



Highland Heritage Day 2024: Community Engagement & Heritage Volunteers

Successes and Challenges

Community Engagement

Successes:

- Hiring someone to be engagement officer. This means they have dedicated time and energy
- Knocking on doors in a small community
- Choose topic carefully. Find something really local and people will engage. Focus on local stories and topics
- Ask around – what’s the best way to get people to engage
- Organise a Get to Know Your Village walk. A good way to meet and make the first steps.
- Get schools on board. A good example from the Black Isle is where the school had a project to identify local issues of interest, and then could use local groups to help deliver. In this case the outreach was organised by the Highland Council to identify priority interests. The school responded, and having a local group then pick up on this worked well
- To engage with university-age people, work with UHI. If it is topic-based, project-based students will get involved.
- Gairloch Museum has a variety of initiatives to get people into the museum, e.g. a book group, coffee mornings, warm venue. Not necessarily heritage as focus, but this gets people in the door.
- Focus on winter activities to keep interest going through the winter months
- Approach non-heritage related local groups to come and give a talk i.e. Women’s Institute, Rotary, Women’s Aid etc
- Use films and photo exhibitions to get people interested
- Use community owned venues to put on events
- Engage with people with other hobbies or interests in the village to see if there is something that could link heritage and their interest i.e. book group, knitting group, golf course etc
- Putting on fun events i.e. Halloween event for children in a heritage venue
- Ask communities what they want in terms of heritage
- Creating activities that people can drop in and out of so there is no commitment
- Thinking about your organisation as a social enterprise i.e. how does your organisation support wellbeing and mental health – this can help with funding
- Co-create funded post to be shared between two related organisations
- Plan specific events out with the usual museum ‘themes’ – Garden day, Have a pint to support the Museum, etc
- Work with other community groups on a joint project or theme – mental health charities, men’s shed
- Look to events outside of the building itself – outdoor activities will encourage a different audience
- Engaging with local care homes to create activities for people with dementia or people who are no longer mobile
- Evaluating your event – post-it notes at event so people can leave quick, on the spot feedback
- Thinking creatively – if you don’t ask you don’t get



- Engaging with climate change/recycling to capture younger audience – link your event to this theme i.e. artichoke exploration lectures, historical recycling examples prehistoric standing stone to Pictish stone, coastal history projects
- Engage with creative community to put on historic creative workshops
- Putting together an engagement strategy
- Understanding the demographic of your community
- Centre a project around a strong local story that will engage all members of the community – need to make this accessible to tourists also
- Making your organisation reliable – if there are regular events the community will come and support you
- Open your premises (if you have them) up to the public for other uses i.e. welcome people to use toilets, warm space etc
- Think of events that could be taken into people's homes if they are not mobile
- Asking your volunteers for ideas on community engagement – different perspective

Challenges:

- If you want to hire someone, they need to be able to do fundraising
- Securing funding for paid post to start with
- Have enough people to share the load. Burn out if one person tries to do it all
- Personalities. This can be a major factor preventing engagement.
- Publicity – needs to be targeted and focus on topics/themes
- Need to keep engaging with community after a successful event and soon after to keep momentum going – this can be challenging
- Evaluating your event – resource to do this
- Perception of "heritage" to community
- Fear of community engagement by group – resistance or holding on to a project by the group or organisation
- Fundraising in general – where to start
- Wide geographical area that your organisation covers – do you stick to hyper-local events or spread out
- Connectivity issues in remote areas in relation to online events



Volunteering

Successes:

- Partnering up with another local group to share volunteers and recruit new ones for each group
- Remote volunteers – can use diaspora who have genealogical skills
- Volunteer celebration events and Open Days – bring a friend
- Being clear with your volunteers what is expected of them
- Being realistic of what time volunteers have and what skills they can bring to your group
- Ask volunteers what they would like to do
- Good volunteer training
- A volunteer mentor
- Youth Trustee to encourage younger people to volunteer and get involved
- Creating a volunteering plan
- Skills audit of volunteers
- Being part of local area volunteers day – all local charities and groups advertise what they have to offer
- Ask volunteers what their interests are, and try to match these with a job
- Go out to find people, don't wait for them to come to you, use word of mouth
- Instead of mentioning heritage, museum or archaeology, say we're looking for a website developer, or social media expert
- Focus on transferable skills that volunteers can use elsewhere or take forward
- Creating online volunteer roles
- Advertising for volunteers through local media, word of mouth and posters
- Tap into local tour guides for help, ideas and support
- Being flexible around when a volunteer can be available
- Giving volunteers a set list of tasks
- Celebrating volunteers' contribution with annual dinner, day trip etc
- Engaging with DYW (Developing the Young Workforce) - <https://www.dyw.scot>
- Succession planning
- Giving volunteers agency over their own projects and their own development in your organisation

Challenges:

- For the most part, we are small organisations, and as such approaches with creating and maintaining policies will not be the best way forward
- How to recruit younger
 - Outreach to schools – but need an approach that isn't piecemeal
 - Many young people don't have driving licenses. How to get them to venues without good public transport?
- Terminology can be a big turnoff. Archaeology, History, Heritage. But no one with any ideas on what to use instead
- Resource and capacity – does your organisation have people who can help co-ordinate volunteers
- Keeping volunteers interested is an ongoing issue
- Demographics an ongoing issue – aging volunteers and trustees
- Loss of key individuals with experience through retirement or death
- People feeling pressurised to stay on as volunteer either on Board or generally
- Having somewhere volunteers can meet or a focal point if no premises
- Succession planning