

# Open House Festival

## Case Study

How Open House are using their Festival to support regeneration in the town of Bangor through art and culture and how they raised £70,000 from fundraising campaigns within Ticketsolve.



Open House  
Festival



# Introduction

## Open House

During the month of August, the scenic town of Bangor, in County Down, is home to Open House, an annual summer music and arts festival. The charity also promotes music concerts throughout the year in Belfast and Bangor along with Seaside Revival, a vintage festival and Sundown Market, a major artisan food and drink event.

With more than 100 volunteers and over 150 local participating businesses, Open House utilise 40+ different venues and host 140 events during the entire month of August. The spaces fit anywhere from 30 to 2,500 audience members per event.

Open House Festival was first established in Belfast in 1999, in the City's newly designated arts and cultural flavoured Cathedral Quarter, and contributed to the process of regeneration in the city centre over the next 15 years. This inspired the team at Open House to take their experience and learning to a new location, moving the festival to Bangor in 2013.



# The Problem

Bangor was a failing town with little to entice the community and boost the local economy.

15 years after establishing the Festival in Belfast, the founders moved Open House to their hometown of Bangor 15 miles along the coast from Belfast. In recent decades Bangor had become one of many failing seaside towns, with a declining retail sector, growing social and economic deprivations, and a local population disconnected from its town centre and seafront. Bangor had effectively become a dormitory town for Belfast, with locals commuting to the City for work, shopping and leisure activities.

Since its founding, the Festival has always had a nomadic persona, never having a permanent office or location. Programming revolved around pop-up events organised at local open spaces, pubs, derelict buildings, and social centres. While the pop-up nature of events suited Bangor, there was no arts purposed building that could serve as a hub for the Festival. The challenge was how to create a festival hub, and more importantly, how to fund it.





# The Solution

## Open House wanted to use the arts and cultural festival to help regenerate the town of Bangor.

Studies have proven that arts and culture can help keep towns alive and thriving. Festivals, in particular, can help to create a strong identity for local communities to gather around. For example, The Galway International Arts Festival creates a vibrant scene and draws foreign visitors annually, transforming Galway into a hub of culture for two weeks a year. Not only is this a massive boost to the local economy, but Galwegians take a huge amount of pride in hosting this international event.

The team at Open House wanted to create something similar. The Open House Festival works to bring together artists, businesses, and local communities to boost the local economy, and create positive social impact. The main drive is to bring the heart back into the town centre and reposition Bangor as a modern seaside town with a strong grassroots movement to draw cultural tourists. Fáilte Ireland identifies this particular segment as 'Culturally Curious'.

'Culturally Curious' audiences look to find new places to experience landscapes, history, and culture. Studies show that this segment seek an authentic destination and an immersive experience, and are interested in all aspects of what a town or city has to offer.

Over the last six years the Festival has been steadily building a solid foundation for Open House in Bangor, even without an arts purposed building to act as a focal point.

The festival team discovered the Court House, an iconic Victorian listed building, on a prime site on Bangor seafront right in the town centre. The Court House was originally built as a bank in 1866, the year after the railway came to Bangor. This period was the beginning of the Victorian heyday which brought tourism, commerce, and opportunities to the town. From mid-1860, Bangor was renowned as the biggest seaside town in Northern Ireland, and probably the largest on the island of Ireland. At the time, Bangor was referred to as the 'Brighton of Ireland' with similar proximity to Belfast as Brighton is to London. The area would also attract tourism each summer from all parts of Scotland.

In 2013 the building was decommissioned and became derelict. Open House started exploring the possibility of using the building as a permanent home for the festival, a steady office space, and a year-round venue for arts and cultural activities including theatre, comedy, film and food programmes.





# The Strategy

## Using Ticketsolve and Data to create a Funding plan to restore and develop the Court House in Bangor.

As a registered charity, Open House aims to acquire the Court House through Community Asset Transfer, also known as CAT. This will be the first transfer of its kind in Northern Ireland where Open House will be given the building for zero cost in return for turning it into an asset for the local community of Bangor.

The team applied to the Heritage Lottery for funding to restore and develop the Court House. Critical to their applications were two factors:

- A commitment by Open House to raise a portion of the required funds themselves.
- Demonstrate local engagement with the project and a significant social return on investment.

In order to create a strong business plan and submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the first step for Open House was to process and collect audience data.



You have to have a very strong and simple idea that people can buy into, or you could really damage your reputation if you do fundraising incorrectly



Alison Gordon  
General Manager





### Analysing Audience Data With Ticketsolve

Analysing their audiences through Ticketsolve, Open House identified that 50% of their audience members are outside the proximity of Bangor and 7% of their audiences arrive from outside of Northern Ireland.

Open House also ran a series of bespoke reports to get an overview on audience information and also finer, more detailed reports on audience demographics.

### Gathering Data with Ticketsolve's Mailchimp Integration

The Festival team also gathered data through surveys of customers, local businesses and volunteers, using Ticketsolve's MailChimp integration to create a direct link between MailChimp and SurveyMonkey. Open House were then able to determine a whole range of indicators about their audiences, including age, displacement, accommodation needs, marketing impact, and total spend while visiting the festival the previous summer. They were also able to gather important feedback on the overall audience experience. Nearly 1,500 past Festival attendees responded, giving Open House plenty of data to consider. The data revealed that attendees spent an additional £38 per person on top of their festival ticket, that 94% said the Festival made them feel better about Bangor, and that 91% of people would have stayed at home, or done something else outside of Bangor, if they hadn't been at a Festival event.

“

Ticketsolve is integrated across all we do, website listings, ticketing, communication with our customers and stakeholders, and its linked into our marketing and linked into our business planning

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Kieran Gilmore  
Director





# The Results

## Open House raised over £70K through fundraising.

Fundraising was vital in order for Open House to fund the restoration of the former Court House.

An arts focused, central HQ for Open House, based in the Court House, would significantly advance the objectives of the festival. A central premises would allow Open House to create an accessible cultural and creative hub for the community, and help develop local engagement and civic pride. It would also help Open House overcome practical challenges such as a space for training their team of 100 festival volunteers and providing a home for their 80-member festival choir.

By providing cultural events for the local community and creating excitement around tourism for the culturally curious, audiences have developed a real passion for Open House Festival. The fundraising campaign offered audience members the opportunity to support a festival which is contributing to the rich arts and cultural scene developing in their communities.



“

Bangor has stunning natural assets and beautiful landscapes, yet local people had become disconnected from their town centre and fallen out of love with their seafront... the town had fallen into a spiral of decline. Arts and culture can create new local connections, and pride and business and economics can follow

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**Alison Gordon**  
General Manager



With two-thirds of revenue generated through ticket sales, Open House was able to gently prompt their audience members to consider donating through recommendations on Ticketsolve. Open House also created a fundraising page on Ticketsolve to drive donations through the box office.

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When we looked at other crowdfunding options we were delighted we could do this through Ticketsolve as it was totally integrated, we had complete control, and it was a much cheaper option

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Kieran Gilmore  
Director



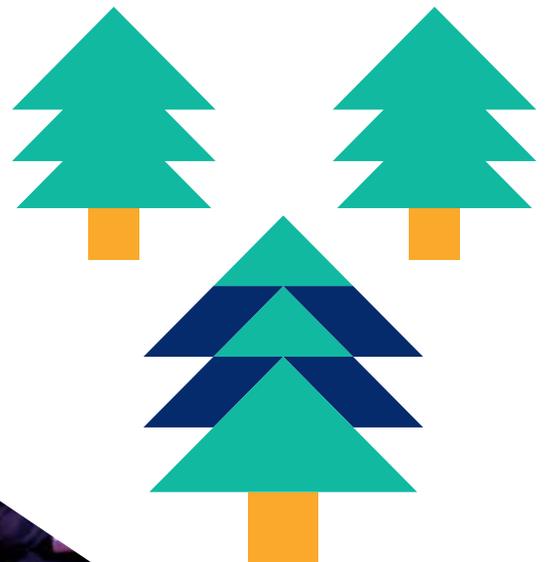


# The Future

Open House will be able to increase the number of year round cultural events to further encourage regeneration in the town of Bangor.

The team at Open House were delighted with the results of their initial fundraising campaign, which helped them secure support from Heritage Lottery and other funders to finance a development phase for the project. During this 12 month period they have been able to finalise architectural plans, apply for planning permission and develop their business plan for the full restoration of the building. They will shortly be applying to Heritage Lottery for the bulk of the money needed for restoration, with their crowdfunding acting as partnership money and evidence of local buy-in to the project. They hope to start building works this year, with the restored building opening by the end of 2020.

As part of the CAT, Open House must ensure that cultural wealth is invested back into the local economy. They currently work with over 100 local businesses and implement a Festival Friends Scheme where retailers offer a discount to Open House Festival ticket holders. The festival offers an inclusive remit and encourages involvement by all; from hairdressers and hardware shops, to florists and fishmongers.





# Thank you

We would like to thank the entire team at Open House Festival for their help in pulling this case study together. It's great to have them as part of the Ticketsolve Community and we look forward to helping them grow even more in the coming years.

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