

# Measuring Social and Cultural Infrastructure

## – Guidance for Funders



Social and cultural infrastructure plays a critical, yet often unnoticed, role in the lives of communities. Despite the concept(s) gaining traction in policy and research circles in recent years, until now there has been no consistent approach to measuring it. Funded by the British Academy, this project develops a novel approach to the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure.

This guidance outlines the framework and why it is useful for funders. It also provides a theoretical example of how a funding organisation could use the framework, though we encourage all users to use the framework in a way that is tailored to their priorities and context.

### ***Why is the framework useful for funders?***

Our framework offers funding bodies a valuable tool to enhance their support for local social and cultural infrastructure by enabling them to make **more informed decisions about where and how to allocate resources**.

By complementing tools such as the Community Needs Index, the framework supports funders to identify gaps in provision and **design targeted and inclusive interventions**

Through its emphasis on local knowledge and insights, our framework allows funders to develop a deep understanding of local contexts, ensuring they **align their investments with the specific needs of communities** to create long-term, sustainable impact.

With its dual focus on local and national insights, the framework also allows funders to draw nationwide comparisons, evaluate the broader impact of their programmes, and **balance community-specific needs with strategic, system-wide objectives**.

### ***Key points of the framework***

**Social and cultural infrastructure is infrastructure.**

We propose a characteristics-based approach grounded in the theory and language of infrastructure. This approach involves asking three key questions:

- Is the entity being measured an asset?
- Does it function as infrastructure?
- Is it social and cultural in character?

**Measurement is a process.**

We have developed a unique measurement framework, which involves three phases:

- Phase 1 involves asking why we are measuring and what we will do with the results.
- Phase 2 moves to identifying and measuring the 'stock' of social and cultural infrastructure and its usage.
- Phase 3 encourages stakeholders to present and analyse the evidence collected in dynamic and creative ways that facilitate action.

### ***Strengths of the framework***

We believe our approach possesses a number of strengths:

1. It encourages stakeholders to think about how social and cultural assets **interact with other types of infrastructure**.
2. It ensures **greater transparency** with regards to the measurement process and decisions taken as a consequence.
3. It is **flexible** in that it enables anyone to use it, regardless of their purpose, and allows its users to determine the assets under consideration.
4. It encourages a **wide range of data and views** to be taken into account, from national perspectives to community voices.

# Case Study: Funding Organisation

## 1. Who is measuring and why?

A national funding organisation is **developing a strategy for investing in social infrastructure in some of the most deprived places** in the country. It wants to explore the state of social infrastructure across the country to shape a targeted strategy that aligns with the needs of communities.

## 2.a Identifying social and cultural infrastructure

Rather than trying to assess all social infrastructure, the funder decides to focus **on 8 types that fulfil a range of functions and serve different groups of people** to provide an indication of the state of social provision. These include:

1. **Publicly-owned** assets – community centres, youth centres, libraries, and parks
2. **Privately-owned** assets – pubs, shops, and markets
3. **Intangible** assets – charities, community organisations, and community businesses

## 2.b Measuring provision

The funder uses **a range of sources to measure the provision** of these 8 types of asset across the country, including: Google Maps, Field in Trust's Green Space Index, and data from Power to Change, the Charity Commission, 360 Giving, and the ONS.

Once the organisation maps the data, it identifies **20 local authorities with particularly low levels** of social infrastructure.

## 2.c Measuring use and access

For each of the twenty local authorities, the funder **organises workshops with key stakeholders**, such as local policymakers, local health services, charities, community organisations, and local businesses. In these workshops, they identify what social infrastructure already works well, what social infrastructure is needed, and how it could tackle to particular local challenges.

The funder also **partners with the community organisations and charities to use a digital mapping tool** to offer insights into the existing networks and connections between people, organisations, and institutions in each area.

## 3. Analysis and decision-making

The funding organisation uses the evidence that it has gathered to **develop the criteria that they will use to fund social infrastructure**.

Following on from the workshops with key stakeholders, the organisation also sets up **a series of community panels to help design their evaluation approach**.

Their research also identified the importance of ongoing funding, and so they adapted their strategy to focus **less on new facilities but more on keeping existing facilities running**.