

Advice on fundraising in a time of crisis

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Researcher and evaluator Henrietta Hopkins, Director of Hopkins Van Mil, introduces a new report which finds that heritage endowments are a cornerstone of resilience in challenging times.

Attachment

Size

[A New Reality: a summary report on fundraising in a time of crisis](#) 346.17 KB

The Heritage Endowments Programme

When The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded £10.35million through its [Heritage Endowments Programme](#) in 2017 they could not have imagined the social, economic and political change ahead.

The grants were match funding, which aimed to support the recipient organisations to encourage more philanthropic giving and build capacity and skills in fundraising.

Since then, those heritage organisations have had to deal with the ongoing fall-out from austerity policies, a general election, negotiations to leave the EU, major terrorist attacks, severe life-threatening storms and flooding – as well as a global pandemic.

Through our evaluation of the programme, Hopkins Van Mil has followed the grantees' progress. I've seen them battle with the new crisis-infiltrated reality, and their fundraising and development skills have been sorely tested.



Learning in adversity

But important lessons have been learnt and shared, hence the publication of our report 'A New Reality: a summary report on fundraising in a time of crisis.'

The aims of this short research project were to:

- gain an overview of the current landscape in which heritage endowment campaigns are operating
- understand the impact coronavirus (COVID-19) has had on campaigns including the challenges faced and the opportunities taken during the pandemic
- analyse what this tells us about what the sector needs to rebuild its fundraising (focused on endowments) programmes as a result of having to operate in crisis mode

The research was conducted in March and April 2021 using desk research, data gathered from Heritage Endowment grantees and building on the findings in the [2020 Interim Heritage Endowment Programme Evaluation Report](#).

What has fundraising in a crisis shown us?

Some of the original grantees achieved the target they set for their endowment from £250,000 to £1m – match funded by The Heritage Fund. For these organisations the learning is that **heritage endowments**, once in place, **are a cornerstone of resilience**, allowing organisations to survive in times of fundamental crisis.

The research highlights four crucial points about fundraising in a crisis:

- **Staying flexible, thinking laterally, remaining open to all opportunities** and being prepared to invest time in cultivating unexpected prospects have been essential elements in Heritage Endowment grantees work during the crisis.
- For some, increased time has been available to work in this new way – having **more time to think** and **plan strategically** balanced with **spontaneous activity**, for example maintaining donor relationships.
- The national lockdowns have highlighted **how valued heritage organisations are**, and how much they are **missed when inaccessible**. This is a useful platform from which to relaunch fundraising activity once the immediate crisis is passed.
- **Digital and virtual opportunities** for donor engagement and fundraising activities **have been invaluable** in the pandemic and have enabled campaigns to 'tick over' when there is no site access. The digital space, including social media, has opened up the heritage organisations' offer to a wider group of people, and has been a route to democratising cultural heritage during the pandemic.

Treat everyone as a potential donor

We also found that organisations that have treated everyone that they interact with as a potential endowment or legacy donor have been successful. Donations and legacies which have supported endowment campaigns in the COVID-19 crisis have come unprompted from unexpected or unknown sources. Fundraisers have found that personal approaches and tailored key messages have been effective tools for keeping donors informed and feeling part of the solution to the crisis – which encourages donations to continue.



Address risk

Planning for the future in times of uncertainty has been seen to work best when it incorporates working through a range of scenarios and understanding how to mitigate risk for each of them. This includes working with potential donors to demonstrate that endowments do give a return on investment, even in times of economic uncertainty.

The New Reality report provides timely advice from those who've experienced fundraising in the most challenging of times – do read it.

Find out more

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Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we are making. [Read more of our insight.](#)

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