

Climate and creativity insights report



Summary

Creativity has a vital role in effective community engagement, helping to make the climate conversation more relevant and accessible to people and their daily lives. Throughout the Community Climate Action Project, we've used creativity as a tool to engage a wide range of people in climate and nature action.



Highlights



8 citywide creative commissions including workshops, poems, films and an animation



Embedding creativity as a key community engagement tool



5 community creative commissions including podcasts, films, audio trails and a mural



Over £60,000 invested in climate-themed creative commissions



Benefits include

- Ability to engage a diverse range of citizens
- Making complex topics more accessible and engaging
- Developing relationships between artists and community groups
- Fun and relatable routes to connect residents with the climate conversation
- Positive and empowering experiences for all involved
- Improved wellbeing and resilience for community members
- Build knowledge of climate justice within creative sector

Top tips for commissioning artists



- Start with a detailed and clear creative brief
- Pay artists fairly and give opportunities to emerging artists
- Make the application process straightforward and accessible
- Allow spacious delivery timescales and build in flexibility
- The creative engagement process with communities is as important as the final output
- Make the most of opportunities for cross sector sharing and learning
- Physical creative works will require longer timescales and additional considerations
- Build in organisational time and budget to support the creative commission process
- Build intermediate outputs and experiences for communities into the process
- Hold regular check-in meetings with artists

"We see creativity as a key strategy for deeper engagement. By collaborating with artists, storytellers, and makers, we build resilience, empower more people, and ensure diverse voices shape the future of climate action. This is more than a method – it's a movement, a way of working, and a powerful tool for change."

-Kirsty Tait, Climate Action Programme Manager Heart of BS13

What you can do

Everyone has a role to play in bringing more creativity into climate work. From the climate and community sector collaborating with artists, to the creative sector making space for art on climate justice, to funders supporting creative community engagement. Through collaboration, we can use the power of creativity to engage and inspire more people to take climate and nature action.



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Introduction

Creativity has the power to engage and inspire more people to take climate and nature action. Through the Community Climate Action Project, which, since 2020 has been pioneering bold and fair community-led climate and nature action in Bristol, we have worked with local artists to create films, poems, and theatre to break down complex topics and connect with people on an emotional level.

Creativity also has an important role in effective community engagement, helping to make the climate conversation more relevant and accessible to people and their daily lives.



Overview



A core aim of the Community Climate Action Project is to engage a wide range of citizens with the climate conversation but following the pandemic and at a time when many people were struggling financially, talking about the climate crisis sometimes proved challenging with many of our local communities, where simply surviving from day-to-day has had to be people's top priority.

As a city with a thriving arts and cultural sector, Bristol often uses creativity to explore challenging topics or have difficult conversations, in ways which are accessible and resonate with people's daily lives and lived experiences.

From climate craftivism to film and animation, from spoken word poetry to forum theatre – creativity has enabled us to engage more, and more diverse, people meaningfully with the climate conversation.

So collaboration with local artists and creatives has been an important part of the Community Climate Action Project, incorporating elements of communications and community engagement, at both a community and citywide level.

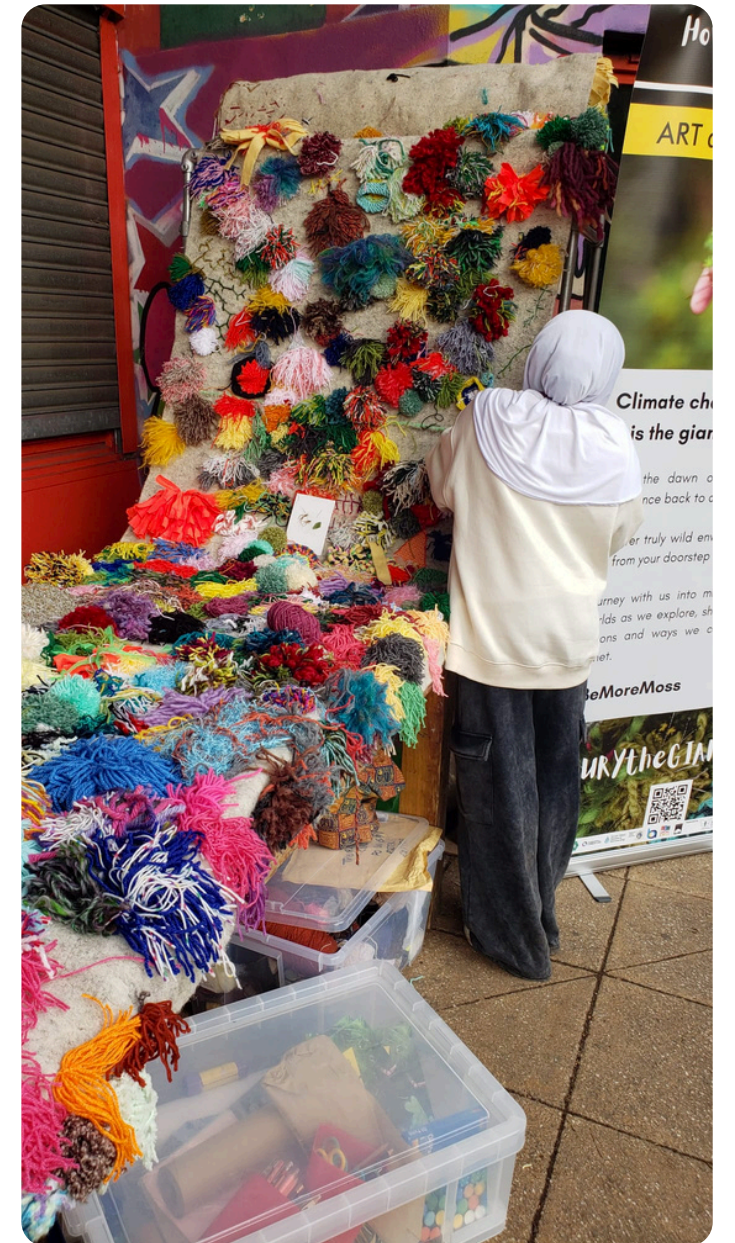
Through a series of large and smaller scale creative commissions, the project has been able to explore issues such as the accessibility of public transport, children and young people's views on climate and nature and the racial and intergenerational aspects of climate justice.



What we did



We embedded creativity within the Community Climate Action Project from the beginning, starting with two small scale creative commissions in the development phase (2021/22) to pilot its potential and impact. This pilot confirmed that that collaborating with creatives was an effective way of engaging a wider and more diverse audience with climate and nature, and so we embedded the approach in the full project (2022-25). We baked in budget for a citywide creative commission on just transition; a series of neighbourhood level commissions led by community partners as part of their ongoing engagement and two targeted commissions as part of our Climate and Disability programme.



The commissions all had a strong focus on engagement with local people through events such as craftivism workshops, supper clubs and quiz nights, as a medium for citizens to connect with one another; have informal conversations exploring climate, nature and social justice issues, and generate ideas which shaped final creative outputs such as films, murals, public art and poetry.

Overview of creatives we collaborated with throughout the project:

Citywide commissions



Musician and performer Ian Solomon-Kawall – 'Hard Ears' eco rap performed live at a large city event



Facilitators and filmmakers Morgan Tipping and Tommy Chavennes – series of sharable digital memes cocreated via community workshops



Presenter and film director Euella Jackson – powerful short film 'Capsule' exploring a just transition plus a 'making of' film



City poet Kat Lyons – '10 things to remember about surviving the climate crisis' poem performed live at two citywide events



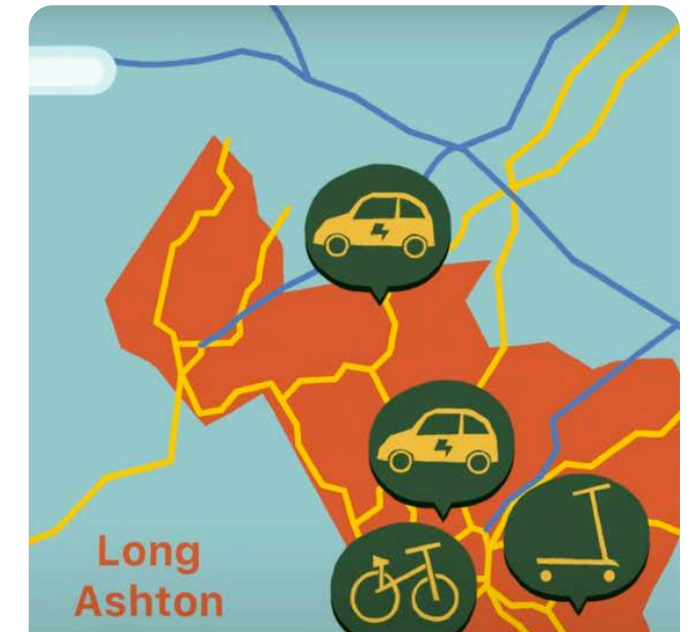
Community artist Dee Moxon – series of climate craftivism workshops and films



Creative Emma Geen – forum theatre workshop exploring bus transport with local community of Disabled people



Creative Ruth Norley – podcast and zine exploring the intersection between Disability, race and a just transition (launching summer 2025)



Rumpus – accessible animation to accompany our Inclusive Transport Vision



Heart of BS13 – a series of films featuring young people, climate craftivism workshops, and a community lantern parade



Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust – nature-themed wooden sculpture and audio trail in local green spaces cocreated with community members



Eastside Community Trust – a series of climate themed podcasts and short films cocreated by children from a community adventure playground



ACH – inclusive building mural coproduced with young refugee artists



Ambition Lawrence Weston – a nature-themed, carved wooden codesigned with local children for the grounds of new community centre building

Case study

Heart of BS13

Creativity has been at the heart of our approach to climate engagement. One of the most impactful ways we have done this is through craftivism—using art and creative expression as a form of activism.

Our community has responded incredibly well to this approach, demonstrating how creative, hands-on engagement can be more effective than traditional awareness raising campaigns. We worked with seven artists on the development of our community climate action plan – they helped us to shape and visualise the ideas, concerns, and aspirations of our community. By incorporating creative processes, we were able to bring more perspectives into the conversation and ensure that the plan was both community-led and deeply rooted in local identity.

This creative methodology is now woven into everything we do. From lantern-making workshops that symbolically light the way for climate action to welding pollinator sculptures that highlight the importance of biodiversity, we have found that art is a powerful tool for engagement and change. These activities not only educate but also create a sense of ownership and pride within our community, reinforcing that climate action is something everyone can take part in—no matter their background, skills, or experience.



Case study

Eastside Community Trust

Our climate leadership programme didn't begin with a focus on creativity, but the facilitator we worked with brought that expertise and incorporated it into her sessions, and it became one of the key reasons that kept people coming back. We now include a creative element in every session and participants report a feeling of improved wellbeing, connection to the group and motivation to continue participating – all things that contribute to our community's resilience.



Participants have mentioned some of the things they like about the creative sessions:

- the importance of beauty and joy
- doing something contained that can be completed within a session when there are so many things that feel big and unresolved in their lives
- using their brains in a different way
- learning a new skill.

Creativity has been a useful starting point for conversations. Making something together in a creative session has allowed conversations to start more organically, with people coming up with ideas and sharing things more freely than if we were to sit down and frame it as a discussion with people answering questions directly. Creative workshops have been a fun, effective way to engage with children and families. Written materials can feel inaccessible, especially for people who don't speak English as a first language.



Creative, more visual and film-based messaging can be helpful tools to get people's attention and make it feel like these messages are for them. Working to create films and images that represent the wider community has been important in helping people see themselves in conversations about climate and feeling like "this is for me".

'When kids are already struggling with eco anxiety or mental health more generally, we need to find a balance between giving them agency over their future, without making childhood feel even heavier. Creative activities have helped us create space for kids to engage with climate issues in a way that is positive and playful.'

-Emily Fifield, Community Project Manager

Using creativity as a tool for community climate engagement – what we learned

Creativity can be a very powerful tool for inspiring hearts and minds; however the environmental sector may be less familiar with the value of this form of citizen engagement. It is important therefore to have a strong narrative for climate sector funders who may be less confident or experienced with supporting creative-based citizen engagement on climate. Collaboration between the climate and community sectors and local creative organisations is important to help embed climate as a key priority within local arts and cultural strategies.

Collectively we have learned a lot from the commissioning and delivery of a diverse range of creative climate engagement with artists, including:



A good detailed creative brief provides a strong foundation for this work – use existing templates of briefs, contracts and schedules of work and seek support from creative sector partners



Local arts organisations or local council arts and cultural departments are a useful source of advice on how to pay artists fairly for their work in relation to their skills and experience



Try and make the application process for your creative commission accessible to encourage a diverse range of creatives to apply



Research who your creative partner is during the commissioning process and choose a partner with the experience you need for your particular context



Allow spacious timescales and build in flexibility for unintended outcomes - these can be some of the most impactful and a benefit of working with creatives



It's not all about the end product – the process, particularly the community engagement is as important as the final output, sometimes more important and provides a good opportunity for mutual learning between environment, community and creative sectors



Physical creative works will likely require longer timescales, consideration of the seasons and collaboration with those who own, manage and use buildings and spaces



Build in time and budget for your organisation to collaborate with and project manage your commissioned artist. Help them integrate into your wider project and community, and to help shape and inform the creative outputs



Build intermediate outputs and experiences into the process which feel tangible for the community, particularly when the final creative output might be more conceptual or take a longer timescale to complete



Keep revisiting the brief and the objectives via regular check-in meetings with artists, to help ensure your holistic outcomes are met.

“Working on Capsule has been life changing for me as an artist. Many organisations can learn from Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership’s creative commission model. Through working on this short film about the power of our collective dreams, we’ve been able to immerse ourselves in the issues of climate justice and build a solid community around the film. The impact is far beyond what I imagined because it’s accessible and relatable. The beautiful thing about art is it’s able to continue conversations and have a legacy long after it has been made.”



-Euella Jackson

The benefits of collaborating with creatives on climate engagement

Here are some of our key reflections on the power and potential of working with creatives to explore climate and inequality with communities:

Creatives and the creative process can help make the more abstract and complex aspects of climate change (e.g. science, data/stats) more relatable and accessible to more people' to 'Creatives and the creative process can help make the more abstract and complex aspects of climate change, such as data and statistics, more relatable and accessible to more people

Creativity has the power to create an emotional connection with people and their everyday lives, which is an important starting point for engagement, and then action

Creativity can bring joy and lightness when people are struggling with challenges in their day-to-day lives or experiencing climate anxiety or burnout – this joy isn't something frivolous, but instead something critical for our human resilience and to help us collectively imagine a better future together



Photo credit: ShamPhat

Artists can creatively challenge and disrupt the status quo, enabling them to be subtle but important agents for change

Creativity can spark collective imagination and help collectively progress towards a more just and resilient future for people and the planet

Creatives with existing links to communities will approach climate issues differently to the environmental sector, while introducing communities to new creatives can generate new and different perspectives, conversations, ideas and connections



Photo credit: ShamPhat

Benefits to climate sector

- Ability to engage a diverse range of citizens in conversations around climate change and climate justice
- Making complex topics more accessible and engaging
- Collaboration with engagement partners who are representative of society and who are accessible and relatable to diverse communities

Benefits to creative sector

- Building knowledge and understanding of climate change and climate justice
- Expanding opportunities for collaboration and future funding
- Socially engaged creatives given opportunity to work on key societal challenges
- Opportunities to support and develop young artists and artists from marginalised backgrounds
- Artists continue to develop their relationship with community groups and together find more future opportunities for collaboration

Benefits to community sector

- Fun, engaging and relatable routes to connect residents with the climate conversation
- Foundation for engaging community in the development of a community climate action plan
- Empowering and connecting positive experiences for community members
- Improved wellbeing and resilience of community members



What you can do

Creativity has a valuable and cost-effective role to play in how citizens from all walks of life connect with and participate in conversations about climate and climate justice. Everyone can catalyse more of this important work:

Climate sector – commission and collaborate with artists and creatives to support public engagement, build this into proposals and projects

Creative sector – make climate space and climate justice key themes for creative programming and commissioning, and support opportunities for diverse and emerging artists

Community sector – integrate artists and creatives into your community engagement on climate issues

Funders – support more climate engagement with artists and creatives and advocate for the important role artists and creatives can have in how we do climate engagement locally, regionally, and nationally



Photo credit: Jahiem Williams

“We are excited by the Community Climate Action Project’s use of arts and culture to engage more people in climate and nature action. Not only does this approach harness the region’s talent to reach wider audiences but also recognises the expertise and talent of the creative sector in communicating about complex and difficult subjects.”

-Elise Hurcombe, Bristol City Council



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