

This resource, from our Sustainable Volunteering Officer, Eleanor Moore, details guidance on contemporary collecting in response to COVID-19.

Contemporary collecting involves collecting objects, stories and material culture that reflect the recent past and what is happening today. So, where do you start?

1. Read what others have done and adopt their good practice guidelines

We have found four useful introductory resources covering ethical and practical considerations and suggesting different ways to approach a project, with real life examples:

Make sure you start with this resource!

Contemporary Collecting Toolkit from North West Museum Development and Jen Kavanagh:
A brilliant step by step guide to take you through any contemporary collecting project.

https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/mdnw_contemporarycollectingtoolkit_july2019.pdf

Contemporary Collecting : An Ethical Toolkit for Museum Practitioners from the London Transport Museum:

https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/assets/downloads/Contemporary_collecting_toolkit.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2nWmZD--r-1z4CRNaT0MUIGu2KISNQWm1HA4dfQcNtjOAgH00NEN1W33A

Collecting the Contemporary: A Handbook for Social History Museums – Baveystock, Z and Rhys O (Editors) 2014:

In particular, the Victoria Bush Fires chapter by Peg Fraser is relevant.

<https://museumsetc.com/products/collecting-the-contemporary>

Excellent advice from the Oral history Society on collecting oral histories about Covid 19:

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/covid-19/>



Stay Safe, 28 March 2020, [Tim Green](#) CC BY 2.0

Top tips:

- Before you start - ensure you can collect appropriately, safely, sustainably and ethically.
- Make sure that any collecting and documentation activity meets Museum Accreditation standards.

2. Think about what really is urgent when deciding what and how to collect

Covid-19 is an unprecedented event that, unlike so much of modern life, affects the entire population at the same time – albeit in hugely differing ways, and over a long period of time.

In comparison, the storm of 2014 which destroyed the railway line at Dawlish was a uniquely severe, short term event. Dawlish Museum's volunteers moved fast to get visual material and first person testimonies from the event and its aftermath. Here's what they collected and how they made it accessible in response to huge local, national and international interest:

<https://www.devonmuseums.net/The-Great-Storm-DVD/Dawlish-Museum/View-Product/>

There will be large amount of potential material to collect from the lockdown period. Consider collecting digitally to start with, and then approaching some of those who have shared digital material to ask them to work with you further and keep physical material to one side for you.

Many museum and archive organisations are currently exploring what they might collect:

Have a look on Archives List Serv at the Ethical Contemporary Collecting directory – a shared spreadsheet of efforts to document and collect during COVID 19:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1curZNtDiVcHAWwYRBDzwYdaSeSA24M6AjbXG2XG7_Gg/viewform?edit_requested=true

3. You may be working remotely, but consider developing a partnership

Co-curation approaches will be vital for this unique contemporary collecting effort.

Could you work with...

- A local youth group?
- A local family, all in one place or dispersed across several households?
- A local charity involved in front line work?
- Could you commission an artist to help you document responses to Covid-19?

Once you've talked to your potential partner, consider a having a partnership agreement (if working with an organisation or an artist) or a letter (to individuals, families) confirming your agreed approach to this collecting project.

- What sort of timescale do you have in mind?
- What costs can you reimburse?
- How will you work together to agree what will be accessioned and preserved long term and to share display ideas?

When choosing a partner, think about:

- Audiences that you would like to develop closer links with – [See our audiences resources here](#)
- Safeguarding processes for working with individuals and groups - make sure you apply these now, just as you would in 'normal times'.
- That you are sure your collecting project does not encourage partners to break social distancing guidelines.

4. Ask yourself the right questions *before* you start

Check first! Ensure you collect appropriately, safely, sustainably and ethically, in line with Museum Accreditation.

- **How does this fit with your Collections Development Policy?**
- **Who else is collecting?**

You need to collect in line with your policy. You need to inform and consult other organisations that might be collecting similar material, including archives.

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/managing-collections/holding-and-developing-collections/collections-development-policy/>

- **How will you store and document the collection (including digital collections)?**
- **What are the conservation and long term preservation implications of the material you are thinking of collecting?**

For example, modern papers may be more unstable than older paper; glue on post-it notes may degrade very quickly, jeopardising long term preservation and display. It may be better to collect a digital image than something made out of an unstable material.

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum-resources/conservation-and-collections-care/>

- **How will you manage new material safely, including the risk of virus transfer from objects?**

Plan ahead and if in doubt, quarantine new arrivals for a minimum of three days. You should also quarantine new acquisitions for all the more usual reasons, such as to avoid bringing pests into your stores.

- **What about copyright?**

See our copyright and Intellectual Property rights resource below or contact our Digital Engagement Officer Rachel Cartwright Rachel.cartwright@bristol.gov.uk for support regarding copyright and digital collections,

<https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/resources/copyright-intellectual-property-rights-policy-template/>

Have a look at the Museum of Barnstaple's approach to clarifying copyright within their current appeal for Covid 19 stories: <https://www.barnstaplemuseum.org.uk/covid-19-you-story/>

5. Plan ahead – think about building a team to help carry out the project

Could you recruit volunteers just to help with your COVID 19 collecting once lockdown is lifted?

There is a huge amount of community interest in the historical significance of the crisis. You could tap into this, but you will need to plan a recruitment strategy for your new volunteer team carefully and in advance.

Volunteering Guidance

We have a large amount of resources to help you with volunteer recruitment and management available on our website. We also have a resource on virtual and distance volunteering, which may be helpful during times of isolation.

[View all our resources on volunteering](#)

Lastly, if you decide that it isn't appropriate for you to collect from the pandemic at this time, why not thank the people who contact you with suggestions, and refer them to the Mass Observation Survey – this will give them a chance to contribute to an archive capturing and using records of every day life.

<http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/what-s-on/205-covid19>



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Supported using public funding by
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