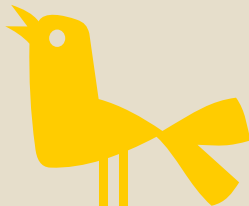




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Bangla Month 2025

- 1. Executive Summary
- 2. Context and Introduction
- 3. Evaluation Methodology
- 4. Festival Overview
- 5. Outcomes
- 6. Case Studies
- 7. Key Strengths and Areas for Improvements
- 8. Develop Legacy WM’s Capacity as an Organisation to Deliver Future Arts Initiatives
- 9. Build Confidence in Birmingham Around New Talent and Opportunities in the Creative Economy
- 10. Recommendations
- 11. Conclusion



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1. Executive Summary



Pohela Boishak

Bangla Month 2025 (“Bangla Month”), founded and pioneered by the Bangladeshi Artist Development Agency (BADA) - a consortium led by Legacy West Midlands in collaboration with cultural partners marked a significant step forward in the development of a sustainable, high quality platform for Bangladeshi heritage arts in Birmingham. Expanding from the previous year’s Bangla Week into a full month-long programme, the festival demonstrated clear growth in scale, ambition and impact. The festival’s success was underpinned by strong artistic and organisational leadership. The Artistic Director played a central role in shaping the artistic vision, curating the programme and ensuring high-quality delivery, supported by the BADA Steering Group whose collective expertise and sector knowledge informed the festival’s strategic direction and development.

Overall, the festival can be considered highly successful. It delivered an increased number of performances across a broader range of venues, showcased a diverse and high-quality artistic programme, and achieved strong audience engagement. Enhanced marketing and social media activity significantly raised the festival’s profile, contributing to wider reach and visibility both locally and nationally. The programme effectively combined headline events with a vibrant Fringe offer, supporting both established and emerging artists. It also strengthened partnerships across Birmingham’s cultural sector while creating meaningful development opportunities for artists, producers and creatives. Across the programme, 66 artists and creatives participated, 2 new commissions were developed and presented, and 3 trainee producers were supported through bursaries.

Audience attendance across headline events consistently exceeded expectations, with strong engagement from local, regional and national audiences. In essence, Bangla Month 2025 delivered significant artistic, cultural and community impact across Birmingham and beyond. The festival increased the visibility of Bangladeshi heritage artists within mainstream cultural spaces, created meaningful opportunities for artist development and attracted strong audience engagement from diverse communities. By presenting high-quality work in professional venues, Bangla Month challenged barriers to participation, strengthened partnerships across the cultural sector and demonstrated clear demand for culturally representative programming. The festival has helped position Bangla heritage arts as an important and valued part of Birmingham’s cultural identity and future.

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2. Context and Introduction



Night Bazar

This report evaluates the delivery and impact of Bangla Month 2025 (“Bangla Month”). It draws on existing quantitative and qualitative data, stakeholder insights extracted from a structured evaluation workshop, one-to-one interviews with individuals involved in the festival and reflective learning to assess how effectively the festival met its aims. Bangla Month sits at the core of the Bangladeshi Artist Development Agency (BADA)’s mission, acting as both a public-facing celebration of Bangla heritage arts and a strategic platform for artist development, leadership and sector engagement. Bangla Month is a key outcome of BADA’s strategic development. BADA is a consortium incubated within Legacy West Midlands (Legacy WM), which provides the organisational infrastructure, governance, management and administration necessary for delivering large-scale cultural initiatives.

This partnership enables BADA to focus on artistic leadership, talent development and community engagement, while Legacy WM provides operational delivery and strategic oversight. Participating venues and cultural organisations contribute as collaborators and Steering Group members, helping shape and support the festival’s wider development. BADA, originally incubated within Legacy West Midlands in response to the under-representation of Bangladeshi heritage artists within Birmingham’s cultural ecology. This incubation provided a critical foundation, enabling the development of partnerships, testing programming models and establishing a sustainable framework for future growth. Bangla Month 2025 builds on the success of the inaugural Bangla Week, expanding into a month-long programme in response to increased audience demand, growing artistic ambition and heightened sector interest. This expansion allowed for a more ambitious programme, increased visibility for artists and deeper engagement with audiences and communities.

The festival aligns with Arts Council England’s Let’s Create priorities by:

- Placing Bangla heritage artists at the centre of programming
- Commissioning new work
- Supporting early-career producers
- Creating platforms for emerging and established artists
- Engaging local, national and international audiences

Alongside artistic excellence, Bangla Month prioritises cultural pride, community connection, skills development and pathways into the creative industries. It positions Bangla heritage artists as leaders within Birmingham’s cultural future. Bangla Month 2025 presented a multi-disciplinary programme celebrating Bangladeshi heritage artists across Birmingham. The festival was delivered across multiple venues and consisted of headline events alongside a Fringe programme spanning music, poetry, comedy, exhibitions, film screenings and participatory activity.

The evaluation is structured around key outcomes aligned with Arts Council England’s Let’s Create framework, focusing on:

- Creative People
- Cultural Communities
- A Creative and Cultural Country



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3. Evaluation Methodology



Poetry After Chai

This evaluation draws on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to assess the impact and effectiveness of Bangla Month Festival 2025.

The methodology includes:

- In-depth interviews with staff at Legacy West Midlands and BADA, alongside selected artists, trainee producers, partners and audience members
- Feedback collected from individual events across the programme
- Analysis of social media activity and digital engagement
- A structured stakeholder evaluation workshop held at Soho House in January 2026
- A separate Steering Group roundtable discussion focused on strategic learning, partnership development and long-term sustainability
- Direct input and reflections from participating artists

This mixed-method approach has enabled a well-rounded understanding of the festival's artistic, cultural and organisational impact, combining lived experience with measurable data.

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4. Festival Overview

Bangla Month 2025 presented a multi-disciplinary programme celebrating Bangladeshi heritage arts across Birmingham.

Festival Dates: 31st October – 29th November 2025

Key Venues and Partners:

- Birmingham REP
- City of Birmingham Symphony (CBSO)
- Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC)
- Midlands Arts Centre (MAC)
- Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG)
- Birmingham Hippodrome
- Saathi House



Neel Kamrul & Friends

The festival included:

- A series of headline events featuring nationally and internationally recognised artists
- A Fringe programme supporting emerging and local talent
- Activity spanning music, poetry, comedy, exhibitions, film and participatory work

Bangla Month was delivered in partnership with major cultural organisations and venues across Birmingham, reinforcing its strategic positioning within Birmingham's cultural ecology. Participating venues and partners also contributed as collaborators and Steering Group members, supporting the development and delivery of the programme.

The 2025 programme demonstrated both artistic breadth and depth, combining high-profile performances with grassroots and developmental activity.

Headline Programme

The headline events successfully attracted audiences while maintaining a clear focus on representation and artistic excellence.

The opening night performance by Mumzy Stranger, one of the UK's most prominent British Bangladeshi artists, set a strong tone by combining a nationally recognised headliner with local Bangla artists, effectively balancing visibility and community representation. Poetry After Chai created an intimate and culturally resonant space for literary expression, supporting both established and emerging voices. The Comedy Night featuring Smash Bangalis' first-ever solo comedy show introduced and elevated British Bangladeshi comedy an underrepresented artform while providing a platform for emerging comedians. The International Music Commission featuring Neel Kamrul and Shanta Islam from Bangladesh demonstrated a strong commitment to artistic innovation and international collaboration, culminating in a high-quality closing performance at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Partner-led events strengthened institutional collaboration while enabling participating venues to engage with new audiences, artists and culturally diverse programming approaches.

Fringe Programme:

The Fringe programme played a critical role in talent development and sector engagement. It:

- Provided performance and showcasing opportunities for emerging artists
- Supported experimentation and new work
- Enabled early-career producers to gain practical experience
- Strengthened pathways into the creative industries

The Fringe was particularly effective in supporting artists at transitional stages in their careers.

Bangla Month Delivery Model:

Bangla Month operates through a collaborative festival model designed to support artistic development, partnership working and audience engagement across Birmingham's cultural sector. The programme combines commissioned work, independently produced events and partner-led activity, creating multiple pathways for artists and organisations to participate.

The delivery model is structured across four key strands:

- **Two BADA-commissioned concerts** - Large-scale headline performances, typically developed through high-profile artistic collaborations, including partnerships with organisations such as the CBSO.
- **Six BADA mini-commissions** - Supporting the creation and presentation of new visual and performing arts work by emerging and established Bangla heritage artists.
- **External independently produced shows and events** - Events delivered by artists and organisations operating through a collaborative box office split arrangement, enabling wider participation within the festival framework.



- **Funded partner events** - Collaborative activity delivered in partnership with cultural organisations, venues and community partners, helping extend the artistic reach and audience diversity of the festival.

Through its partnerships and infrastructure, Bangla Month provides participating artists and organisations with a range of developmental and practical support, including:

- Showcase opportunities through established partner venues
- Access to rehearsal and development space
- Production and technical support
- Professional advice and guidance
- Marketing and promotional support
- Box office management
- Overall festival coordination and partnership support

This model enables Bangla Month to balance artistic ambition with grassroots participation, while creating accessible pathways for artists, producers and organisations to engage with the festival at different levels of experience and scale.



BADA Comedy Night

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5. Outcomes

Creative People: Bangla Month made a substantial contribution to creative participation and professional development.

- Artists were provided with high-quality platforms to present their work
- Emerging producers gained hands-on experience and industry exposure
- New work was commissioned and developed
- Participants reported increased confidence, skills and professional networks

The festival successfully created accessible entry points for new talent while supporting progression pathways.

Cultural Communities: The festival had a strong impact on cultural identity, pride and community connection.

- Bangla heritage artists were placed at the centre of programming
- Audiences engaged with culturally relevant and representative work
- Events fostered a sense of belonging and shared cultural experience
- Intergenerational participation was evident, particularly in poetry and community-led events

Bangla Month continues to play an important role in increasing the visibility of Bangladeshi culture within Birmingham's wider cultural landscape.

A Creative and Cultural Country

The festival contributed to a more inclusive and representative cultural sector by:

- Strengthening partnerships between major cultural institutions and Bangla artists
- Supporting international collaboration and exchange
- Enhancing the professional profile of participating artists
- Demonstrating the value and demand for diverse cultural programming

These outcomes position Bangla Month as a key strategic initiative within the region's cultural development.



Kolapata Ceramics

Scale, Reach and Participation

Artists and creatives involved: **66**
 New commissions developed: **6**
 Trainee producers supported: **3**
 Festival duration: **1 month**
 Average headline event attendance: **200**



Audience Demographics and Engagement

Audience data indicates that Bangla Month successfully attracted a diverse audience across age groups, ethnicities and geographic locations. Attendees included members of Birmingham's Bangladeshi communities alongside audiences from wider cultural backgrounds, demonstrating the festival's ability to engage both culturally specific and mainstream audiences. As a snapshot the audience data from the Poetry after Chai and Bangla Shorts suggests that Bangla Month attracted a broad cross-section of attendees across different age groups and locations. While age data was unavailable for most ticket purchasers (82.5%), the available information indicates that the festival appealed most strongly to audiences aged 36–55, who accounted for over 14% of all recorded attendees. Smaller numbers of attendees were recorded in the 18–35 and 56–65 age brackets, suggesting potential opportunities to further grow engagement with younger and older audiences in future years.

The festival achieved strong geographic reach across Birmingham, with audiences attending from a wide range of postcode districts. The highest concentrations of attendees came from B19 (10.5%), B13 (8.8%), B11 (7.9%), B31 (7.0%) and B28 (7.0%), demonstrating strong engagement from communities across North, South, East and West Birmingham. Audiences also travelled from outside the city, including Leicester (LE5), Coventry (CV4 and CV6), Wolverhampton (WV1), Derby (DE22), Solihull (B91) and Kent (CT9), indicating growing regional interest in the festival. The geographic spread of attendees demonstrates Bangla Month's ability to attract both local audiences and visitors from across the Midlands and beyond. Feedback from venue partners also highlighted the festival's success in engaging new audiences and increasing participation among communities who may not traditionally attend mainstream cultural venues.

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6. Case Studies

The following case studies provide deeper insight into the artistic, organisational and strategic impact of Bangla Month 2025. They have been included to capture a range of perspectives from key individuals who have played an integral role in shaping, delivering and supporting the festival's development.

The selected contributors represent a cross-section of leadership, artistic direction, venue partnership and sector advocacy. Collectively, they bring extensive knowledge of Birmingham's cultural landscape, alongside a strong understanding of the needs, interests and lived experiences of Bangladeshi artists and communities.

Their reflections highlight not only the successes and impact of Bangla Month, but also the challenges, learning and opportunities that will help shape the festival's future growth and sustainability. Importantly, these case studies demonstrate the value of collaborative working between community-led organisations, artists and mainstream cultural institutions in creating a more inclusive and representative cultural sector.

Case Study 1:



Fateha Begum (Independent Theatre Director and BADA Steering Group Member)

This case study reflects the experience of Fateha Begum, an Independent Theatre Director who has been involved with Bangla Month since its early development, including being part of the Steering Group and playing a hands-on role in the 2024 Bangla Week.

Fateha described the growth and evolution of Bangla Month as “transformational”, highlighting how the festival has developed in scale, ambition and quality year on year. She expressed a strong sense of pride in having contributed to its journey, noting that being part of the Steering Group enabled her to shape, influence and actively participate in the festival's direction. A key highlight for Fateha has been seeing the emergence of new and upcoming talent. She emphasised that Bangla Month has created a supportive platform where artists at different stages can develop and showcase their work. She described the festival as a “stepping stone” not only for emerging creatives but also for established practitioners, including herself.

Through her involvement, Fateha has gained access to new opportunities, including connections with strategic partners, venues and wider sector networks. She noted that these spaces can often feel closed off to artists, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, and that Bangla Month has helped to open doors and build confidence in navigating the sector. Looking ahead, Fateha identified opportunities for further development. She expressed a strong interest in seeing more workshops for both artists and community participants, emphasising that these should be well-facilitated and properly resourced to attract and nurture new talent. She also highlighted the importance of extending this work into schools, creating early pathways for young people to engage in the arts. She noted that the festival plays an important role in raising awareness of careers in the creative industries, particularly by demonstrating that opportunities extend beyond performance to include a wide range of behind-the-scenes roles.

“*Fateha also valued the co-creation approach taken within the festival, which she felt strengthened both the quality of the work and the sense of ownership among participants.*”

Reflecting on the festival overall, she described it as:

Getting better every year ambitious, aspirational and fun. We want to keep building on that.

Key Takeaways:

- Bangla Month has become an important platform for emerging and established Bangla artists
- The Steering Group structure enables collaborative leadership and co-creation
- The festival helps create pathways into the creative industries for younger generations
- Continued investment in workshops and schools' engagement could strengthen long-term impact.



Case Study 2:



Junna Begum (BADA Strategic Manager & Artistic Director – Bangla Month)

This case study reflects the experience and reflections of Junna Begum, BADA Strategic Manager and Artistic Director for Bangla Month 2025. As one of the key creative and strategic leads behind the festival, Junna played a central role in shaping the programme, developing partnerships and ensuring that Bangla Month remained rooted in its core mission of supporting Bangla heritage artists and audiences.

Junna explained that the primary objective of Bangla Month was to create a meaningful space for Bangla artists and audiences, ensuring that artists felt visible, valued and professionally supported within Birmingham’s wider cultural landscape. Reflecting on the festival overall, she felt these aims were successfully achieved through the breadth of the programme, the quality of venues and the strength of audience engagement. A major success for Junna was the festival’s ability to reach both national and international audiences and artists. Bangla Month attracted audiences from Birmingham, London, Manchester, Bristol and other parts of the UK, while also supporting collaborations with artists from Bangladesh and beyond. She described this as an important step in positioning Bangla Month as both locally rooted and internationally connected.

Junna highlighted that the festival placed significant emphasis on artist development and capacity building. Through performance opportunities, commissions, mentoring and partnership working, artists were supported to strengthen their professional confidence, expand networks and develop new creative opportunities. She noted that Bangla Month intentionally created pathways for both emerging and established artists, ensuring that all artists were presented within professional and respected cultural venues without compromising on artistic quality.

Headline performances from artists such as Mumzy Stranger and the sold-out comedy night featuring Smash Bengali were highlighted as particularly significant achievements. Junna reflected that these events demonstrated both audience appetite and the importance of creating culturally specific spaces for Bangla artists to thrive. She also noted the diversity of the artistic programme, which successfully included music, dance, poetry, comedy and visual arts. Importantly, the festival achieved a strong gender balance across the programme, with a notable increase in female artists compared to previous years. Junna reflected that this was partly influenced by the festival being largely led by a female team, helping create an environment where women artists felt encouraged, visible and supported.

A particularly meaningful outcome for Junna was seeing artists participate who did not necessarily come from traditional artistic backgrounds. Many artists worked in other professions but felt comfortable performing because Bangla Month provided what she described as a “safe and supported creative space.” She felt this was critical in helping widen participation and nurture talent that may otherwise remain unseen. Junna highlighted the importance of experienced artistic leadership in the festival’s success, noting that clear creative vision, strong industry knowledge, and effective leadership contributed significantly to the quality and professionalism of the programme. Alongside the successes, Junna reflected honestly on several challenges and areas for future learning. These included changes in personnel during the delivery period, as well as moments where partnerships felt more transactional than fully collaborative. She also highlighted operational challenges around access to equipment and technical resources. One specific learning point related to exhibition materials used at MAC, where issues around presentation and display standards provided important feedback for future planning and development.

Junna also reflected positively on the development of the three Assistant Producers involved in the festival. Initially nervous and lacking confidence, she observed significant personal and professional growth throughout the delivery process. Each Assistant Producer developed distinct strengths, with responsibilities spanning artist liaison, logistics coordination and administrative management. Junna stressed the importance of maintaining a strong core team to support the continued growth and sustainability of the festival. Looking ahead, Junna identified several priorities for future development, including beginning planning processes earlier and developing a stronger sponsorship and partnership package to support long-term sustainability and growth. She also reflected on the opportunity to expand digital engagement in future festivals, including exploring live streaming and Facebook Live options to increase access and audience reach beyond physical venues.

Reflecting on Bangla Month overall, Junna described the festival as:

“*A space where Bangla artists felt seen, supported and celebrated professionally while audiences experienced work that genuinely reflected the diversity, creativity and talent within our communities.*”

Key Takeaways:

- Bangla Month successfully created professional and culturally safe spaces for Bangla heritage artists and audiences
- The festival strengthened artist development through performance opportunities, partnerships and capacity building
- Audiences attended from across the UK, demonstrating growing national interest and reach
- Strong female leadership contributed to increased visibility and participation of women artists
- The Assistant Producer programme significantly supported confidence-building and professional growth
- Future development should focus on earlier planning, deeper collaboration, stronger sponsorship development and expanded digital engagement
- Bangla Month demonstrated the value of presenting Bangla artists within high-quality mainstream cultural venues without compromising artistic standards



Case Study 3:



Rachael Thomas (Chief Executive Birmingham Repertory Theater and BADA Steering Group Member)

This case study reflects the perspective of Rachael Thomas from Birmingham REP, one of Bangla Month's key venue and cultural partners. Through Birmingham REP's involvement in the festival, Rachael observed both the growing impact of Bangla Month and the opportunities it presents for strengthening culturally representative programming across the city.

Rachael highlighted the strong success of the festival's headline events, noting that performances attracted high audience demand and, in several cases, sold-out audiences. She reflected positively on the way Bangla Month successfully brought in younger and more diverse audiences, helping venues engage communities that are not always represented within mainstream arts programming.

A key strength identified by Rachael was the festival's role in elevating and showcasing the work of Bangla heritage artists, while also highlighting the important contribution of BADA and partner organisations. She noted that Bangla Month reflects the diversity of Birmingham in an authentic and meaningful way, helping to ensure that the city's cultural offer better represents the communities it serves.

Rachael also praised the quality of the festival's marketing materials, particularly the professionally produced brochure, which helped strengthen the overall profile and credibility of the programme. She described audience responses as highly positive and emphasised that there is a significant appetite for more festivals and events of this nature across Birmingham.

She also highlighted the importance of making greater use of the expertise and infrastructure available within partner venues. Drawing on the experience of venue staff in areas such as event management, staging and artist support could help strengthen delivery processes and build organisational capability across the festival.

In addition, Rachael reflected on the importance of programme pacing and event scheduling, noting that combining multiple artforms within a single event, for example dance performances alongside live bands does not always create the strongest audience experience. She also emphasised the importance of events starting on time, describing this as an important part of developing professionalism and capacity across the festival's delivery teams and participating artists.

Looking ahead, Rachael expressed strong optimism about the future of Bangla Month. She emphasised that the Steering Group and partners should continue building on the areas that have worked successfully while learning from areas requiring improvement. She felt this reflective and collaborative approach would be essential in enabling the festival to scale sustainably and maintain long-term commitment from partners and venues.

Reflecting on the festival overall, she described Bangla Month as:

“*A festival with huge potential and clear audience appetite one that reflects the diversity of Birmingham and creates opportunities for artists and audiences that the city needs more of.*”

Key Takeaways:

- Bangla Month successfully attracted diverse and younger audiences into mainstream cultural venues
- The festival reflects Birmingham's diversity and strengthens representation within the city's cultural offer
- Greater use of partner venue expertise and infrastructure could strengthen future delivery
- Continued learning, scaling and strategic collaboration will be essential for long-term sustainability and partner commitment
- There are strong audience demands and significant potential for future growth of culturally specific festivals in Birmingham.

Case Study 4:



Deborah Kermode (Chief Executive and Artistic Director Midlands Art Centre Chief)

This case study reflects the perspective of Deborah Kermode, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), one of Bangla Month’s key cultural venue partners. Through MAC’s involvement in the festival, Deborah observed the growing ambition, professionalism and audience impact of Bangla Month, while also identifying opportunities for future artistic and organisational development.

Deborah reflected positively on the overall organisation and coordination of the festival, noting that MAC’s liaison with the Bangla Month team primarily took place through colleague Jo Carr. She described the process as well organised and collaborative, highlighting the professionalism and commitment demonstrated throughout the planning and delivery stages.

A key strength identified by Deborah was the strong public interest in the programme. She noted that Bangla Month successfully generated audience excitement and engagement, attracting both existing and newer audiences into MAC. This reflected the growing appetite for culturally diverse programming and reinforced the importance of festivals such as Bangla Month within Birmingham’s wider cultural landscape.

Deborah also praised the high artistic quality of the programme and highlighted the festival brochure as a particularly strong aspect of the overall presentation and branding. She felt the quality of the printed materials helped position Bangla Month as a credible and ambitious cultural festival, contributing positively to audience perception and engagement.

Reflecting on future development opportunities, Deborah suggested that the festival could continue evolving artistically by exploring more contemporary social themes and conversations within future programming. She referenced topics such as environmental issues, LGBTQ+ experiences and women’s issues as potential areas for exploration, helping ensure the programme continues to reflect contemporary experiences and engage a broad range of audiences and communities.

She also suggested that future festivals could benefit from incorporating more discussion-based activities, including artist talks and panel discussions alongside performances and exhibitions. Deborah felt these additions could deepen audience engagement, create space for dialogue and strengthen the educational and reflective aspects of the programme.

Alongside these positives, Deborah reflected on a challenge relating to exhibition materials used during one of the events at MAC. She described this as a learning experience for both the venue and the festival team, emphasising that the issue had highlighted the importance of clearer communication and planning around technical and exhibition requirements. Deborah noted that MAC would continue working collaboratively with the Bangla Month team to help avoid similar issues in future festivals.

Looking ahead, Deborah also reflected on the importance of securing funding earlier within the planning cycle. While acknowledging the challenges involved in cultural fundraising, she suggested that earlier funding confirmation could help strengthen long-term planning, marketing and programme development.

Overall, Deborah expressed strong support for the continued growth of Bangla Month and its contribution to Birmingham’s cultural sector. She felt the festival demonstrated both artistic quality and strong audience demand, while also creating opportunities for cultural organisations such as MAC to engage more meaningfully with diverse communities and artists.

Reflecting on the festival overall, Deborah described Bangla Month as:

“*A high-quality and ambitious festival that is clearly building new audiences and creating important cultural conversations within the city.*”

Key Takeaways:

- Bangla Month demonstrated strong organisational coordination and professionalism
- The festival attracted new and diverse audiences into mainstream cultural venues
- High-quality branding and presentation strengthened the festival’s public profile
- Future programming could explore more contemporary social themes and discussion-based activity
- Stronger technical planning and earlier funding confirmation could further strengthen delivery and sustainability
- Bangla Month continues to play an important role in diversifying Birmingham’s cultural offer and audience engagement.



Case Study 5:



Aftab Rahman (Chief Executive Officer, Legacy West Midlands & Founder of BADA)

This case study reflects the perspective of Aftab Rahman, Chief Executive Officer of Legacy West Midlands and Founder of the Bangladeshi Artist Development Agency (BADA). As one of the driving forces behind the development of Bangla Month, Aftab has played a central role in advocating for greater visibility, investment and recognition for Bangladeshi heritage arts within Birmingham and beyond. Aftab described the core vision of Bangla Month as creating high-quality platforms where Bangladeshi artists can perform professionally, while enabling both Bangladeshi and wider communities to experience and celebrate the richness and diversity of Bangladeshi arts and culture in its many forms. He reflected that the festival was intentionally designed not only as a celebration of culture, but also as a long-term intervention aimed at reshaping representation and access within the cultural sector. He spoke passionately about what he described as a “renaissance” currently taking place within Bangladeshi culture and artistic expression. According to Aftab, this growth is being strengthened by newly arrived Bangladeshi diaspora communities from cities such as Dhaka, alongside migration from countries including Spain, Italy and Denmark. This demographic and cultural shift has introduced new artists, creative influences and audiences into Birmingham’s cultural ecology.

Aftab reflected that Bangla Month has helped create opportunities and visibility for artists who previously may not have seen themselves represented within mainstream arts spaces. He described the significance of seeing Bangladeshi artists perform confidently within venues that historically felt inaccessible to their communities, noting that the festival has helped break down both practical and psychological barriers around participation in mainstream cultural spaces. Importantly, he also highlighted how Bangla Month has supported audience development within Bangladeshi communities. He observed that audiences are increasingly engaging not only with Bangla Month itself, but also with wider arts and cultural activity taking place across Birmingham. For Aftab, this signals an important cultural shift in confidence, visibility and participation. Reflecting on the festival’s wider significance, Aftab described Bangla Month as the result of more than twenty years of advocacy and relationship-building with mainstream cultural institutions. He explained that securing access to major venues and platforms “on our own terms” has required long-term persistence and collective effort from artists, activists and organisations within the Bangladeshi community. At the same time, Aftab emphasised that this process is not solely about changing institutions, but also about supporting change within communities themselves. He reflected on the importance of encouraging audiences to recognise the value of investing financially in arts and culture through purchasing tickets and supporting creative activity.

He acknowledged that this cultural shift takes time, particularly when communities have historically felt excluded from mainstream cultural spaces. Aftab firmly believes that the arts, heritage and cultural expression of all minority communities deserve equal recognition and investment. Referring to the success and visibility of Black History Month within Birmingham and the UK more broadly, he described Bangla Month as having similar long-term ambitions to become an established and celebrated part of the city’s cultural calendar. He also reflected on the importance of advocacy and representation within the cultural sector, noting that meaningful change often happens when communities have visible champions and influential advocates. While Legacy West Midlands has stepped forward to help fulfil this role for the Bangladeshi community, Aftab posed important questions about future leadership and representation within mainstream media and culture.

Reflecting on the future, he asked:

“Who is our Riz Ahmed, Guz Khan or Dev Patel? We need more visible advocates and role models who can help open doors and inspire future generations.”

For Aftab, Bangla Month is ultimately about more than a festival programme. It represents a long-term movement towards cultural equity, visibility and belonging ensuring that Bangladeshi artists and audiences are recognised as an integral part of Birmingham’s cultural identity and future.

Reflecting on Bangla Month overall, Aftab described the festival as:

“Twenty years of struggle turning into opportunity creating spaces where Bangladeshi artists and audiences can finally see themselves reflected, valued and celebrated within the cultural life of the city.”

Key Takeaways:

- Bangla Month was created to provide high-quality professional platforms for Bangladeshi heritage artists and audiences
- The festival reflects a wider cultural renaissance within Bangladeshi communities locally, nationally and internationally
- Bangla Month has helped open access to mainstream cultural venues that historically felt inaccessible to Bangladeshi artists and audiences
- Audience development involves both institutional change and encouraging cultural participation within communities themselves
- The festival is helping diversify Birmingham’s wider cultural offer while strengthening representation and belonging
- Long-term advocacy and visible cultural leadership remain essential to sustaining change and creating future opportunities
- Bangla Month has the potential to become a nationally recognised flagship cultural programme similar in significance to other established cultural heritage celebrations



Case Study 6:



Sandhya Nandra (Marketing Communications Officer Legacy West Midlands)

This case study reflects the experience of Sandhya, Marketing and Communications Officer at Legacy West Midlands, who played a key role in supporting the marketing, communications and audience engagement activity for Bangla Month 2025. Sandhya was responsible for helping to promote the festival across a range of channels, including Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, printed flyers and posters. Reflecting on the campaign, she noted that Instagram proved to be one of the most effective platforms, attracting engagement from a broad range of audiences and age groups. Given the diversity of events within the programme, ranging from music and comedy to poetry and exhibitions, she explained that one of the main challenges was tailoring marketing materials to appeal to different audience demographics and interests.

To address this, the team adopted a multi-channel approach, ensuring that marketing messages reached audiences through a variety of platforms and formats. Sandhya highlighted the value of having access to contacts and audience data from previous years, which provided a strong foundation for targeted marketing activity. This enabled the team to distribute invitations, flyers and promotional content to existing supporters while also reaching new audiences. Beyond marketing, Sandhya also supported several operational aspects of the festival, including coordinating presentation materials and visual content for event backdrops. She reflected that much of the work that contributes to the success of a festival takes place behind the scenes and often goes unseen by audiences. She noted that strong technical support from venue partners helped ensure events ran smoothly and that having clearly defined roles and responsibilities across delivery teams was critical to the festival's success.

A particular highlight for Sandhya was the level of media coverage achieved throughout the festival. Bangla Month received coverage across radio, BBC platforms and community media channels, helping to raise the profile of both the festival and participating artists. She felt this contributed significantly to increasing awareness and strengthening the festival's reputation.

Sandhya also reflected on the importance of maintaining authenticity and cultural integrity within the festival's communications. She highlighted the care taken to ensure translations used in marketing materials were checked and verified, helping to ensure accuracy and respect for language and cultural nuances.

In terms of audience engagement, Sandhya observed that the festival appeared to engage particularly strongly with audiences aged between 30 and 50. She also noted that the programme felt inclusive and welcoming, with events successfully creating spaces that were respectful of different cultures, identities and experiences. Looking ahead, Sandhya identified several opportunities for future improvement. She suggested strengthening audience feedback collection through the use of QR codes and printed evaluation forms at all events, helping capture richer audience insights. She also highlighted the potential for live-streaming selected events to reach wider audiences who may be unable to attend in person.

A key recommendation from Sandhya was the development of a dedicated Bangla Month website and standalone social media channels. As the festival continues to grow, she believes it has reached a stage where it can establish its own distinct digital identity, helping to build year-round engagement and strengthen brand recognition.

Reflecting on the festival overall, Sandhya described Bangla Month as:

“*An inclusive and evolving festival that is successfully reaching new audiences and creating greater visibility for Bangla artists and culture. The foundations are now in place to grow its digital presence and audience reach even further.*”

Key Takeaways:

- A multi-channel marketing approach helped reach diverse audiences across different age groups and interests.
- Instagram emerged as one of the most effective platforms for audience engagement.
- Existing audience databases provided a strong foundation for targeted marketing and promotion.
- Strong technical support and clear delivery roles contributed to smooth delivery.
- The festival achieved valuable media coverage across BBC, radio and community channels.
- Future opportunities include live-streaming events, strengthening audience feedback mechanisms and developing dedicated Bangla Month digital platforms.
- Maintaining cultural authenticity and high-quality communications was a key priority throughout the campaign.

প্রধান শক্তি ও উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রসমূহ

7. Key Strengths & Areas for Improvement

The key strengths and areas for development were identified through a structured evaluation workshop held at Soho House in January 2026. The workshop brought together members of the BADA Steering Group, artistic producers, audiences, artists, strategic and community partners, volunteers and staff.

The festival's success reflects the effective collaboration between BADA, Legacy WM and participating venues and Steering Group members. This collaborative model enabled ambitious programming, strong audience engagement and enhanced organisational learning and capacity.

Key Strengths

- Successful expansion from a week-long to a month-long festival
- Strong artistic quality and diversity across the programme
- Effective integration of headline and developmental activity
- High levels of audience engagement and geographic reach
- Significant improvement in marketing and social media presence
- Meaningful opportunities for artist and producer development
- Strong partnerships with leading cultural organisations and venues

Areas for Improvement

- Ensure long-term sustainability and funding stability
- Further strengthen data collection and evaluation processes
- Expand audience diversity beyond existing networks
- Increase organisational capacity to support a growing programme
- Develop clearer progression pathways for artists beyond the festival
- Enhance digital engagement and access through live streaming and online content
- Develop a clearer and more consistent ticketing and accessibility strategy



Poetry After Chai

ভবিষ্যৎ শিল্পকলা উদ্যোগ পরিচালনার জন্য লিগ্যাসি ডব্লিউএম-এর সাংগঠনিক সক্ষমতা উন্নয়ন

8. Develop WM's Capacity as an Organisation to Deliver Future Art Initiatives



BADA Comedy Night

Bangla Month represents BADA's flagship festival and has contributed significantly to strengthening Legacy West Midlands' capacity to support and deliver large-scale cultural programmes. As the lead partner, Legacy WM provides strategic oversight, governance, management and administration, enabling BADA to focus on artistic leadership, talent development and community engagement. This collaborative delivery model has strengthened organisational learning, resilience and the ability to deliver future arts initiatives of increased scale, ambition and complexity. This development can be understood through alignment with Arts Council England's Let's Create framework:

Creative People

Bangla Month has strengthened Legacy WM's ability to support creative talent at multiple stages of development. By working closely with artists, trainee producers and creatives.

The organisation has:

- Built experience in nurturing emerging talent and supporting professional progression
- Developed inclusive approaches to participation, ensuring opportunities are accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds
- Created pathways for continued engagement in the arts beyond the festival

This positions Legacy WM as a key organisation in enabling people to develop and express creativity throughout their lives.

Cultural Communities

Bangla Month has deepened Legacy WM's role in contributing to strong, connected communities. Through collaborative delivery with partners, venues and artists, the organisation has:

- Strengthened its ability to convene and work across sectors
- Delivered culturally relevant programming that reflects and celebrates local communities
- Increased understanding of how culture can support belonging, pride and social cohesion

Bangla Month demonstrates how culturally specific programming can enrich places like Birmingham, ensuring that cultural provision better reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. It also shows that, with the right artistic offer rooted in local talent and artforms that resonate with audiences there is strong potential for sustained community patronage and engagement. While there has historically been some scepticism from mainstream venues about whether Bangladeshi artists would attract audiences, the festival has clearly demonstrated a strong appetite, with some events achieving sold-out audiences.



A Creative and Cultural Country

Bangla Month has enhanced Legacy WM's contribution to a more dynamic and inclusive cultural sector. Through international collaboration, partnership working and artist commissions, the organisation has:

- Developed experience in delivering innovative and collaborative projects
- Strengthened relationships with major cultural institutions and sector partners
- Positioned itself as a connector between grassroots talent and mainstream cultural infrastructure

This work supports a cultural ecosystem that is outward-looking, representative and capable of reaching wider audiences both nationally and internationally.



Mumzy Stranger

সৃজনশীল অর্থনীতিতে নতুন প্রতিভা ও সম্ভাবনাকে ঘিরে বার্মিংহামে আত্মবিশ্বাস বৃদ্ধি করা

9. Build Confidence in Birmingham around New Talent and Opportunities in Creative Economy

Bangla Month has played an important role in building confidence across Birmingham in both emerging talent and the wider creative economy. By presenting high quality work from Bangladeshi heritage artists in established cultural venues, the festival has demonstrated that diverse talent is not only present but essential to the city's cultural and economic future.

The festival created visible platforms for new and emerging artists, alongside established names, helping to challenge perceptions and raise expectations of what locally rooted talent can achieve. This visibility is critical in building confidence among audiences, partners and industry stakeholders, reinforcing the idea that Birmingham is a city where diverse artists can develop sustainable creative careers.

Through initiatives such as artist commissions, trainee producer bursaries and Fringe opportunities, Bangla Month has also highlighted clear pathways into the creative industries. These opportunities help demystify the sector, showing that there are tangible routes for participation, skills development and employment within the creative economy.

Importantly, the festival has strengthened relationships between grassroots creatives and major cultural institutions, helping to bridge gaps between emerging talent and established infrastructure. This contributes to a more inclusive and accessible creative ecosystem, where new voices are recognised, supported and invested in.



Folklore of Bengal

By amplifying underrepresented artists and delivering work of a high artistic standard, Bangla Month has helped shift narratives around who creates culture in Birmingham. BADA has enabled this change through Bangla Month pioneering an approach that has not previously been attempted in the city, and this leadership should be recognised, supported and applauded. In doing so, it builds long-term confidence in Birmingham as a place that nurtures innovation, reflects its diverse communities and offers real opportunities within the creative economy.

Audience and stakeholder feedback demonstrated increased confidence in the visibility and viability of Bangladeshi heritage artists within Birmingham's cultural sector. Participating venues and partners noted the strong audience response and the importance of continuing to invest in culturally representative programming.

“A fun filled month. Thoughtful and energetic. Lots of new audiences created. New generation Bengali artists are recognized.”
Makbul Choudhury (Commissioned Artist)

“Absolutely smashed it out the park. This event brought a little bit of Bangladesh to Birmingham. Loved it. It's given a totally different perspective of Bangladeshi arts for me.”
Harun Rabbani (Audience)

“Great vibe, buzzing atmosphere - what more do you want!”
James Mirgan (Audience)

“Great to see the Bangladeshi community highlight themselves, would love to attend more Bangladeshi events & support the Bengali artists are represented.”
Sheila Khanom (Audience)

“It reinforced my view that Bangladeshi arts in the UK are vibrant, diverse, and deeply rooted in tradition while still evolving in fresh, creative ways.”
Maha Prottasha (Trainee Producer)

“Very entertaining and well presented. Amazing work by the organisers who were very hospitable and welcoming. I very much enjoyed the experience, and it has opened up a new part of the Bangladeshi arts for me.”
Labin (Audience)

“Everything was very well planned and presented. BADA need better marketing and promotion to get this to a wider audience. It might also be helpful in the future to try and run some of the key events either mid-week or Sunday to allow more Bangladeshi catering workers to attend with their families. It has broadened my view of Bangladeshi culture.”
Abu Numan (Audience)

সুপারিশসমূহ

10. Recommendations



Pohela Boishak Procession

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

A. Sustainability and Investment (High Priority)

- Sustain and grow the festival - Bangla Month should continue to develop as BADA's flagship annual festival, supported through long-term strategic investment to enable growth in scale, artistic ambition and impact. There is clear value in supporting more programmes of this kind, as they enrich regions such as the West Midlands culturally, socially and economically.
- Increase long term funding stability - develop multi-year funding partnerships to support forward planning, organisational resilience and programme sustainability.

B. Artist Development (High Priority)

- Strengthen artist development pathways - create clearer year-round progression routes for artists, producers and volunteers through commissions, mentoring and sector partnerships. This should include developing partnerships with schools, universities, youth clubs and community organisations to create accessible entry points, nurture emerging talent and support long-term engagement in the creative sector.
- Expand education and community engagement - develop partnerships with schools, youth organisations, universities and community groups to support long-term creative participation.

C. Audience Development (Medium Priority)

- Broaden and diversify audiences - continue developing targeted audience engagement strategies that reach wider and more diverse communities across Birmingham and beyond. Mainstream venues such as Birmingham Rep, CBSO and MAC should continue to widen their audiences to better reflect the diversity of Birmingham. This includes embedding culturally diverse programming and targeted engagement strategies.
- Enhance digital engagement - expand live streaming, digital content and online audience engagement opportunities.

D. Strategic Partnerships (High Priority)

- Deepen collaborative working - strengthen long-term collaboration between mainstream cultural institutions and community-led organisations including Saathi House, Aspire and Succeed, Community Connect Foundation and Nowka Bais.



E. Organisational Capacity (High Priority)

- Increase staffing and infrastructure - invest in staffing, systems and infrastructure to support the continued growth and complexity of the festival.
- Sustain experienced leadership - ensure continued access to experienced cultural leadership and sector expertise to maintain artistic quality and strategic development. Invest in organisational capacity to support the continued growth, ambition and sustainability of the festival. This includes ensuring that BADA is sufficiently resourced to realise its long-term ambitions, enabling forward planning, strategic development and the delivery of a more ambitious and sustainable programme.

The success of the festival over the past two years has been strongly supported by experienced leadership, which must be sustained, alongside the development of additional staff capacity to support the Artistic Director. It is also essential to ensure access to the right personnel with relevant sector expertise, as this is key to the successful delivery of high-quality artistic projects.



Pohela Boishak

উপসংহার 11. Conclusion

Bangla Month 2025 represents a significant achievement for BADA, Legacy West Midlands and their partners. The expansion into a month-long programme has elevated the festival's profile while deepening its artistic, cultural and community impact.

As BADA's flagship festival, Bangla Month has demonstrated how culturally specific, artist-led programming can deliver artistic excellence, meaningful community engagement and sector-wide change simultaneously. Through strategic leadership, partnership-building and a commitment to representation and equity, BADA and Legacy WM have helped create a platform that better reflects the diversity, creativity and lived experiences of Birmingham's communities.

The festival has strengthened pathways for artists, supported emerging talent, expanded partnerships and encouraged mainstream cultural institutions to think more inclusively about audiences, programming and collaboration.

With continued investment, strategic development and sustained partnership working, Bangla Month has strong potential to grow as both a flagship regional festival and a leading national model for culturally specific, artist-led cultural development.

Bangla Month has demonstrated that culturally specific festivals can enrich cities culturally, socially and economically while building stronger connections between communities, artists and institutions. It offers a powerful blueprint for how Birmingham and other UK cities can create a more inclusive, representative and ambitious cultural future.

BADA and Legacy West Midlands would like to acknowledge and thank all artists, audiences, Steering Group members, venue partners, volunteers, funders and community organisations whose commitment, creativity and collaboration made Bangla Month 2025 possible. Their collective contribution has helped shape a festival that not only celebrates Bangla heritage arts but also strengthens Birmingham's wider cultural landscape. Moving forward, continued collaboration and investment will be essential in ensuring that Bangla Month continues to grow, inspire and create lasting opportunities for future generations of artists and communities.



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