How the learnings from our endowment programme can help your fundraising

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Final evaluation shows how endowment schemes can help protect heritage and strengthen organisational resilience.

Attachment	Size
PDF View Heritage Endowments Programme evaluation - final report as PDF(515.74 KB)	515.74 KB

In 2017 we awarded grants of £250,000 to £1million to 15 heritage organisations to develop an endowment fund. Our investment was matched through other fundraising and aimed to help organisations diversify and develop long-term income.

An endowment is money or property that is intended as a long-term investment, often invested as a capital fund to maintain its value or to provide an annual income.

This evaluation – conducted by Hopkins Van Mil – examines how the programme outcomes have been achieved, how it supported the organisations to fulfil their ambitions and the knowledge developed along the way.

What we learned

> Our overarching evaluation message is that the Heritage Endowments programme has been highly successful in meeting its aims and objectives for financial sustainability and preserving the heritage.
>
> *Hopkins Van Mil*

The Heritage Endowments programme had two key outcomes:

- heritage will be better managed
- funded organisations will be more resilient

Six of the 15 funded organisations have met their endowment fundraising target and the programme outcomes. Eight have extended their grant agreement to address the delays in campaigning caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, while one organisation decided to end its campaign at 88% of target at the original timescale. These nine organisations have found that the programme outcomes are already being achieved.

Hopkins Van Mil says: “Our overarching evaluation message is that the Heritage Endowments programme has been highly successful in meeting its aims and objectives for financial sustainability and preserving the heritage.

“This holds true even for those organisations which have not yet achieved their targets, as they have nevertheless found the learning and achievements of the last four years invaluable in making steps towards these outcomes.”

The report recommends that the impact of this learning could be maximised through a sharing event and creating resources about endowment fundraising.

Tips for developing an endowment fund

Summarising the experiences of the 15 organisations, the report sets out six recommendations for other heritage organisations considering an endowment fund:

1. **Don't be deterred**: smaller organisations benefit from their ability to be flexible and pivot their campaigns quickly. Larger organisations benefit from having existing donor bases and established fundraising teams. Use the early stages of the campaign to set up internal structures, gain organisational buy-in and lay the foundations for success using a solid strategic plan.

2. **Remember you are not alone**: grantees drew strength, support and momentum from a range of networks to develop their campaigns – existing trustees and donors, community organisations and other museum and heritage organisations.

3. **Create excellent communication tools and channels**: raising awareness and maintaining communication includes celebrating key successes along the way. It keeps funders engaged and can attract unexpected donors.

4. **Diversify your fundraising methods, but not too much**: a range of fundraising methods and tactics – from large-scale public events to specialist dinners and tailored donor events – proved successful for our grantees. Use a variety of methods tied to benefits and gifts which recognise the value of the donation to the organisation, but don't overstretch your resources.

5. **Match funding improves the offer**: Heritage Fund match funding was highly significant, demonstrating trust in the grantees that other donors valued. Taking up opportunities for match funding from a range of sources means the value of one donation can be substantially enhanced.

6. **Plan for and balance risk and reward**: an endowment fund plan needs to integrate both risk and reward, demonstrating to potential donors how it can give a return on investment even in times of economic and social uncertainty.

Find out more

Download the full evaluation report on this page to explore the impact of our Heritage Endowments programme in more detail.

It also includes further information for those interested in starting your own endowment scheme – from match funding and how to attract donors, to communication and fundraising tactics.

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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