

A THOUSAND
LOST AND FOUND STORIES
A GUIDE TO RUNNING
DIGITAL HERITAGE WELLBEING PROJECTS





A picture is worth a thousand words. An object can tell a thousand stories...

Engagement with Heritage can have a hugely positive impact on our physical, social and mental wellbeing. This guide will help you to prepare and deliver your own project, based on the learning from our successful project.

In your project, inclusion is vital.

You must aim for everyone to have a positive experience. **Research is key.** Learn about the participants you want to benefit and about the themes you want to address. Set clear outcomes for your project before you begin. Use these to track success or shortcomings. Some things will go brilliantly, some things will not. That's ok. Run a pilot if you can – and evaluate it. Get feedback, learn from this and adapt.



If, like us, you are running work in partnership with community groups, then get to know your partners. **Walk in their shoes.** Understand who they are and what they bring to the table. You will work better together as a result...

The world of Health and Wellbeing can be a minefield. If you are going to make a positive difference you need to understand. Words can be very important. Ask your partners what the **right words are.**

Wherever possible take this advice from the community itself. If you want to gain people's trust, show them that you **listen** to them.



Technology.

Our project happened in a pandemic, so took place entirely online. This meant we needed to use technology where we would usually work in person. Vital to getting this right was **practise, practise, practise.**

We hosted a **welcome** session with each group before the course itself began. This gave them a chance to practise before the sessions began, and gave them a chance to meet.

Whatever your project, success will come about through shared contact, **person to person.**

Everyone involved, participants and staff, will have questions and doubts. **Put their minds at rest.**

Adapt and meet the needs of your groups and individuals. No two are the same. The welcome session will give you an invaluable insight into this.

Your technology may present some defined limitations for users. Understand this and react. Some online platforms work better for big groups. Some are better for smaller groups. Some are more interactive. Some allow genuine conversation, whilst others allow a leader to control the conversation. Decide which will work best for your project.

Whatever your project is, it is about **people.**



Our Project Started with a Simple Idea.

How could we use the objects hidden away in storage to start a **conversation** between people? And how could we allow this conversation between people to grow and develop until the connections had a power all of their own?

How could an image of a once-lost object find a relevance and impact in the lives and wellbeing of our community today?

We understood that we had two very important resources – archaeological **objects and experts** who could share the stories behind these finds.





“Whatever your project is, it is about *people.*”

The fragments a community leaves behind can reveal some essential truths about the lives they lived.

If you could choose an object to reflect your own life, what would it be?

The objects in our project were a stimulus to a deeper conversation.



This is where the wellbeing comes in. A Neolithic flint axe head can **spark a conversation** between strangers about their own lives and a new connection is born.

If archaeology is about understanding people from long ago through the objects we find, Lost and Found was about understanding the people we worked with through the objects they chose to **share** with us.





“As with all projects, the most important thing is that people feel Welcome And Safe.”

It is important to ask yourself not what is fascinating about this piece of Heritage, but rather ‘how can we use this piece of heritage to engage with the lives that we lead today’. What is the story that resonates?

The people in the room are the important bit. Not just the heritage.

People are fascinated by being given a glimpse behind the curtain. Who made this? How did they make it? Why did they make it?

Structuring Your Project.

If your project is **interactive**, and it almost certainly should be, then you must build in a flexible structure to allow for the participants to follow their own reactions. They will probably **surprise** you. They will react in unseen ways. They will have ideas. They will see **connections** you did not predict. Let this happen. This is where the project will be at its most successful.

You must give space for these creative responses, but also you must build bridges for those who need more support. As well as leading work, **watch and listen carefully.**



Part of our project was the setting of tasks to be completed at home. **Be good role models** in this. Staff should do these tasks as well.

The staff delivering the sessions are part of the group. They just have a clear role to deliver within that group. **The best deliverers make connections alongside the participants, not ahead of them.** An informal atmosphere can be a huge advantage in fostering a sense of belonging.

People admire and respect skill. Your staff will benefit from this if they openly share their **knowledge**.

As with all projects the most important thing is that people feel **welcome and safe**. Assess progress when it feels useful. Not just at the end. Learn from this and adapt.

Check in with people. Sometimes its enough to be there and silent. It is hard to predict what the impact of the work may be.

Smaller group numbers allow for more personal impact. **People get lost in a crowd** and it is harder to follow the flow from the group itself.

Think carefully about the length of your sessions.

Empower people to make decisions. Don't underestimate the power of this. In our project, participants (not experts) chose exhibits to form part of a new virtual museum.



When the work is drawing to a close, think about afterwards.

Could the group go on meeting? With or without you

Signpost participants to other opportunities or support.

Have a genuine interest in what the project has meant to them and what they will do next.

Celebrate successes.

Share your findings and successes with colleagues and other stakeholders.



Your project could be the beginning of another story...

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The Museum of the Lost and Found was a Digital Engagement Wellness Project run by Wessex Archaeology and Funded by Historic England.

The Museum can be viewed here:

<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/museum-lost-and-found>



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