

International working helps build a stronger heritage sector at home



Our new strategy wants “to see the UK’s heritage grow and learn by taking opportunities to engage internationally”

From our historic towns and cities, iconic landscapes, parks and World Heritage Sites to the rich tales of our diverse cultural past, our heritage is vital to the UK’s place on the world stage. The strength of our heritage is not only important for how we see ourselves as a nation, but also how we engage with countries around the world. The UK’s heritage brings enormous benefits to tourism, international diplomacy and the skills and knowledge we share and exchange.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund’s new strategy wants “to see the UK’s heritage grow and learn by taking opportunities to engage internationally.” Nearly half of National Lottery Heritage Fund grantees consulted as part of this research are already active internationally. In so doing, heritage sector organisations are able to learn from others through tackling shared challenges, as well as strengthening problem solving by applying existing knowledge and expertise creatively to new challenges around the world.

International working benefits audiences at home as well as abroad. Supporting cultural diversity and connecting with diaspora communities extends the audience reach of UK heritage and makes our stories richer and stronger. Additionally, building relationships across national and cultural boundaries nurtures the tolerance and understanding we need in an increasingly fragmented world. Last but not least, international working is an opportunity to develop new approaches to financial sustainability through direct or indirect financial benefits.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund will support the UK heritage sector to build the capacity it needs to grasp the opportunities that working internationally can bring, both to individual organisations and the UK heritage sector as a whole.

Cover image:
Working Holiday
Programme at the
Strahov Monastery
in Prague, 2018 ©
Czech National Trust



Ros Kerslake OBE, Chief Executive
The National Lottery Heritage Fund, April 2019

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About this research

The National Lottery Heritage Fund commissioned BOP Consulting to provide a snapshot of international activity in the heritage sector and to inform our approach to building the capacity of the sector to engage internationally. The following research findings are based on survey responses from over 400 recent HLF grantees from across the heritage sector. This data is supported by desk research and further informed by 12 interviews with sector representatives, stakeholders, and organisations that had delivered international projects.

Almost half of heritage sector organisations surveyed are already active internationally

48% had worked on any international projects or taken part in international activities in the past, **52%** had not.

Most survey respondents (69%) who had worked internationally had worked on fewer than five projects, but a **significant minority (13%) are very active**, having worked on over 20 international projects / activities in the last five years.

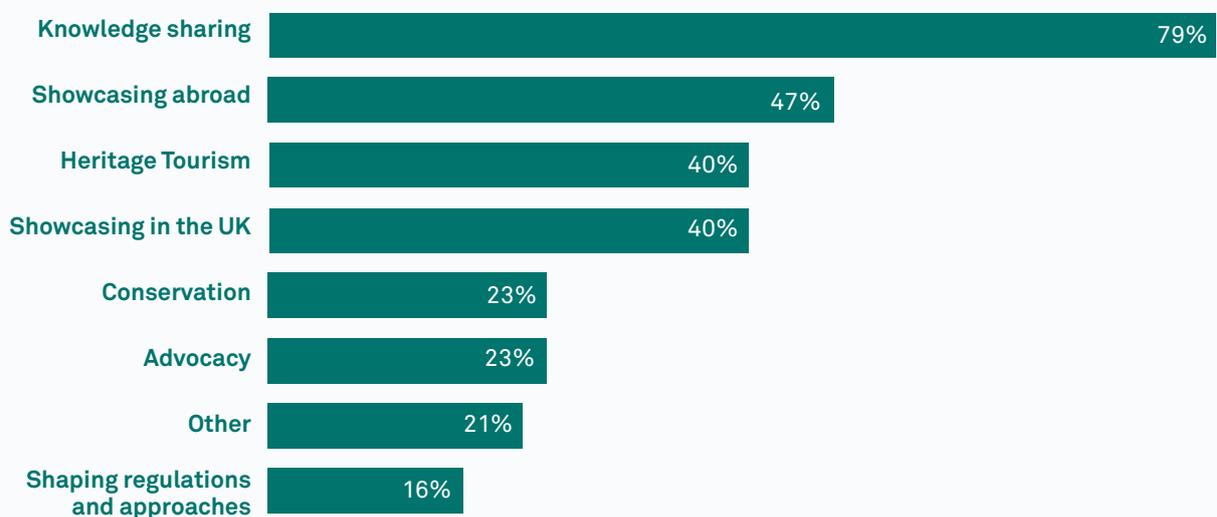
International activities with a relatively low barrier to entry (such as short time scale, narrow scope, low cost or all three) were accessible to a larger number of organisations. However, between a half and a quarter of those surveyed had taken on more challenging and resource intensive international work.

Knowledge sharing came up most frequently, and can include participating in international conferences or delegations, (co) hosting international conferences or delegation visits, sharing digital resources, corresponding with peers overseas, or giving advice (in a training or consultancy capacity).

Around half took part in **showcasing**, either taking exhibitions or performances abroad, or giving their UK audiences the chance to experience culture and heritage from another country or countries.

Practical heritage projects also featured strongly, with 23% of survey respondents having taken part in international heritage conservation.

A few organisations focused on **young people**, for example via youth international exchanges



Common factors when choosing the geographical focus of international work include:

Government priorities (particularly important for larger umbrella organisations representing the sector)

Delivering on the **strategic goals** of the whole organisation (including learning or building domestic capacity)

Delivering on the goals of an organisation's **stakeholders or members**

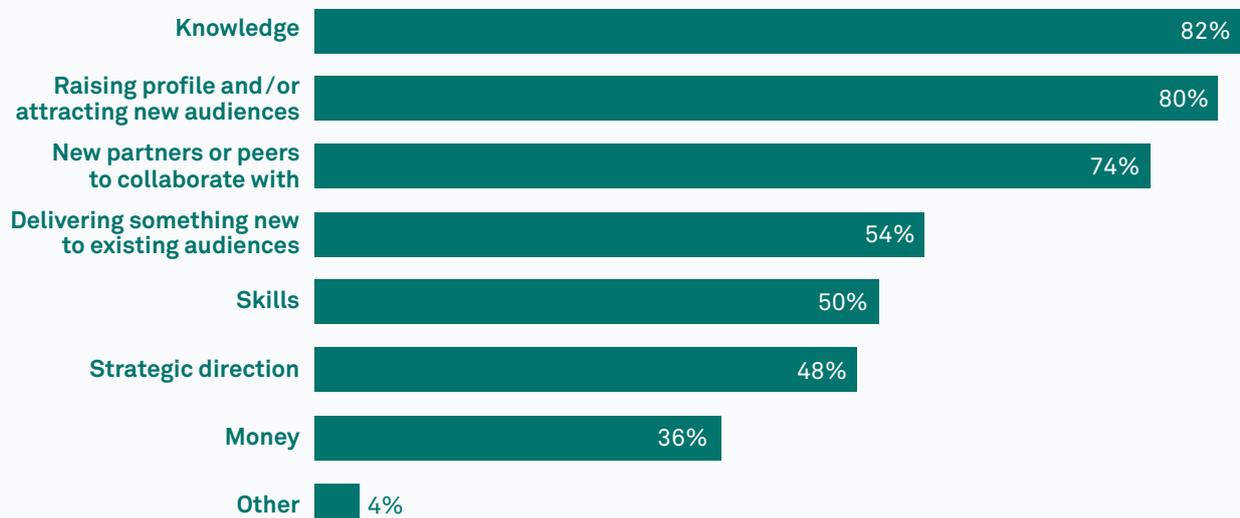
Reflecting or better connecting to an organisation's **audiences** (particularly UK diaspora groups)

Prioritising the selection of **partners** with shared goals (over geographical location)

Opportunities that become available (especially if these are funded)

Personal **interest** among an organisation's leadership

How is the value or benefit of working internationally seen at the moment?



It's "about not working in isolation"

Most heritage sector organisations see international working as bringing learning opportunities, including sharing best practice and strengthening skills

"(it's) about not working in isolation", "we understand viewpoints and approaches better than if we were doing this ourselves"

"The challenges are universal, the challenges are shared – perhaps exaggerated overseas. Hearing from professionals overseas and how they've overcome those struggles" (is valuable)

"we see people using skills that have been lost in our country"

"we learn to co-work with other countries" and "to showcase your own culture and heritage"

International working helps organisations reach and diversify audiences at home

(it's an opportunity to) "educate people about the importance of ethnic communities...(to) ask other countries to help us to do things appropriately in terms of what those communities want"

"people who own the history...now believe they have a history worth looking at"

Fewer organisations saw the value of international working as financial

"Engaging more customers and increasing revenues, growing visitors, that's a big part of it"

"the main benefit was the in-bound tourism"

The “sticking point with getting going is how to start or where to find contacts”

How are the barriers to international working seen at the moment?

Money was a barrier for 70% of those who are active internationally. Interviewees commented that “international working comes low down” when they have to “make choices within limited resources”. Linked to this, a majority (64%) cited “capacity to do it when you have lots of other things on your plate”

Nearly three quarters of survey respondents were charities, third sector organisations or community or voluntary sector groups. Only 36% saw the value of international working as financial. Together, this indicates a **need for focused, practical discussion on financial opportunities as well as barriers.**

Awareness as to **relevance** of international working to an organisation’s **overall strategy** is a key barrier for (53%) of those organisations that have yet to engage.

Access to **contacts and information**, and lack of a forum, platform or mechanism where these could be shared, was a barrier for those already active internationally but also for those yet to engage. Interviewees commented that “access to information is important, otherwise how do we know where to look?” Another “sticking point with getting going is how to start or where to find contacts – partners that match.”

Navigating legal and financial structures was less at the forefront for those not yet active internationally, but those already active are more likely to have hit problems and accessing such advice is expensive.

What opportunities should the UK heritage sector be capturing? What does the sector need in order to do this, or to be more effective internationally?

Opportunities

Collaborate and share learning around sustainability in heritage, particularly financial sustainability but also other areas.

Collaborate and share learning about the social impact of heritage (e.g. wellbeing, ageing), and how projects can involve local communities from the outset.

Develop and strengthen the heritage sector inbound tourism offer.

Share technical skills.

Capacity building

Learn from (and if possible collaborate with) those already working internationally.

Learn from (and potentially partner with) the private sector, strengthening commercial awareness and skills such as marketing.

Recognise and build up foreign language skills within heritage organisations.

Encourage everyone to keep an open mind, particularly around what can be learned from international partners or their context.

Develop creative problem-solving “Gathering ideas is one thing, but it’s quite tricky finding a locally adapted solution. You need to be creative!”
