

Report on Archives and Sustainability

A partnership event for Archives in the region and the Heritage Lottery Fund

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to disseminate the outcomes of a recent event entitled 'Archives and Sustainability', held on Tuesday 7 November 2006, at the University of Central Lancashire.

The event was organised by MLA North West, in partnership with the North West Regional Archives Council (NWRAC) and the Heritage Lottery Fund North West Team (HLF). The aim was to enable archives to access HLF funding more successfully in the future by developing a new relationship between archives in the region and HLF, based on a better mutual understanding of each other's priorities and objectives.

2. Context

The context for the event and this subsequent report is MLA North West's vision and plans for working in partnership with archives to help drive further improvements and transform the archives sector into one which is sustainable and fit for purpose in the 21st century.

The recommendations from this event have been used to inform MLA North West's action plan for archives.

3. Summary of the event - Archives and Sustainability

3.1 Objectives

The objectives were to:

- To develop a better mutual understanding by HLF of the current needs of North West archives and by archives of HLF criteria and priorities, in the current climate of reducing budgets
- To identify the key barriers to archives accessing HLF funding
- To find solutions, individual, regional and national, to enable archives to access funding more successfully.

3.2 Format

The event attracted 40 archivists and managers with responsibility for archives, from across the region and from a range of types of archives. The list of participants can be accessed at [..17 Nov Attendance\Confirmed Attendees.xls](#)

The day was jointly managed by a team from archives, HLF and MLA North West and was split into three parts, as follows, designed to achieve the objectives set out above:

- Scene setting presentations by archives and HLF
- Informal break out sessions to aid mutual understanding, identify key barriers and find solutions
- Plenary.

Each break out session contained a mix of archives and HLF staff and members of the event managing team acted as facilitators and note takers.

4. Presentations

4.1 John Hodgson, Keeper of Manuscripts and Archives, John Rylands University Library.

John gave a taster of the range and depth of archive collections held in the region. He also summarised the regional priorities for archives, highlighting some of the key barriers to achieving those priorities and suggesting ways in which archives could work more successfully with HLF, for example through collaboration, partnerships across the sector and through strengthening relationships with communities.

4.2 Tony Jones, North West Regional Director, Heritage Lottery Fund.

Tony noted that the archive domain perceived itself as less successful than other domains / sectors. However, the domain had received almost half of all grants within the MLA sector and almost £25M, which was significantly greater than some sectors such as the natural heritage, though less than the £120M to museums and libraries. The North West has received just over £400M in total since 1994.

Three projects were highlighted illustrating opportunities in:

- developing storage and visitor facilities
- conservation, cataloguing and digitisation
- opening up collections to new users
- creating new archive deposits.

HLF budget is declining from a peak of £330M pa over the last 12 years. It will bottom out at £180M pa for approximately 3 years from 2009, before recovering to a steady £220M pa from 2011/12 – 2019. Tony made the point that this is still far more than was ever available to the heritage sector prior to the lottery and there was still a significant opportunity to support projects from the archive domain.

Both presentations can be accessed at [..\Delegate Packs\John Hodgson Presentation.ppt](#) and [..\Delegate Packs\Tony Jones.ppt](#)

5. Summary of break out sessions

Through facilitated break out sessions, archives and HLF:

- explored issues raised in the two presentations more fully,
- identified barriers to accessing HLF funding,
- suggested some solutions to overcoming those barriers.

5.1 Barriers

The main barriers were identified as

5.1.1 Resources - time money and expertise

- The workload involved in submitting a bid to HLF is perceived as being beyond the resources of many archives both in terms of staff time and expertise.
- Many archives lack of a professional archivist to develop a bid.
- There is difficulty in estimating the time and cost of submitting a bid.
- There is a lack of expert advice from the regional agency on bidding to HLF, due to MLA North West's changed functions. This service was previously available through a domain specific development officer.
- There are skills gaps in archives around advocacy to HLF on how archives can meet HLF criteria and public policy agenda.
- There are skills gaps in archives around fundraising generally.

5.1.2 Awareness and understanding of each other's objectives

- HLF case officers lack a broad understanding of what archives are as their expertise comes from assessing bids and there are relatively few archives bids to date.
- Expertise gained by individual case officers tends not to be shared across the team.
- Advice given by 'expert advisers' to HLF about archive bids is perceived as being inconsistent by some archives.
- There is a lack of awareness by archives of the scope of HLF funding for example the misconception that funding cannot be sought for specialist collections within public libraries and that HLF will not fund "small" organisations.
- Occasional changes to HLF's strategic plans result in altered criteria. This effects submissions and can lead to misunderstanding and potentially an unsuccessful bid.

5.1.3 Conflicting objectives

- There is some tension between HLF's priorities around access, widening participation and life long learning and archive priorities around conservation.
- Whereas archives see cataloguing as an essential element of some bids in order to enhance access, they perceive that HLF regard it as core work, not necessarily eligible for funding, therefore some projects have to be "forced to fit" HLF criteria.
- Some archives perceive that HLF asks too much in terms of access and that visitor targets are sometimes too ambitious. "Archives will never be a mass spectator sport."
- Archives perceive that HLF promote the use of historic buildings to house archives and this may not provide the best environmental conditions to preserve documents.
- A perception that there are conflicting voices amongst archives staff in the region, between those who are keen to modernise and the more traditional archivists and this is seen by some as "holding back" archives.
- There is some conflict between community and mainstream archives in terms of roles. Mainstream archives see the role of community archives as creating access not collecting.

5.1.4 Archives lack of status and influence

- Archives sometimes lack high level support within their organisation or local authority service. Staff are often junior within governing organisations, making it difficult to lobby for core funds or for support to make an HLF bid.

5.1.5 The process of bidding to HLF

- For large capital bids, there are some problems with the two-stage process. Archives feel that the boundaries between the work involved in each stage are not clear. The HLF Board's input comes too late in the application process and the site visit comes only after the stage 1 bid has been submitted.
- Not enough detailed pre application discussion is taking place with HLF, especially in view of changing HLF priorities.
- The online application form is perceived by some as problematic and requiring amendment.

5.1.6 Evidence of the public value of archives

- There is a lack of qualitative data on the public value of archives, specifically on the impact of archives on life long learning.
- What evidence does exist is not collected systematically or shared.
- In common with other domains, there is difficulty in accurately measuring digital access.

5.1.7 Partnership working

- There is a lack of partnership working across archives and between archives and other domains within the sector e.g. museums and arts which might enable consortium bids and generally aid the sharing of good practice on themes such as learning or audience development.
- Some archives perceive that there is a need for external brokering of partnerships and coordination of networks due to a lack of capacity and infrastructure in archives.
- Although cross domain working is regarded as potentially beneficial, there is a perception that in such partnerships, archives would be weak and archive priorities might be compromised.

5.1.8 Match funding

- Archives have difficulties securing match funding. In kind support is more common than cash.

5.2 Solutions and recommendations

The following solutions and recommendations were suggested to overcome these barriers

5.2.1 A role for North West Regional Archives Council (NWRAC) NWRAC in brokering partnerships:

- NWRAC could consider setting up an informal network or "learning set" of archives involved in HLF bids in order to facilitate structured peer support, the sharing of expertise and perhaps the development of consortium bids. The Capital Projects network is an example of a similar national network.
- An HLF project planning grant could be applied for by NWRAC and used to fund a project officer responsible for developing a bid, for example to extend

the Cheshire Tithe map project to others, using Cheshire staff as expert advisers.

- NWRAC could ensure that archives relationship with the regional HLF team and National Lottery Advisor are maintained and built on through regular contact. HLF regional staff could attend NWRAC meetings from time to time to update archives on HLF strategy and priorities.

MLA North West will:

- *Develop the MLA North West case studies database to showcase best practice in archives in the region.*
- *Consider the development of archive learning sets - Encourage archive practitioners to form or join special interest networks –to develop responses and share ideas and good practice across a number of areas. Initial support will be available from MLA North West to initiate these learning sets which will build on some of the existing sub regional networks with a view to these networks becoming self-sustaining and self-administering once established.*

5.2.2 Training and development

- There should be specific advocacy and fundraising training for archives staff brokered by MLA North West in partnership with NWRAC.
- There should be further training for HLF staff on the nature and work of archives including joint visits by archive and HLF staff to new archive buildings and services across the country. This will help to share information and build relationships outside the formal relationships between archive services and HLF.
- Specific training in bid writing was requested.
- Placements or secondments for HLF and archives staff in each other's offices was suggested.
- A follow up event should be held to build on the relationship between archives and HLF created through the Archives and Sustainability event to develop some of these solutions further.

MLA North West will:

- *Interpret the public policy agenda to demonstrate the ways in which museums, libraries and archives can make a unique contribution. We will communicate this to the sector and to stakeholders through a range of communication channels.*
- *Deliver a seminar programme for the domain - Archives in the 21st Century. Areas will include:*
 - *Alternative service delivery models and modernisation*
 - *Children and young people*
 - *Community engagement and audience development*
 - *Service development for smaller archives*
 - *Learning*
 - *Archival websites and on-line services*
 - *Internal advocacy for archives*

5.2.3 Volunteers

- More use could be made of volunteers to free up archivists' time.
- A bid should be made to HLF to support a regional volunteer co-ordinator; this bid should come from a consortium of archives.

5.2.4 Consultants

- More use should be made of consultants to provide elements of a bid, for example the audience development or training plan.

5.2.5 A role for HLF

- HLF are willing to get the necessary permissions to enable them to share with archives, the detail of successful bids.
- There should be a section on the HLF web site with exemplar applications and cost plans.
- HLF should target mailings more directly to archive staff, particularly within local authorities, to avoid mail only reaching Heads of Services.

5.2.6 Advice for individual archives

- Staff should make better use of HLF pre-application advice procedures. They should make contact with HLF early, ask for advice and be prepared to negotiate.
- Staff should attend all HLF training courses and those offered by the Archives Lottery Advisor.
- If within a local authority, archives staff should contact their Economic Development department for assistance with an HLF bid.

5.2.7 Cross-domain working

- Archives should work with and learn from the museum sector in terms of making holdings more accessible.
- Archives should learn from the museum sector in relation to advocacy. Over the last ten years museums have been successful in demonstrating the wider benefits of their collections and services in terms of community cohesion, value for money, income generation etc.
- Archives should use the improvement framework, Inspiring Learning for All as a self-assessment tool to drive improvement; in particular the Generic Learning Outcomes should be used more systematically to measure the value of archives to the public's learning.
- Archives should actively look at ways to work more closely with the North West Museum's hub. There may be a potential for partnership working to lever some of the funding available through Renaissance in the Regions.

MLA North West will:

- *Work with the wider MLA Partnership to undertake a national study – building on work already undertaken in the region - on the impact of archives on learning.*
- *Develop partnerships. We will work with the North West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries to establish a partnership with archives and opportunities for archivists to benefit from Federation professional development programmes around modernisation*
- *We will continue to explore opportunities for archives to benefit from other government funded programmes such as Renaissance in the Regions and the Strategic Commissioning (Cultural Entitlement) programme*

6. Evaluation

The evaluation of the event suggests that it was very successful in creating an informal opportunity for staff from archives and HLF to discuss in some depth, their different perspectives and objectives, in terms of accessing and granting funding. In particular participants reported it enabled some myths and misunderstandings to be dispelled and therefore some perceived barriers to accessing funding to be removed.

Most importantly, it created an opportunity for new relationships and partnerships to develop between archives and HLF staff and across archives in the region. MLA North West will continue to work with NWRAC and HLF in the coming year to act on the recommendations made in this report.

Chris Chadwick
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