

HLF Dialect and Heritage: The State of the Nation project

Relevant extracts from phase 1 application

3a Describe what your project will do.

This project taps into language's powerful ability to connect us with the past, with places and with history; to unlock meaning and reawaken connections with remote or unfamiliar cultural heritage; and to express identity and self. Nothing connects us quite so well to the past and its objects as the voices of those who lived it; nothing conjures up that strong sense of place, identity and belonging quite as well as the dialects, words, and accents with which they are so intimately associated. This project will:

1. Digitise and index the holdings of the LAVC (and relevant museum holdings), thereby transforming it into an online, fully indexed, digital collection and preserving it for future generations. We will thus be able to make the collection publicly available in its entirety for the first time, and to make visible the, as yet, unexplored links between its different constituent parts (e.g. photographs, audio recordings, word maps, research and SED fieldwork responses on particular aspects of vernacular culture such as food, games, domestic and rural life, or local trades).
2. Develop an interactive, engaging, and informative project website to make the digital LAVC collection readily available to public audiences from across the country and beyond. This will allow people to explore the collection in ways that are interesting, meaningful and relevant to them, enabling them to encounter and rediscover their own cultural heritage, and that of others. The website will help us reach wider, more diverse, and new audiences, and encourage increased digital participation in cultural activity. The website will be dynamic (we will add new data as the project progresses) and usable in different ways depending on the needs/interests of the user. We envisage: exploration via key themes which relate to our and the museums' collections; visualisations such as maps, timelines, family connections; both free text and guided searches with basic and advanced functionality. The website will link to social media platforms to enable people to connect with the project, partner museums, and each other using familiar interfaces. The fully indexed digital collection and website present unparalleled opportunities to reconnect this national, but currently locally scattered, vernacular culture tradition.
3. Enhance partner museums' permanent exhibition spaces by embedding digitised LAVC materials which complement their existing artefact/building collections but are also sensitive to local needs, opportunities and strategic objectives. The embedded materials will offer new insights, educational opportunities, and cultural stimuli for present-day audiences to discover the stories of their past. They will help bring the museums' collections to life via the immediacy of language, audio recordings and photographs from the period.
4. Develop temporary rotating and touring exhibition materials which promote interactivity, positive engagement with dialect and the museums' collections, and the gathering of present-day dialect from visitors. We envisage a rotating series of word maps (see sample photographs), a 'dialect word of the week' activity, focused and fun dialect survey activities on themes such as home life or local trades, and opportunities for people to contribute their own dialect to the project. These temporary exhibitions will develop common threads across the museums, whilst ensuring that the project is dynamic, with repeat visitors encountering something new each time. We will replicate the rotating word map and 'dialect word of the week' activities online, to engage with even wider audiences, and to allow people to virtually extend their museum visits if they wish.
5. Put on up to 60 special project events in the museums or community venues e.g. roadshows, dialect and family days, schools' events, reminiscence afternoons, which target particular demographics, help diversify museum audiences, and assist the museums in

achieving their local strategic visions (such as the DCM's aspiration to be dementia friendly) and raise their profile as local hubs. These events will allow visitor groups to explore and contribute to the project in more focused ways. We will have a project presence at existing museum calendar events such as Tractor Day, Sussex and Yorkshire Days.

6. Invite descendants of original SED respondents and local families to contribute present-day dialect, memories, heritage and culture to the project via oral history interviews (20-25 in each museum area). Many of the original SED interviewees were from farming backgrounds: with farms usually passed down through the generations, we are confident of being able to find a significant number of present-day family members, enabling us to reach back in time to unite the voices of the past with those from the present. This will allow people to connect with their own familial heritage whilst adding to the ancestral store of cultural knowledge.

7. Transcribe new and existing LAVC oral history/dialect recordings to make them useful for, and accessible by, diverse audiences. Transcribing the recordings will offer opportunities to: further enhance the museums' collections and the website; stimulate future research; enable people to have a deeper level of engagement with the project and gain skills via crowdsourced transcription activities.

8. Create a schools pack tied to the national curriculum (English key stages 3, 4, and English Language A-Level all focus on different varieties and registers of English) which are informed by up-to-date research. This builds project legacy by educating younger audiences about diversity in dialect and local identities, within the context of a shared cultural heritage.

9. Train and support 200 museum and online volunteers to work on the public engagement activities as: oral history fieldworkers and transcribers; digital assistants devising metadata and creating digital records; helpers at project events; community ambassadors. Volunteers will gain skills across a range of activity types, and can elect to get involved in one or multiple activity streams. By training volunteers, and building the ripple effect via museum partners acting as local hubs of knowledge and expertise, we ensure ongoing legacy for the project, partner and other museums, and local and online communities once the period of funding has expired.

10. Add the newly collected dialect and cultural heritage materials to the online LAVC digital collection and website, and museums' collections, and carry out research to advance knowledge and understanding in the following key areas:

a) Dialect use past and present: the geographic and longitudinal scope/richness of the LAVC collection, coupled with the national spread of our partner museums, will offer new insights into dialect - opening up comparisons between the historic and contemporary, different places, and varying local customs and heritage to public audiences.

b) Family language: to discover whether families play a role in dialect maintenance, and how this relates to their sense of shared family heritage and identity. This will give valuable insights into the family-based cultural heritage that we each carry within us, and fits well with museums' visitor profiles and missions.

We will feed this new dialect and cultural heritage data and research back out to communities to close the circle via the museums, website, schools' resource and dementia pack, and local museum-external community activities.