Working with Society Collections

- A guide for community groups
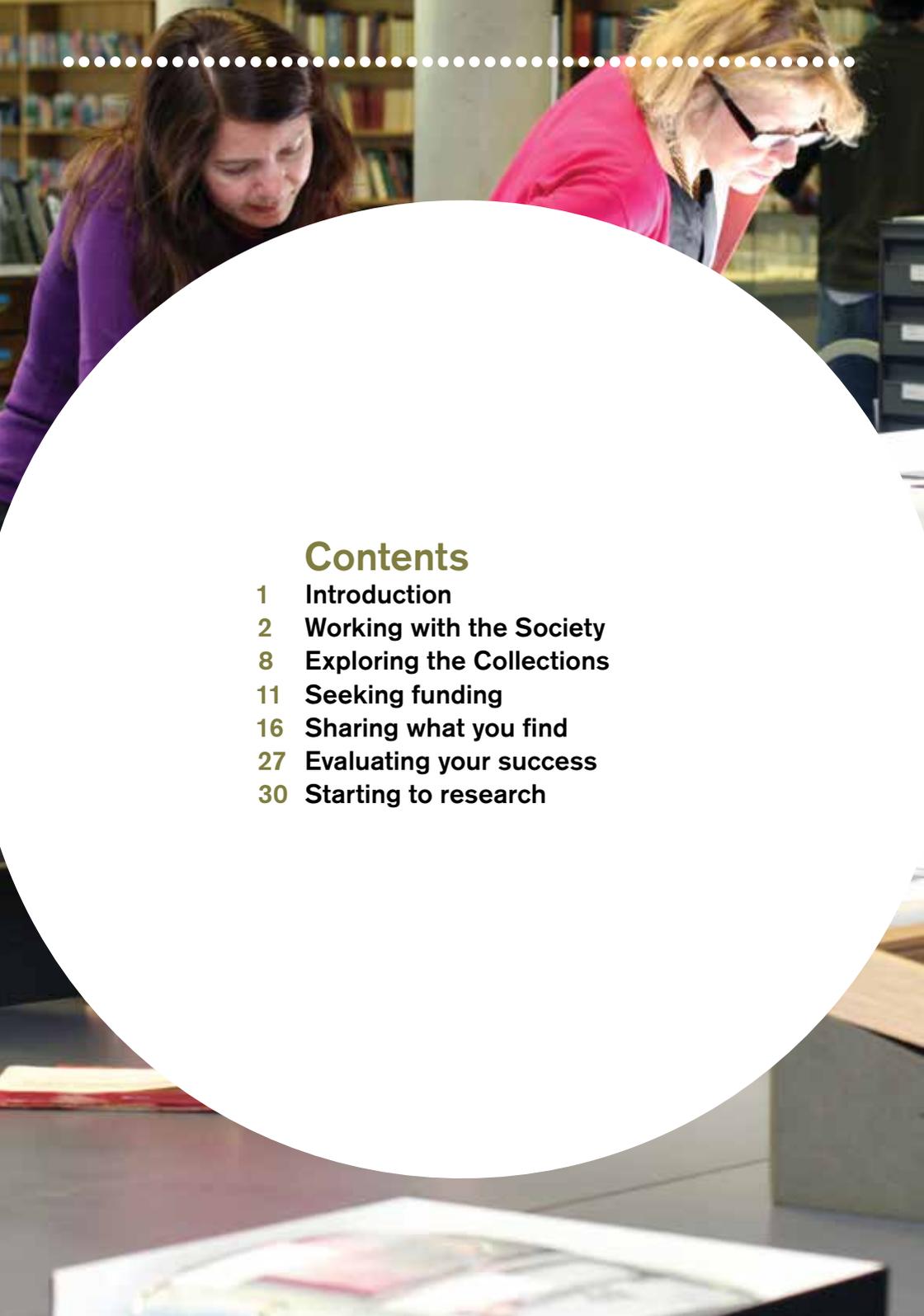
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Introduction

Over the past ten years, the Society has developed expertise in working collaboratively with community groups on projects based around our Collections. This guide aims to share that expertise and encourage more organisations to access and explore our Collections.

The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) holds one of the world's largest geographical Collections. Designated as being of national importance, the Collections comprise over two million items, including books, maps, manuscript archives, film, photographs and artefacts, documenting the people and places of the world over a 500 year period.

We welcome opportunities to work with community groups and other organisations that are interested in the wide range of places, cultures and environments represented in our rich visual and documentary holdings and want to use them to explore further their cultural heritages. In return, the Society, other users of the Collections, and the wider public benefit greatly from the interpretation and context offered by community representatives.

We hope the advice and information this guide contains, including how to start working with the Society and our Collections, will inform the development of many community-led heritage projects in the future.

Dr Rita Gardner CBE
Director
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Working with the Society

We welcome opportunities to work with community groups and other organisations interested in the wide range of cultures, customs and places represented in our Collections. Society staff can offer assistance in locating and understanding appropriate items for research purposes.

Start a conversation

Talk to us. Get in touch at an early stage to chat about your ideas and ask questions about the potential relevance of the Society's Collections to your plans. Society staff can offer advice and expertise from previous projects.

There is no obligation on either side at this early stage, so take the opportunity to explore how your project ideas might benefit from the Society's Collections, and vice versa.

Consider what you want to explore

It might be difficult to know what you want to explore in detail without having seen what is in the Collections. It does help, however, to have a general idea of how your project might be enhanced by items in a geographical collection. For example, you might want to:

- explore and celebrate the history of individuals/groups of people and where they lived, or travelled to and from
- bring people from different backgrounds together to learn about their rich histories and share them with new audiences
- connect people of different ages in order to share knowledge of a place across generations
- explore a series of events, and the way they shaped people, places or environments

- give a voice to people by recording their memories about a place or time (oral history), especially to share forgotten stories and cultural traditions
- help people to learn about the social and historical context of images or items, perhaps to recover lost knowledge or skills
- understand how places or environments have changed – through photographic images, maps or other forms of visual record
- look at how language changes our understanding of how places and people are described through time
- use items from the Collections to inspire individuals to re-visit their own personal collections.

You can find out more about using the Collections for research in **Exploring the Collections** on p8.

Sharing what you learn

There are many different and innovative ways of sharing what you find during your project. It is a good idea to start thinking about what you might want to do from the start. Whether your initial idea eventually leads to an online or physical exhibition, an event, a blog or something else which shares your project and its findings with others, the Society can work with you from idea to final delivery.

You can find out more about some of the different ways of telling your story in **Sharing what you find** on p16.

Project planning

It is often valuable to set out your aspirations and what you hope your project will achieve in a brief **outline project planning document**. You can then share this with the Society and others to gain **feedback**.

Your outline project planning document will develop as you receive feedback and understand more fully how you/your group can work with the Society's Collections. As it develops, you may discover that you also want to **consider other collections** which complement those at the Society or you may find that you want to use the Society's services and public spaces as a hub for other organisations and groups to come together.

Organising your project plan and developing an initial idea into a fully formed proposal can be challenging. However, if you are applying for funding your outline project planning document is likely to become the basis for your application to funding bodies such as trusts and foundations.

You can find out more about **Seeking funding** on p11.

The Society can offer support for the initial stages of planning your research and engagement with the Collections. Once your project is confirmed, we will also discuss with you the **level of support and resources** that the Society is able to provide at each stage of your project, so that everyone has a clear understanding of the commitments required, both in terms of in-kind and financial contributions.

If requested, a senior representative of the Society may be able provide a **letter of support** for projects which draw extensively on the Society's Collections and where we have agreed to work collaboratively to deliver aspects of the project. This letter can be used as a statement confirming the value of the planned project to potential funders and will include any costs that need to be covered by the project budget and any in-kind support that

the Society is able to commit. The letter will need to be prepared in line with the guidance and regulations of any funding body you are approaching.

Setting ground rules, and planning well

If you are successful in securing funding for your project and intend to use the Society's Collections in part or as the sole source of content for your project, it will be necessary to formalise the collaboration through a **Memorandum of Understanding**. Generated by the Society, but developed with input from your project team, this will help to avoid misunderstandings about what

In *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities*, representatives from partner community groups took part in a series of planning and research workshops that used items from the Society's Collections to stimulate discussion and guide the development of an exhibition.

both sides want to achieve and how much time or resource will be committed to the project. The process of drafting the Memorandum of Understanding together helps both sides to think carefully about what they want from the project and how they expect it to run.

In addition, **a clear and detailed project plan**, including a timeline for when visits, meetings or events relating to the Society's Collections will take place will help:

• the Society to plan its resources and offer the right support at the right times

• to ensure your project resources and funding are used to their

maximum potential
- to identify potential challenges or risks to the project's success.

If your project is funded by a trust, foundation or other funding body, then the Society will need to have a copy of the parts of the funding agreement which outline the services and financial commitments associated with us.

Understanding terms and conditions

You may find that your project introduces you to processes and terminology that are not familiar to you – from contracts to copyright regulations linked to the reproduction of content. The Society can help you with information, as it relates to our Collections, on how to record and acknowledge sources of content that you intend to include in your project.

Using the expert staff, and sharing your expertise

The Society's Collections team are used to dealing with a wide range of people from different backgrounds and are knowledgeable in their subject areas:
- they also understand the research process and are strong advocates for the sharing of knowledge about the Society's Collections
- they welcome initial pre-project visits to orientate and help people gain confidence in using the Collections and asking research questions
- their advice can help you to speed up your search process.

Similarly, please share what you know – your expertise is valuable to the Society's understanding of our Collections. Community projects based on the Society's Collections have delivered important new perspectives on aspects of our holdings, which in turn inform a richer shared understanding of the world's people and places.

More information:
Research on Display. A Guide to
Collaborative Exhibitions for Academics,
edited by Laura Humphreys –
www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/docs/staff/147183.pdf

National Coordinating Centre for Public
Engagement: Working with museums and
libraries – www.publicengagement.ac.uk/
do-it/partnership-working/working-with-
museums-and-libraries

Heritage Lottery Fund: The difference we
want your project to make – www.hlf.org.
uk/looking-funding/difference-we-want-your-
project-make

Contact details

If you would like to start a conversation with the Society
about using the Collections for your community project,
please contact:

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Exploring the Collections

The Society's Collections comprise over two million documents, maps, photographs, paintings, periodicals, artefacts and books, and span 500 years of geography, travel and exploration.

When searching the Collections to find resources for your project, it helps to think of items in the following groups:

• **Books and pamphlets** – also called monographs, these are published items covering the history and geography of places and environments. If you are an RGS-IBG member, you may borrow most books published after 1910.

• **Scholarly journals** – over 800 titles, including the Society's own journals, some of which have ceased publishing, many in languages other than English.

• **Images** – over half a million photographic prints, artworks, negatives, lantern slides and albums dating from the 15th century onwards.

• **Maps** – there are more than one million sheets of maps and charts, 3,000 atlases, 40 globes and 1,000 gazetteers, dating from 1482 to the present day. The map collection also includes carto-bibliographies, which are catalogues of maps.

 • **Archival records** – these are mainly unpublished items such as letters, diaries, manuscripts, research notes and meeting minutes.

• **Artefacts (objects)** – these include personal items owned

More information:
Society Collections
– www.rgs.org/
Collections

by travellers and explorers, scientific instruments, and cultural objects.

Each of these resource groups has its own search aid and the Collections team can help you with your search.

Visiting the Collections

The Foyle Reading Room (FRR) is the reading room for the Society's Collections and archives. A reading room is slightly different to a library – only a small amount of reference material is in the reading room itself, while most of the Society's two million items are in dedicated storage areas with closed access.

On the walls of the FRR you can find materials for browsing such as maritime navigation charts, town plans, country gazetteers (quick reference guides for places), travel guides, new books in geography, recent scholarly journals, and Society publications (journals and books).

Using the various catalogues and reference materials you can search for items of interest to your research. You then complete a form to request closed access items, which staff will bring to you. Some items might have restricted or special access (e.g. artefacts) while others might be viewed digitally online (e.g. images). Each group of similar items in the Collections has a Class Number, and each item in the Collections has a unique reference called a Control Number. When you request an item, you will need these details, together with the title, author and date of publication (where applicable). The Collections team can help you.

A record of items you request will be kept by the FRR team and this can be very helpful in tracking how your research enquiry has evolved.

Some of the items in the Collections are very old, fragile or rare. Please follow staff direction when viewing and handling items, using rests, weights gloves or supports as required. You will be shown how to take care of the items when you request them.

To use the search tools in the FRR, or to view Collections materials you will be asked to register as a reader and provide proof of identity: an RGS-IBG membership card or photographic ID (like a student ID or driving licence). If you do not have these forms of ID, it will still be possible for you to come in to use the Collections under the umbrella of the project by providing a passport or other photo ID.

Although access to the Society's Foyle Reading Room is free for RGS-IBG members, members of the public usually need to pay a small fee. However, this is always waived for educational users, including charity and community groups undertaking specific project work.

Seeking funding

Most funding organisations will provide a set of guidelines that:

- invite projects or activities of a certain type or provide a certain outcome/audience
- have specific requirements for the application process, including some rules about when and how to apply and what information to provide.

Read the guidelines carefully. Prepare each funding application like a job application – personalise your proposal to the funder's interests and questions.

You might find it helpful to consider the following points prior to preparing an application for funding.

Relevance: Develop a short set of bullet points that pay particular attention to what your project is, what it hopes to achieve, how collaboration (e.g. with the Society) will be of benefit, and how the grant will support all of those things.

Feasibility: Check your project supports the aims of the funder/grant scheme. Consider whether your project, as you've described it, is actually achievable by your organisation. How much effort is required? What resources are needed? Is your team, or network of supporters, able to deliver the project?

Timing: Consider the timeline for your project and test its feasibility. Have you allowed enough time for the various stages of the project to be completed? Is time built in to allow for any unexpected delays or changes to your project plan?

Competitiveness: Is your project good value for money? Why should it be funded? Consider the strengths and weaknesses

of your project: what questions or concerns might someone reading your application raise? How can you address these in your application or in the project approach?

Impact: What are the impacts of your project? How do you intend to evaluate the impacts in order to inform your funder of its success? What tools will you use to measure impact?

Stepping stone or completion: Are you applying for seed funding for a project, with the intention of further development in later, separate funding bids? Or will the project be completed in its entirety within the funding you hope to secure?

It can be very helpful to have a project partner or colleague read through the application before you submit it.

Estimating project costs

Any application for funding will need to have a clear budget for project costs. You should try to plan for all the costs that will be directly incurred as a result of the project, for example:
• paying someone to manage the project or help with your project accounts, or paying additional hours for a member of staff
• equipment and materials, e.g. photocopying or photography for copies of Collections items
• training
• travel and other expenses for volunteers, estimating your costs using the most economic method and time of travel
• running activities which engage people with your project
• producing materials to share with wider audiences – in print and online
• promoting your project to a wider audience
• putting on an exhibition or another activity to share what you learned

- a percentage of the total budget as a contingency, to cover any unexpected costs.

Remember that VAT may be charged on some of the service costs that you will incur and budget accordingly. It may be possible for you to reclaim all or part of the VAT from the project if your organisation is VAT registered. Your funder may expect to be provided with evidence of how its funds have been spent. It is essential for a treasurer or other similar figure to maintain accurate records of income and expenditure.

Estimating in-kind costs

In addition to cash expenditure during the project you will almost certainly be working with people and resources which are provided in-kind, where otherwise the cost of these services would have to be paid for.

Funding bodies will usually expect you to show what in-kind support you are proposing to secure to help to offset the costs of the overall delivery of your project. Many projects rely on the goodwill and support of volunteer supporters.

Volunteering

Volunteers can provide a great deal of help and support in the delivery of your project, not only as contributors to the research and shaping of the project's content, but also in providing on the ground assistance in practical matters and at any supporting activities or events.

In order to maintain a good relationship with your project volunteers, it is always advisable to create individual work plans for those who are working as part of your team.

These work plans should be agreed in consultation with your volunteers and should include the level of commitment made by

them to support the project, the length of the project and the expectations of both the volunteers and the organisation. It is good practice to have a written agreement with the volunteers who are supporting your project to ensure that you all understand the commitments being made.

Be sure to record the time offered by volunteers (e.g. focus group facilitators, project team members who are not staff of your organisation) as a non-cash or in-kind contribution towards the overall project budget.

Project partner in-kind contribution
As a project partner, the Society can provide a list of services and other contributions that we will make to support the delivery of your project. The financial value of these in-kind items should be included in your project budget, for example, the provision of a number of hours of dedicated work by a member of staff supporting the project.

More information:

Heritage Lottery Foundation: Grants programmes supporting groups undertaking projects that look after and share heritage – www.hlf.org.uk/looking-funding There is extensive advice, examples and templates to help you prepare an application. Many group projects working with the Society's Collections will qualify under the "Sharing Heritage" programme, but if you are planning an application for a different grant scheme, use the "Project Enquiry" service to check that your project is the right fit for the other funding opportunities.

Funding Central: a search tool for other funding and finance opportunities for voluntary organisations and social enterprises registered in England. Includes tools and guides supporting you to develop funding strategies – www.fundingcentral.org.uk Visit the help, FAQ and other information web pages for the grants you intend to pursue.

Arts Council England: Grants programmes supporting arts and culture for everyone – www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding There is a 'funding finder' to help you find the most suitable programme for your project as well as an extensive list of other potential funders.

Sharing what you find

There is a wide range of ways for you to use the Society's Collections to engage with your project participants and audiences and share what you find out.

Some of the engagement might be as part of the research and discovery process, as you explore the Collections to understand the items. This can help the Society greatly to interpret and give context to these resources. You might also choose to present what you have found to a wider audience, those already connected with your community group or the public, through an exhibition, printed materials, website or other format.

Opportunities you may wish to consider for your project could include:
• drawing out and highlighting a particular aspect of the Collections that has not previously been explored or understood very well, and raising awareness, e.g. through an event or publication
• undertaking research, and/or supporting others (e.g. volunteers, students) to undertake research, which could be for an individual image or object of significance
• hosting an "interpretation event" to view and discuss items held within the Society's Collections of interest to your group
• inviting an expert to give a talk about highlights within the Collections of particular interest to you
• staging an exhibition
• hosting study days or conferences where academics can engage with your group and the public
• creating a publication or printed document (e.g. a leaflet, handout, book), which might also be available electronically
• a performance or dramatisation
• adding information to, or creating, a website

- creating audio or video, for presentation on its own or in the context of an exhibition or other format
- a digital interpretation, tool or app, e.g. scanning a map and adding annotations for people to explore online, or a virtual tour of a neighbourhood
- providing specialist advice or information to others wishing to know more about the Collections
- developing a workshop or other teaching activity, e.g. for school or other groups, to accompany an exhibit or set of Collections resources
- getting involved in other projects taking place, adding your voice/story to theirs.

No matter which format you choose, be creative in considering ways to encourage curiosity and engagement with ideas, and to create connections between people and the stories you have found in the Collections.

Planning an exhibition

An effective exhibition:
- is written and designed in an engaging way for everyone to enjoy
- has a clear written and pictorial narrative which is easy to follow and understand
- recognises and may be partly shaped by its audiences
- is relevant to those audiences
- uses a variety of strategies to engage attention, from talks and events to social media
- meets the needs of more than one target group.

Developing an exhibition idea
- Sum up your exhibition in less than 30 words.
- Who are your target audiences?
- What is the narrative of your exhibition – its beginning, middle and end?
- What is the title and how will it attract your target audience?

- What ideas from your research will be included?
- Which perspectives will be represented? (Think about bias, sources, audience views.)

Start with the items used in your research – think about what pictures, documents or objects from the Collections can show or say to your audience. If you can tell a story without showing the copies of the items, an exhibition might not be the most appropriate format!

Analysing texts and images to be included
- Who created it? Why/for what purpose? Why has it been kept?
- What is your interpretation of the information it contains? Are there other interpretations?
- What other sources corroborate or refute this source?
- What story does the source tell? Is it part of a bigger story?

Writing text for exhibitions
- Use simple language to express complex ideas.
- Keep your text concise to aid clarity and hold attention.
- Use language appropriate to your subject and audience.
- Read text aloud and note natural pauses.
- Get feedback and refine.
- Consider how the text will appear as part of the wider exhibition design.

Selecting images
- Black and white vs. colour.
- Scene-setting vs. specific: Use of whole images vs close-ups, or both in combination.

- Range of sources/perspectives represented.
- Limits on use, e.g. does it make sense in isolation (away from other images); is editing allowed?

Referencing original source material, and copyright
- Permission must be requested from the copyright owner, whether this is the Society or another organisation or person.
- You must reference all original material, usually as part of the caption or near the image. Take advice from Collections staff about what information to include, and whether any additional thanks or credit is required by the owner/donor.

In *Making Freedom*, the Windrush Foundation brought together items from several different collections, including the Society's, to produce an exhibition that included audio-visual presentations and enabled visitors to delve deeper into individual stories of emancipation from slavery.

Captioning
- Will the captions be descriptive, informative, interpretative?
- Consider the size and location of captions in relation to images and to other text on display.

Design
- How much space do you have? What layout? Does it need to be portable or able to travel?
- Colours – visibility, relationship to images and text, overall effect.
- Font style and sizes.

Other decision making

- Keep in mind your 'big picture' aims for the exhibition and the images/items you have chosen to highlight while you decide the little things.
- Create a timeline which you will use as the basis for your planning, working back from the opening date and setting milestones to achieve along the way – always be realistic about the amount of time different stages of the exhibition production may take, so that you do not run out of time.
- Where will the exhibition take place? What health and safety/risk factors need to be considered? Will it be accessible?
- Who will set up the exhibition? When? How will it be transported and stored?
- Do you need to do any further fundraising? Is the exhibition fulfilling your funder's requirements?
- How will you advertise your exhibition and invite visitors?
- How will you record visitor attendance and their feedback?

There are professional exhibition design and build companies that can work with you on your project. Talk to the Society about companies we have worked with previously, but there are many others.

Writing brochures

It can be useful to have a document for people to look at or take away that explains your project and what you found. One format that delivers this well is a brochure (also called a pamphlet, flyer or leaflet), because it is a concise, visually appealing document that captures people's attention.

Getting started

- Gather ideas and examples from other projects and organisations.
- Brainstorm your own project – Who are the target audiences?

What would you like to tell them? How long do you have to create the brochure, and how much money do you have for design and printing?
- Choose a format – will your brochure be folded? How big will it be? How much space do you have? Will it be black and white or colour?
- Write an outline – what are the key topics and images you want to include?
- Create a logical sequence – put the topics and images in order to create a story. It might help to sketch this out on a piece of paper the same size as your planned brochure.

Layout
A typical layout for a brochure is double-sided A4 paper folded into three, though you can choose any size or format you think is best for your project. One example layout is following – the numbers indicate the order that the reader will see the pages.

Side one (outside)

Page 2	Page 6	Page 1
Project information	**Contact information**	**Front cover** *– include the project name and a striking image. Try to keep this simple.*

Side two (inside)

Page 3	Page 4	Page 5
Project information	**Project information**	**Project information**

The information about your project might include one or more of the following:
- who you are, what your organisation does
- what you are doing in this project
- how the reader can take part (e.g. view the exhibition, be part of the research)
- things you have found out.

Once you have your finished brochure design, talk to local printers about the most cost-effective way to print. Then, have a plan to distribute your brochures at events or via your project participants. Don't let them sit in a box unused.

Using websites and social media

The internet is the primary source of information for many people. It can be a fast and simple way to share your project in a wide variety of formats, from text, images and downloadable files, to audio and video.

A website can be used to provide information about your project while it is underway, and then to share what you find when it is finished.

Building a website doesn't have to be difficult or involve a professional web developer. You can use a range of free tools on the internet to start a blog, build a basic web page, or upload a video or audio, such as:
- Wordpress – for blog sites and websites
- YouTube – for video
- SoundCloud – for audio
- Flickr – for image galleries.

Getting started
- Who will create and maintain your web presence? If you want to make changes or add content, how will this be done?

- Will you have your own domain name? A domain name is a specific address you have chosen for your website, e.g. www.makingfreedom.co.uk. You will need to purchase the address for a set period of time (e.g. £7 to £15 per year, depending on the address you choose and how long you will need it for) and then link the domain name to your website.
- Do you need a web hosting service, or will you use free tools? A web hosting service is when an internet service provider hosts the files for your website on their server. This is sometimes needed if your website is developed by a professional web developer, or if someone in your project team has experience doing it this way. If you use free tools, like www.wordpress.com to develop your website, the web hosting is built in.
- If you have already produced other aspects of your project, e.g. exhibition panels, use the same design for consistency.

Preparing content for your website
- Who is the target audience for your website?
- What information do you want to share?
- What types of files do you have to share, e.g. images.

You should treat a website like an online exhibition and be careful about the text and images you choose to put on the website. Remember to think about what permissions you will need.

Social media
Social media can be used to encourage interaction between your audience and the exhibition or other outputs from your project.
- Twitter is good for sharing information quickly and widely on a regular basis, especially with younger people (aged 18 to 35). You can also re-tweet other work that is relevant to your project, and start conversations using hashtags (e.g. #makingfreedom).
- Facebook is good for encouraging discussion around a

topic or within a group, and you can share information in lots of different formats (images, web links, videos, text). You can also create events and ask people to 'Like' or 'Share' for you.

- LinkedIn is good for engaging with professional audiences, or people working in a particular organisation or sector.
- Blogging is a way to share information and updates without needing to have prepared all the content for a website. It can help people to find out about things coming up, or your reflections on work already completed.
- Instagram and Pinterest are good for researching and sharing images.

Teaching resources

Creating teaching resources can be a great way to encourage school students to engage with your project. Resources could take the form of:
- activity sheets that students fill in
- slide packs or images for teachers to show in class
- quizzes
- glossaries of ideas and words
- maps and diagrams
- 'time travel' guides and historical storytelling.

Teaching resources are most popular when they:
- are directly and clearly linked to the curriculum
- are suitable for a range of age groups (key stages) – if you can, make it clear which age groups your resource is suitable for

- contain a range of activities or ideas that can be used together or individually, for short or long periods of time
- encourage engagement and learning in different ways.

It makes sense to work with a teacher to develop teaching resources for your exhibition. If you do not know one, consider contacting the Society's schools team or your local school to ask if any teachers would be interested in taking part in the project.

Working with academics to inform research

Your project and what you learn from the Society's Collections may be of interest to researchers

By working with school groups and teachers, the Windrush Foundation was able to engage with young people directly. The Foundation used volunteers to act as guides for the *Making Freedom* exhibition, enabling students to ask questions prompted by the images on show.

working in universities, to inform their own research and teaching. Your community group or project may have subject specialists who can help to interpret and 'open up' Collections items in a way not seen or used before. Some tips for working with academics are:

- find a researcher or research group that shares a common goal or interest with you – you may encounter them in the course of your project or research. Work with people who want to work with you.
- try to create local connections; if it is a new relationship, face to face opportunities will help to create connections more quickly.

- get on and do things – start small and work up. You'll find that the relationship will develop once you start achieving things.
- be flexible – university processes can be bureaucratic. Similarly, some of your processes might not fit their standard procedures. Don't let this become stressful; be creative!
- encourage academics to consider their language when writing for your audiences – write things together so that everyone involved is engaged. Be willing to contribute to academic publications, too.
- use this as a training or development opportunity for staff or volunteers, exposing them to different people and relationships.

The Society might be able to help make connections, please ask.

Evaluating your success

If you receive funding to support your project you will be expected to report back to the funder about your progress and success. Putting a few simple evaluation measures in place before you start will make it easier to report on how you are making an impact.

You must first have a clear idea of what you are trying to achieve. In your funding application you will have been asked to describe your project's aims. When you write these, be sure to describe:

- why your project is needed (what need or opportunity are you seeking to address?)
- what you will do (in very specific terms, what activities is the grant paying for?)
- what difference you will make (what will have changed as a result of your project?).

Lessons learned along the way

If you have people in your project team who have worked on similar activities before, use their experience. Keep a note of things you learn along the way, e.g. when your timeline had to change, your costs were more or less than you expected, or you needed different resources or people involved. Noting these will ensure that the challenges and successes of your project can be used to inform future projects. You may also be asked by your project's funder to describe things you would do differently next time or advice for other groups embarking on similar projects.

Ideas for evaluation

Consider whether you want to capture feedback as you go, or at the end. It is likely that you will need to do a combination of both to capture a wide range of experiences.

Some evaluation questions you might consider are:
- what did people learn?
- what skills were developed?
- who volunteered time? How much? What did they do?
- what groups of people engaged with your project?
- what were their backgrounds? How did they engage?
- what attitudes or behaviours changed as a result of your project?
- what social/political/economic effect did your project have?
- did people enjoy it?

Once you have an idea of what you want to know, consider how you will measure and capture that information from the project team, participants and audience/visitors. You might end up using a range of formal and informal tools for feedback that are appropriate to different audiences (e.g. age, location, cultural background, level of education) in order to capture a variety of experiences. These might include:
- a record of attendance/participant numbers
- note-taking from conversations, discussions and focus groups
- visitor book comments at an exhibition, or comments on a postcard/Post-it note
- a web-based or email survey
- give written feedback
- a show of hands for questions posed to groups
- recording audio feedback via interviews or voxpops
- asking people to email you an image they took of your event/ exhibition and why they chose that image
- twitter hashtags and Facebook comments
- collective mind maps – e.g. on poster paper
- taking photographs (don't forget to get consent)
- asking participants to record their feelings at the start and end of their participation, e.g. by drawing a face (happy, sad, frustrated, confused, excited, etc)

• face to face surveys
(e.g. volunteers talking to visitors at an event or exhibition)
• token voting – ask visitors to place a plastic token in a jar to indicate agreement with phrases written on the jar, e.g. "I've changed my mind about something" or "I learned something new today" or "I'll share what I found out with someone else".

Some questions you could ask an audience:
• what did you enjoy most, why?
• what did you enjoy least, why?
• what do you think you will you remember six months from now?
• what did you find out today that you will you share with someone else?
• what have you learned about yourself today?

Don't forget: Gaining feedback should not overshadow the experience of participating or visiting – a light touch is most often better!

Starting to research

Define your topic

Start with your broad area of interest – is it a group of people? An event? A place? Type of object? Set of maps? What else? Then, narrow it down to a more specific topic. Make your research manageable by limiting the investigation, e.g. to a specific time period, geographical location, object.

If you haven't already identified a group of Collections sources that might help you in your topic, now is a good time to check what's available. Visit www.rgs.org/CatalogueSearch to start looking, or www.rgs.org/cataloguehelp to find out more about how to search the Collections. Society staff can help you to navigate the Collections.

Ask your question

Now you need to find a specific question or problem to answer using the sources. Starting with your topic, write a series of questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. Don't try to find out the answers yet – just think up at least one question for each, relating to your topic.

As you work through your questions, jot down any sources that you already know about that you think might be useful to help answer that question, or sources you might want to use (if they exist).

Once you have a list of questions, look for overlaps and common themes. Choose one or two that you want to research. Make sure your question is focused and clear.

Choose your sources

Use the Collections catalogue and finding aids to help you decide what sources you can use to research your question.

Make a note of these. Review your sources – do you think you will have enough information to answer your question?

What do you think you will find out from these sources? This is called making a hypothesis.

Collect your evidence

Request your sources and look at them. What evidence can you find that will help you answer your question? While you are collecting evidence, you should keep in mind:

- where did this source come from? Why was it created? Is it reliable? Is it accurate?
- does this source answer your question, or cause you to ask other questions?
- what is the best way to record this information?
- what information do I need to record about the sources themselves (e.g. catalogue references and control numbers)?
- what would I like to present to my audience?

Analyse your findings

Give yourself enough time to read things carefully. Let the sources "speak" to you.

Ask – how do these sources help me answer my question? Am I discovering what I expected to find, or is it different? While you are gathering evidence, pause regularly to think about your evidence and review your research plan. Do you need to change anything, e.g. look for other sources, change your question?

Present your findings

Go back to your research question. How does your evidence answer your question? What story is there to tell?

For example:
- what was your question?
- why was this of interest to you?
- what is the most interesting thing you found and why might other people also find this interesting?
- what was easy to find out?
- what was difficult to find out?
- what couldn't you find out?
- which sources helped you the most? Which didn't?
- what would you do differently next time?
- what would you do next?

Getting help

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask your friends, ask a librarian, ask other researchers, ask Society staff. Talking about your question and why it's interesting to you will help to make it clearer in your mind.
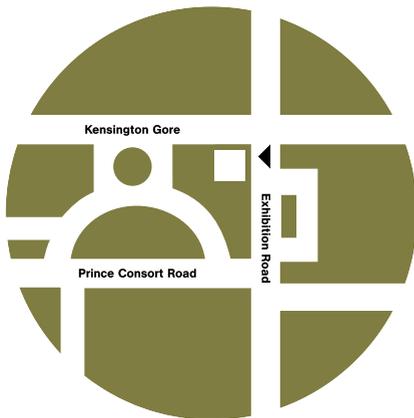
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