

Made in Bath

Event Overview & Write Up From
Roundtable Discussions

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Overview

On Wednesday 8th July 2026, The CSJ Foundation held an event in Bath focused on philanthropy and philanthropists in the City (and surrounding area). The purpose was to bring together philanthropists and practitioners to explore how engagement with charities in Bath could be better supported – especially in areas of deprivation.

During the event, seven simultaneous roundtable discussions were hosted focusing on two key areas: philanthropy and volunteering. To prompt discourse through the hour-long session, six questions were posed to get people talking. Reviewing the notes from each table, it's clear that most tables leaned more towards the philanthropy discussion than volunteering (probably because time ran out before the volunteering questions could be reached). The six questions were:

- What would it take for Bath to become a national exemplar of place-based philanthropy – and what's the first step we need to get it right?
- How do we make giving to Bath feel as natural and compelling as giving to a national charity?
- What role should local businesses play in funding and supporting community-led change, and how do we bring them to the table?
- What barriers stop people from volunteering today, and what would make it easier for them to say yes?
- How do we ensure volunteering efforts are sustained over the long term, rather than surging around a single campaign then fading?
- How can we create a culture of volunteering in Bath that becomes genuinely embedded in our institutions – e.g. universities, schools, and workplaces?

Executive Summary

Overall, the discussions on each table were positive and constructive. There was a consensus among the groups that that Bath already has the wealth, expertise and goodwill which drives both philanthropic giving and volunteering. Conclusions centred around the need to increase support and awareness of need, rather than to increase the desire to give. This is a very positive starting point.

The most frequently raised issue was the lack of connection between charities, philanthropists and volunteers. Other common themes were the need for better funding models and volunteer infrastructure, the history of philanthropy in Bath, and the need for the charity sector to better engage with the local community.



Philanthropy

Network Gap

The first barrier to philanthropy, which was mentioned in almost every group, was a lack of connection between philanthropists and local charities. Small and new organisations lack the networks, contacts and 'know how' to approach philanthropists. Ruby Sant described charities as being "locked out" of funding without a database of contacts, and Rachel Mostyn stated "organisations shouldn't have to shapeshift to get funding. They should do their programme well and better know who to approach. If philanthropists want to be discreet in their giving, that's fine, but we need more networks to help us reach them – it's a dark art." Isobel Michael and Lucy Walker pointed out that even basic fundraising skills are difficult with Lucy Walker saying, "it's not just the who but the how – how on earth can I know to call X and what do I say?"

Knowledge Gap

Meanwhile, philanthropists don't have an awareness of the local charity scene to know what to fund. Participants mentioned that charities don't know how to increase their visibility and get their message out, so philanthropists have to search extensively to find initiatives they want to fund. Eve Salomon stated, "what is lagging even for a relatively small place like Bath, is an understanding of what is actually being done in the voluntary sector and who is doing it." Similarly, Mark Whitcroft said, "I don't know where to go to find out what there is" and Esta MacMorris said, "I think it's signposting for me ... there's lots of people who probably could donate but don't, and not necessarily from not wanting to but knowing that money is going to the right cause."

This is a fascinating point because it gets to the very heart of the problem for philanthropists: a knowledge gap, which leads to a confidence gap. We've already established there is a need to give, plus a willingness to give. The missing link

is how to connect donors with charities effectively. Several table discussions asked whether it would be possible to 'map' charities in Bath to create a simple interface that allows people to see what's happening.

It was also clear that there is a disconnect between the needs of charities and the needs of philanthropists and neither party has a grasp of the others'. Charity representatives highlighted that philanthropists often don't understand the type of funding they require. Celia Mead explained that charities need regular funding for core costs rather than short term, project-based funding. Likewise, while match funding and legacy giving work well for donors, unrestricted multi-year funding is better for charities. Tony Bury also noted that "philanthropists often need educational help themselves to understand how to run their trust and how to invest well."

Philanthropists on the other hand, highlighted that charities don't understand the importance of ongoing relationships and proving impact. Many philanthropists noted that philanthropy is inherently relational. Chris Rogers mentioned that in his experience "universally they [donors] didn't respond to advertisements, they didn't respond to appeals, they responded to networking" and Lynne Fernquest stated, "it's not only about the money, it's about bringing like-minded people together." Along similar lines, Becky Salter said, "it's not just about the money, it's about skills and expertise ... charities need to not just ask for money, but see it as a partnership." In order for charities to maximise philanthropy they must maintain these relationships, demonstrating the impact funding has had. Rob Walters said "After all, philanthropy is and should be a business that's run like a business. It's about reciprocity and hearing back from charities to know what's happened." Similarly, Halena Coury said "It seems from this discussion that it's about knowing who and what you are giving to. It's really important to know why you're giving, what difference you're going to make and hearing from them."





Leadership Gap

Many solutions were suggested to resolve these issues, but the prevailing idea was that there needs to be clear leadership of philanthropy in Bath, a central system, person or organisation which brings people together and encourages giving. For some participants this could be a local giving fund – Laura Blake suggested that there needs to be somewhere people can go where they know they can give locally, and Andrew Pitt suggested a local trust which will distribute money on behalf of philanthropists. Other participants suggested philanthropy networks although these suggestions took various forms. Some suggested a digital hub such as a website, database, or app that puts local charities in contact with philanthropists, while others suggested an effort by the council or local newspapers to raise awareness for local charities.

Mixing events were also praised including this “Made in Bath” event hosted by the CSJF. Another suggestion was networks exclusively for philanthropists which provided training. Tony Bury observed that even experienced philanthropists (and their heirs) rely on networks of other philanthropists, and organisations such as Snowball or Philanthropy Australia to learn how to give and invest well; Isobel Michael called for Bath to ‘celebrate’ philanthropists in the way national bodies do.

Some participants pointed out that convening organisations do exist, but they are small or not well known. Within Bath, Angela Emms highlighted the Bath Giving Fund and a few mentioned 3SG BaNES, and the new Pride in Place structure. Other examples were mentioned from elsewhere such as Quartet and Tessa Armstrong shared her experience at a High Sheriff ‘speed dating’ event.

Social Context

Another key theme was the local context and Bath’s history of Philanthropy. Participants highlighted that people generally like to donate to charities they have a connection with, however in Bath, many potential donors move for retirement without a long-standing connection to the city. Robert Campbell recognised “[There’s a] huge cohort of people in Bath not understanding how they can help because they’ve retired here and feel no connection here ... [they] don’t understand the issues of the city and don’t give to the right thing.” Rachel Mostyn also observed this saying, “lots of the wealthiest don’t understand what the issues are in Bath, but they know they love Bath.” Ruth Keily and Emma Sandwood described the need to explain the social divide in Bath because the city is often assumed to be wealthy and without social need. Laura Blake also raised concerns about the future of philanthropy, and the need to instil the spirit of giving in young people now.

Suggested solutions to this issue centred around the need to create a strong local narrative and a compelling vision around philanthropy in Bath, which makes giving the “social norm” as Emma Beeston put it. Laura Blake highlighted that Bath has a strong philanthropic history going back to the 1740s with charitable projects such as the Mineral Hospital defining the story of the city. Chris May agreed, saying that the public display of wealth is part of Bath’s philanthropy story. Angela Emms and Richard Hall both suggested hosting “Welcome to Bath” events to connect with newcomers and bring them into the community and culture of Bath. Emma Sandwood suggested building a sense of citizenship in schools and Justin Sargent and Natasha Kidd pointed out the potential for better connections with the universities. Justin Sargent suggested that alumni giving could be encouraged and Natasha Kidd said that while students are often currently excluded from the Bath community, the creative university could be key to telling the story of change in Bath.

Volunteering

Barriers

A key point raised here was the source of barriers to volunteering. While it was agreed that barriers to volunteering do exist, different examples were drawn on what these barriers are. One suggestion was the 'cost' for volunteers and a lack of connection to opportunities. Isobel Michael pointed out that "lots of people don't have the income to volunteer" while Lynne Fernquest observed a similar phenomenon saying "now people have to work because of the cost of living crisis it's really strained to find the time to volunteer." Tim Rutherford shared his own experience, saying "it's difficult finding opportunities, because predominantly all the organisations that tend to contact me, contact me for money, that's always what they want and it's the one thing we can't give them." Other participants including Sue Blatchford also noted this, which shows that a lack of visibility for charities is as much a problem for recruiting volunteers as donors.

Pressure on charities

Other participants disagreed, arguing that the problem is not with recruiting volunteers, but with the pressure it puts on charities to host them. Stephen McLeon stated, "we have an abundance of volunteers" and Robert Campbell noted "[there's a] huge cohort of volunteers but they're often in the wrong places not driving social impact." Representatives from small charities found that in their experience, having volunteers came with a cost. Rachel Mostyn from Women's Work Lab said "half our team is mums that have done the programme. Supporting them costs us time – so we have to be honest about the financial cost." Andrea Harris agreed, saying "it's the responsibility for volunteers as well, isn't it? There's so much legal responsibility now. It's very hard and worrying. It's risky taking volunteers." Sara Grimes shared a similar experience, "as someone who's part of charities that are really tiny ... I'm terrified of getting new volunteers. I think I haven't enough to set them up doing stuff that I don't have time [to support them]."

Despite having different perspectives on the barriers to volunteering, similar solutions were presented. The need for stronger volunteering infrastructure was identified by multiple participants. Sara Grimes suggested a central support mechanism for organisations who'd like to have volunteers but struggle with the overhead, and Ruby Sant asked, "could we have an organisation that points people to smaller places and provides training?" Isobel Michael highlighted the importance of building trust before volunteering, saying "training of volunteers needs to be about working in a community and earning trust first" while Becky Salter suggested a form of volunteering passports; "I'd love to see something like a local passport where people could do all their checks, they could see all the different volunteering opportunities that are available and just go do it."

Other participants showed that larger or more central systems can be successful, participants pointed to Bath Festivals, where good training, leadership, and enjoyable experiences have created a strong volunteer community. Lynne Fernquest explained her own positive experience, "when recruiting volunteers and trustees we were crystal clear about what we needed and had a really positive experience using 3SG."



Business Link

Participants also highlighted a need for the charity sector to forge stronger relationships with businesses and universities to encourage volunteering. Bath is a university city so there is potential to tap into the student community for volunteers. As Chris Rodgers pointed out, “we live in a city where during term time, 1 in 4 people in our city are students.” Volunteering opportunities also benefit students as Robert Campbell noted, “so many students stay, they have the time to do this, and they want the work experience.” Ruth Keily raised the issue of attracting volunteers of diverse ages, “there’s also an age split, we really want working age volunteers as well as retired people, and that bit is often missing for very obvious reasons, we need workplaces to make it possible.” Esta MacMorris had one possible solution, suggesting that businesses and workplaces adopt an “annual charity of the year” creating ongoing relationships. Other participants similarly suggested employers allow employees to have dedicated volunteering hours during the week.

Recommendations

Taking account of the discussions and the comments made by participants, here are six key recommendations that would improve both philanthropy and volunteering in Bath.

1. Create a single point of leadership for philanthropy in Bath
2. Increase education about the social needs in Bath, especially areas of deprivation where support is most needed
3. Convene regular networking sessions for Bath-based philanthropists
4. Create a central tool (website?) that maps Bath’s charities
5. Create a volunteering ‘dating app’ to match charities with volunteers
6. Issue Volunteer Passports which allow volunteers to verify volunteers and open up new opportunities to help across the city





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