2.3 Work Streams Two and Three

Conducted stakeholder interviews to explore the perspectives of organisations and individual practitioners involved in services and activities related to African heritage. The aim was to understand their challenges and gauge their interests in participating in an African Heritage Collaborative Network in the Midlands, UK.

The objectives were to:

- Explore the background of participants' current and past roles and experiences, services they provide, and geographical areas served; challenges they have faced as an organisation (if applicable).
- Develop a joint vision for the network – i.e. what participants perceived the role of the network would be and purpose served as well as its potential benefits.
- Set up the network and map out their experiences and contributions to other networks, challenges the network may face and what the participants may be able to contribute to the network.
- Operate the network – i.e. views on which individuals/organisations could join the network, how the network could be managed and run and how it could become economically viable and sustainable.

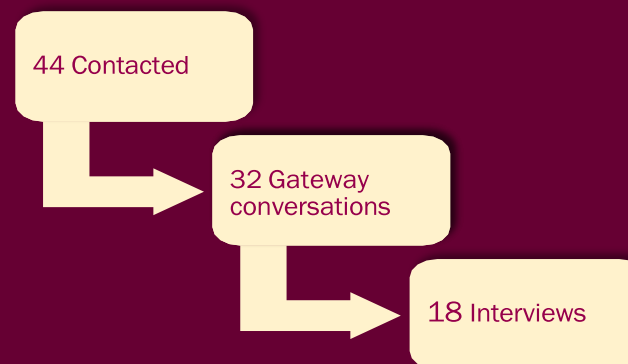
Participant Recruitment Approach

The team employed a variety of strategies to recruit participants, as outlined below:

- Utilising professional networks:** A list of potential stakeholders was compiled based on existing contacts maintained by the Highlife Centre across the Midlands. Seventeen participants were recruited through this method.
- Call to Action:** A promotional document was produced and published digitally, including on social media, email marketing, and the Highlife Centre website. This method successfully recruited 11 participants.
- Direct Approach:** To capture a wide breadth of participants' views, a review of African heritage organisations was conducted using internet searches to identify additional organisations that could be approached. Sixteen participants were recruited using this method.
- The 'snowballing' method** - which involves asking participants already recruited for the study to identify others they know, was also employed to recruit additional participants. However, no participants were successfully recruited through this method.

Participants were initially contacted via email and/or telephone. This was followed by a 'gateway conversation' which provided more information about the research and addressed any questions the potential participants may have had. Interviews were scheduled and conducted after these conversations.

Figure 3: Recruitment Process Flow Diagram



A total of 44 organisations and heritage practitioners from the Midlands, South East, and London participated in thirty-two (32) gateway conversations. This activity resulted in 18 organisations accepting to be interviewed for the research.

Geographic Coverage

61% (11) of participants operated in the West Midlands, 11% (2) operated in East Midlands, another 11% (2) operated in East and West Midlands, and 11% (2) operated in the South East and 6% (1) in London.

Services Offered

The organisational focus of participants covered services such as music/arts, education, youth development, wellbeing and housing.

Legal Structure

39% (7) participants represented CICs, 22% (4) represented charities, 17% (3) represented private limited companies by guarantee and 22% (4) were individual practitioners.

Length of Establishment

Of the 14 participants from registered organisations, 79% (11) were quite newly established (<10 years); 21% (3) were established for 19, 20 and 64 years, respectively.

Organisational Type

78% (14) of the participants led incorporated organisations, whereas 22% (4) were unincorporated.

Research Findings

Overview of Research Participants



Findings from the Stakeholder Interviews

Motivations to be part of an African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN)

This section discusses the key themes that emerged from the stakeholder interviews on what motivated them to be part of an AHCN in the Midlands.

Knowledge and Skills Development

28% of participants believed that being part of a network with other like-minded organisations that possess an entrepreneurial spirit is a valuable means of developing new knowledge and skills, which can facilitate the management of one's own organisation through regular communication and networking. 17% indicated that the network can function as a platform for mentorship, where experienced individuals guide and support one another, thereby fostering a culture of mutual assistance and development.

"I know getting into a network like that, I will definitely meet people who have gone ahead of me, and have done something beyond what I'm aiming for. I can get advice and we can share ideas. We can deliberate on things and someone can easily hold my hand to show me what to do in terms of getting to where I want to get to. So, in as much as I will give my experience out, I would also expect someone, not necessarily in my industry, but then, ways of building up small and medium sized businesses to a very big goal or objective that we have." (Interviewee 12)

Sharing Contacts and Opportunities

22% of participants' reported that the network can facilitate the exchange of information and resources among members. They believe that this interconnectedness could lead to numerous opportunities, including collaborations on cultural projects, access educational and professional development resources, and participation in community initiatives.

"I think that a network would not only give each individual organisation a power in sharing practice and accessible to organisations who may be similar to you or may complement the work that you're doing to form larger partnerships or alignments in the future." (Interviewee 9)

Stronger Voice for African Heritage

39% noted the benefit a network like this would have for building a strong voice for African heritage as African heritage is low compared to other cultures in their area.

22% thought that the African community across the Midlands was quite disparate and that this could give a sense of isolation. Being part of a network would give rise to a stronger voice for the African heritage community and raise awareness of African culture in ways that other cultures have been successful at accomplishing.

Another 22% noted that a network could support a stronger, more cohesive African community in their local area and beyond and the benefits this would bring.

17% expressed that establishing robust networks can extend their impact beyond local communities to a national level. By leveraging the collective power of various organisations, these networks can serve not only the people of the West Midlands but also have a broader national influence to drive change and serve communities across the country.

"The network, once established, could have some extra connection with the other networks which are working at the national level so that our network, the whole network, only doesn't serve the people of West Midlands, but it does help even at the national level. You can even do a petition at the Parliament ... it will come from different organisations, big organisations, big networks. I think we may easily influence our politics. You can influence our decision-makers." (Interviewee 13)

Challenges Faced by Heritage Organisations

Funding and the Role of Small Grants

The primary challenge was securing funding to support the sustainability of the organisations. This issue was highlighted by fourteen interviewees, representing 78% of the participants. They expressed a sense of apprehension regarding how access to funding could impact the sustainability of their organisations.

“Small grants will go a long way to help us to achieve the dreams [of the organisation].” (Interviewee 11)

Funding was often secured through grants from various organisations, but it also relied on the establishment and development of sustainable funding pipelines through clients and customers to generate income. Small grants were particularly vital, with 56% of organisations emphasizing the crucial role they play in their operations.

28% of respondents noted that while these grants significantly aid in achieving goals and initiating projects, they are insufficient for sustaining long-term growth and effectiveness. This highlights that small grants alone are inadequate for ambitious objectives. Nevertheless, small grants continue to play a crucial role, particularly for those in the early stages or primarily reliant on local funding sources. Organisations aiming to provide quality community services require more substantial funding to succeed.

“The small grants have a role in terms of one-off grant, but if you're an organisation that has the potential that drives the ambition, the relationships and partnerships to transition to the next stage, Small grants amounts don't sustain that model. What they do is just help you to start, but they don't support and sustain your growth. So yes, small grants have a part to play, but if you're ambitious in achieving things for your community and delivering quality services, you can't be reliant simply and solely on small grants.” (Interviewee 2)

Anticipated Purpose and Role of an AHCN

Participants were asked to reflect on the purpose and role of the AHCN in serving the organisations that are part of it.

Social Capital: Mutual Support and Strengthening Community

All participants (100%) emphasized the importance of the network in connecting individuals and organisations. This network would serve as a support system, strengthening the relationships between organisations and practitioners working in areas related to African heritage. The interconnectedness of the community not only strengthens the sense of African heritage but also empowers individuals by providing access to valuable social resources. This connection enhances the community's ability to effectively address challenges and pursue its goals. Through such a network, African heritage organisations can play a crucial role in sustaining and enhancing social capital within their communities.

“First and foremost, I think it would accelerate development. Yeah, it may have the opportunity to accelerate those who have done that very hard and deep work to establish grassroots community organisations or small businesses, it could help to accelerate those businesses to become more commercial, for example, or become as we mentioned earlier, around gaining greater presence and investment from local authorities or national bodies. So, if that acceleration happens in development we can then see an expansion or growth of businesses and community organisations that service, you know, our growing community of African origin I think.” (Interviewee 9)

Funding and Pooling Resources

28% discussed the advantages of applying for joint funding opportunities as a network, allowing them to pool resources in both financial and human capital. By uniting various organisations and individuals under a common heritage umbrella, the network can present a more cohesive and compelling case to potential funders. This collaborative approach enhances credibility and demonstrates a united front dedicated to preserving and promoting African heritage.

22% of participants discussed the importance of supporting one another in achieving common goals, such as applying for and securing funding. They noted that some applications can be complex and challenging to complete, and that the network could facilitate collaboration and increase the number of successful submissions.

"I always believe that we need an African heritage network because I always see lots of potential and there's so much we can do to be represented and I believe if we have this African Heritage network and bring our resources together, work together, you know, we can we can build that." (Interviewee 8)

28% emphasized the value of learning from more experienced organisations, which helps to avoid common pitfalls and accelerates both personal and professional growth. Continuous learning and development can be fostered through regular interactions with other members, conducting workshops, and providing mentoring.

"I'm very passionate about learning. So, first and foremost would be learning from those who are more experienced than me, those who were further on in the journey. So, understanding the practice of successful organisations locally, nationally and internationally. To understand where my vision and where my company can fit in." (Interviewee 9)

Contributions to offer an African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN)

Sharing Domain Expertise: Knowledge and Skills

100% of the participants expressed a willingness to contribute their knowledge and skills to the network, supporting other members and helping the network thrive. Additionally, they represented organizations from a diverse range of sectors related to African heritage, including education, history and artefacts, music, dance, and health and well-being. Participants also demonstrated a commitment to supporting one another by providing guidance and encouragement to newer or less experienced members. This collaborative approach to leadership and resource sharing can enhance the network's capacity to achieve its goals and foster a supportive, empowered community.

Resources

11% (2) of participants highlighted the importance of contributing human resources to the network through their own time and effort, and by leveraging other individuals, they collaborate within their organisation. One participant, actively involved in building communities by supporting refugees from Africa, specifically mentioned the ability to enlist volunteers with diverse skills and expertise that can be utilised as needed. By leveraging their networks, they can collaborate with diverse individuals and cultivate an expanding community. Additionally, they can receive assistance with events, share venues and spaces, and explore funding opportunities.

"We have a substantial number of volunteers with diverse expertise in various fields. We will be able to provide our skills in different areas based on what is required. (Interviewee 13). We can build upon and leverage numerous initiatives undertaken in the past. Our community comprises individuals from diverse professional backgrounds, including students, storekeepers, medical practitioners, and lawyers. This wealth of resources can significantly benefit the organisation and support individual businesses. (Interviewee 11)

Infrastructure and Management of an AHCN

There was overwhelming support among all participants for establishing a formal infrastructure for the AHCN. A well-structured framework is essential to ensure the network's sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness in achieving its goals. All participants emphasised the importance of having a clear organisational structure with defined roles and responsibilities. This formal infrastructure would facilitate better coordination, decision-making, and accountability, ensuring that the network operates smoothly and transparently. Effective management was deemed crucial for the AHCN's success, which includes implementing robust governance practices, such as regular meetings and transparent financial management. 33% (6) proposed suggestions for establishing a board to oversee the network.

One interviewee, however, expressed caution regarding a structure that is overly rigid, as it may lead to issues with hierarchy and hinder open communication among members, regardless of their positions.

"A board of directors would be good or maybe having somebody who's overall in charge of a small team maybe underneath them who speaks for the whole organisations." (Interviewee 18)

Organisations that Could Be Part of the Network

All participants demonstrated an open-minded attitude regarding the types of organisations that could be included in the AHCN. There were no recommendations to restrict the scope of the sectors in which these organizations operate or the types of services and activities they provide. One interviewee proposed a diverse array of organizations that could be part of the network, spanning from finance to education.

"Finance, wellness, events ... all of that, education, helping young people passing their GCSEs and a lot everything really. It's an umbrella full of things." (Interviewee 10)

Consideration was also given to the legal structures of organisations that could join the network. 67% (12) expressed a willingness to be inclusive of various types of legal structures for participating organisations, including both not-for-profit entities (e.g., charities) and for-profit organisations (e.g., private limited companies). Additionally, members did not need to be exclusively of African ethnicity. This openness may reflect the fact that some participants operated as limited companies in conjunction with the not-for-profit aspect of their business or that they possessed strong business acumen from previous or concurrent experiences. As one interviewee noted, there is an added benefit to incorporating a diverse range of organizations, which can foster different perspectives and approaches to activities.

"When it's kind of small businesses, you know CICs and that, there's a certain way of doing things, whereas if you have corporate organisation or you know, private businesses, then you start thinking about things in a different aspect as well." (Interviewee 3)

There were, however, 22% (4) expressed the view that the network should be more tailored to not-for-profit organisations, such as social enterprises and charities.

"I would say not-for-profit organisations and so mainly are social enterprises and charities. That's what I envisage yes." (Interviewee 15)

This sentiment of exercising caution regarding the involvement of private businesses in the network was clearly illustrated by one participant. They noted that private businesses may prioritize profit generation over community service.

"I would think a network like this one because we don't know yet the focus of it and I have not read the motives of it or just to know exactly why this network wanted to be established. I don't know yet. But if it is for the benefit of the community, I would suggest that maybe not to be involved with the business ... because for them it's money, money, money, money coming in." (Interviewee 13)

When considering all the feedback collectively, it became evident that the organisations and businesses within the network should align their perspectives and share a common understanding of the network's aims and goals. This alignment would not preclude different types of organisations from participating in or being involved with the network in various capacities. Consequently, organisations such as Afro-Caribbean organisations could include those that work directly with African heritage themes and those with an interest in African heritage.

Services Offered to the Community

Community Building and Collaboration

Community building and collaboration are considered central to the mission of the African Heritage Collaborative Network, as highlighted by 50%(9) of participants. By bringing people together individuals and organisations, the network can create a cohesive and supportive environment where members share resources, knowledge, and expertise. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the bonds within the African community but also fosters a sense of unity and purpose for the network. The benefits of community building and collaboration can extend beyond the immediate network. By establishing a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, the network can serve as a model for inclusivity and cooperation throughout the community. For instance, one interviewee discussed the development of community champions who could engage with the network in relation to arts and storytelling.

“What we should be doing as well is using arts to tell stories, have champions and promoting champions in our community, past and present, and also using arts as a message board for what's happening in society right now.” (Interviewee 2)

Activities for the African and Broader Community

The AHCN could be dedicated to offering a variety of support and services tailored to the needs of the African community in the Midlands, as well as to the broader population of individuals residing in the Midlands and beyond. Naturally, the organisation will have the capacity to serve the African community, as several interviewees have already worked with this demographic. The network would be well-positioned to build on these existing relationships effectively and efficiently. Interviewees discussed the diverse range of activities and services that could be made available to the entire community rather than exclusively to the African community. While many services and activities may have an African theme, anyone interested in these offerings could benefit from utilizing them. 22% (4) highlighted the importance of showcasing various cultures through artistic events.

“A display of a country's culture, maybe like a cultural dance, maybe music artists from different countries. Just things that would showcase that country and also putting together things to display like museums, so you know, encourage countries to bring their artefacts as well to display. So those are the kind of things that I envisage that could be done...” (Interviewee 4)

11% (2) highlighted other events that may extend into running conferences and supporting sporting events as further examples of activities the network could support.

“There can be seminars, symposiums, conferences available, and sports events. The network can also organise for people to come together. The network can also sponsor activities, school activities or whatever activities that there are in order for people to know what exists for the network or from the network that they can achieve. So yeah, so there can be a whole lot of things that can be organised.” (Interviewee 12)

The impact of these services extends beyond the African community. By showcasing the rich cultural heritage and contributions of African communities, the network can attract interest and participation from the wider public. This broader engagement fosters mutual understanding and respect, breaking down cultural barriers and promoting social cohesion.

Financial Sustainability of an AHCN

A strong consensus was that the AHCN requires a clear strategy to achieve financial sustainability. This is likely reflected in the fact that many organisations interviewed identified funding as a key challenge for their successful operation and sustainability. Interviewees highlighted several avenues that could support the AHCN's financial sustainability, which are discussed below.

Grant Funding

Grant funding was one of the potential sources of income for the African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN). 55% (10) of participants recognised the importance of securing joint, network-wide grants to support the network's activities and sustain its operations. Initial National Lottery funding to facilitate the establishment and early development of the network underscores the necessity for strategic and business planning to ensure continuity once such grants expire.

"It's about sharing ideas; it's about doing the research together. Joint funding applications supporting our communities, going out to doing outreach work, you know, I think." (Interviewee 18)

Membership Fees

28% (5) of the participants indicated that membership fees could be a viable means of generating income for the AHCN. They proposed the introduction of different tiers of membership for organisations, practitioners, and the general public, which could accommodate varying levels of involvement and financial capability. This tiered approach promotes greater inclusivity while ensuring that those who benefit most from the network's services contribute appropriately. Clear communication of the benefits associated with each membership tier is essential to encourage sign-ups and maintain member satisfaction.

"Membership, yes, but you can have tiers of membership. You can have a free membership where people can access certain information, and then you can have a paying membership where you get access to support information and people. And then, yeah, applying for funding as well. So, I think, as I said, all of the above." (Interviewee 3)

One interviewee, however, expressed caution regarding the implementation of membership subscription fees, emphasising the importance of ensuring that they provide value for money.

"If you're doing a membership subscription, then there's no point asking people to pay membership subscription if there is nothing they gonna gain from it. If there's gonna be membership subscription, then there should be a significant benefit for people who will be members." (Interviewee 4)

Events and Charges

Charging for events was another suggested strategy to generate income for the AHCN, as 22% (4) of the participants noted. This approach aligns with survey findings from other reports, indicating participants' willingness to pay for valuable and well-organised events. Event fees could be tiered based on the type of event and the target audience, ensuring accessibility while generating revenue. Transparent communication regarding the purpose of these charges and the funds' intended use can help maintain trust and encourage participation.

"Having things where people pay - not much, because I can't imagine people want to pay very much - but just maybe either donations or like a cafe where you buy food, or maybe events where you pay like one pound or two-pound entry." (Interviewee 18)

Summary of The Findings from Stakeholder Interviews

Fundraising and Donations

22% (4) of participants recognised the potential of organised fundraising activities to generate significant revenue. These activities may include community events, online crowdfunding campaigns, and partnerships with businesses and philanthropists. Effective fundraising necessitates a clear strategy, compelling narratives about the network's impact, and robust marketing efforts to engage potential donors and supporters.

“Of course, will organisations be willing to pay some money towards it if we will have a loose kind of community fee from the beginning? Will we ask people to donate one pound fifty or whatever as we grow it?” (Interviewee 16)

Consultancy

Offering consultancy services may be a viable income-generating strategy for the AHCN. By leveraging the expertise within the network, the AHCN can provide consultancy to organisations, businesses, and individuals seeking insights into African heritage, community engagement, and related fields. This approach could generate revenue and position the AHCN as a thought leader and a valuable resource within the community. As noted in previous findings, participants suggested that the AHCN could harness various skills and experience from various sources, including institutions, businesses, and local, regional, or national government bodies. Consequently, there is potential for an AHCN in the Midlands to serve as a leadership voice for African heritage specifically. Offering services that encompass advice, guidance, and other forms of support could be considered within the scope of income-generating methods for the AHCN.

“The network can serve as the voice for its members and be the voice of Africans in Midlands, being experts in this area.” (Interviewee 16)

The findings from this tranche of the AHRP will support the work conducted in future meetings with network members and will help inform the future direction of the research team and those involved in establishing the network. The findings revealed that further efforts are needed, including regular workshops with prospective network members, surveying the public to gather their opinions on potential events and services the network could offer, and supporting the development and establishment of the AHCN in the Midlands.

This research demonstrated a significant level of enthusiasm and interest in establishing an African Heritage Collaborative Network in the Midlands. Participants possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience that could contribute to the network and foster a dynamic and supportive culture. The diverse representation of organisations among the interviewees underscored the potential for an African heritage network in the Midlands to leverage unique skills and experiences.

Many participants recognised the advantages of a support system that would facilitate networking and the development of knowledge and skills. The network's role would encompass building social capital, strengthening the community, pooling resources, and promoting its members' personal and professional development.



2.3 Approved Purpose Three

Carry out 240 surveys with people from diverse backgrounds.

2.2.2 Work Stream Three

Involving a Diverse Audience in African Heritage

A survey was conducted to assess public interest in African heritage and their experiences. The survey was conducted from May to August 2024. Participants were recruited by engaging in community surveys across nine cities in the Midlands, including Coventry, Leicester, Northampton, and West Bromwich. Additional responses were gathered by disseminating the survey through social media and professional networks familiar to the research team.

The aim was to examine individuals' experiences and interests in various African heritage events and activities, including their willingness to travel and how much money they are prepared to spend to participate in them.

Two hundred and sixty-six (266) surveys were completed over a three months' period exceeding the target of 240. The surveys were conducted in Nine (9) cities and towns. Of the 266, 118 (44.36%) requested to be kept informed, providing their contact details, including 64 (24.06%) giving their direct phone numbers.

Survey Findings

City or Town of Residence

Respondents reported residing in a variety of locations, including the Midlands (92.4%), East of England (1.2%), South East (1.2%), London (1.6%), North West (1.2%), North East and Yorkshire (0.4%), outside the UK (1.2%), and those who did not respond to the question (0.8%).

Ethnicity

The most common ethnicity among respondents was 'White' (46.7%), followed by Black African (18.8%). Compared to census data, the sample exhibited an excellent representation of Black and other ethnic groups. Although the White ethnic group comprised the highest proportion of respondents, this percentage was lower than that found in the Midlands population.

Gender

More than half of the respondents identify as women, comprising 52.1% of the total. Only one respondent preferred not to disclose their gender, and two did not respond. Overall, the data reflects a relatively balanced representation between men and women, with minimal non-responses or preferences for non-disclosure.

Age

The largest group consisted of individuals aged 25 to 34, with 92 respondents (35.6%). This was followed by the 35 to 44 age group, which included 65 respondents (24.9%). The smallest group comprised participants aged 65 and over, with five respondents (1.9%).

Disability

The majority of respondents (95.4%) reported having no disability. A small proportion (1.4%) identified as having a disability, while 1.1% preferred not to disclose their status. Overall, most respondents did not identify as disabled.

Five key questions were posed to gather qualitative responses from the public regarding their experiences and interests in activities or events that showcase African heritage.

Activities and Events Showcasing African Heritage Previously Attended

Music (59%) was the most commonly attended activity or event among respondents, followed by food and music festivals (50%). Dance (42.9%) and art exhibitions and galleries (31.8%) were also popular activities attended by survey participants.

Activities or Events of Interest

The most popular activities that respondents expressed interest in attending in the future are Food and Music Festivals (75.1%) and Music events (73.6%), followed by Dance (60.2%) and Arts Exhibitions and Galleries (56.3%). Spoken Word and Poetry received the least selection, with only 34.5% of respondents indicating interest. Additionally, several respondents provided 'other' activities they were interested in, with 27 individuals (10.3%) offering suggestions that included history and theatre.

Average Affordable Activity Payment

When considering how much individuals would be willing to pay to participate in one of the activities mentioned in the previous question, the most significant number of respondents (112; 42.9%) indicated a willingness to pay between £5 and £10. This was followed by 30.0% willing to pay between £10 and £15. A smaller group (15.2%) expressed a willingness to pay more than £15, while 7.2% would pay less than £5. A minority of respondents (4.6%) stated they were unwilling to pay anything, and 0.8% did not respond. Overall, the majority of respondents are willing to pay within the £5 to £15 range.

Interest in Extracurricular Activities

While attending or participating in activities or events, most respondents (94.6%) expressed interest in Food and Drinks, followed by 58.8% in Hair and Beauty (including makeup). A small percentage (5.4%) indicated an interest in "Other" activities, with specific responses including ancestral wisdom, Health and Well-Being, and History.

Travel Distance to Attend Events

Responses in Table 17 indicate that the largest group of respondents (37.5%) were willing to travel between 5 and 10 miles, suggesting a readiness to attend or participate in activities at a relatively local destination. Most respondents were willing to travel, as only 10.8% indicated they would travel less than 5 miles.

Summary of the findings from surveys

A total of 264 responses were collected.

- ▶ Respondents were drawn from a diverse range of individuals but were not fully representative of the Midlands region.
- ▶ Most respondents had previously attended an African heritage event or activity.
- ▶ Food, music, and dance were the most popular activities, garnering the highest levels of interest among survey respondents. Other activities, such as art exhibitions and drumming, demonstrated moderate interest, albeit slightly less than food, music, and dance.
- ▶ Lower interest was observed in comedy, creative market days, and spoken word/poetry.
- ▶ Most respondents indicated a willingness to pay for events, with most willing to spend between £5 and £15.
- ▶ Willingness to travel for events typically ranged from 5 to 15 miles, with fewer respondents willing to travel longer distances.

To gather information from individuals from diverse backgrounds, the AHRP team collaborated with an external consultant to distribute an online survey to prospective participants throughout October and November 2024. An additional question was included in the survey to inquire whether respondents had children.

2.4

Approved Purpose Four

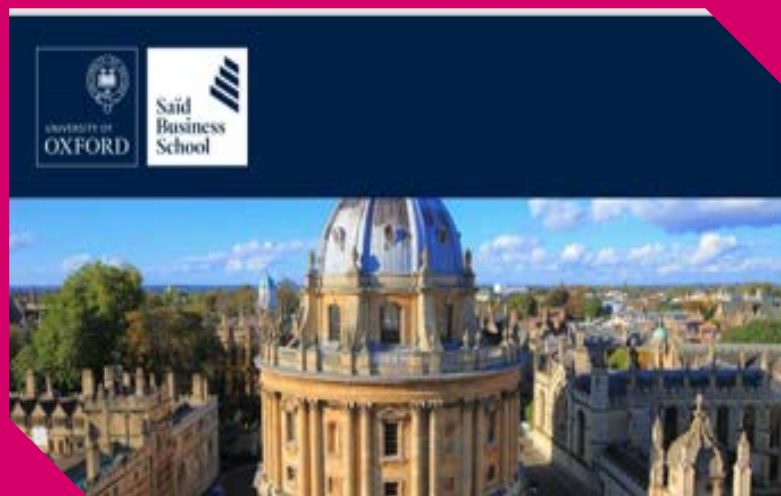
Conduct a governance review and skills audit, a review of the business and operating model, and review the existing environmental framework.

Strengthening our Governance

A Governance workshop was facilitated by Andy Perkin, a Community and Enterprise Consultant which covered: Exploring Governance, The Qualities of Good Charitable Organisations, Good Practice Evaluation and Early Warning Guide, Board responsibilities and Governance Structures and Changes. An online evidence of the support and output can be accessed here: [Highlife Centre Governance Support | Visual Business Planning](#).

The trustees found the training sessions very useful in enhancing their understanding about their roles and responsibilities as trustees. Following the sessions, the board recruited an additional two trustees with expertise in information technology and law who officially joined the Board in January 2025, thereby broadening the skills and expertise of the trustees. The Centre is also diversifying its business activities to supplement the existing grants. Additionally, Beyond Just Now was commissioned to support the Centre to update its governing document which is due to be submitted to the Charities Commission.

'I gained a lot because there was a lot that I didn't know eg How we should look at our organisations, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Making sure that vision/objectives are working well and if not review it to ensure it is working and aligned with things on the ground. Working well with funders to ensure everything is under control and we understand each other's needs and expectations; knowing our wellbeing, connecting with staff, each other and service users'. Trustee 1



Improving our Environmental Sustainability

The Chief Executive attended the Oxford Leading Sustainable Corporations Programme 2025. This was a six-week environmental sustainability course that focused on:

Module 1: Corporate Purpose and Value Creation

Discovered how organisations perceive the value they generate within a capitalist system and how this perception influences their impact on stakeholders and, ultimately, their sustainability.

Module 2: Responding to Climate Change

Explored why climate change and carbon emissions are significant to organisations.

Module 3: Natural Capital and Resource Management

Investigated how the Centre interacts with natural resources, focusing on which resources it relies upon and which resources it affects.

Module 4: Social Sustainability

Examined how the Highlife Centre recognises its dependence on and impact on human and social capital.

Module 5: Ensuring Sustainability, Governance, Risk, and Reporting.

Suggested methods by which the Highlife Centre's governance can integrate sustainability.

Module 6: Levers of Change

Outlined how sustainability can be enacted at the Highlife Centre.

The Environmental Strategy is attached here:

[3 HLC Environmental Policy 31032025.pdf](#)

Becoming a Capability Support Infrastructure

The Highlife Centre commissioned Ben Onvio to support the Centre with strengthening its policies, processes and systems to become an Infrastructure support organisation including becoming a grant maker. The Centre's requirements focused on organisational capacity assessment and developing systems for grant management. Key points included the need to update policies annually, and the importance of having a proven track record in project delivery. The support highlighted the necessity of clear financial management systems, including standard operating procedures and travel subsistence policies. These are linked in to governance, succession planning, and the need for a social accounting system to calculate unit cost per beneficiary. Furthermore, the support covered the distinction between audits and independent examinations and the importance of aligning policies for effective grant management. Please note that whilst the support was terminated early and other grant makers continued to support in-kind.

The Grant Making Strategy is attached below.

[HLC Grant Making Strategy V1 31032025.pdf](#)

The Centre's Governing document has been updated to reflect this with the support from Beyond Just Now attached below.

[V1The Highlife Centre CIO Constitution Final.pdf](#)

[Special Resolutions The Highlife Centre.pdf](#)

The support received highlighted three key points:

- ▶ First, a succession plan is necessary to ensure that someone can assist the Chief Executive and step in when she is unavailable.
- ▶ Second, the Highlife Centre needs to diversify its business activities, as its primary source of income is currently reliant on grants.
- ▶ Third, there is a need to recruit additional trustees to address the gaps at the trustee level.

An interview with the two trustees suggests that these actions are well underway and need to be addressed. For instance, a succession plan has been developed, and an individual staff member has been designated to shadow the CEO. Additionally, preparations have accelerated since the governance training session to recruit more trustees. In January 2025, two new trustees officially joined the Board, bringing valuable expertise in information technology and law. Finally, the trustees revealed that the Centre is currently working on diversifying its business activities to supplement its grants. The centre has been refurbished, and rooms are now available for meeting hire, a kitchen has been fully equipped for hire, and a café is ready to be leased for commercial activities. Trustees were quick to point out that activities to enhance the growth and efficiency of the Centre remain ongoing. The trustees are reviewing key documents: the 3-Year Strategic Plan, the 3-Year Operational Plan and Budget for 2025, and an Environmental Strategy.

2.5

Approved Purpose Five

Evaluate your project in line with the National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance and make this publicly available to all stakeholders.

Management ensured that the project incorporated a process evaluation, and therefore, the Evaluation Consultant was involved from the beginning to the end of the project. The Highlife Centre commissioned QBQ Research and Consulting Ltd, an evaluation consultant, in 2024 to conduct formative and summative project assessments. The evidence presented in the evaluation report is derived from the ongoing activities of the consultant, including the interviews conducted for the evaluation. QBQ was involved in the project at all levels and took the time to engage directly with each stakeholder. The QBQ consultant developed a logic model (see page 9) to assess the project and attended all team meetings to understand the project's progress, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation. QBQ engaged with management to receive regular updates, ensuring the project runs smoothly and with minimal risks.

Furthermore, the consultant produced a "Research Ethics" document that outlines the key principles of research ethics and provides checklists to guide and inform the overall research process. QBQ Research and Consulting Ltd. has reviewed the findings from the comprehensive research conducted by the Research team, and the recommendations have been incorporated into the report accordingly.



2.6

APPROVED PURPOSE SIX

Form a collaborative working group involving up to 12 Black-led Heritage organisations and develop an understanding of barriers to accessing heritage.



The primary goal of the network workshops was to identify suitable individuals and organisations that could contribute to the AHCN and help establish a foundation for a sustainable network beyond the conclusion of the research. The specific objectives included:

- ▶ Complete ten workshops to help build relationships and trust among members.
- ▶ Develop a roadmap outlining key activities and milestones for the duration of the ten planned workshops.
- ▶ Work towards developing a collaborative framework document.
- ▶ Exploring the impact of small grants on supporting organisational activities.

Working Group Workshops

Meeting One: Inception Meeting

Meeting Two: Mission Statement and Vision

Meeting Three: Purpose of the Network

Meeting Four: Defining the Collaborative Framework

Meeting Five: Skills and Experience Audit

Meeting Six: Roles and Responsibilities of Members

Meeting Seven: The Impact of Small Grants: Roles and Responsibilities

Meetings Eight and Nine: Celebration Event
Development Activities 2025: Roles and Responsibilities

Meeting Ten: Network Launch Event

'I am a Caterer and also a product of the Highlife Centre. My value to the Network lies in bringing unity and contributing to community knowledge through catering skills. In short, I provide food which brings people of all race together'. Member R

Current Network Members

Members of African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN)

Member	Network Role
<i>The House of Emanuel I&I CIC</i>	Strategic Lead
<i>Maambena Village CIC</i>	Strategic Lead; Operational Lead
<i>African & Minority Families Support Services (AFRIFAS) CIC</i>	Finance and Fundraising Lead
<i>Brighter Moments CIC</i>	Finance and Fundraising Lead; Community Engagement and Wellbeing Lead
<i>Action Speaks CIC</i>	Admin and Marketing Lead
<i>LA - Individual Heritage Practitioner</i>	Admin and Marketing Lead
<i>Country Kitchen Africa CIC</i>	Operational Lead
<i>Young Beacons Ltd</i>	Community Engagement and Wellbeing Lead
<i>Highlife Centre Ltd</i>	Business Development Lead
<i>Communities of Impact</i>	Business Development Lead
<i>QBC Research and Consultancy Ltd</i>	Research, Monitoring & Evaluation Lead
<i>NHS / Freelance researcher</i>	Research, Monitoring & Evaluation Lead



“Network meetings and workshops have been a rich source of learning and clarifying my thoughts. For example, the sessions with Sona, an independent Consultant, to provide external, independent facilitation to establish the Network structure has been very useful. In particular, the guidance on the process of defining scope, roles, and legal structure for the network has been refreshing and empowering.” **Member K**

Launch of the AHCN Celebration Event on 13th December 2024

Twelve organisations and Individual practitioners expressed overwhelming interest in advancing the network as strategic participants, which led to assigning specific roles to each member and providing support to strengthen their capacity and capabilities.

The event formally inaugurated the AHC network. Please note that the formation of the network and its unveiling were unexpected outcomes of the AHRP project.

The Collaborative Framework developed for the AHCN is attached here:

[AHCN Collaborative Framework v1.pdf](#)

Brand guidelines was developed for marketing and promotional purposes which can be accessed here:

[AHCN Brand Guidelines.pdf](#)

A work-in-progress website has been developed for the network and can be accessed here: [African Heritage Collaboration Network](#)

Terms of reference for AHCN can be found here:

[FINAL Terms of Reference 240325.pdf](#)



Challenges in Running an African Heritage Collaborative Network.

Funding

Funding was the challenge most frequently cited by participants regarding the operation of an African Heritage Network, mirroring similar difficulties expressed by interviewees concerning their organisations. Six participants (33%) indicated that securing funding to establish and maintain the network would be a significant obstacle. “Funding will always pose a challenge in establishing an organisation like this” (Interviewee 2).

Building Trust Between Organisations

Building trust between individuals and organisations within an African heritage network is essential for fostering collaboration, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting mutual respect and understanding. The significance of establishing trust among organisations was widely acknowledged, with nearly half of the participants (44%) emphasising its importance. They highlighted previous negative experiences with failed initiatives that lacked trustworthiness.

“One of the other things which is very prevalent in the diaspora conscience is trust as well. Really having that authentic seal of approval that this network is the bona fide real network with the right endorsements to stand as the only vehicle ... to understand that this is trustworthy, this is, you know, maybe sometime over the years you see things pop up and you know people are trying to achieve something and you think, okay, I will join this. And then after so long, you realise, oh, it's only developing. And there's so many stories of people set one thing up for a particular purpose, then they change and disappear. So, in terms of leadership and direction and definitely business, I know that the sense of trust is going to be very important.” (Interviewee 9)

Building Momentum and Enthusiasm

Building momentum and harnessing enthusiasm within the African heritage network is essential for driving sustainable growth and maximising impact. 17% identified this as a potential challenge, particularly in the early phases of developing the network. This concern often arose from past experiences with similar projects that began enthusiastically but ultimately faltered due to a lack of sustained engagement or resources.

Potential participants may be concerned about the network's capacity to sustain long-term interest, secure consistent funding, and effectively mobilise volunteers and supporters. One interviewee emphasised the significance of establishing strong relationships with a core group and expanding as activities progress to maintain momentum.

“I think the starting is really important, and then it's also about whether we are a core group or how big are we gonna be? And I think that's important ... because sometimes when you start with a group that's too big, right? It's difficult to build those links. I think sometimes what you do is you start with something small and then it grows.” (Interviewee 2)

Another interviewee observed that a natural decline in enthusiasm and motivation may occur if it is not consistently maintained.

“Often something gets very exciting to begin with. It's sustained for a bit and then it tails off. I'd say it's even less about the resources and more about that the motivation that there's always new people who feel they belong to something that they can contribute and something that they can own, something in some ways, collectively. Because when you have the energy and the desire you can solve those other problems.” (Interviewee 5)

Case Studies

Brighter Moments (BM) is a Network Strategic Group Member and leads in Community Engagement and Wellbeing. BM is an 'event planning' organisation in its early stages of formation, advocating for African culture and promoting empowerment and togetherness. BM had the opportunity to be impactful when given the contract to do the decorations for the launch of the Network last December. The BM lead stated that most of the resources were sourced from Africa and combined that with other resources here in the Midlands to create an African theme for the event. Feedback from the event organisers and participants suggests that a very good and creative job was done in fusing resources to create an African theme, which effectively achieved the event's purpose. She reflects on the extent of her impact on the network with the following observation:

Reflecting on the distance travelled so far with the network, she feels impacted by many things. She joined the African Heritage Resilience Project at a time she was undergoing training for her newly formed event planning business. The association with the project and the network has been a learning curve, meeting new people and gaining new knowledge and skills. The extent of impact on her is reflected in her statement below:

"Responding to a questionnaire recently for the creation of a logo for the network reminded me of the African theme decoration that I undertook and achieved for the event."

AFRIFAS is a consultancy firm advocating for African and minority families navigating the social care system. The CEO is also a community activist with a clear mission to champion 'culturally competent support, challenge systemic inequalities and empower families'.

Though initially reluctant to join due to other competing priorities, he is very excited to be part of the network, as he sees a lot of potential in the project. Since joining the Strategic Group, he has been able to shape the direction of things. For example, he successfully championed the idea of remuneration for members of the group despite initial challenges. He also volunteered to be the Master of Ceremonies at the official launch of the Network, which attracted over 100 people. He sees himself as one of the vocal, if not the most vocal, when views are being solicited, to the extent that 'when quiet, I note that people want to hear my voice'. The activities of the network have had a lot of impact on him. He says

"Still in its infancy but can see the potential. Beginning to know each other's strengths and knowledge. Learning a bit more from each other. As we interact we enrich each other".

So far, the journey has been an 'eye opener' for him, seeing that there are other effective ways of doing things. The whole idea of the exploratory research work leading to the formation of the network, as it happened, was a completely new approach to him. He considers it as a more effective approach as the group has been quite organic in terms of member's contribution in shaping it to date. He also considers the role of the external consultant in shaping the structure of the network as refreshing and excellent idea. Going forward, he sees transparency as the key to the newly formed network and will urge colleagues to be very critical, putting existing relationships aside. He explains

"Some people have an existing working relations and therefore not as critical as they should be. The more transparent you are the more you can be trusting. Existing relation make people less critical".

High visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities as well as using the project to acknowledge and thank National Lottery Players.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS WANTED

BE PART OF SOMETHING TRANSFORMATIVE IN THE MIDLANDS

THE AFRICAN HERITAGE RESILIENCE NETWORK (AHRN) is interested in working with enthusiastic and passionate volunteers to assist in an exploratory research into people's interest in the African Culture and Heritage across the Midlands.

ALL EXPENSES PAID INCLUDING TRAVEL AND FOOD EXPENSES

INTERESTED?

What will we ask?
 Volunteers will work alongside our researchers and respective participating organisations to conduct surveys using a community engagement approach to gather interest people have shown about organisations that focus on the African culture and heritage activities and events.

Would I learn skills, or experience?
 No skills necessary as training will be provided, just have a can-do attitude, and be easily confident to speak/engage with people from diverse communities.

Would I be from the Black Community?
 No this is not a requirement as the survey is conducted with people from all ethnicities and backgrounds.

How many surveys would I be expected to complete?
 30 surveys over a four month period - from June to September 2024.

How much time will I be expected to give?
 10-15 hrs in total. Most of your own pace but within the times they provided.

Will you pay for my travel?
 All expense paid including travel to attachment/food purchase during the time of your work.

Please click the link or scan the QR Code below to register your interest
<https://www.africanheritagenetwork.org.uk>
 OR


Deadline for registration: May 2024
 For further information please email
info@ahrn.org.uk or 01692 266666

Thank You To National Lottery Players








2.8 APPROVED PURPOSE EIGHT

Take proactive measures to be inclusive, remove barriers to access and reach new and diverse audiences.

Call-to-action promotional material was created and distributed across various social media platforms. Additionally, a survey was developed to encourage participation from the general public. This survey was promoted extensively through social media, community engagement platforms, and direct outreach to schools and other community organisations. Further efforts were made to engage underrepresented groups in the surveys, including LGBTQ+ individuals, young people, and the elderly, in order to obtain insights from these diverse communities.

03. PROJECT OUTCOMES

The AHRP was tasked to achieve three main outcomes:

- ▶ A wider range of people will be involved in heritage.
- ▶ Develop the skills of people working on the project.
- ▶ Ensure the Highlife Centre will be more resilient.

3.1

A Wider Range of People will be Involved in Heritage.



Our goal was to increase the engagement of Black Caribbean and African communities by 60%, while also sharing their heritage with the broader community, which will represent 40% of the audiences and participants.

We have accomplished this by:

Collaborating with 12 organisations that have established the African Heritage Collaborative Network (AHCN) which fosters social capital development and enhances heritage activities and interest within the community across both regions.

Additionally, through community engagement activities, we collected 266 surveys from the general public to gauge interest in African heritage among diverse audiences across the Midlands.

3.2 Skills Development



Lead Researcher

The lead researcher reports that he now understands the structure and process of such a research project.

His previous research was mainly conducted independently in the field, but this project aligned him with a team.

The project has taught him the importance of maintaining consistent communication to help identify areas of the research project that he might have overlooked if he had been working alone.

He explained how trust made the work less stressful and have learnt to plan strategically to help focus on all targets.



Associate Researcher

He reported skills, including facilitating several workshops and general management. He gained cultural awareness of African heritage/culture through working with many people with African backgrounds on the project team and with the network members.

He now understands more about the dynamics of different cultures and people's behaviours and values.

He has also acquired business management skills as he discovered the challenges and benefits of running small organisations through speaking with many directors/ managers.



Research Support Officer (RSO)

The RSO reported that before the commencement of this research, he saw the role as an opportunity to support the research team administratively. However, he has gained new skills and knowledge while improving on other skills. These include:

- ▶ Project coordination & management
- ▶ Conducting research
- ▶ Events planning
- ▶ Facilitation skills for workshops
- ▶ Report writing skills
- ▶ Public engagement & speaking
- ▶ Organisational leadership
- ▶ Conflict resolution and problem-solving
- ▶ Negotiation skills
- ▶ Project monitoring
- ▶ Communication skills.



Network Members

The strategic group members developed skills and knowledge that will strengthen their capability to benefit the network and their own organisations. The roles include:

- ▶ Strategic Lead (vision, strategic long-term planning for network)
- ▶ Finance and Fundraising Lead
- ▶ Admin and Marketing Lead (Including events/community engagement)
- ▶ Operational Lead
- ▶ Community Engagement and Wellbeing Lead
- ▶ Business Development Lead (Partnership/Relationships)
- ▶ Evaluation and Monitoring



3.3 Resilient Organisation

The Highlife Centre collaborated with consultants to strengthen its governance processes, solidifying our heritage offer and established the Centre's strategic and operational direction towards becoming an infrastructure organisation. We developed grant-making skills and formulated a comprehensive strategy and associated policies. Additionally, we have updated our governing documents and are preparing to submit them to the Charity Commission. Furthermore, our CEO has completed the Oxford Leading Sustainable Corporations Programme, equipping us with the knowledge to produce an Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

A community project that is research-based and exploratory, with a year-long delivery target, ultimately aims to establish a network within marginalised and diverse communities that have competing priorities, expectations, and complex historical experiences. This endeavour is undoubtedly challenging. However, developing a risk management plan at the project's outset mitigated the associated risks. In summary, the African Heritage Research Project (AHRP) was an incredible journey filled with uncertainties, learning opportunities, connections, and overcoming challenges.

New Research Team seeking to Mobilize a Complex Community

The new research team was assembled quickly to ensure they could hit the ground running. Notably, the researchers were unfamiliar with one another and had not collaborated before this project. With limited time for team building, they faced the challenge of engaging marginalised, diverse, and historically complex communities, persuading them to embrace a shared vision.

Social Unrest

Finally, the researchers recalled moments of vulnerability during the fieldwork for the survey. It was noted that the survey fieldwork coincided with social unrest and riots across several cities in England. The researcher explained that he would have felt much safer if he had been accompanied at some of the interviews.

Building Trust and Demonstrating Early Wins

In light of the previous challenges, fostering team spirit, building trust, and achieving early wins were essential for boosting morale and winning over potential network members. Significant efforts were made to provide administrative support for organizing meetings and bringing people together in person at the outset, with expenses and subsistence covered. Additionally, implementing suggestions made by members during meetings was crucial to demonstrate that their voices were being heard.



04. CHALLENGES, RISKS & KEY LESSONS.

Uncertainties in Maintaining Engagement Throughout an Exploratory Project

The nature of an exploratory project implies that tangible benefits for the participants are not guaranteed. Survey participants and potential network members expressed enthusiasm about the prospects of a network. However, they were also faced with the possibility of not having a network after the research project. This proposition was challenging to present to deprived and marginalised communities, eager to see guaranteed progress and development resulting from their time and commitment to any endeavours or projects.

Capacity/Capability Grant Support

The Heritage Funding grant package included a budget for capacity/capability development to support the Highlife Centre to become a grant making organisation. However, the consultant commissioned lacked the necessary knowledge and expertise in this area. His contract was subsequently terminated and support was sought from existing grant makers using the Funders Network website who provided the needed policies and guidance.

Inability to Recruit Volunteers

The online surveys did not yield as many responses as we expected, therefore a revised plan to solely rely on the public engagement activity was initiated. However, there was also difficulty in recruiting volunteers. Members of the research team opted to do the work themselves which yielded better results.

Demographic Gaps in the Survey

After conducting the surveys, the research identified a lack of data concerning older individuals and the LGBTQ+ community. A marketing consultant was commissioned to help gather insights from these groups, resulting in the completion of 11 additional surveys.

Confusion in Terminology Used

Additionally, the research team recalled some differences in terminology (e.g. workshop, focus group) leading to some disconnection between the original plan for funding and the revised plan by the team. The attempt to 'bring the two together, proved to be a bit challenging'.

Budgeting

The Project Manager did not anticipate the time required to manage, coordinate, and attend all the capability development activities, particularly in the environmental sustainability course. An adequate budget for these efforts was not included in the original financial plan. Consequently, the project management team contributed significantly more hours than contracted, providing voluntary in-kind support to the project which have been documented accordingly.

Difficulties in Building Relationships

Furthermore, reference was made to the limited time available to build or develop relationships with network members. Meetings were mostly virtual with limited opportunity to build stronger relationships with people. For example, reference was made to a failed attempt to organise an in-person meeting in Oxford.



05. BUDGET PERFORMANCE

Category	Description	Agreed Budget (£)	Actual Expenditure (£)	Variance Against budget (£)
1	Staff Cost	£43,991.00	£58,268.36	-£14,277.36
2	Professional Fees	£38,080.00	£52,923.23	-£14,843.23
3	Travel	£4,800.00	£940.00	£3,859.26
4	Other Costs i.e. Room Hire, Refreshment and Office	£7,820.00	£6,877.94	£942.06
5	Training – Capacity Building	£7000.00	£8595.00	-£1,595.00
6	Full Cost Recovery	£39,079.00	£23,318.99	£15,760.01
7	Contingency	£15,409.00	£6,653.20	£8,755.80
8	Evaluation	£7,500.00	£7,325.00	£175.00
	Sub-Total	£159,867.40	£159,867.40	-£1,223.46
	Plus In-Kind contribution by HLC	£3,811.60	£5,035.06	
	Total	£163,679.00	£164,902.46	

06. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is potential for further progress by building on the achievements of the research conducted for the project, aiming to advance the 'African Heritage Community Network' toward autonomy and long-term sustainability. Here are some initial considerations:

Communication: Sustain the momentum by using multiple channels (e.g., WhatsApp, email, telephone) to keep in touch with all stakeholders, actively listening and providing feedback regularly to ensure voices are being heard and actions are being taken.

Openness and Transparency: It is important to avoid displaying signs of prior conversations and knowledge during meetings, as this may make some participants feel uncomfortable. Consequently, they may become uncooperative and less engaged. Additionally, it is essential to prevent any perceptions that individuals have existing working relationships, which could lead to a lack of critical evaluation. The more transparent you are, the more trust you can foster. Existing relationships can diminish the level of critical analysis among participants.

Managing Expectations: Networks consist of individuals and organizations with diverse expectations and fluctuating moods that must be managed carefully. There have been instances of misunderstanding, particularly regarding funding and the grants received to deliver projects. Often, there is confusion about how funds should be disbursed or allocated, and trust remains a significant issue. It is essential to clearly distinguish between grievances and requests for clarification. Appropriate channels should be established, and protocols should be outlined for resolving complaints and any conflicts that may arise.

Code of Ethics and Conduct: The proposed network is likely to generate genuine interest in heritage matters. However, it is not uncommon for a network's operating environment to foster entrenched divisions, greed, impatience, and a lack of long-term relationships. There have been instances where members have fallen out with one another and departed without notice or communication. Such occurrences must be avoided at all costs. Systems should be designed, implemented, and thoroughly explained for the benefit of all members and delivering partners. There must be clear rules of decorum and formal business etiquette during meetings. When a body or network fails to establish a simple discipline around these rules, the culture it reflects is unlikely to be one of focus and seriousness.



07. CONCLUSION

This research successfully achieved its objectives and facilitated the establishment of an African Heritage Collaboration Network (AHCN). The project identified various suitable individuals and organisations to participate in the AHCN. The research ensured that the network's members represent various expertise, resources, and cultural perspectives by leveraging comprehensive stakeholder mapping and community engagement. This inclusivity positions the AHCN as a genuinely representative body for African heritage communities.

Secondly, the perspectives and opinions of stakeholders were comprehensively examined to understand how the AHCN could function to meet the needs of its members. Through surveys, interviews, and workshops, stakeholders provided valuable insights into the network's structure, priorities, and operational strategies. This collaborative approach has ensured that the AHCN's design closely aligns with the expectations of its participants.

The research successfully identified mechanisms for economic viability and sustainability, including funding opportunities, partnership models, and resource-sharing strategies. These findings provide a robust framework to ensure the long-term impact of the network. Additionally, developing a collaborative framework and governance model represents a significant achievement. These structures will guide the network's operations, fostering transparency, accountability, and shared decision-making.

Finally, exploring small grants underscored their substantial impact on supporting organisations' activities, further validating their role in enhancing community resilience. Collectively, these achievements position the AHRP as a crucial step toward realizing the vision of a thriving, collaborative African Heritage Collaboration Network. Progress is still needed in building upon this research's achievements and advancing the AHCN toward autonomy and long-term sustainability. With the introduction of leadership roles and the development of plans for 2025, including establishing a legal framework for the network, the AHCN is well-positioned to expand, thrive, and make a meaningful impact on its members and the broader community it aims to support.





08.

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