



# Learning from the Bringing People Together Programme, 2021-2024

## Executive Summary

NDTi, November 2024



*“In the most difficult of circumstances, no matter what is going on around the world or in the Middle East, it’s possible to put friendships first, it’s possible to put humanity first and engage with, even have a good time together with someone from the other side.” (Participant in BPT project)*

The Bringing People Together (BPT) Programme aimed to increase understanding of **what works in bringing people together**. The programme was made up of 23 diverse projects, which were funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), and ran between autumn 2021 and autumn 2026. The programme funded projects that helped communities to thrive and prosper by creating the conditions, infrastructure and social fabric that enable better and longer lasting ways of bringing people and communities together.

This report draws together the learning from the National Development Team for Inclusion’s (NDTi’s) work as **BPT’s Learning Partner** between early 2022 and late 2024. NDTi worked alongside projects and TNLCF to draw out the learning that is shared below.

BPT has generated insights and understanding about the nature of strengthening communities and connections across the UK. Although the programme was delivered in the most challenging of contexts, BPT has **unlocked some of the ‘abundance’** that exists within communities.

We hope that the report will be **useful to a variety of audiences** including: community leaders and activists, those involved in projects designed to strengthen connections and relationships across divides, community organisations and groups including NGOs and social enterprises as well as businesses, local authorities, funding bodies, designers, entrepreneurs and researchers.

The insights from BPT, summarised below, make **an important contribution** to wider learning on how to bring people and communities together, at a time when this knowledge is more valuable and necessary than ever.

### Key Insights

**Preparing the ground and creating the conditions for change is a slow and intentional process, and includes the following steps:**

- Understanding and mapping the current picture by finding people who share the same goals, existing networks and the connections between them
- Relationship and partnership building, through approaching early conversations with great thoughtfulness and sensitivity
- Building a sense of trust and belonging and setting a positive tone from the outset
- Working with the cycle, being thoughtful about the right point to involve people and understanding the natural ebbs and flows of energy.

**The methods and approaches used by BPT projects are richly diverse and operate at different levels, from micro 1:1 conversations to UK-wide developments, but they share some common elements:**

- Rooted in shared values and common themes, for example positive, equal relationships, respect, flexibility and responsiveness
- Based on theory and evidence, such as social network theory, but often applied to new contexts and in new ways
- Rich language and creativity as a focus, built upon stories of change, and often with arts and culture as a shared experience
- Avoiding over-engineering and rigid models, leaving room for surprising things to happen and insights to emerge.

**Projects highlight important lessons about strengthening relationships and bridging divides:**

- Bringing people together with gentleness and compassion, introducing different groups sensitively and creating shared endeavours
- Creating the right environment – safe spaces or brave spaces? While participants need to feel safe, there must also be room for uncomfortable conversations and challenge
- Making creative use of community resources, for example by opening up underused space in supermarkets as a meeting place
- Building and investing in expertise, such as skilled and courageous facilitation, as well as skills in network building, resource sharing and capacity building, and supporting the leaders of the future
- Protecting communities by bringing people together to forge deep emotional connections and countering divisive social media narratives.

**BPT has contributed to shifting power towards people and communities, by:**

- Talking about where power lies in communities – who has it, how do they use it and to what extent is it shared?
- Supporting people to reduce the power gap, for example by brokering connections between small community groups or offering choice to people who are not used to having agency
- Building for the future by supporting communities to take control and take the work into its next phase.

**Creating a supportive environment for change**

- Funders play a key role in modelling flexibility, responsiveness and humanity
- A values-led learning network is useful in helping to build and share learning.

## What next?

**Although BPT is a time-limited funding programme that is drawing to its end, the programme highlights five key lessons about sustaining what works, embedding and using the learning in the future:**

- Sustaining what works and maintaining momentum by shifting power to communities
- Investing in key people and roles with explicit responsibility for bringing people together and bridging divides
- Supporting ways of helping to build capacity to bring people together, for example through skills development
- Building expertise and collective understanding by bringing projects and organisations together in learning networks
- Designing in proportional and creative ways of exploring, tracking and understanding impact.