Exhibition Toolkit

Toolkit Introduction

An exhibition is a display of objects, images or artworks which help people learn about a specific topic or theme. An exhibition is often part of a wider project and is there to share what you have learnt with others.

Putting on an exhibition needn't be scary. This toolkit is aimed at groups who have a fascinating heritage story to share but have never put on an exhibition before. It will help you from the start of the process to the end, and beyond. It doesn't matter whether your budget is big or absolutely tiny or whether your exhibition is going to be on a single wall or in a large building. This toolkit will help you plan and deliver an exhibition. It is broken down into 6 stages. There is also a handy checklist and a list of helpful online guides and resources at the end.

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Stage 1: Concept

Why put on an exhibition?

So you are interested in putting on an exhibition. To start the process you should be asking yourself a few questions.

• What do you want to achieve? Try writing a few sentences that sum up your idea.

Example

"I want to show how important the local Scouting movement was and still is to the people in our local area."

• Who are your target audiences? Will your exhibition appeal to them? How will you reach them? Try and be specific. It might also help to ask why will people want to come?

Example

"There is a wealth of memory and association to the Scouts in the local area with both older and younger generations. I am hoping people will want to come because this connection is important to them."

Example

"An exhibition will be a good way of connect people of different ages who might not have anything in common."

Once you have considered these two questions you should have a clear idea of what your goal is which you are ready to develop and share with others.

What other options are there?

An exhibition isn't always the best way to share your work. Consider other options such as:

- A website might work best for an ongoing project that is ever changing. Don't forget that an exhibition can work on the web too.
- o **Blogs** can also be a good way of sharing your interests with others. It also allows the author to continually update posts and connect to their audience.
- A Book might be an ideal way to tell a story that has a strong narrative but doesn't have a large range of visual material
- o A heritage trail might suit projects that are tied closely to a specific location



Figure 2 - Manchester Histories Festival is an example of a project that works well on the web

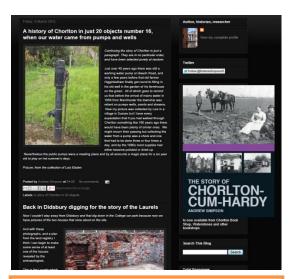


Figure 3 – A blog discussing the history of Chorlton and the surrounding area.



Figure 1 - Irwell Sculpture Trail connects landmarks along the River Irwell

Stage 2: Planning

At this stage you should have:	
Decided on the key stories your exhibition will explore	
Considered other options	
Defined your audience	

Top Tip

Some funders do not want you to start anything before applying to them. Others are keen to see that your planning and research is well under way. You will need to find out by talking to your funder how much planning you should do before applying to them.

Audience

The most important question to ask before you start planning is: who is your exhibition for?

- Is there a particular group of people who will be interested in your topic, or a particular group you would like to share the story with?
- Is your exhibition for people already familiar with your topic, for those who are completely new, or both? Different visitors sometimes need different levels of information. Some people will read every bit of text while others just want the main points.
- Are you aiming at an adult audience? What about adults with children? Will there be something for children to do?
- If you already have a venue in mind, think about who normally uses the space where the exhibition will be? For example, if it is at a youth centre, your audience will be young children and teenagers. If your space is in a university then your audience will be students. If this is not the audience you are looking for, you may need to look for another space. It is easier to take your exhibition to where your audience are than to get them to come to you.



Figure 4 - Information sheet on migration providing extra information for visitors.

Research

Most people will put on an exhibition at the end of a project to share what they have learnt. Most of the research on your topic has usually already been done. Now is the time to turn all that knowledge into a story visitors could understand. You need to decide:

- O What is important is there a key message you want visitors to come away with?
- How do you want to tell your story. Is it best by date order (chronologically) or by certain themes? This will form your exhibition structure.
- What objects, images or artwork you want to show people. It might help to develop a list of objects that you would like.

Example

"Do I tell the story of my local Scout groups from their beginnings in the early 20th century to the present day? Or do I explore certain themes such as camps, uniform and membership?"

Example

"I believe the exhibition should be themed in order to draw interesting parallels between the past and the present."

- A good way to get some ideas is to look at similar exhibitions. Nothing beats some fieldwork.
 So look for:
 - How other exhibitions present their story.
 - o If they are similar to yours, what could you do better or differently?
 - Think about what images and objects are in the exhibition, what draws your attention and why?
- Another way is to talk to people and try and find out what they would like to see in the
 exhibition and whether they are interested in the topic. Some of them might want to get
 involved in planning and creating the exhibition.

Involving people

Why involve others?

- They can spread the workload.
- o They may have personal experience about the topic.
- They can promote the exhibition to their friends.
- They may have technical skills, such as film-making, that you would otherwise have to pay for.
- They can provide feedback and improve the quality of the exhibition.
- o They will enjoy being involved and gain useful skills and experience.

Example

"I want to involve the Scouts in my local area. These groups can provide material for the exhibition and help with research. It might be enjoyable for the Scouts to learn more about the history of their own group and participate in the research."

Budget

How much does an exhibition cost? Consider what you might need to pay for:

- Materials
- Framing
- Furniture
- Staff
- Transport/hire
- Volunteer expenses
- Space
- Exhibition promotion
- Launch activities
- Image copyright
- Printing
- Display cases and boards
- Computers or TVs to show films or websites

Top Tip

Every exhibition is different so every cost is different. If you are planning a large or permanent exhibition the Heritage Lottery Fund have produced some sample prices of what certain larger items could cost as part of their 'Interpretation Guidance' http://www.hlf.org.uk/apply/how-apply/guidance-applying.

Where can I get funding and how do I apply?

The heritage alliance has a useful online funding directory of various bodies, local and national, which fund heritage projects and exhibitions.

www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/fundingdirectory/main/fundinghome.php

The main national funders of large exhibitions are the Heritage Lottery Found and the Arts Council but these are often very competitive and there might be a smaller local funder who specialises in your area of interest. If you are unsure where to start your local CVS (Community and Voluntary Service) can often help.

Not all the funding for an exhibition has to come through grants. Some parts of an exhibition can be sponsored by local businesses or paid for by online crowd-funding. Other parts can be paid for by 'in-kind support.' For example, a local builder's firm could provide materials, a community centre could provide a free room, a local newsletter could provide free advertising? Many funders like to see that you have explored other options and are only asking for the parts you can't get funded elsewhere.

How you apply for funding depends on the funding body you are applying to. Most have online application forms. It is important to check:

- What the outcomes and priorities of the funder are. Are they similar to yours?
- When the deadline is and when you will get a decision. It is important to leave enough time before the start of your exhibition

Do you need some paid help?

Using existing volunteers and staff is great but sometimes you can benefit from some extra help and experience. Using freelance staff can be expensive and many groups put on great exhibitions without any paid staff. Some of the expertise you could bring in include:

- An External Curator will have experience at putting on exhibitions and should specialise in exhibition interpretation and how to engage audiences.
- A Graphic Designer will have experience in making exhibition content (text and objects) visually appealing.

There are several on-line lists used by museums which list companies that provide goods and freelance staff. These are at the back of the toolkit. The lists are a useful place to start but it is important to look at various companies and choose the one that is best value. Cheapest isn't always best!

Space

The 'Catch 22' of exhibitions. You need a space before you can go ahead with large scale planning. Yet it can be extremely difficult to secure a space without a well thought out and persuasive application.

- Where can you exhibit? Many organisations have dedicated display spaces these include:
 - Museums
 - Art Galleries
 - Libraries
 - Community Centres
- Think creatively! Wherever there is space that people already use you can put on an exhibition. For example:
 - o Graffiti artists use any available wall space.
 - Airports, train stations and bus stations often have exhibitions displaying local artworks or showcasing what their city or country has to offer.
 - o Cafes and restaurants often use wall spaces for exhibitions.
 - o Faith buildings exhibit historical material including memorials and banners.
 - o Supermarkets have spaces for pop-up exhibitions.



Figure 5 - Nexus Art Cafe in the Northern Quarter, Manchester.



Figure 6 - The Community Gallery at the People's History Museum

Things to consider when choosing a space

- o Is your exhibition right for the space?
- o Is your exhibition quiet and thought-provoking, or vibrant and lively?
- o Does your subject matter seem wrong for the venue?
- o How many visitors will there be?
- O Will the exhibition be seen by passers-by?
- o How much space will you need and how flexible are you willing to be?
- o Do you have a date in mind for your exhibition?
- o Are you planning on any sound? If so what background noise is there?
- o If large groups visit, will there be room for them? Is there a hire cost?
- o Do you need to write an application and is there a deadline?
- o Geographical location Where do you want your exhibition to be?
- o Does the venue have particular requirements? Are there any rules?

Top Tip

It is often easier to put on an exhibition in a place that people already visit, rather than hiring a special venue and working hard to get them to come to you.

Applying to exhibit

Some venues will need you to fill in a formal application to use their space. It is best to talk to the venue early and find out:

- O Which member of staff is best to speak to about potential exhibitions?
- O Do you need to fill in an application form?
- o How far in advance of your exhibition to you need to book the space?

Top Tip

Venues usually programme exhibitions between 6 months and 2 years ahead. This makes it difficult to deal with urgent or specific display space requirements. It is sometimes often easier to secure a venue if you are flexible on dates.

Stage 3: Design

At this stage you should have:

Carried out some background research	
Drawn up a list of potential objects or artworks	
Chosen and secured space and dates for your exhibition	
Developed a budget of how much the exhibition is likely to cost and applied for funding	
Recruited some people to help create the exhibition and spread the word	

The next step is turning the idea into a physical exhibition.

Objects

- Which objects do you want to show?
- How much space do you have?
- Are your displays going to be themed?
- What story to do you to tell with your objects or artwork? Is it clear or will extra explanation be needed?

Top Tip

Make sure you measure. There is nothing worse than realising a key object doesn't fit in a case or a frame doesn't fit on a wall.

Figure 5 - Measuring and photographing objects can be a good way to keep track of everything



Art

- Producing art inspired by your topic can be a great way to make your exhibition more varied and stir people's emotions.
- It's important to make sure that people who don't know anything about your topic can understand the heritage story that the art work is telling.

Example

"While working with a local Scout group I showed some archive photographs of Scouts doing activities 30 years ago. They had the idea of taking photographs of current Scouting activities and setting up an area of the exhibition that displays the old photographs against the new."

Interactives

"I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand"
The philosopher Confucius

Anything that involves the visitor can be described as an interactive. This can range from listening to an interview, playing a game, to sharing memories in a book.

Why have interactives?

- Games can make learning more memorable, sociable and entertaining.
- TV, video or projections can offer visitors a glimpse of different material.



Figure 6 - Floor snakes and ladders with interesting facts.

Top Tip

Often when creating an exhibition you might get so many responses that you can't get everything in. A great way to deal with this can be to use photograph and text slideshows that can be played on a TV or a projector.

• Interactive types include:

- Quizzes
- Voting
- Asking visitors questions
- Games
- Children's activities: creating, colouring, playing
- Who are they aimed at?
- Where will they be? (Integrated throughout? At the end?, In their own section?)
- If you have multiple sound interactives consider where they are placed. Do you need headphones?
 Should they be as far away as possible to avoid sound clash?



Figure 7 - An example of good wiring, with plug sockets covered and trunking keeping cabling neat.

 If you have electrical interactives consider wiring. Where is the nearest plug socket? Will wires need covering?

Creating an exhibition plan

- It is often good to draw an exhibition floor plan either by hand or on the computer. It only
 has to be rough but make sure you have measurements for your wall space. This way you
 can check if things will fit without being in the space.
- Think about how visitors will flow through the space. This will give you an idea of where you want to place things.
- Consider accessibility for people with disabilities. What you need will depend on the size and cost of your exhibition, but often small changes can make a big difference.
 - o Wheelchair reading heights and wheelchair access
 - Subtitles on films
 - o Audio description
 - Large print text hand-outs
 - o Hand-outs on different coloured paper

Exhibition Floor Plan 150cm Fire Exit 150cm Case Study 1 - Alex's Story Photograph display 150cm Case Study 2 - Jane's Story 150cm Case Study 3 -Peter's Story 150cm Exhibition Introduction Comments Table Entrance / Exit Display Wall Table Display Case Projection slide show

Figure 8 - Example floor plan with wall measurements, themed sections and an idea of content

Writing exhibition text

- Before you start writing it is good to give yourself guidelines to work within:
 - Think about different levels of text. These are often split into:
 - Headlines or titles;
 - First level text like your introductions or theme explanations;
 - Object labels;
 - Supplementary text that might be in the form of a handout or pull out.
 - You will want a good balance between text and objects so set word limits for your text and labels. As a guide limit your theme introductions to 150 words and objects labels to 50 words. This will also help you be concise. There might be a few times when you want to allow yourself exceptions for particularly interesting or important objects.
 - Decide on a font and font size for your various levels of text. Ask yourself is the font easily readable and is the text size big enough? Try not to go any lower than point size 14 for labels and point size 18 for wall mounted text.

Drinkers' Map of Liverpool, 1883

On this map all the places to drink are shown by red dots. They are mainly located around the docks and in working class areas of housing. 50 years after the birth of the teetotal movement, there were still plenty of places to have a drink.

Figure 9 - Example of a label to scale at point size 16. There are 3 points made, getting visitors to engage closely with the object.

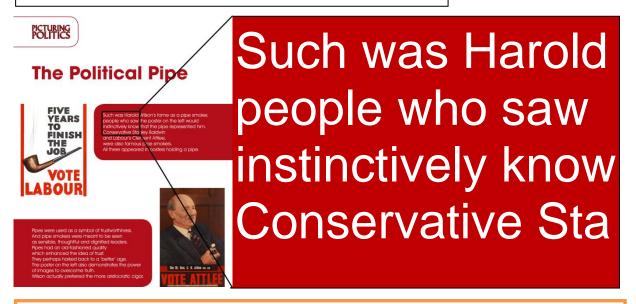


Figure 10 - Example theme introduction panel from an exhibition on political posters, with actual size of text at point size 37 on the right.

Helpful tips on writing exhibition text

- o The opening sentence should be the one most important thing you need to say.
- o Prioritise the two or three central ideas you want to communicate.
- Use simple sentence structures. No complex clauses. Try to use no more than 20 words in a sentence.
- Try and be concise. Read every sentence carefully. You will usually spot some unnecessary words, or a way of saying something that requires only one word where you might have used several.
- Use simple words and 'plain English.' The average reading age of the United Kingdom is nine years old.
- Using 'plain English' doesn't have to be patronising. Don't aim to simplify complex ideas too much, and don't avoid potentially difficult words when they are important to the story. Where you need to use a complex or specialist term define it.
- Use active forms of the verb where possible. For example "Mark posted the letter" rather than "The letter was posted by Mark". The subject of the sentence should come before the verb.
- Use conversational rhythms and variations so the text is easily spoken out loud. Put line breaks placed at natural pauses in a sentence. Try reading drafts out loud as you go along, as this is how you want people to be able to read them in the gallery.
- Use short paragraphs and short line lengths.
- Be consistent with your style. Examples of inconsistencies include dates: "9th century & 12th century". Numbers: "10 or ten". Do you present quotes in Italics, bold, single or double inverted commas?
- Think about your audience. Will you need to have the text translated into another language?
- Ask someone from a disability group or someone whose first language is not English to make sure they can understand it.
- Make sure you get your text proof read by as many people as possible. Ask them to look for mistakes and challenge them to reduce the number of words.

What you will need to display your story?

For some groups displaying an exhibition involves printing some large photographs and putting them on the wall with a label explanation. For other groups, it might involve loaning glass display cabinets, building display stands and purchasing frames for images. This will push the price up. Often a well done but simple display can be the best way to get a message across.

Top Tip

If you need special display equipment, ask your local museums or art galleries if you can borrow from them or ask where they buy from. There are also some useful online directories at the end of the toolkit. Make sure you get prices from several companies.

Types of suppliers you might need:

- Printers For text panels, image reproductions. Ask about the variety of material and sizes available
- Joiners For construction of a variety of things from making walls and plinths to games or jigsaw puzzles
- Framers- For protecting and highlighting images



Figure 11 – The
Oldham Road
exhibition looked at
the changing
landscape of the road
from Manchester to
Oldham. It's a good
example of a simple
but effective
photographic
exhibition



Figure 12 - Ghosts exhibition explored the history of music scene in Moss Side and Hulme. It involved room sets, TVs, oral history posts, text panels, case objects, costumes and music interactives. It's a good example of a more complex exhibition.

Exhibition events

- Why put on events?
 - Events can help promote the exhibition and can encourage people to come.
 - Through talks and tours you can expand on the exhibitions story.
 - Workshops and creative events can encourage more active participation.
- What events can you do?
 - Exhibition opening
 - Tours/talks
 - Creative Workshops
 - Film showings
 - Artist sessions
 - A costumed explainer visit

Figure 13 - Visitors at a workshop creating a collage for a display.

Security and Insurance

- It is important to consider security, especially for expensive electrical equipment like projectors, or framed objects. Consider:
 - Securing or locking down electrical equipment.
 - Fixing framed items to the wall with mirror plates rather than hooks.
 - Locking objects in cases or behind Perspex screens if they are wall mounted.
- It is important to make sure the exhibition is durable. Consider:
 - Mounting or laminating text onto a durable material like foamex. Be wary of using paper which can easily be torn or creased.
 - Interactives need to last for the duration of the exhibition. Make sure anything that visitors might touch or play with is durable.
- It is important to ensure that your exhibition is covered by public liability and contents insurance. Your exhibition may already be covered by your venue's insurance.



Figure 14 - Mirror plates are screwed into the frame and the wall, securing it in place.



Figure 15 - An example of perspex protection. Make sure all objects are secured.

Stage 4: Installation

At this stage you should have:	
Selected a range of objects or artworks	
Decided on exhibition interactives	
Created an exhibition plan	
Written your exhibition text	
Placed orders for display equipment	
Developed exhibition events	
Publicised exhibition & events	

Before the installation

Think about:

- How much time do you have to install your exhibition? Is this long enough?
- Is there anything you can prepare beforehand?

During the installation

- It's important to start early. It always takes longer than you think.
- Always refer to your exhibition plan.
- Find a safe place to store your objects while you install the exhibition
- Prioritise. Start with the most difficult and important tasks first. Putting up labels and a
 comments book can wait until the end. Think about any jobs that need to be done first. For
 example will you need to paint any walls and leave them to dry before putting up pictures?
- Make sure things are secured properly. It's no good if things fall over in the first week

What you will need

- You need to know who will install the exhibition. It can take a long time to put up an exhibition so make sure you get some people to help. Give everyone a clear job so they know what they need to do.
- Make sure all printed material or items being delivered are with you before the installation or have been arranged for a convenient time on installation days.



Figure 16 - Some of the tools that you might need when installing your exhibition

- The equipment you will need depends on the exhibition. You may be able to borrow some from the venue. Tools needed for more complex exhibitions include:
 - Spirit level
 - o Tape measure, pencils
 - Screwdriver or electric screwdriver
 - o Filler, sandpaper, dust masks if there is any wall preparation to do
 - o Paint, paintbrushes, rollers, masking tape if there is any painting to do
 - Drill bits, drill, various screws, nails, wall plugs, hammer for mounting framed objects to plaster, brick or mortar walls
 - Mirror plates for securing framed objects
 - Velcro tape for mounting lightweight text panels or labels
- You might need a variety of other supplies to stock the exhibition with. These could include:
 - o A comments book
 - o Pencils, pens and other stationary
 - Leaflets and flyers
 - o Badges or any other items that you want your visitors to take away with them

Top Tip

Make sure you have a vacuum cleaner and brushes! It can often be helpful to clear up in stages as you go along. Things can get very messy.

Before the exhibition opens

- Make sure that you have a good look round the exhibition after you have finished the installation. It can be good to get a friend who doesn't know anything about your exhibition to walk around with you. Check for anything that might be wrong or need correcting.
 - o Spelling and grammar mistakes
 - o Factual mistakes. For example using the wrong dates
 - Poorly secured objects
 - Health and safety hazards
 - Poor directional signage

Publicity - telling people about your exhibition

- Do you have a website? Is it worth setting one up?
- Does the venue have a website? What details do they need to publicise your exhibition?
- Could you use social media to interact with people interested in your project?
- Will you need printed marketing such as leaflets, flyers, posters?
- How can you encourage people to tell others about the exhibition?
- Could you use your contacts to invite interested groups?
- Could you ask the local media to feature your exhibition?

Stage 5: During the exhibition

At this stage you should have:	
Created a plan for your installation	
Got the right tools and equipment together	
Assigned jobs	
Installed objects, text and interactives	
Checked for errors and problems	

- If staff or volunteers are not regularly in the exhibition, you will need to make occasional trips to check it is still safe and complete.
- Things that can be used up, such as pencils, pens and leaflets need to be replaced during the exhibition to avoid disappointment.
- Check any early feedback as there might be a common negative comment, such as not enough directional signage, that can be quickly fixed.

Recording visitor feedback

There are many ways to record people's thoughts or opinions on the exhibition. These can include:

- Comment books
- Message boards or blackboards
- Digital Feedback forms
- Voting interactives
- Social media

It is important to think about what went well and what you could have done differently.



Figure 19 - Asking visitors specific questions can provoke interesting responses. By displaying comments cards visitors can share their thoughts with others.



Figure 17- Visitor comments book



Figure 18 - Blackboards can be a good way to engage with visitors but are not great as a permanent record

- It is good to record the number of people who visit your exhibition. Many museums and art galleries will record the number of people who walk through the doors. This will give you a good idea at the end of the exhibition how many people have seen it.
- If possible record what kind of people visited your exhibition. Was it who you expected?

The exhibition draws to a close

- Return borrowed items. Make sure to arrange any details before the exhibition ends.
- Is the exhibition going to other venues 'on tour' or is it being kept together in storage? Transport needs to be arranged. The space you are using is probably going to be used for another exhibition or activity soon so it is unlikely they will have space.
- Package up any breakable objects carefully with bubble wrap or tissue paper.
- Celebrate what you have achieved and thank everyone who has been involved.

Stage 6: Life beyond the physical exhibition

Hopefully the end of the exhibition doesn't mark the end of your project's story. There are several options for extending the project's life beyond the exhibition:

- o Creating an exhibition website.
- o Using Social Media.
- Capturing visitor responses and stories during the exhibition.
- Donating a collected object to an archive or a museum.
- Creating resources that can be used again, such as a teacher's pack for local schools.
- o Using part of the exhibitions in future events, such as the group's AGM.



Figure 20 - Booth Hall Hospital Heritage Project Facebook page. The project was set up to capture memories of Booth Hall hospital which was demolished in 2014. It is an example of a project successfully using social media, both before, and after an exhibition.

Top Tip

Not only can social media create a life for you exhibition after it's happened but it can also be a great tool for involving people in local projects.

Before You Start Checklist	
Decided on the key stories your exhibition will explore	
Considered other options	
Defined your audience	
Carried out some background research	
Drawn up a list of potential objects or artworks	
Chosen and secured space and dates for your exhibition	
Developed a budget of how much the exhibition is likely to cost and applied for funding	
Recruited some people to help create the exhibition and spread the word	
Selected a range of objects or artworks	
Decided on exhibition interactives	
Created an exhibition plan	
Written your exhibition text	
Placed orders for display equipment	
Developed exhibition events	
Publicised exhibition & events	
Installation Checklist	
Created a plan for your installation	
Got the right tools and equipment together	
Assigned jobs]
Installed objects, text and interactives	
Checked for errors and problems	

Appendices

List of useful websites & resources

Lists of suppliers

- The Museum Services Directory http://www.museumsassociation.org/find-a-supplier
- Association of Heritage Interpretation http://www.ahi.org.uk/www/suppliers/by_category/
- Group for Education in Museums http://www.gem.org.uk/fnet/fnet_list.php
- Museum Association http://www.museumsassociation.org/find-a-supplier

It is up to you to find out which is best for your exhibition. We cannot recommend any particular company.

Exhibition Spaces

There are many community exhibition spaces that are not expensive to hire. For example, in Greater Manchester, some of the venues that have dedicated community exhibition space are:

- Galley Oldham http://www.galleryoldham.org.uk/exhibitions/community-gallery.htm
- Eccles Community Art Gallery http://www.ecclescommunityartgallery.org/
- People's History Museum http://www.phm.org.uk/about-us/exhibition-opportunities/
- Nexus Art Cafe http://nexusartcafe.com/art/submissions/
- Castlefield Gallery http://www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk/associates/newartspaces/

Groups who might be able to offer free or low cost support on creating exhibitions:

- University students and lecturers. The history department of your local university is a good place to start but other departments, such as tourism, art or media, can also help.
- Your local council sometimes have heritage officers who can provide support.
- Other groups who have put on similar exhibitions can give you advice.

Other toolkits

- Oral History Toolkit http://www.racearchive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/oral-history-toolkit.pdf
- How to involve young people in heritage projects
 http://www.hlf.org.uk/file/11888/download?token=y5hRN5D9ISSSgRmVjlVgcqtv-Fq5MULM7LpROsiLTes
- Guidance for larger or permanent exhibitions HLF 'interpretation good practice guide' http://www.hlf.org.uk/apply/how-apply/guidance-applying