Good Practice Guidelines for Developing Learning Programmes in Museums

About these guidelines

The main purpose of these guidelines is to provide a starting point for museums developing learning programmes for the first time.
They can be used as a reference guide, a planning tool or a checklist. They are primarily intended for developing resources for schools, but the same principles can be used when working with other audiences.

This is not intended to be a prescriptive document. The guidelines are designed to be used during discussions with other museum staff who may already have useful experiences and skills to share.

Contents

Unlocking learning in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire

These guidelines have evolved from the work of two Renaissance funded posts working with museums in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

Renaissance East of England has supported museum learning programmes in the region since 2007. It has funded the Learning Development Officer to work with museums without learning officers across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. The post has provided support for these museums to develop their offer to schools and to engage with teachers and school-children. Areas of work have included planning successful school visits, connecting collections to the National Curriculum, marketing to schools, and developing partnerships with local schools and teachers.

This post also worked in partnership with the Hertfordshire Museums Learning Officer to create museum resources and deliver training opportunities for museum staff. This partnership working has brought in additional funding support from the MLA Strategic Commissioning strands. This has enabled museums in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire to develop resources in partnership with local schools and teachers.

How to develop an E2BN gallery

What is an E2BN gallery?

- A web-based image gallery hosted by the East of England Broadband Network (E2BN), part of the National Education Network (NEN).

- Web location: **www.e2bn.org**

- The site hosts a growing collection of over 52,000 images as well as audio and video clips.

- There are 27 themed galleries on E2BN ranging from Animals, and Plants to Transport and History.

- Museums come within the Culture and Heritage Gallery.

Why put your images on an E2BN gallery?

- NEN is a dedicated network designed to support creative teaching and learning.

- E2BN can be accessed anytime and anywhere.

- It enables pupils, teachers and parents to collaborate in a safe and secure environment.

- All of the resources used on E2BN are copyright cleared so they can be downloaded, and edited for educational use within the classroom, and as the resource is web based it can be used at home as well.
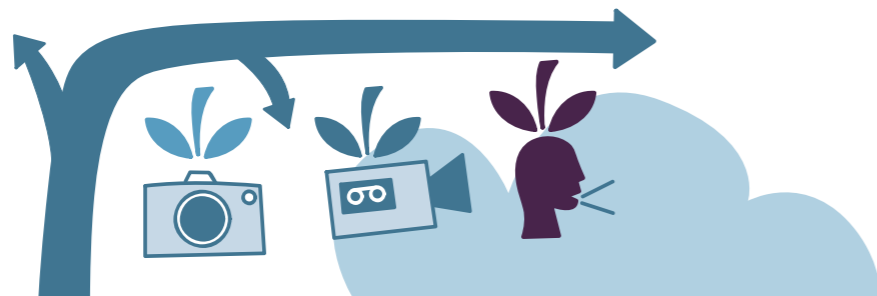
What material can you add to the site?

- Choose photos of objects that teachers will want to blow up and show on their whiteboards.

- Be inspired by your collection.
  - Every museum is unique and every object tells a story, so make your E2BN gallery an extension of your museum.

- Do you have a school loan box scheme?
  - Put photos of the contents onto your gallery as an added resource for teachers to use.

How to get started?

- Register with E2BN; you will be issued with a user name and password.

- Log on to the site and create albums.

- Your album will probably be the name of your museum.

- Add pictures, deciding on a subject within the album.
  - Keep your descriptions short: 'a picture speaks a thousand words'.
  - You can create links to your museum website if you want viewers of your images to find out more.

E2BN is easy to use, has step by step instructions, is self explanatory and is an excellent resource to showcase your museum to a wider audience.

How to develop museum trails

What is a trail?

- An activity that encourages visitors around the museum and engages them in activity at different points.
- It might be a sheet of paper but could also be clues or pictures on cards that visitors take round and then return.

What can trails do?

- Help visitors find displays or objects they might otherwise miss.
- Give visitors a focus for their visit.
- Give visitors more fun and activity in the museum.
- Regulate visitors' orientation around your site.
- Support visitors who may find the displays difficult to access.
- Change a regular visitor's experience without changing the displays.

Who are they for?

Anyone - but only focus on one audience at a time when you create a trail.

- Young children:
  - Hidden objects they need to hunt for.
  - Pictures of objects they have to find.
- Older children/adults:
  - Clues or pictures to guide them to a display and then an activity or question.
  - Keep questions as open as possible to engage their imagination.
  - Activities instead of questions can be more fun e.g. identify an object in a feely bag or try on a costume.

Tips to get you started

- A trail can focus on just one area or aspect of your site.
- Keep it simple and fun – (don't make it look like a school worksheet).
- Give visitors a 'prize' for successfully completing a trail, even just a sticker.
- Give the trail a theme
- Ensure clues/trail objects are accessible to the intended audience e.g. at low heights for young children/wheelchair users.
- Make sure all museum staff know about the trail so relevant objects are not moved!
- Try a seasonal or exhibition theme.

Practicalities

- How are you going to hand out the trails?
- What resources do visitors need to complete them? e.g. pencils, clipboards.
- If the trail is a sheet of paper, who is going to do the photocopying and keep the stock going?
- How much are the trails going to cost? e.g. photocopying, laminating, photography, cost of replica object.

How to develop a school session

Things to do:

- Ideally, work with a teacher throughout the entire development process.

- Outline clear learning objectives.

  – What do you want the pupils to achieve through this session?

  – Set yourself a maximum of two specific learning or skills objectives.

  – Revisit them through the development process.

- Think about your audience.

  – Are your activities age appropriate?

  – Be honest, are your activities interesting? Imagine yourself in the children's shoes; would you go away inspired or bored? Act on your instincts!

  – Offer a well balanced mixture of information, objects and activities. Provide your visitors with a real mixed bag of things to do and get them moving!

- Be practical.

  – Select activities and objects that are safe, do-able and interesting.

  – Be mindful of timings.

- Make sure that the pace of your session is well balanced.

- Don't put too much emphasis on 'filling time'.

- Evaluate.

  – Be confident, you are human too and piloting your session is the best way to ascertain whether or not things work.

  – Use the Inspiring Learning for All Framework to evaluate your session. This is a good way of obtaining data from qualitative information. There are some great example questions on their website: **www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/**

- Respond to evaluation honestly.

  – Act upon all the feedback you get in a practical way. It might seem tough at first but this is the only way to improve and ensure you are providing users with a good service.

- Give schools a real reason for using the museum service.

  – Create a session that they cannot replicate themselves in the classroom.

Things not to do:

- Over think.

  – The best sessions are usually simple and straightforward.

- Overfill the session.

  – Do not include so many activities that the pupils cannot see the wood for the trees; this will ultimately confuse them.

- Get bogged down in the subject matter.

  – It needs to be accurate, but be selective about the level of detail they realistically require and will find interesting.

- Be afraid to ask for help or guidance.

  – Ask your colleagues and teachers what they think. Working in a bubble is often uncreative as well as difficult.

How to create an e-bulletin

What will be in your e-bulletin?

- Highlights for teachers of any of your events, exhibitions, or services.

- Brief text – consider a maximum of 150 words.

- Links to your own and other websites for further information.

- A maximum of four stories per bulletin for greatest impact.

- Images.

  – One per story: photographs, illustrations or relevant logos.

  – Ensure you have the correct level of permissions for any images of people, especially children.

- Plan the content of bulletins for some months in advance.

  – Retain flexibility by leaving one story unplanned until closer to publication date.

Who will you send it to?

- Email addresses for school offices.

  – Using office addresses gives you greater coverage in the short term, but the risk is that admin staff will consider the mailing 'junk' and it may never get to the teachers it is intended for.

- Ask teachers for their own email addresses.

  – To be effective these must be monitored as staff may change, or may change their email address.

  – Data protection – you need an individual's permission to hold their personal information, including email addresses. Make sure that you are clear in your wording when requesting information e.g.

  Would you like to go on our email list?

  ☐ I am already on it   ☐ No thanks

  ☐ Yes, my email is ....

Unsubscribe button

- Remember to include an unsubscribe option within each bulletin e.g. If you wish to unsubscribe from future emails from the Little Town Museum Service, just type unsubscribe in the subject box and return this email.

HTML email

- If you know that most people on your list use Microsoft Outlook, an email designed in Outlook will show up better when it is received.

- If you do not know what people are using to view your e-bulletin, you might choose to use HTML email.

- If you have less then 1,000 people on your list, you can use www.mailchimp.com which offers a free HTML service.

When to send?

- Teacher consultation shows that teachers value the regular contact a monthly bulletin offers.

- Be realistic; if you do not have enough stories to create a monthly bulletin then opt for termly.

- Plan your publication dates to avoid end of term or middle of the holidays.
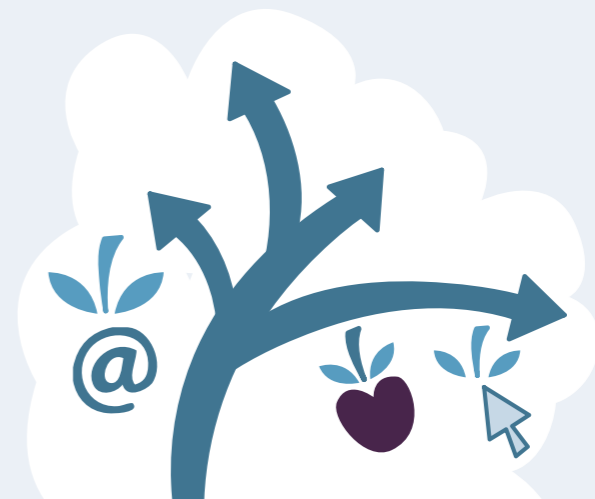
How to develop a resource box

A popular service for schools as well as a marketing opportunity for the museum.

Is it the right time for you?

Work out your priorities for your education provision.

• Is it better for your service to develop a handling collection to enhance a visit to your museum first, and then develop the loans service afterwards?

Preparation:

• Target audience.
  – Is your theme a subject schools want to explore?
  – Can you work with a school to develop it?
  – How do the schools want to use the boxes?
• Consider developing the box related to a workshop used in the museum.
  – It can be used as a stand-alone session, or as either extension or preparation work to complement the school coming to the museum.
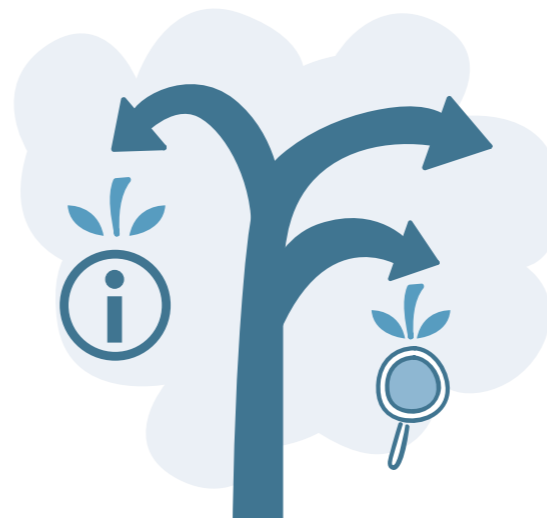
What objects will you include in your box?

• All need to be interesting and give clues about past lives.
  – Will they be purely illustrative?
  – Will they be used for investigation and comparison?
• Original artefacts if possible.
  – You may not always get the specific object you first thought of, but it is probably better to use a different original object than to use a replica.
• Replicas: use sparingly and make the reasons a point for discussion in class.
  – Use good quality replicas: many craftspeople make these and they are worth the investment.

– Replica costumes – fine if they are historically accurate. If not made by historical costumiers they are probably purely 'dressing up clothes'. These are not a source of information but useful for sparking imagination.
• Do not use the museum's main collection items.
  – They have been given to the museum to hold in trust and we have a duty of care for those artefacts.
  – Only formally de-accessioned items or those specifically acquired for the handling collection should be used.

- Marking the artefacts with a unique number is essential.

  – The handling/loan collection needs a separate recording and marking system to the museum's main collection.

  – They can be identified immediately by museum staff as to which collection they come from.

  – They can be identified in a crowded classroom.

- Do not use items which belong to museum staff.

  – It is not sustainable, and questions of ownership, liability and longevity become blurred.

- The objects for these boxes should be dedicated to these boxes.

  – Try not to "borrow" them for other purposes. (This will make it harder to maintain the service).

How will you pack the box?

- Make it easy to pack and unpack the objects.

- How will the teachers use them in class?

  – They may prefer the objects to be contained in individual plastic boxes.

- Is the box too heavy?

  – Split into smaller boxes?

- Provide notes/photos on how to re-pack the boxes so that the objects remain undamaged in transit as far as possible.

  – Use labelled bags?

- Packaging materials.

  – Keep them simple.

  – If cut-outs in foam are too complex, consider bubble-wrap bags.

Once your box is ready and in use:

- The resource boxes will need regular maintenance to keep them up to standard.

  – broken or dirty items or missing paperwork are not acceptable.

- Keep up to date with changes in the curriculum and the requirements. Building up a relationship with a school or teacher will make this easier to do.

How to develop partnerships with local teachers

Why do it?

- Your relationships with teachers will be your most effective advocacy tool.

- They can strengthen your service in countless ways.

Making links:

- Seek out opportunities to meet with local teachers.

- Attend network or consortium meetings to promote your museum and services.

- Contact local schools initially.

  – Ask to attend staff meetings, INSET sessions or training. These don't have to be very formal, just a five minute slot.

- Be flexible and patient. Teachers are busy people and hard to engage.

- Work in school first if necessary. A visit to the museum will eventually follow.

What to say:

- Be succinct.

  – Give your information in a snappy and direct way.

  – Do not use museum jargon!

- Be confident!

  – Remember that you are the best advocate for your museum; sell yourself!

- Listen.

  –Teachers can tell you about the ways they teach that will give you ideas for supporting them.

- Ask questions.

  – Don't be afraid to ask for school jargon to be unpicked!

What next?

- Speculate to accumulate. Offer a service free in return for detailed evaluation and photographs.

  – This will give a good testing ground for a session.

  – It will show teachers you are serious about getting things right for them.

  – The photographs will form the basis for advocacy and marketing material.

- Ask teachers for their email addresses for your mailing list.

  – Don't inundate them with meaningless round robins.

  – Make every email worth reading and think carefully about the subject line. You need to stand out!

- Offer guided visits of the museum after school or on a Saturday morning.

  – Provide cake, coffee, wine etc! Anything that will give the teachers an incentive to visit your museum is worth it!

Things not to do

- Aim too high.

  – Approach only the number of schools that you can immediately work with.

- Be despondent.

  – Keep trying! Sometimes it takes several calls or emails to get a response.

- Take it personally.

  – Sadly some teachers just won't get back to you. Work first with those teachers who are keen and interested, then promote your successes with those that may appear initially to be disengaged.

How to work with an education consultant

Why are you employing them?

- Be clear about why you are employing a freelancer.

  - Is it for their specific expertise that you don't have in the museum.

  - Is it to carry out a project you do not have time for?

  This will help you with your brief to them in terms of how much you need them to advise you and to what extent you need them to keep to your specific instructions.

- Do you want them to manage the project for you? Or just undertake one element of a project?

What will your role be?

- When planning your project think about the time you will need to invest in the project yourself.

- You may have sufficient funds to employ the freelancer to manage the project however they will still need time with you or other staff.

Make things clear

- At the start of the project agree a fee and time scale.

- You will need to give the freelancer a clear aim (brief) for the work that you expect them to do at the start of the project. Describe what you want them to do in one sentence if you can!

- Make your objectives clear; if you have a specific method that you want the freelancer to use to achieve the aim, you need to be specific. e.g.

  - Do you want them to pilot their work?

  - Are there specific contacts you want them to consult with?

- Agree the outputs – what is the finished project going to look like? e.g.

  - Do they buy the replicas you need or just source them for you?

  - Produce some text? If so, is it hard copy or electronic only, PDF or word format? What font do you want?

Remember

- This is a rare chance to work with a colleague with a different skill set – use their time wisely.

- Is the work what you wanted? You can only judge it by the aims and objectives you set.

How to review your schools service

Prepare yourself!

- Step back; try to be dispassionate; don't be precious!
- Be willing to take on ideas of change.

Who to involve?

- Ideally, everyone who works with schools at your museum.
- If you work alone, ask a colleague from another museum to help you.

Five key areas to include in your review:

1 Why do you do it?

- Discuss why you want schools to use your museum.
- What do you hope teachers will get out of a visit?
- What impact do you hope to make on students? Short, medium and long term?
- What do you want to share with a schools audience?

Bring your answers together and you have your 'gold standard' – the fundamental aims of your work with schools.

2 Research

- Use whatever curriculum information is available – think where you best fit.
- Talk to teachers about what they want from you. Where can your resources help them?
- Include teachers from local schools who don't visit as well as those who do.
- Which school activities were the most popular over the last couple of years?

2 Reflect

- Compare your priorities with those of the teachers. Aim to match them!
- What can you change that could bring you closer to what teachers want without compromising your 'gold standard'?
- Why are your most popular sessions successful?
- What is it about your unpopular sessions that mean they are rarely booked?

3 Observe

- If possible, observe some/all of your sessions or your resources in use by schools.
- Discuss how the sessions measure up against your gold standard.
- What were the strongest points? What needs improving? How?

4 Action

- Use your gold standard, research and observation.
- Focus on the strengths and aim to bring the weaker areas up to the same standard.
- Pilot your changes and re-evaluate.

How to apply for funding

What do you want to do?

Make sure you are clear:

• what you want to do.

• why you want do it.

• why you need funding.

How long will a funding application take?

• The longer you can give yourself the better.

• Give yourself a target date to submit the application.

What funds could you apply for?

• Ask colleagues who may have useful experience.

• Consider signing up for funding advice and alerts. The following suggestions give a feel for what is available.

• www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/hcc/stratandpart/rpu/funding/

Funding information on the Herts Direct website.

• www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/councillors/localitybudgetscheme09/

If you are in Hertfordshire it is worth remembering that each County Councillor currently has £10,000 to spend on projects in their division. Arts and heritage projects have benefitted from this Locality Budget scheme.

• www.voluntaryarts.org/cgi-bin/website.cgi?tier1=network&tier2=funding&fp=true

This is the funding page of Voluntary Arts Network which has lots of useful links. You can also sign up for a weekly news bulletin that contains funding news

• www.seee.co.uk

Social Enterprise East of England. A source of varied advice and has museums and heritage organisations as members.

Things to think about before you begin

• All funding comes with strings attached. You will need to fulfill any conditions.

• Working in partnership? Make sure you have fully discussed the project with partners and that they are happy to be involved - then plan it together.

• Be realistic.

– If you think an application is getting too complicated and running away with you, it probably is!

– If so, start again and make the goal achievable.

Completing the application

- Remember – your application is all the assessor has to judge you on.

- Don't try to pretend to be something you are not. e.g. don't promise to work with groups you have no contact with.

- Emphasise the areas of your project most applicable to the funder's interests.

- Don't flannel or use jargon.

- Stick to the word limit.

- Put your most important points in early.

- Don't introduce ideas or plans in section 5 that you've failed to mention up to that point.

- Don't worry if some sections of an application form appear to make you repeat yourself. (Assessors often use this for cross checking consistency).

- Don't add lots of extra material if you haven't been asked for it.

- Get someone with a fresh eye to read the application. Does it make sense?

- Don't over-promise. If you plan three road shows then say three, not five because you think the funder might feel you were offering too little!

Keep going you will get there in the end!

- Should you fail don't give up.

- Some funders will give feedback on why the application failed.

- Alternatively you could take the application to a critical friend and ask for suggestions.

- Once you have had some success, more will follow.

Contact Details

For further information about any of these projects please contact:

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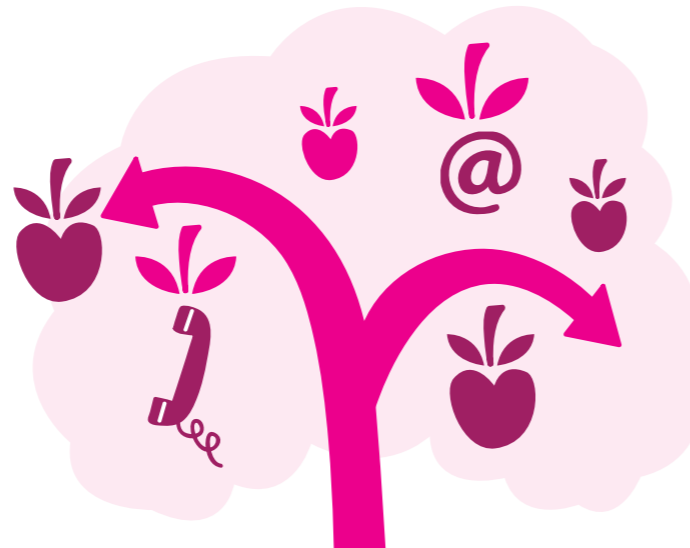
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