

Outreach to Ownership Evaluation Summary

December 2022



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Context



The overarching aim of the Outreach to Ownership pilot was, to contribute to a different view of community engagement in research.

Traditionally communities are viewed as audiences for – and beneficiaries of – research.

Increasingly they are participants. Historic England (HE) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) wanted this pilot to begin empowering them to be leaders and advocates in the field.



Outreach to Ownership' is a cross-border pilot research programme that explores approaches to inclusive community engagement across culture sector organisations in Scotland and England. Managed in partnership by hub partners Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland, the project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The pilot intended to lay the foundations for a national research Hub, providing long-term support for the GLAM sector.

Partner organisations across England and Scotland delivered five pilot community research projects alongside a capacity-building programme delivered by HE & HES between February and September 2022. Each project was bespoke in approach, research and audience, with partners seeking to answer research questions through consultation with their communities.



The Art House



The five community research projects were:

Building on History explored the potential of a co-created digital tool to recognise diverse heritage.

Everyone's Stories Matter undertook research that explored the obstacles and opportunities around managing community archives in Scotland.

Inclusive Island Heritage explored inclusive heritage engagement in Scottish island communities focusing on Skye and Shetland.

Makey Wakey sought to understand the impact of creatively using interim spaces in the Ridings Shopping Centre in Wakefield.

Bridging the Gap consulted on the barriers and solutions to sustainable community ownership of historic rural churches.

This summary shares the headline findings of the external evaluation undertaken by Bright Culture. Detailed evaluation can be found in the two accompanying reports.



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Headline
Findings

The O2O project has had extensive geographical reach across England and Scotland, enabled through a range of community partnerships and stakeholder support. A diverse range of stakeholders and communities were engaged through the five projects and their activities.

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Across the O2O projects over 440 people took part in 30 workshops either in person or online

159

A further 159 people responded to surveys

79

New or strengthened partnerships created with 79 community groups

652

The pop-up events and exhibitions were attended by 652 people

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Knowledge & Skills

The project has been a professional investment for partners and stakeholders. It has facilitated skills development and shared learning through project delivery and capacity building. Partners increased knowledge of community engagement, evaluation, and research. At the same time, stakeholders learnt practical skills such as surveying, web design and cataloguing.

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I've learnt a lot about evaluation, and all the other capacity-building workshops that the project has offered. It has been very helpful to me and I'm passing that on with the other work I do with community archives and heritage groups. Its hugely beneficial.

— Project Partner

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Hybrid Working

Communities value face-to-face, in-person interaction. But providing a hybrid model and online options for both partner and stakeholder engagement allowed for a wider geographical reach and increased accessibility.

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Community Engagement

It takes significant time, skill and trust to undertake community engagement, and within a short delivery period, this was very challenging. Projects were often successful due to working with existing stakeholders or community gatekeepers/connectors who facilitated sessions or reached out to communities, but this took work.

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Co-creation

Genuine co-curation is about sharing and questioning ownership and decision-making. It requires working in a bespoke way and is unpredictable. This can be intimidating and off-putting to people delivering and taking part if there is not enough time to develop skills, embed relationships and ensure engagement can be undertaken authentically.

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Co-curation/co-production has been emphasised during capacity building sessions, but it is very hard to do this in a meaningful way on such a short project without alienating people or putting too much of a burden on your communities to create things.

— Project Partner

It has helped further develop our community engagement and co-creation skills, and it has given us an opportunity to engage with some really creative and excellent organisations and work with HE and HES.

— Stakeholder

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Community Facilitation

Several partners trained and supported community group members to take on the roles of facilitators, which was very successful. In some cases, facilitators were given flexibility over small budgets, which gave real power and ownership to the communities.

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Community Benefit

Stakeholders and community groups valued being listened to, having opportunities to share ideas, and being part of bespoke projects.

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People have shared their views and opinions freely. Having facilitator-led sessions created environments where people felt more comfortable and able to be honest.

— Stakeholder

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Delivery Timescale

The timescale was short and squeezed the whole project, especially fitting in delivery over the summer when engagement with community groups is challenging. The timing also put people under pressure when committing to capacity building, particularly when people worked part-time.

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We have had to flex our staffing in order to meet the demands of the workshops, and we are lucky that we are of the size that is able to do this, but we recognise for some of the smaller organisations participating, that is going to be a real challenge. That being said, they have been very enriching, and we have felt we are operating in a very supportive environment.

— Project Partner

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The Hub Partnership

The relationship between HE and HES has been positive and functioned well. Working in partnership across England and Scotland has encouraged new delivery approaches and access to diverse expertise for the delivery partners.

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Capacity Building

The capacity-building support was an unusual, beneficial and valuable part of the project. It enabled geographically spread partners to collaborate and share experiences and learning. However, the time commitment was substantial for many partners and was challenging to balance with delivery, and some felt the offer needed to be more bespoke to needs.



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Community Fatigue

Some community groups receive regular engagement requests, which do not always feel sincere or aligned with their needs and can sour future relationships. In addition, groups are often voluntarily led by a few retired people with small resources, which can mean making decisions and communicating significantly differently to professional organisations.

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It feels like we've only just started... it feels like we've got a really good springboard to set off from, it was a short project, a pilot study, but it's got everybody talking, it feels like we're all on the same page now.

— Project Partner

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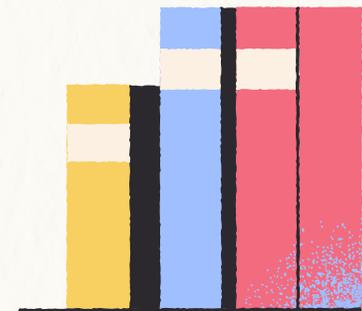
Evaluation & Reflection

Building in time and resources to continually appraise, reflect and learn has benefited both HE/HES and the partners. In addition, working with external evaluators early in the project ensured they were part of the co-design process, which contributed to the evaluation's effectiveness.

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Learning Environment

Projects partners shared that the consistent advice, support and safe space created by HE & HES and the project's structure was a highlight and a real asset to the project. The project started to explore the risk appetite for people to innovate and stretch.



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Project Structure

The distinct layered structure, with project funders, Hub Partners, Community Partners and Audiences was vital to the success of projects and the ability to reach and engage with local communities.

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Project Design

Project phasing of design, delivery and dissemination has been a strength and supported partners in developing their thinking and research focus.

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Application Process

The timescale for responding to the call out for projects was very tight, which meant initial ideas on how best to structure projects, in some cases, needed revising in the development phase.

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Aims & Objectives

It was a complex and ambitious pilot project, and the overarching O2O aims were challenging for partners to communicate with local stakeholders alongside their own project objectives.

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HE/HES's primary aim is ascertaining whether or not this is a successful model, while the partners' primary aim is the successful delivery of their project – everyone involved is invested in the success of the programme, and the partners have been very supportive of us as funders gathering and measuring the data we need.

— Historic England

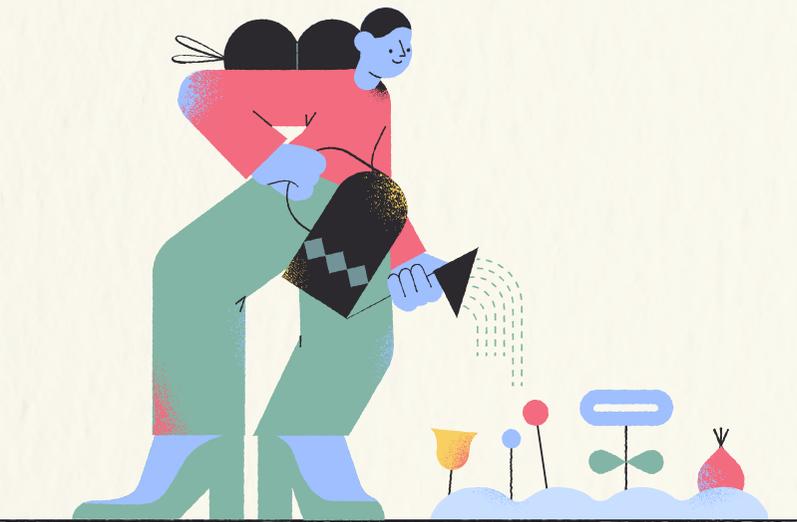
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Project Management

Situating the project within an organisation (Historic England), which had a pre-existing grant mechanism and the ability to manage financial functions and grant-giving with speed, skill and flexibility, was critical to the overall delivery

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Future



Time Frame

Time is the most significant constraint for delivery; more time is required for all delivery phases, from application to dissemination.



Context

Further guidance, case studies and a thematic approach could support the project application process.



Expectations

More clarity is required around the commitment needed for capacity-building during the tendering and the design phase.



Funding

Community research projects need flexibility and contingency built into budgets to deliver co-curated work successfully.



Infrastructure

The pilot project has demonstrated that a National Hub should be situated in an organisation with the ability and resources to manage financial functions, grant-giving, and professional development support with speed, skill and flexibility.



Professional Development

Responsive online resources, in person and online sessions and mentoring are all essential in upskilling and supporting partner organisations.



Community Engagement

A national hub needs to consider the sustainability of Hub Partners' relationships with the delivery Partners and their relationships with their communities.



Bespoke Delivery

A tailored, flexible and responsive approach is required when communicating and working with often volunteer-led community groups and an understanding of their specific constraints.



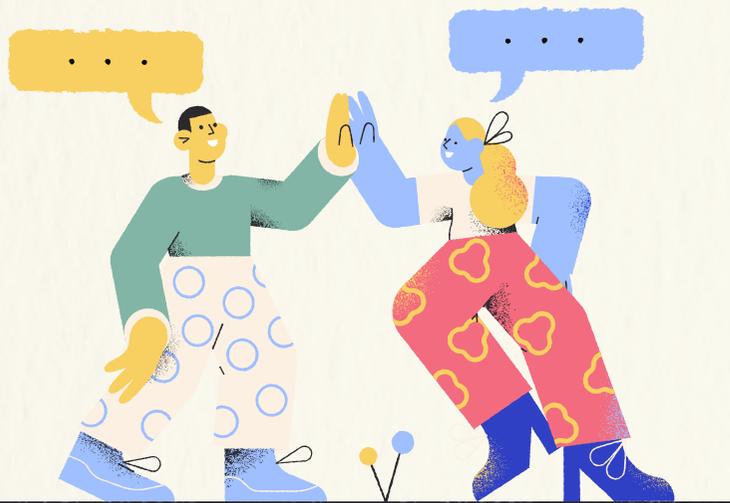
Co-curation

Ownership & responsibility are important elements when undertaking a co-curated approach. The building block for this is establishing trust, which requires time, authenticity and respect for people's needs.



Hybrid Working

Virtual online working can increase access and geographical spread but cannot replace people's desire to meet face to face, and the benefit of this, which needs to be resourced.



Digital Communication

Digital forums and communications have their role, but further testing is required to understand what would appeal to and be used by a majority.



Research Outputs

Support and exploration in creating creative toolkits and resources from community research that can be used to develop the sector.



Tracking impact

Build in time and capacity to track and revisit the impact of the pilot project on partners & stakeholders in 1-2 years' time.



Learning & Risk

There needs to be space in community research delivery for trying, failing and sharing learning, as this will help both communities and the sector move forward. An exciting part of this is openness and exploration of risk.



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