The story of us: heritage and communities

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Research from Esme Ward, Clore Fellow, into how to best support communities in creating new heritage activity.

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An enquiry by Esme Ward, Clore Fellow 2016-17.

Esme Ward, Head of Learning and Engagement at the Whitworth and Manchester Museum conducted her placement on the Clore Fellowship with the Strategy and Business Development Team at HLF. She examined how HLF could change its funding approach to support communities to catalyse new heritage activity.

The Story of Us: Heritage and Communities seeks to support and influence HLF's next strategic framework and contribute to the wider institutional and sector-facing conversation about the role, value and future of heritage within communities.

The research involved interviews with community leaders, practitioners and thinkers, and highlights case studies from other sectors and funders. There are three main findings and associated propositions for change:

1. Be more relational

It calls for a more relational approach to help HLF be more inclusive. It proposes that HLF develop a relational approach to grant-giving which supports ideas within communities, even if not fully formed. It also describes how small amounts of money can make a big difference and that application processes should be simplified.

2, Focus on the local

Increasingly in UK there is an interest in place-based investment and local decision making. This research explores the implications of this and argues that it is time for ambitious thinking at HLF about 'localism' and place-based funding.

3. Find and support powerhouse people

Mavericks, visionaries, activists and "powerhouse people" drive communities and organisations forward. The report profiles their impact and explores how HLF might better support them and brings together a list of people shaping the future of heritage. The report profiles heritage as a progressive force within society, draws upon a diversity of thinking and experience, in wider recognition that HLF's work is as much about our future selves as the past.