

Children and young people in heritage good practice guidance

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We're committed to supporting children and young people to engage with heritage. We want them to have the best possible experience in the projects that we fund.

By reading this guidance you'll learn about 10 principles to help you to engage children and young people with heritage in a meaningful way. It also outlines who children and young people are, why they should be involved in your project and the types of activities that they might be interested in.

The guidance includes case studies of best practice and links to further resources.

Why you should engage children and young people with heritage

Children and young people have a right to engage with heritage and have their voices and opinions heard about the things that affect them – including heritage. These are the basic human rights included in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), under Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) and Article 12 (respect for the views of the child).

Heritage enables children and young people to understand the world around them, connect with their peers and communities and access learning in different environments. It helps them develop skills, inspire lifelong interests, increase wellbeing and a sense of belonging and take action on the things that they care about.

Every child and young person is different and can bring new ideas and perspectives to heritage, help to grow and diversify audiences and inspire wider partnerships and support. Engaging with them is key to future-proofing heritage organisations and ensuring heritage is valued by generations to come.

Who are children and young people

Children and young people cover a wide age range – 0–25 years old – who will engage with heritage in different ways depending on their stages in life:

- babies and early years will primarily interact with heritage alongside parents and carers
- school-age children may take part through their schools and wider families
- teens may engage with heritage through schools, colleges and youth-centred organisations
- young adults may get involved through employment and training opportunities as well as their own leisure time

Children engage with the world around them through play. Open-ended, child directed activity is central to how children make friends and learn, develop skills, creativity, cultural awareness and resilience. Young people are motivated by skills development, health and social relationships, as well as fun. Enjoyment is key at any age.

Children and young people will also have different interests and needs based on their location, wider background and experiences. It is important not to make assumptions about them. They will bring a wide range of identities and

perspectives, beyond their age.

Some will face greater barriers to engaging with heritage, including for example, disabled and neurodivergent children and care experienced young people.

How to engage children and young people with heritage

Children and young people could be the focus of your project, or part of a wider group of audiences or participants for any project.

Children and young people could also be involved in shaping capital development, place-making and other projects that influence their environment.

The opportunities that you create with and for children and young people to engage with heritage should respond to their needs and interests. These activities should also contribute to the impact you have set out to achieve with your project. For example, activities might include:

- hands-on workshops or creative sessions, for example, baby, toddler or early years groups, outdoor activities, creative workshops or home education visits
- spaces or resources for play
- co-creating labels, exhibitions, digital content or tours or developing events for their peers
- volunteering, social action or activism
- work experience, paid apprenticeships or traineeships
- making decisions as part of a community grant scheme or participating in governance

Consider any other ways that inspire children and young people too.

You can apply for our funding to engage children and young people through school, if at least one of the following applies:

- the activity is additional to the core curriculum
- it happens outside of school hours
- it takes place at a heritage site or other relevant non-school setting

Principles for working with children and young people

These 10 principles for engaging children and young people with heritage should be considered from the initial development of your project, all the way through to the final evaluation.

They draw on learning from our research and evaluation, including the [Kick the Dust programme](#). We have also gained input from leaders in the heritage and children and young people sectors. These principles have been designed as a starting point for you to develop and deliver the best possible experience for both children and young people and heritage organisations.

Please note that everything set out below can be paid for as part of your heritage project and is applicable to any project funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, not just those specifically targeting young people.

Listen to children and young people and act on what they say

It's the basis for a strong, relevant project. First, you must create the conditions for children and young people to feel confident to share their interests and ideas by building a trusting relationship. Observing, listening and consulting children and young people, in a supportive environment, is the starting point for understanding how they can engage with heritage in a genuine way.

Engage the whole organisation

Engaging children and young people with heritage comes from across the whole organisation, regardless of size. Ensure that everyone from the chair and trustees to the frontline staff and volunteers all understand why you are wanting to work with children and young people or heritage and understand how they can support the work in their roles.

Create strong partnerships

Partnerships between heritage organisations and children, youth, learning and play organisations are key to sharing knowledge and expertise and ensuring a high-quality project.

Collaborating with others will also enable you to engage with a more diverse group of children and young people. It might help to also think of parents, care givers and other trusted adults as partners in creating the best possible experience for children and young people. They can be important to whether and how a child or young person will engage.

Provide training

Assess what training or support is needed for staff and volunteers to feel confident working with children and young people or heritage. This could be delivered through training, working with partner organisations or employing staff with the specific skills, such as play or heritage engagement.

It is also important to ask the children and young people what training or mentoring they need to enable them to participate with heritage and take on different roles in leading and delivering aspects of the project.

Be inclusive

Consider how to engage children and young people who don't usually take part in heritage activities. Identify and address barriers that may prevent participation and help to engage a wider range of children and young people. For example, ask:

- Is the physical space accessible?
- Are there clear, age-appropriate communication and content, with alternative formats?
- Are there opportunities for sensory engagement, for example, to touch, hear or smell?
- Is food, transport, tickets etc. free or affordable, and can you give financial recognition to young adults?
- Are your staff confident in welcoming children and young people at times and places that suit them?
- Do young people, and their parents/carers, see themselves represented and reflected in your organisation and its values?

Be a learning organisation

Research similar projects and incorporate the learning into your project development. Continually evaluate and reflect upon your project and act on the findings.

Observe, reflect and share learning throughout the delivery of your project with everyone in your organisation, your project partners and more widely to the heritage, children and young people's sectors.

Be flexible and responsive

This is part of being a learning organisation. Continue observing, listening and consulting with children and young people when you are delivering the project and make changes to your project in response to how it is being received and delivered.

Talk to The National Lottery Heritage Fund staff about your project as it develops and we can work with you to respond flexibly to your findings.

Have policies and procedures in place

Ensure you have the appropriate policies and procedures in place. You must have a usable, regularly reviewed safeguarding policy and procedure and code of conduct that everyone in the organisation has access to and can understand. You can read [guidance from NSPCC](#) and a [safeguarding policy example on GEM](#).

You may also need an [online safety policy](#).

Consider having policy documents that are targeted at children and young people so they can understand where they fit into the organisation.

Create pathways for children and young people

Create pathways for children and young people to engage with heritage in a flexible and progressive way. Start with low-barrier entry points, such as outreach sessions where children and young people already feel comfortable or introductory workshops, that allow them to explore heritage without pressure or long-term commitment.

From there, participants can choose to deepen their involvement, for example through joining a club, co-production opportunities, work experience, leadership roles or structured learning routes such as short courses and traineeships. Ideally, also consider transitions beyond the project, such as employment, further education, governance roles for young people or sign posting to other heritage-related opportunities.

Involve child and youth voices in decision making and leadership

Children and young people should have a say in the issues that affect their lives, and this includes heritage. Think about how they can take a leading role in the project or contribute to wider decisions about heritage in their local area.

To be relevant for the future, heritage organisations also need to consider how they can create welcoming opportunities for a diverse cross-section of children and young people to feed into their leadership. For example, they could join a working group or committee, participate in a children's panel, become paid members of staff or participate as young

evaluators or researchers.

Get inspired through our projects

We fund a range of projects that engage children and young people. From youth-led research to creative practice and skills development, these examples show how young people shape projects, share their voices and connect with heritage in ways that matter to them. Explore the projects below:

- **On Our Wavelength:** this [youth-led research project](#) explored environmental impacts on coastal communities and shared the findings through traditional storytelling, delivered through a partnership between Youth Link Scotland and Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland.
- **My School, My Planet:** Learning through Landscapes worked with 16 schools in Walsall to help children learn about and improve their natural environment, mitigate the effects of the climate crisis and increase wellbeing.
- **Children's Capital of Culture – You're not from New York City, you're from Rov'Rum:** 18 young heritage producers captured the voices, memories and moments that define Rotherham's different communities, marking the borough's time as the world's first Children's Capital of Culture.
- **Reimagine Remake Replay:** working with the Nerve Centre and National Museums Northern Ireland, young people connected with heritage through creative media and digital technologies.
- **Heritage Skills:** Sussex Heritage Trust, working in partnership with Weald & Downland Living Museum, Chichester College Group, South Downs National Park Authority and a network of local employers, is training the next generation in traditional building craft skills.
- **Stories and Treasures of Street and Dale:** as part of a capital redevelopment, Craven Museum created an accessible, family-friendly experience, including a warm welcome, staff training in autism awareness and interactives and activities for all ages.
- **Senghenydd Youth Drop-in Centre's Young Peoples Oral History and Heritage Project:** young people researched their local heritage and interviewed community members, discovering how industrialisation created the diverse community in which they live, with oral histories shared on People's Collection Wales.

More information and resources

There is a lot of guidance, toolkits and case studies available to help you further develop and deliver your project. For example, the following organisations and partnerships offer a wide range of resources:

- [Amgueddfa Cymru – Museums Wales](#): the museum collaborates with young people living in or from Wales through paid opportunities
- [Children in Wales](#): resources for working with children and young people on participation
- [Council for British Archaeology](#): provides advice on creating youth advisory boards
- [GEM](#): resources include a guide to helping young people develop skills for employment and a wide variety of case studies
- [Kids in Museums](#): it has a manifesto setting out what makes a great heritage visit, as well as guidance on welcoming babies, play, youth panels and transferable skills for employment
- [Learning through Landscapes](#): provides a range of case studies and reports
- [London Museum](#): provides an early years toolkit
- [Natural Leaders Project](#): a partnership including YouthLink Scotland and RSPB Scotland created a practitioner resource on a youth work approach to nature

- [Participation People](#): includes information about youth voice and participation
- [Practical Evaluation](#): resources for evaluating children and young people's participation
- [SEND in Museums](#): resources include accessible evaluation methods for working with children, young people and families and examples of accessible trails
- [The Young Trustees Movement](#): resources to increase the representation of trustees aged 30 and under on charity boards

Youth agencies and play bodies across the UK also provide research reports and evidence around child and youth needs and impact.

We also encourage you to look at our website, which includes lots of case studies, blogs and advice on issues from [inclusive recruitment](#) to [techniques for supporting young people's wellbeing](#) during heritage projects.