# Dream Big!  A creative commission to help imagine and shape a new creative hub with young people in Barking & Dagenham

## About this opportunity

Barking & Dagenham Giving (BD Giving) and the Blagrave Trust are working in partnership to create a new creative hub with young people aged 16-30 in Barking, shaped and led by local young people and communities. Our ambition is that, eventually, the building will pass into community ownership and become an asset for generations to come.

We want to create space for young people, and the local organisations they know and trust, to explore the idea, challenge our assumptions, test ideas and help us understand what would make a hub genuinely useful, exciting and relevant to B&D's communities.

We are therefore looking to commission 4–6 local groups or organisations working with young people to run creative engagement and testing activities with young people in the borough.

## Background

The idea for a creative hub for young people grew out of Barking & Dagenham Giving's work with local residents through their Spaces+Places programme, exploring what kind of community asset could make the greatest difference locally.

For Blagrave, the partnership has grown from the priorities of their new strategy, Leading with Hope, which aims to support and resource young changemakers, and sees physical buildings as important assets that can become owned by local people and create long-term benefit.

Together, the partners are committed to creating something permanent for the borough that will change the landscape, literally and figuratively, for local young people.

We believe that young people and their communities should take the lead on what it should look like, feel like and offer, and how young people should be involved in leading it.

## What we're trying to learn

We want this work to help us answer some big questions.

### *Where?*

In the long term, we want the building to be an asset for local communities for generations to come. This means that, financially, it should be able to sustain itself, for example through renting out space for community activities or service provision.

For this to be a success, the building should be in a busy location with high footfall. Beyond this requirement, we want to hear from young people: **where in the borough feels right, and why?**

### *Why?*

**What would make this dedicated space for young people valuable to Barking & Dagenham?**

What is going on for young people in 2026 and how could a community-owned, youth-led space provide the solution? What would a hub make possible that isn't possible already? Where could a new space complement, rather than duplicate, the brilliant work already happening locally?

### *What?*

**What should the space look like, feel like and offer?**

We want young people to be able to really dream big and imagine a *different* Barking & Dagenham. That might include thinking about activities, opportunities, programmes, facilities, enterprise, creativity, social action, food, work, learning, wellbeing, hanging out, or things we haven't thought of at all.

It might also involve thinking about the physical space and ideas for design that would best serve the purpose of the space.

### *How?*

**How should young people shape and lead it?**

We want to explore what meaningful youth leadership could look like, both while the hub is being developed and once it exists.

Could we recruit early-career professionals to support the work? And how could local young people work in an intergenerational way alongside older professionals who'll be needed to bring this idea to life, for example architects, project managers and others?

NB: Your particular approach doesn't have to answer all of these questions! Hearing from young people is going to be an ongoing process, and we don't need to do it all at once. These questions are there as ideas and prompts, rather than a required list.

## Guiding principles for commissioned partners

Work to your strengths. Think about how you're specifically best placed to help us answer some of the questions above. We'd love you to use activities you know and trust, and that you already know young people will enjoy taking part in, to explore and test ideas.

Work with your community. We're looking for organisations that already have trusted relationships with young people, rather than organisations that will have to work hard at the initial engagement stage.

Freedom to challenge. We'd love to see partners give young people explicit freedom to challenge ideas, including telling us what wouldn't work, what they don't want or what they don't agree with. Tell us about differences as well as consensus. We don't expect "young people" to have one collective view.

Reward participation. We'd expect you to include payment for young people's time in your budget.

Support accountability. Factor into your plans and budget how you'll hold us to account, for example by feeding back to your participants.

## Who we want to hear from

We're interested in working with groups or organisations that:

- are rooted in Barking & Dagenham and hold strong and trusted relationships with local young people;
- have experience of making participation creative, enjoyable and meaningful;
- understand youth leadership and power, not just youth consultation;
- can create safe, accessible, inclusive and equitable spaces for young people to participate and lead, valuing diverse perspectives;
- work with young people whose experiences and ideas can too easily be missing from traditional consultation and decision-making.

We don't expect one organisation to reach every young person, which is why we want to share the work between 4–6 local partners. We're looking for trusted relationships with your community; we're not asking one group of young people to speak on behalf of all young people in the borough.

## What we'd love to see at the end

### 1. Creative engagement activity

A programme of creative activity involving local young people. This could be anything from a one-off event to a programme of work covering several months.

### 2. Learning

A record of what you heard, saw and learnt through the process, including:

- ideas young people were excited about;
- things they didn't want;
- questions that remain unresolved;
- differences in views;
- ideas worth testing further;
- recommendations for what should happen next.

### 3. Something from young people themselves

Where appropriate and possible, we'd love some of the learning to be communicated directly by young people.

That could be through film, audio, photography, artwork, models, presentations, writing or something else. We don't need polish or expensive techniques; phone filming or recording is absolutely fine.

### 4. A shared learning session

At the end of the commission, we'd love to bring commissioned partners together with BD Giving and Blagrave to share what we've learnt across the different pieces of work and identify themes, tensions and questions for the next stage.

## How the learning will be used

The insight will help inform the continuing development of the Creative Hub. We'd expect the young people you work with to be able to see their ideas and considerations reflected in the plans for the hub, including:

- what young people need and want from the space;
- what kinds of activities and opportunities it could hold;
- how existing youth organisations and spaces could be involved;
- what makes a space welcoming and accessible;
- how young people should participate in decisions;
- what we should test next.

Where participants' ideas aren't possible, we will hold ourselves accountable for feeding back why that's the case.

## Budget

We have £50,000 available for this work and expect to commission between four and six local partners. This creates an indicative budget of between c.£8,350 and £12,500 per partner.

However, each partner should budget realistically for what it takes them to do this work well. We recognise that different organisations have different overheads, and we don't want partners to have to squeeze this work into existing provision.

So, when we come to selecting partners, we'll be looking for realism in the budget rather than simply looking for a low budget. If you would like to do the work but have a good reason why the indicative £12,500 ceiling isn't enough, please do talk to us.

The budget should include paying for or recognising young people's participation. It can also include staff time, activities, food, travel, access requirements, venues, creative costs, capturing learning and a reasonable contribution to organisational overheads, plus any relevant costs not listed here.

## Anticipated timeline

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| Commission applications open | 21 October 2026 |
| Deadline | 7 January 2027 |
| Conversations / decisions | January 2027 |
| Planning begins | February 2027 |
| Engagement / delivery period | March - June 2027* |
| Shared learning session | July 2027 |

**Indicative timeline. If you'd like to do the work but this timeline doesn't suit you, just put this in your application.*

## How to express an interest

Please send us a short proposal, which can be in written form, video or audio, whatever suits you best.

In whatever format you choose, it must include brief details of:

### About you

Who you are, your work in Barking & Dagenham and the young people you have relationships with.

### Your idea

How you'd engage your young people in exploring or testing ideas for the hub and answering some of the questions above. This doesn't need to be completely designed; just a sense of your approach is fine.

### Outputs

What you'd expect to share at the end. For example, a simple written report, video, podcast or something else.

### Safe, accessible and meaningful participation

How you'll make participation safe, accessible and meaningful.

### Budget

A simple top-line breakdown.

### Anything you'd need from us

Tell us what would help you do this well.

## How we'll choose partners

Applications will be judged by a panel of young people aged 16–30, from the borough and both partner organisations.

Selection criteria will be based on:

- a strong understanding of Barking & Dagenham and trusted relationships with young people locally;
- an idea that feels innovative, ambitious, engaging and useful to young people;
- awareness of power, inclusion and accessibility;
- the potential to generate useful learning.

We'll also consider the overall mix of organisations and young people across the commissions, so that we're not simply commissioning several organisations to reach the same networks in the same way.

## Safeguarding and wellbeing

Organisations will be responsible for ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place for the activities they deliver.

We will discuss safeguarding, participation and any additional access or wellbeing requirements with successful partners before the work begins.

## Working together

Although these are separate commissions, we'd like this to feel like a shared piece of exploration between all commissioned partners.

## BD Giving and Blagrave will:

- be available to discuss and test emerging ideas;
- provide context and information about the hub as it develops;
- connect commissioned partners with one another, including hosting the final session to bring all partners together and compare findings;
- make clear how learning is being taken forward;
- avoid imposing unnecessary reporting requirements.

In return, we'd ask partners to come into the work with curiosity and openness, and to share both the things that work and the things that don't.

## Permission to experiment

We know briefs like this can sometimes unintentionally encourage organisations to tell funders what we seem to want to hear. We're clear that the only thing we really know at this stage of the work is that **we don't know very much!**

Please do tell us if anything about this commission doesn't feel right, is asking too much of you, can't be done within the budget, or just won't work for your young people.

And if you have a brilliant idea for how to work with us that just doesn't fit the commission, we'd still love to have a conversation.

## Contact

If you have any questions, please contact Bhav at bhav@bdgiving.org.uk.

We're looking forward to hearing from you!