

Content Q&A preparation is critical to every stage



Recording a podcast episode with SWI members Maz Thorn, Janette McKirdy and Sandra MacArthur. Photo: Scottish Women's Institutes.

It's a big challenge to capture and share over a century of community history. Scottish Women's Institutes (SWI) CEO Diane Cooper tells us what she's learned from developing and delivering its unique heritage programme.

About the project

The [SWI Heritage Project](#) documented the organisation's role across all parts of Scotland since 1917. Over two years, SWI volunteers preserved historical artefacts and collected oral histories at risk of being lost, including the often-unheard stories of women from rural areas.

These histories were shared and made available through digitising archive materials, recording a podcast series and building a new website. The website will continue to share the SWI's plans for celebrating its heritage as the largest women's social movement in Scotland.

What did you find most challenging about your application and how did you overcome these challenges?

“It was our first time applying for funding, so we had so much we wanted to say about our project, which made it tricky to stay within the word limits. We also felt a real sense of responsibility to get it right and explain our work clearly.

“To manage this, we focused on the key messages we wanted to get across and made sure each answer really said something important. We wrote and rewrote our responses, asking colleagues and friends to read them and give feedback. In the end, the process helped us understand our project better and gave us more confidence about how to describe what we do.”

What would you recommend future applicants spend more time on when developing their application?

“Reading [the application guidance](#) before you start. It really helps to understand what the funders are looking for and how your project fits with their aims. It’s also worth looking at [other successful projects](#) to see how they’ve explained their work and what made their applications stand out.”

What one piece of advice would you give to someone applying for funding for the first time?

“Prepare as much as you can before you start writing. Get in touch with your local Heritage Fund team as early as possible, ask questions, go to any workshops or information sessions they offer and speak to people who have successfully applied in the past.”

“Take
elevator



Host Jennifer Reoch, SWI National President Mary Burney and members Elizabeth Hay and Margaret Dick record a podcast episode. Photo: Scottish Women's Institutes.

What one thing do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began?

"Just how complicated the practical side of heritage work can be, especially when dealing with both physical and digital archives. We didn't realise how much space, time and money it would take to store and organise everything properly.

"It's been a big learning curve, but a valuable one. With help from experts and partner organisations, we now have a much better understanding of how to manage and protect our materials. It's made us more prepared for the future and given us confidence that our growing archive will be looked after properly for years to come."

What's been the most rewarding thing to come out of your project?

"Seeing how much our members have enjoyed being part of the project. Our remote volunteers, who have been cataloguing years of SWRI magazines from their homes, have really thrown themselves into it. They've loved reading the old articles, often laughing at pieces that show how some things never change!

"It's been amazing to see how connected people have felt to our history and to each other. Everyone involved has said how rewarding it is to contribute to something meaningful and lasting. The project has brought people together, built friendships and reminded us all how powerful it is to share stories and preserve our heritage for future generations."

This is part of [a series of Q&As with successful grantees](#) – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.



efyd mewn ...

[The restored pub has become a focus for socialising and a hub of key community facilities. Photo: Ty'n Llan.](#)



[key to community project success](#)



[A community group build benches as part of the Lost Peatlands project. Photo: Neath Port Talbot Council.](#)



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[Karen and the project team gather to celebrate the launch of the Maroon Mile at the Heart of Midlothian Memorial Clock, in the city's Haymarket.](#)

[**Grantee Q&A: mapping community history in the heart of Edinburgh**](#)