

Is evaluation the secret to a successful HLF project?

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There's a correlation between the quality of the evaluation and the quality of the project
Newly published review reveals what makes a good project evaluation.

A comprehensive review of the way HLF-funded Our Heritage projects carry out evaluations shows that three key factors - evaluation spend, length of reports and following HLF evaluation guidance - all lead to higher quality evaluations.

Our Heritage is an HLF open grants programme, with awards ranging from £10,000 to £100,000. These can range from projects based in museums and historic places to those exploring or supporting archaeology, the natural environment and cultural traditions. All projects are required to submit an evaluation on completion.

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Baselines

The aim of the newly published [Our Heritage Review](#) is two-fold.

Firstly: to provide an in-depth look at how well the outcomes for heritage, people and communities that HLF expects all its funded projects to deliver have been achieved.

Secondly: to create a baseline for the quality of project self-evaluations, with learnings for future heritage projects to draw on.

HLF guidance for Our Heritage projects notes it is not necessary for a single project to contribute towards all HLF's outcomes, but states that the outcome most valued is that "people will have learnt about heritage".

92% of evaluations studied in the new report showed that this had been achieved – the second highest scoring outcome after 'people will have volunteered time' (94%). Other high scoring outcomes included 'heritage is better interpreted and explained' (86%); 'people had an enjoyable experience' (85%); and 'a wider range of people have engaged with heritage' (85%).

Perhaps not surprisingly with grants under £100,000, fewer Our Heritage projects were found to have: 'boosted the local economy' (6%); 'created a more resilient organisation' (12%) or 'made the local community a better place to live, work or visit' (24%).

The key factors

Kion Ahadi, HLF's Head of Evaluation, says: "We want National Lottery players' money to work as hard as possible for the heritage, people and communities it supports, and getting a robust evaluation framework in place at the outset can be key to this." Crucially, the reports shows that the main factors that will influence the quality of the evaluation are:

- **Evaluation spend:** projects which had allocated a specific budget for evaluation were more likely to be graded as good or excellent
- **Length of reports:** the median lengths of the good and excellent reports were 18 and 35 sides respectively
- **Use of HLF evaluation guidance:** reports that indicated they used HLF guidance were more likely to be excellent or good

"There's a correlation between the quality of the evaluation and the quality of the project," Kion adds. "If you start thinking about the evaluation at the beginning, you're more likely to run a good project and achieve lasting benefits beyond just our funding."