



# Poplar: The local context

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TRILOGY



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# Introduction

The concept of a university’s ‘civic mission’ is becoming increasingly important in today’s social and economic landscape. A civic mission refers to a university’s commitment to actively contribute to the social, economic, and cultural development of its local community. It involves using resources, research, and partnerships to address community needs, foster wellbeing, and create positive, tangible impacts. Republic Education Campus, with its strategic location, resources, and influence, has the potential to play a pivotal role in community prosperity and neighbourhood revitalisation. Although many of our tenant universities are relative newcomers to East London, universities based at Republic are uniquely positioned to uplift the surrounding area and improve the lives of local people.

Republic is dedicated to cultivating strong, mutually beneficial relationships between the campus and local community stakeholders. We are committed to effective engagement with the local community, aiming to foster partnerships that benefit everyone involved. Part of this work involves supporting our tenants to engage meaningfully with community initiatives, ultimately contributing to positive social value.

To create real impact, universities must embrace their civic role. This could mean delivering targeted skills training, partnering on social projects, or using research to address local challenges. Being based at Republic offers a clear opportunity for universities to lead positive social change, reduce inequalities, and uplift the entire community in which they are based. Effective civic engagement is transformative.

This report aims to help universities understand and define their civic role within the Poplar community. By highlighting key areas of local relevance, it guides Republic’s academic institutions towards impactful, place-based initiatives, fostering a deeper understanding of opportunities for meaningful engagement. Whether through volunteering, community research, work placements, or bespoke civic initiatives, Republic’s tenant universities have an opportunity to form equitable partnerships that drive positive change in Poplar.



## Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide universities with a framework to better understand and address the needs of the Poplar community. It will focus on three key areas: education, community development, and health and wellbeing.

By analysing socio-economic challenges and cultural dynamics, the report aims to guide academic institutions in tailoring their outreach and engagement strategies to foster meaningful and sustainable improvements. This approach enhances the relevance of university initiatives, ensuring alignment with the unique characteristics and priorities of the local community.

## Note on data sources

All statistics cited in this report are based on data from the Nomis 2021 Census Area Profile. This report, derived from the 2021 Census, provides a comprehensive overview of demographic, socio-economic, and community characteristics specific to Poplar. It serves as a foundational resource for understanding local dynamics and informing strategic engagement initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

### Key insights

The report identifies significant challenges in Poplar, including:

- Educational underperformance
- Economic disparities
- Health inequalities

<sup>1</sup> You can access the Nomis 2021 Census Area Profile here: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E09000030,E92000001>





## Introduction to Poplar

This section provides an overview of Poplar, including its socio-economic context, cultural significance, and the unique challenges faced by the community.

Poplar, located in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets, has a rich industrial history shaped by the East India Docks, which attracted a diverse population due to labour demands. The decline of the docks led to economic challenges, necessitating regeneration efforts. Poplar is also notable for its cultural significance as a centre of working-class movements, such as the Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921, which led to significant tax reforms. Architecturally, it features important post-war housing developments, including the Lansbury Estate, showcased during the Festival of Britain in 1951.

Despite recent redevelopment, Poplar continues to face significant challenges, including high unemployment, low educational attainment, and socio-economic deprivation. These issues are juxtaposed with the wealthier areas of London, emphasising social inequalities. The community also grapples with affordable housing and the impacts of urban regeneration, which have sometimes displaced long-standing residents.

Culturally, Poplar remains vibrant and diverse, maintaining a strong sense of community rooted in its working-class heritage. Despite ongoing challenges, the area’s legacy of resilience and struggle for social justice remains a core part of its identity.

## Objectives of the analysis

The objectives of this analysis are to provide a foundational understanding of the community in Poplar and identify areas for potential engagement.

The target audience for this report includes academic institutions, local businesses, and community organisations that can use the findings to inform strategic planning and enhance community engagement. This report is primarily intended for the universities based at Republic, to help incorporate the findings into their civic engagement activities.

Additionally, it serves as a resource for community organisations entering partnerships with these institutions, offering a foundation for aligning their initiatives with identified needs and opportunities in Poplar, and supporting funding applications. The report also aims to inform the strategic direction of the Campus Experience Team, particularly in maximising social and civic impact within the local area.



# Historical and cultural context

Poplar possesses a rich yet turbulent history, profoundly shaped by its industrial origins, wartime devastation, and the intricate social dynamics that have since unfolded.

## Industrial beginnings

Initially, Poplar emerged as a thriving industrial hub, largely due to its proximity to the East India Docks, established in the early 19th century. These docks attracted a diverse, predominantly working-class population engaged in dockside industries, factories, and ancillary trades. This influx of labourers laid the groundwork for Poplar's identity as a vibrant, though frequently struggling, community.

## The Poplar Rates Rebellion

One of the most significant moments in Poplar's history occurred in 1921 with the Poplar Rates Rebellion. Led by local councillors, including George Lansbury, the rebellion protested the unfair taxation policies that disproportionately burdened the poor. The councillors' refusal to levy these taxes, even at the cost of imprisonment, eventually led to significant reforms in local government finance. This event solidified Poplar's reputation as a centre of working-class activism and community solidarity, elements that have continued to define its social fabric.

## Impact of World War II and post-war redevelopment

The onset of World War II brought significant destruction to the area, with extensive bombing campaigns particularly targeting the docks and adjacent residential neighbourhoods. The resultant devastation left large portions of Poplar in ruins, exacerbating an already severe housing crisis. The post-war period saw Poplar become a focal point for urban redevelopment, characterised by the construction of expansive housing estates and brutalist tower blocks. Prominent among these developments were the Lansbury Estate, named in honour of George Lansbury, and Balfron Tower, designed by the architect Ernő Göldfinger. Although initially celebrated as exemplars of modernist urban planning, these structures quickly came to symbolise social neglect, with their imposing designs fostering a sense of isolation and alienation among residents.



## Transportation infrastructure and its consequences

The complexity of Poplar's urban landscape was further intensified by the introduction of major transportation infrastructure, such as the A13 and the Blackwall Tunnel Approach, which intersected the area. These thoroughfares created both physical and social barriers, fragmenting communities and restricting mobility for many residents. The environmental consequences, including heightened noise and air pollution, have further contributed to the deterioration of living conditions in the area.

**Docklands Light Railway and Canary Wharf.** A significant turning point for Poplar occurred in the late 1980s with the construction of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) and the subsequent development of Canary Wharf. The DLR enhanced connectivity, linking Poplar more effectively with central London and beyond, while the rise of Canary Wharf as a global financial centre introduced new investment and employment opportunities. However, these developments also served to exacerbate existing social divisions. The gleaming towers of Canary Wharf stand in stark contrast to the enduring deprivation in Poplar, highlighting pronounced economic disparities.

## Contemporary challenges and cultural resilience

Despite ongoing regeneration efforts, Poplar remains one of the most deprived areas in London. The community continues to grapple with significant income inequality, substandard housing conditions, and pervasive social isolation. The construction of iconic landmarks and the area's proximity to Canary Wharf have done little to bridge the socio-economic divide between the affluent and the impoverished. For many residents, access to the new economic opportunities remains limited, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and marginalisation. Culturally, Poplar retains a diverse and resilient character. The district's rich history, from its industrial beginnings to its significant role in the labour movement, is still reflected in community landmarks such as Chrisp Street Market, the first purpose-built pedestrian shopping area in the UK. However, the community is also marked by the challenges of navigating a fragmented urban environment, where physical barriers and socio-economic inequalities continue to shape daily life.



# Demographic overview

Presents key demographic data, focusing on the population's age distribution, diversity, and socio-economic status.



## Population density and age distribution

Poplar, situated within Tower Hamlets, is part of one of England's most densely populated boroughs, with a population density of 11,615.1 residents per square kilometre, somewhat lower than the Tower Hamlets average of 15,702.9 residents per square kilometre.

Poplar, with 8,068 usual residents, shows a distinct population profile, leaning towards a younger demographic compared to broader borough and national averages.

The median age in Tower Hamlets is 30, making it the youngest area in England and Wales. In Poplar Ward specifically, the age distribution reveals that 25.8% of residents are aged 0-15, notably higher than the borough average of 19.7%.

### 1. Young children (0-15 years)

Poplar has a higher proportion of young children compared to Tower Hamlets and the national averages. Specifically, 7.5% of Poplar residents are aged 4 years and under, higher than the Tower Hamlets average of 6.2% and the national average of 5.4%. Additionally, 8.0% are aged 5-9, which is higher than both the borough (5.7%) and national (5.9%) averages. Poplar's 10-15 age group also stands out, comprising 9.1% of the population, well above Tower Hamlets (6.7%) and the country (7.2%).

### 2. Youth and young adults (16-24 years)

While Poplar has a relatively high percentage of young people aged 16-19 (5.7%) compared to Tower Hamlets' 4.9% and England's 4.6%, the 20-24 age group (8.9%) is slightly lower than Tower Hamlets' 10.3%. However, it remains higher than the national average of 6.0%, underscoring the area's youthful population.

### 3. Young adults (25-34 years)

This age bracket dominates both Poplar and Tower Hamlets, with 22.9% of Poplar's population falling within this age range, though it is slightly lower than the Tower Hamlets average of 27.5%. However, both figures are markedly higher than the national average of 13.6%, reflecting a significant concentration of young adults.

### 4. Adults (35-49 years)

The proportion of residents aged 35-49 is nearly equal between Poplar (22.6%) and Tower Hamlets (22.5%) and is above the national average of 19.4%. This balance suggests that Poplar mirrors the borough's structure for this age group.

### 5. Older adults (50+ years)

Poplar's older population percentages drop considerably compared to national averages, with only 1.2% aged 75-84 and 0.6% aged 85 and over, in contrast to 6.1% and 2.4% respectively at the national level. Tower Hamlets also has a low percentage of older adults, slightly above Poplar's but still below national norms, at 1.6% for ages 75-84 and 0.7% for 85+.

Overall, Poplar displays a young, family-oriented demographic with high proportions of children and younger adults compared to both Tower Hamlets and national figures, reflecting a vibrant, youthful community with fewer older residents.

Poplar has a slightly higher proportion of male residents compared to both Tower Hamlets and the national averages. Of Poplar's 8,069 residents, 50.7% (4,092 individuals) are male, and 49.3% (3,977 individuals) are female. This male-leaning gender split is slightly more pronounced than in Tower Hamlets as a whole, where the distribution is 50.2% male and 49.8% female. Nationally, the balance tips the other way, with 51.0% female and 49.0% male.

This trend in Poplar may reflect broader urban dynamics where certain areas, especially younger, denser neighbourhoods, can show slightly higher male populations compared to national demographics.





## Ethnicity, identity, and religion in Poplar

### Ethnicity

Poplar is marked by significant ethnic diversity, with a notably high proportion of residents identifying as Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh, accounting for 58.0% of the population, a substantial contrast to Tower Hamlets' 44.4% and England's 9.6%. The Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African community represents 8.9% of Poplar's residents, slightly higher than the borough's average of 7.3% and notably above the national average of 4.2%. White residents make up 25.7% of Poplar's population, considerably lower than the Tower Hamlets average of 39.4% and England's 81.0%. This demographic data highlights Poplar's distinct ethnic composition within both the borough and national contexts.

### National Identity

The majority of Poplar's residents identify with a British identity only, representing 62.5% of the population, aligning closely with Tower Hamlets (57.9%) and England (56.8%). Notably, Poplar has a high proportion of residents with a non-UK identity (25.3%), which is similar to Tower Hamlets (26.5%) and significantly above the national figure of 10.0%. This underscores the area's role as a cultural hub for diverse communities, including a mix of UK and non-UK identities.

### Religion

Religious affiliation in Poplar is predominantly Muslim, with 54.4% of residents identifying as such, a significantly higher proportion than Tower Hamlets' 39.9% and England's 6.7%. Christianity follows as the second most common religion, with 19.8% of residents, lower than both Tower Hamlets (22.3%) and the national average (46.3%). Those identifying with no religion make up 16.4% of Poplar's population, which is lower than the Tower Hamlets average of 26.6% and England's 36.7%. This strong representation of the Muslim community highlights Poplar's unique religious landscape within the context of the borough and country.

Overall, Poplar's population is distinct for its young, ethnically diverse, and religiously varied composition, setting it apart from both Tower Hamlets and broader national trends.



# Socioeconomic indicators

## Income levels and economic disparity    Child poverty

Poplar shows clear economic challenges compared to both Tower Hamlets and national averages:

**High dependence on social housing**  
Nearly half (48.1%) of Poplar’s households are in socially rented housing, well above England’s 17.1%.

**Low home ownership:**  
Only 19.5% of households in Poplar are owner-occupied, lagging behind both Tower Hamlets (25.7%) and the national average (62.3%).

**Limited access to high-paying jobs:** Poplar has a lower proportion of residents in professional roles (25.0%) than Tower Hamlets (31.5%), with only 10.2% in senior management roles, compared to borough and national averages of 13.3% and 12.9%, respectively.

**Over-representation in lower-skilled jobs:**  
Elementary occupations make up 11.6% of employment in Poplar, well above Tower Hamlets’ average (8.1%) and national levels (10.5%), highlighting a concentration in lower-paid, manual jobs.

**Underemployment in key sectors:** Only 7.1% of Poplar’s residents work in skilled trades, a figure that falls below the national average of 10.2%, and only 14.8% hold associate professional roles, below the Tower Hamlets average (17.9%).

This paints a clear picture of the disparities in Poplar, showing an area with high reliance on social housing, low home ownership, fewer residents in high-income roles, and a workforce concentrated in lower-skilled occupations.

2 (Lords Library: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/child-poverty-statistics-causes-and-the-uks-policy-response/>)  
3 (Trust for London: <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>).

Child poverty remains a pressing concern in Tower Hamlets — it has the highest rate of child poverty after housing costs among all London boroughs. Nearly half (48%) of children are growing up in poverty in Tower Hamlets, compared to 30% nationally and just 12% in Richmond upon Thames.<sup>3</sup>

Although specific data on child poverty in Poplar Ward is not available, families with dependent children make up 39.4% of households in the area, significantly higher than the borough average of 26.6%. This suggests that many families in Poplar could be facing similar socio-economic pressures as seen across Tower Hamlets. Given the broader context of high child poverty rates in the borough, these figures underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to alleviate poverty and address the underlying economic challenges faced by families in Poplar.

The demographic and economic landscape of Poplar reflects the broader complexities of Tower Hamlets, marked by a young and diverse population confronting significant financial and social challenges. Understanding these indicators is crucial for developing strategies that effectively address the needs of Poplar’s residents, particularly in the areas of education, employment, and overall wellbeing.







Employment rates

Poplar’s employment challenges are highlighted by its economic activity rates. The employment rate stands at 53.3%, which trails behind Tower Hamlets at 58.7% and the national figure of 55.7%. Unemployment in Poplar is also notably high at 5.9%, compared to 4.7% in Tower Hamlets and just 2.9% in England.

Poplar has a considerable proportion of economically inactive residents—36.8% compared to 32.6% in Tower Hamlets and 39.1% nationally. Of these, 12% are occupied with home or family care, double the national figure (4.8%) and well above Tower Hamlets’ 8.4%. Additionally, 4.6% of Poplar’s population is long-term sick or disabled, slightly exceeding the national rate (4.1%).

Poplar’s workforce reflects limited participation in high-skilled sectors, with only 25% in professional occupations versus 31.5% in Tower Hamlets. Managers and directors also make up a smaller share (10.2% compared to 13.3% in Tower Hamlets). Additionally, 11.6% are in elementary roles, higher than Tower Hamlets (8.1%) and England (10.5%), indicating a reliance on lower-skilled jobs.

This profile shows Poplar’s employment landscape remains challenging, with lower rates of economic participation and a higher dependence on support roles, domestic care, and limited access to high-skilled employment pathways compared to the broader borough and national trends.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment in Poplar underscores the socio-economic challenges faced by the community. The proportion of residents with no formal qualifications is 20.3%, significantly higher than the Tower Hamlets average of 16.2% and higher than the national figure of 18.1%. This highlights the pressing need for educational support and pathways for skill development in the area.

In terms of higher education, 40.1% of Poplar residents have Level 4 qualifications or above, which is below the Tower Hamlets average of 50.3%, indicating a gap in higher educational attainment compared to the broader borough. By contrast, the national average for Level 4 qualifications is 33.9%, meaning that while Poplar is above the national average, it still lags behind the rest of the borough considerably.

Further highlighting educational challenges, only 2.6% of Poplar residents have completed an apprenticeship, compared to 5.3% nationally, suggesting limited access to vocational pathways. Poplar also has a notable percentage of residents with only Level 1 or entry-level qualifications (9.5%), exceeding the Tower Hamlets average of 6.8%.

These figures reflect an ongoing need to improve access to both basic and higher-level education opportunities to support the socio-economic upliftment of Poplar residents, particularly in comparison with broader borough and national trends.

Overview

● Poplar  
● National average

48.1%  
17.1%

Households in socially rented housing

53.3%  
55.7%

Employment rate

20.3%  
18.1%

Residents with no formal qualifications

7.1%  
10.2%

Residents working in skilled trades

5.9%  
2.9%

Unemployment

19.5%  
62.3%

Households that are owner-occupied

Conclusion

Poplar’s history is characterised by contrasts—between growth and decline, wealth and poverty, isolation and resilience. The area’s evolution from a thriving dockside community to a symbol of urban deprivation underscores the complex social dynamics that continue to influence Poplar today.



# Educational landscape

Universities at Republic are uniquely positioned to contribute to local development and enhance their civic roles, aligning with national priorities for higher education. With their expertise, networks, and community engagement potential, these institutions have the opportunity to support the socio-economic and cultural development of Poplar and Tower Hamlets.

Three strategic areas where universities could play a significant role locally are educational aspiration, business and community development, and health and wellbeing. These areas reflect well-documented local challenges, particularly in relation to educational outcomes, access to economic opportunities, and public health. Addressing these priorities through targeted collaboration could build on the community’s existing strengths and unlock new opportunities for residents. This report aims to facilitate early-stage discussions on how universities might expand their civic contribution and develop partnerships that generate sustainable, place-based impact.



## Adult education and skills development

Poplar’s educational landscape is supported by a range of schools and institutions that offer both traditional and alternative pathways for learning. While primary and secondary schools generally perform well, with many rated as outstanding or good, there are ongoing challenges in closing attainment gaps and improving outcomes for all student groups.

Adult education and skills development programmes, provided by institutions like New City College, City Gateway, and the Idea Store, play a vital role in enhancing employability and supporting lifelong learning. However, there is a need to further expand these opportunities to ensure that all residents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can access the education and training they need to succeed.

## Educational needs in Poplar: School and student performance

Local schools in Poplar face several significant challenges that impact student outcomes. While institutions such as Woolmore Primary and St Paul’s Way Trust School have achieved “Outstanding” ratings from Ofsted, there are persistent issues that require attention. Notably, attainment levels in core subjects like English and mathematics remain below national averages, particularly at the secondary level, where schools like Langdon Park struggle to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.

Furthermore, high absenteeism can contribute to elevated dropout rates and hinder academic progress. These challenges are exacerbated by the socio-economic context of Poplar, where high levels of deprivation influence both student performance and school resources.





## Access to higher education

Barriers to higher education for students in Poplar are multifaceted. Socio-economic constraints play a critical role, with many families facing financial hardships that limit their children’s educational aspirations. Additionally, a lack of awareness regarding higher education pathways and financial aid options hinders students from pursuing university degrees. Academic preparedness is another concern, as gaps in foundational skills can limit local students’ chances of securing university places. Gender norms and cultural expectations within some communities may also influence higher education participation.

## Business and community development

The Poplar business ecosystem is both diverse and challenging, comprising established community markets like Chrisp Street Market as well as modern developments near Canary Wharf. This dynamic environment presents unique opportunities and obstacles for small enterprises striving to thrive in a competitive space.

### Challenges:

Challenges include elevated rental costs due to the proximity of Canary Wharf, significant competition from larger, well-established retail chains, and limited access to finance—especially for small and minority-owned businesses.

## Health and wellbeing

Poplar residents face several public health challenges that mirror broader trends in Tower Hamlets, such as disparities in healthcare access, elevated rates of mental health issues, and preventable lifestyle-related health conditions.

### Challenges:

#### Healthcare access

Marginalised groups experience considerable barriers to accessing timely and quality healthcare services, which is further exacerbated by linguistic, cultural, and economic factors.

#### Mental health

High prevalence of anxiety, depression, and other common mental health disorders is linked to socio-economic inequalities, inadequate support services, and community pressures.

#### Lifestyle health issues

Rates of obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and other lifestyle-related health problems remain high due to factors such as poor diet, high smoking rates, and limited access to healthy food options.





# Bridging community assets with institutional resources

The organisational structure at Republic is designed to place Republic at the core of a collaborative ecosystem, with universities benefiting from both proximity and shared purpose. At the heart of this model is the Republic Social Impact Manager, positioned as the crucial connector between co-located institutions. By centralising communication and partnership facilitation, Republic ensures that university initiatives are not only aligned but also mutually reinforcing. The aim is to make these partnerships greater than the sum of their parts by fostering a unified approach. This approach enables institutions to tackle local challenges, pool expertise, and jointly leverage opportunities that they could not effectively address in isolation.

In this way, Republic acts as the catalyst that amplifies individual efforts, helping all partners achieve a larger, measurable positive impact in the local community.

Through strategic collaboration, Republic's tenant universities could become powerful catalysts for local development—bridging community assets with institutional resources to drive meaningful socio-economic change. By engaging with local businesses and charities, enhancing employability, and addressing health disparities, universities could foster long-term, co-created solutions that promote sustainable local development. These initiatives would not only enrich students' educational experiences but also generate lasting impact, creating a robust framework for community empowerment.

This report marks the beginning of a broader consultation process. We invite tenant universities to begin conversations with Republic's Social Impact Manager to explore potential areas of collaboration. These early discussions will lay the foundation for a working group, bringing together universities, community organisations, and other stakeholders to co-design impactful, place-based initiatives.



## Role of Republic's Social Impact Manager

The Social Impact Manager at Republic plays a key role as the conduit through which universities coordinate their efforts, ensuring cohesion and maximising impact.

Without this centralised role, there is a real risk of fragmented initiatives that may lead to duplication of work, diluted results, and difficulties in tracking or measuring impact.

Instead, the Social Impact Manager facilitates collective goal setting, regular communication, and structured collaboration. They also provide support with monitoring and evaluation, helping partners establish shared milestones, track progress, and measure outcomes. This ensures that initiatives remain focused and deliver tangible benefits to the community.

By ensuring coordination and measurable outcomes, the Social Impact Manager helps universities avoid isolated efforts and strengthens the collective impact of all initiatives based at Republic.





Implementation plan:  
Short-term actions

Immediate engagement

In the initial phase, the Social Impact Manager at Republic will seek to establish connections with our tenant universities, onsite charities, businesses, and government bodies such as HMRC Courts to explore areas ripe for collaboration. We will adopt a co-production approach to this work, expecting that targeted programmes will arise from these efforts. To this end, we have avoided making specific strategic recommendations in this document.

Monitoring progress

As part of this approach, Republic will provide ongoing monitoring and evaluation support to ensure that all initiatives are achieving their intended outcomes and adapting to community needs. Partners are encouraged to collaborate with Republic on developing clear goals and measurable indicators to track impact effectively.

If you're ready to collaborate or want support in monitoring, evaluating, and amplifying your impact, contact Republic's Social Impact Manager at [community@republic.london](mailto:community@republic.london).

Long-term strategies

Sustained collaboration

Moving forward, our aim is to build long-term partnerships with local stakeholders, ensuring that programmes are sustainable and continuously adapted to meet evolving community needs. This could involve ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms, regular joint planning sessions with community leaders, and integrating community engagement goals into the strategic plans of all partners involved.

Our focus will remain on creating responsive, adaptable programmes that deliver real benefits for the local community while aligning with the priorities of each participating institution.



By following this implementation plan, we can make a significant and lasting impact on the educational, economic, and health outcomes in Poplar, Blackwall, and Aberfeldy, fostering stronger, more resilient communities.



# Republic's bespoke monitoring framework for civic impact

Republic's THRIVE framework, developed in partnership with Forever Consulting, offers a comprehensive approach to evaluating civic impact. This bespoke monitoring framework is designed to help universities track and assess their local civic engagement efforts, providing clear, measurable indicators that align with Republic's commitment to creating thriving communities. The THRIVE framework focuses on six key dimensions of a thriving community, including resilience, wellbeing, and economic sustainability, ensuring a holistic approach to measuring impact.

The framework was created using best practices from leading social impact methodologies, drawing on guidance from the HM Treasury Green Book, the HCA Additionality Guide 2015, and the Cabinet Office Guide to Social Return on Investment. Social value monetary proxies have been sourced from reputable databases, including the HACT UK Social Value Bank and Office for National Statistics. This ensures that all impact measures are aligned with widely recognised standards, providing universities with a robust framework for reporting and evaluating their civic contributions.

Republic's THRIVE framework offers robust qualitative and quantitative measures to ensure consistency in reporting and evaluation. This allows universities to align their impact measurement with national best practices, ensuring that all initiatives are accountable, transparent, and directly connected to community outcomes. Republic supports universities in using this framework to deliver tangible, measurable benefits to the local population.



The National Lottery Community Fund defines a thriving community as one where people are enabled to live fulfilling lives, are connected to and support others, and are involved in issues that affect their community.

What Works Wellbeing and the National Lottery Community Fund, 2019  
Understanding Thriving Communities Report





## Challenges in civic impact reporting for universities

According to ‘Capturing and Enhancing the Impact of the Civic University: Current thinking, issues and challenges’ published by Sheffield Hallam University (Julian Dobson and Ed Ferrari, 13/05/2021), universities face considerable difficulties in measuring and reporting the impact of their civic engagement activities. These challenges stem from a lack of clear, consistent metrics, difficulty in gathering reliable data across diverse initiatives, and a struggle to demonstrate the tangible outcomes of long-term community projects. The report states that “league tables or assessments of universities’ economic impact currently fail to capture either the breadth or the depth of universities’ civic engagement”. This indicates a significant problem with current evaluation methods, which tend to focus on economic benefits, rather than wider social impacts. These measurement issues can lead to fragmented reporting and inefficiencies in data collection, making it difficult for universities to effectively showcase the value of their civic partnerships.

By streamlining these processes, Republic not only saves universities time but also ensures that their efforts are being tracked in a way that demonstrates real impact for local communities.

## How Republic can support universities

Republic’s THRIVE framework addresses these challenges by offering a ready-made framework, enabling universities to track their civic impact in a streamlined, efficient manner. By partnering with Republic, universities can save valuable time and resources typically spent on setting up and managing evaluation systems. Republic will manage the evaluation and reporting processes, ensuring that universities can focus on delivering impactful community projects while Republic handles the monitoring and assessment.

Republic’s team can support universities with the following:

- **Comprehensive reporting**  
Using the THRIVE framework
- **Ongoing monitoring**  
To ensure continuous improvement and impact measurement
- **Time and cost savings**  
By taking the lead on data collection and reporting
- **Expertise in civic impact evaluation**  
To align with university and community goals





# Republic’s THRIVE framework defines a thriving community with the following six key features:

1. Tolerant, inclusive and welcoming

A community where discrimination and inequalities are proactively addressed, and diversity is celebrated.
2. High quality, health promoting, local environments

A community with spaces that promote health and wellbeing, fostering sustainability and biodiversity.
3. Resilient, caring and interconnected

A community where members support each other, participate in local decision-making, and drive meaningful change.
4. Individuals’ wellbeing

A community that enables individuals to develop skills and confidence, with a focus on mental and physical health.
5. Vibrant

A community that is bustling, animated, and where people take pride in their belonging, with regular events and celebrations.
6. Enterprising and sustainable local economy

A community where people have access to meaningful work and local businesses are nurtured and supported.





Republic’s Social and Civic Impact strategy offers **SUPPORT** to local organisations, universities, and residents by:

- Providing **SPACE** for local projects, both short and long term
- UNDERSTAND** local needs through consultation and collaboration
- Creating **PARTNERSHIPS** that drive collective impact
- Delivering **PROJECTS** to meet community gaps
- Creating **OPPORTUNITIES** for employment and skills development
- Using **RESOURCES** to catalyse change
- Providing **TIME** and expertise to engineer lasting community benefits

Capturing and Enhancing the Impact of the Civic University: Current thinking, issues and challenges. Sheffield Hallam University. Written by Julian Dobson and Ed Ferrari, published 13/05/2021. [Understanding-Thriving-Communities-reportV5-9Oct19.pdf](#)

SUPPORT



to THRIVE







# Support and development opportunities

In 2025, we intend to focus on three key areas: educational engagement, community development, and health and wellbeing. To advance these efforts, we will support universities based at Republic to:

1. **Leverage collective strengths:** At Republic, we provide a unique platform for universities to identify and complement each other's strengths, creating powerful partnerships that drive innovation and growth.
2. **Engage with local stakeholders:** Utilising Republic's established stakeholder networks will ensure sustained dialogue and impactful co-creation of initiatives that address real-world challenges.
3. **Set measurable goals:** Republic's expertise in impact reporting can help universities set clear, actionable goals for engagement and outcomes.
4. **Use an agreed framework for collaboration:** Republic provides a structured, results-driven framework for ongoing collaboration, with robust governance systems in place to oversee the implementation and regular review of activities.
5. **Align with educational outcomes:** Republic is committed to integrating community-based learning into curricula, where possible. We work closely with universities to align student volunteering and internship programmes with local organisations, enriching student experiences.

6. **Foster innovation and entrepreneurship:** As a hub for enterprise and innovation, Republic can help universities expand existing incubator and accelerator programmes, supporting local entrepreneurs and fostering new solutions to local challenges through mentorship and collaborative initiatives.
7. **Contribute to local economic development:** By leveraging Republic's local networks, we can support universities in reviewing procurement practices, prioritising local suppliers, and developing employment pathways for residents and graduates, creating a stronger local economy.
8. **Address environmental sustainability:** Republic is committed to environmental sustainability. We provide resources, expertise, and partnerships to improve local environmental quality, share best practices, and work on sustainable solutions with local businesses and organisations.
9. **Promote cultural enrichment:** Republic actively promotes cultural engagement by making its facilities and events accessible at no cost to local community groups. This sharing of space fosters relationships that make it easy for our tenant universities to collaborate with grassroots community organisations on cultural projects, celebrating local heritage and diversity and adding value on both sides.

Our initial focus areas are flexible and may evolve as we collaboratively develop our work with universities, local partners and key stakeholders.



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# Conclusion

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By working together with the support of the Social Impact Manager, organisations at Republic can establish themselves as key contributors to a hub for community impact, harnessing the collective power of the campus's universities to drive meaningful local change. This collaborative approach will not only benefit the area but also enhance the educational experience of students, contribute to the broader mission of each institution involved, and set a new standard for collaborative, place-based university engagement.

If your institution is ready to contribute to building a better, more equitable and sustainable community in Poplar and Tower Hamlets, get in touch with Republic's Social Impact Manager at [community@republic.london](mailto:community@republic.london).



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TRILOGY



TRILOGY CAMPUS