

AHRC Creative Communities

Community Innovation Practitioner 2025-26

Policy Paper

Creative Space as a Catalyst for Community Wealth Building

Scotland

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Devolved Policy Context

[Scotland's devolved status](#) means that policies concerning culture, land and the creative economy such as Community Wealth Building (CWB) can be better aligned. There is an opportunity for Scotland's creative practitioners and organisations to deliver CWB if we can unlock access to long-term space for creative production.

Timing is vital. As CWB guidance is developed by the Scottish Government in consultation with public bodies like [Creative Scotland](#) within 18 months, and local or regional action plans developed in response to these within three years, the value and role of creative communities must be recognised and supported on both a national and local level as a core component of CWB strategies.

Bringing together the creative economy and CWB could transform Scotland's high streets. If they are recognised as anchors, rather than just grant recipients, creative communities are ready to make these new devolved levers work in practice, not just principle, turning Scotland's CWB ambitions into measurable place-based, social and economic impacts.

In Scotland today, creative business, practitioners and communities cannot secure the long-term space they need to experiment and grow. Without these spaces, the economic and social value of creativity for the national economy is being overlooked, and innovation is stymied.

Unlocking long-term, secure and sustainable creative space would enable creative communities to grow, retain benefits locally and contribute to the delivery of [Scotland's Community Wealth Building Act](#) that was passed in the [Scottish Parliament](#) in March 2026.

As Scotland seeks to become the first nation to implement Community Wealth Building (CWB), [creative communities have the skills and expertise to play a crucial role in realising this ambition](#). To realise their potential and continue to create new creative pathways, Scotland needs to utilise its devolved powers to invest in the everyday creative infrastructure that creative communities need not just to survive but to thrive.

Recommendations

1. Activate Anchors: Recognise CWB in Regeneration Planning and Action

Creative and community organisations are deeply rooted in place. They are best placed to activate Community Wealth Building and can act as trusted connectors between local business partners and communities by offering valuable insights into local challenges, needs and opportunities. Although often small in size, these agile organisations provide critical forms of social and entrepreneurship infrastructure, offering opportunities for skills and ideas to be developed and for networks to grow.

As Local Authorities in Scotland develop new CWB partnerships and anchor institution networks, this is a timely moment to recognise creative organisations as anchor partners and agents in their own right, not just as delivery organisations or passive grant recipients. Anchor status should carry practical weight in local procurement via public sector commissioning, giving the spending pillar a tangible way into the sector beyond existing funding routes.

2. Enhance Value: Embed Social Value in Asset Transfer Decisions

Scottish Local Authorities lack a standardised framework for measuring social value in Community Asset Transfers (CAT) and property decisions.

As a result, economic value often becomes the dominant metric under Best Value duties with social and place-based outcomes harder to evidence.

Through the new Scottish Government CWB guidance there is an opportunity to require Local Authorities to co-develop social value measurement tools with communities in line with CWB pillars as part of the CAT programmes. This would provide a framework for creative communities to better evidence social value and ensure that new proposals consider elements from Fair Work and Local Procurement, as well as more traditional measurements like Footfall and Economic Value. The result would be a new approach to assessing vacant property and city centre regeneration that better reflects CWB principles.

3. Stop Public Funding Leakage: Align Public Funding with Asset-Building Objectives

A significant proportion of creative and community organisations that are in receipt of public funding operate under precarious and short-term commercial lease agreements meaning that a portion of the investment that they receive goes straight out of the sector to private landlords.

Scotland's key funding bodies, like the Scottish Funding Council, Creative Scotland and other key funders should

commission a review of their policies to better understand how and where money distributed through publicly funding programmes is leaking through short term lets. They should also commission new research on how their investments can better access and steward long-term space, including acquiring land and property to retain wealth locally. National support should blend capital and revenue streams to support long-term leases, asset acquisition, and community stewardship of creative spaces. Funding calls should promote democratic business models and community-based investment models to reflect the Inclusive Ownership and Finance pillars of CWB.

4. Reform Vacant Property and Business Rates Incentives

Meanwhile space initiatives are becoming the dominant creative space

model due to a lack of long-term space provision in Scotland. These models disproportionately benefit private landlords, are reliant on local implementation of business rates on vacant properties and do not support creative communities to evolve, build wealth and accumulate assets.

To address this, the Scottish Government should align rates relief and vacancy policy to reward long-term community use that meets the ambitions of local and national strategies, rather than short-term meanwhile activation. This approach should be co-designed with local and national cultural and community organisations, and demonstrated by supporting activation of publicly owned vacant space. This approach would invest more efficiently in city centre spaces and attract new investment in vacant city-centre properties that are currently owned by private landlords.

Further Information:

For more information on AHRC Creative Communities visit www.creativecommunities.uk

Contact the CIP

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