

C u l t u r a l B r o k e r s



**A review of HLF's activity during 2005 – 2007 to
mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave
trade in British ships (2007)**



March 2009

Executive Summary

Background

1. One of the most significant charters for human liberty in recent history, the Bicentenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2007 was commemorated in various ways across the country, and internationally. The Bicentenary's importance was particularly emphasised by the high profile accorded to it by the Government. In acknowledgement of its significance to British heritage, HLF ran an initiative in order to encourage applications to its generic grants programmes for projects that would add to the individual and collective understanding of the transatlantic slave trade. For ease of reference in this report we use the term 'HLF 2007' to describe the initiative.
2. The commemorative events and activities for the Bicentenary provided HLF with an opportunity to engage with communities, particularly those designated 'black, Asian and minority ethnic' (BAME), who hitherto had not accessed significant amounts of HLF funding.
3. 'HLF 2007' enabled mainstream organisations involved with commemorative events to work in partnership with minority communities, in many instances for the first time.
4. HLF funded 285 projects across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as part of the Bicentenary initiative.
5. HLF was the largest funder of cultural projects relating to the Bicentenary in the UK.

Summary of key strengths of HLF approach

6. HLF's approach to the Bicentenary was successful in several key areas. These included:
 - The demonstration of the organisation's ongoing commitment to working with BAME groups;

- The demonstration of both imagination and ingenuity in enabling communities and organisations to access money from what are effectively generic programmes involving a competitive process;
- The establishment of partnerships between larger heritage organisations and community groups, some of which are ongoing;
- A higher profile for HLF nationally; the successful communication of HLF's commitment to funding good Bicentenary projects resulted in a more accessible image;
- The applications demonstrated a good geographic spread as well as breadth of subject matter. HLF funded 285 projects ranging from capital developments, such as the refurbishment of Wilberforce House in Hull, to exploring the oral histories of slavery in the Belgian Congo among the Congolese communities in Liverpool, to creating a touring exhibition exploring the connections between Bexley (London) and the slave trade, to providing workshops for local schools about the slave trade in Winchester, to exploring Northern Ireland's links with the slave trade.
- An impressively wide range of organisations gained support from HLF – churches, schools, museums, archives, local authorities, community groups, trusts, theatre/arts organisations, etc.

Summary of areas for development in HLF's approach

7. This review of also highlighted key weaknesses in the HLF approach. These included:
 - Insufficient staff training within HLF in order to enable a deeper, collective understanding about the project objectives and the issues of the slave trade and enslavement in the context of contemporary communities;
 - Insufficient time, money and resources were available to build capacity within BAME organisations. This impacted on their ability to run projects on an equal footing with larger mainstream organisations;

- The perception that expectations of funding had been raised beyond the resources HLF had to deploy;
- The perception (erroneous though it may be) that funding for these projects would not be available after 2007, which led to a number of projects abandoning their plans because their projects could not be delivered during 2007.

The legacy of the 2007 commemorations

8. The considerable legacies created by the 2007 commemorations include:
 - Good quality lasting partnerships across the community and heritage sectors, almost all of them developed through 'HLF 2007';
 - An enhancement of HLF's reputation in giving a voice to those whose histories have hitherto been largely overlooked;
 - An increased awareness across the sector and amongst the public of how the heritage of enslavement underpins UK wider heritage;
 - The production of new education resources and more people trained to use archives, more communities involved in the production of exhibitions and strengthened bonds within and between communities
 - A deeper understanding amongst HLF staff of the issues that impact on BAME groups – particularly in terms of capacity building – as well as the development of more effective strategies for working with these groups.
 - The long-term, ongoing legacy of capital projects such as Wilberforce House.

Summary recommendations

9. The key recommendations of this report are as follows:
 - External stakeholders had a good buy-in to what HLF was attempting to do. However in the future, ownership of similar programmes should be more deeply embedded within the organisation itself;
 - More work needs to be carried out with regard to the communication of rationale and objectives between the national office and

country/regional offices, when undertaking programmes of this magnitude;

- Attempts to engage more effectively with black and minority ethnic communities need to be strengthened, both in terms of encouraging more applications to HLF from BAME organisations, and making sure that non-BAME organisations applying to HLF have the facilities to engage with local BAME groups in their area. This applies to HLF projects in general and any future large-scale initiatives in particular;
- HLF is set up as a reactive organisation with a fairly tight remit: this can be problematic when the focus is on a broad and multifaceted initiative like the Bicentenary. HLF should look at where there might be room for flexibility – for example, supporting capacity building for community-based organisations and in-depth research and development;
- HLF's workforce needs to actively widen its knowledge of diverse cultures;
- Clarity about what constitutes legacy needs to be established with both funded organisations and within HLF itself before the momentum of 2007 is lost entirely;
- The media and communications strategy linked to such an initiative, though largely effective and impressive, needs to be strengthened in the area of attracting non-traditional applicants as well as tapping into a wider range of networks;
- An analysis of the successful applications from BAME-led organisations and an exercise whereby any future applications from these groups are tracked may provide some useful evidence regarding the success factors and the areas for development within BAME-led organisations.