

Case Study:

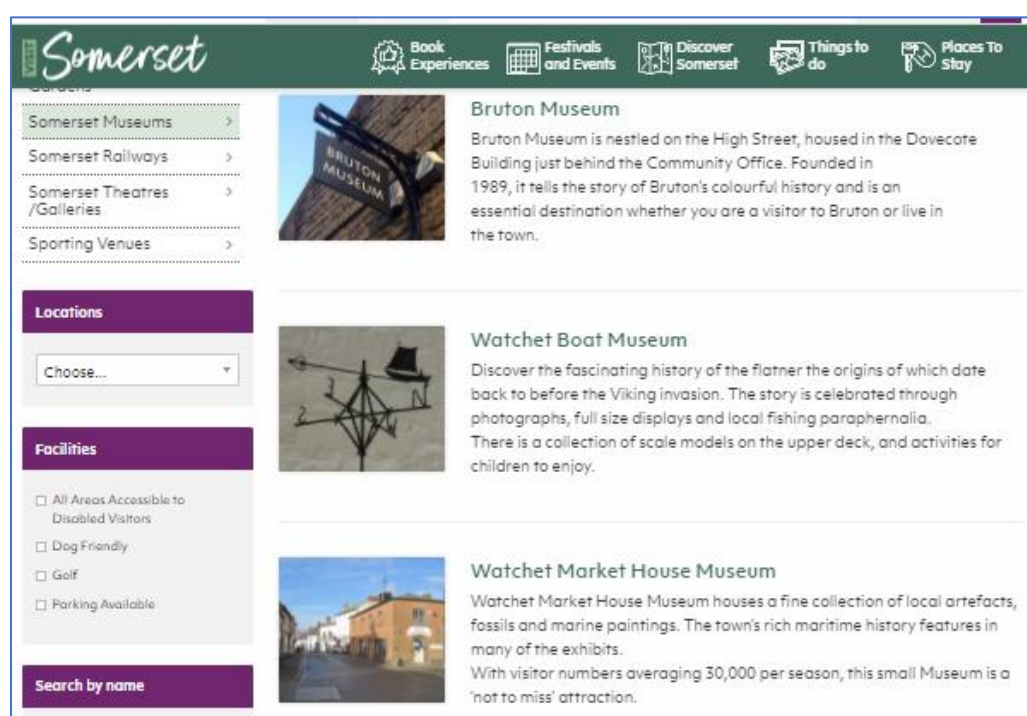
Somerset Museums: Promoting our Museums Small Grant: Big Improvement 2020



The Museums in Somerset Group received [Small Grant: Big Improvement](#) funding from South West Museum Development in Spring 2020. With the aim to enhance the 16 volunteer run museums' online presence and work with the third party Destination Management Organisation, Visit Somerset. The funding was to trial the paid membership for a year to raise the profile of these community museums on the Visit Somerset website.

Rachel Bellamy, Museum Development Officer for Somerset, led on the bid writing, project management and partner liaison, leveraging in additional financial contribution from South West Heritage Trust. Rachel Cartwright, Digital Engagement Officer, supported Rachel Bellamy with project conception, adaption of delivery during the pandemic, and delivered bespoke support and training online for participating museums.

This case study provides further information about the funding process, managing the project and the lessons learned along the way. **Note:** the funding application was submitted pre-pandemic and the award was granted in May 2020 - the project delivery was adapted throughout this changing environment.



Visit Somerset website showing some of the participating museums who are now listed

Funding overview

Funding awarded:	£1,650 (match funding: £550 from South West Heritage Trust)
In-kind support:	Rachel Bellamy, Museum Development Officer (MDO) Rachel Cartwright, Digital Engagement Officer (DEO) 15 days (equivalent est. £4500)
Project dates:	June 2020 – June 2021



Museum feedback:

"This programme helped us realise that we needed more expert help to drive us to the next level."

"Having guidance through this process has been so helpful"

"It was really great connecting with other museums during the project"

Project aims:



Support museums to communicate more effectively with online audiences using existing and new digital platforms; through both their own and third party sites (Visit Somerset). Through building confidence for volunteers in the creation of online content to build audiences.



To pilot the benefits of a co-ordinated approach to paid membership with a third party Destination Management Organisation and the effect of this joint membership on museums' online engagement.

Project outline:

2020

- May: Funding awarded and paperwork signed.
MDO engaged with the museums to take part.
- June: Project agreement created and circulated for each museum to sign – outlining commitments .
Development of digital engagement 'where are you now' survey for participating museums.
Survey circulated and results collated by Digital Engagement Officer to inform training sessions.
- July: Kick off meeting with Museums and introduction to the project plan and feedback on survey findings.
- Aug: Session 1: *Creating optimal and accessible digital content.*
- Sept: Session 2: *Collections online and rights management.*
Meeting: online follow up recap and surgery for questions for sessions 1 and 2.
Meeting: *Introduction to Visit Somerset*, with John Turner, CEO of Visit Somerset.
- Oct: Session 4: *Thinking strategically about digital engagement: focus on Facebook and Tripadvisor.*
- Nov: Follow up meeting and surgery for any outstanding queries for Digital Engagement Officer.
- Dec: Museums start content development for Visit Somerset.

2021

- Jan –
- March: Engagement with Visit Somerset for listings to begin to be developed with support of MDO.
- April: Call for social media content from Visit Somerset.
Museum Mondays posts begin.
Bi-monthly museum group catch-ups with MDO begin, Visit Somerset social media lead joining a few.
- May: Follow up meeting: Visit Somerset and 30 minute session with DEO on social media and collections (to support the Visit Somerset calls for content).
- June: Evaluation surveys circulated.



"It has been great to add more local heritage content to our website and social media channels. We can tell people love reading about it as there is always great engagement on the social posts!"

- Maisy Hatcher, Visit Somerset

Project successes

A centrally coordinated approach to work with a third party

The Visit Somerset team offered a reduced membership rate, as the museums' membership and creation of content was coordinated by the MDO, significantly reducing Visit Somerset's administration for these new members.

Confidence in engaging with a third party organisation to support museum promotion has increased.

Working as a group

All of the participants felt that working as a group had a positive impact on their experience of the project. Most (84.6%) said they would like to be part of a joint project again.

Frequent opportunities to meet online

At a time when everyone was isolating, the online training sessions and keeping-in-touch meetings enabled connection, sharing of learning and problem solving between museum leads.

Project challenges:

Delivering the project during the pandemic

84.6% of museums felt that the pandemic affected their ability to engage with the project

Under-estimation of capacity and project management

Somerset MDO Rachel Bellamy as Project Manager contributed more hours than planned due to need for increased project administration and communication. Further support was required to keep museums engaged during this challenging period.

SWMD's Digital Engagement Officer Rachel Cartwright contributed more hours than anticipated due to the shift in online training delivery and creating additional 'surgery' sessions to support museums with the lack of face-to-face support.

Less definitive outcomes due to the pandemic

- The understanding of whether Visit Somerset membership is beneficial to museums is still ongoing. The museum listings were deferred until Feb 2021 due to closure and restricted travel in the UK wide lockdown.
- The lack of capacity to fully engage in the project amidst the other pandemic priorities has led to less implementation and content development from the museums and therefore less evidence of benefits.
- Museum visitor figures for participating museums in 2021 are low compared to a normal year, as opening hours and volunteer commitment has also been affected.

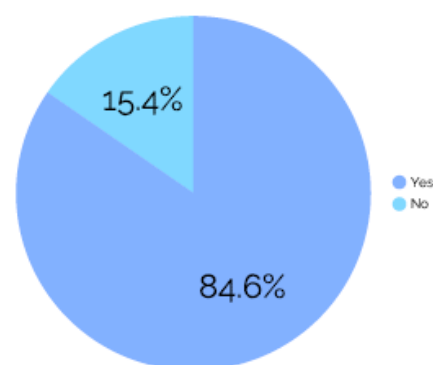
92%

of respondents were more confident at the end of the project in terms of engaging with a third party such as Visit Somerset

100%

of respondents think that working as a group has made a positive impact on this project work

Has capacity (both individual and organisational) affected your ability to engage with the project as a whole?



"We now have more of a master plan on how to engage with our audiences online." **Museum trustee**



"Due to the pandemic it has not been possible to cascade the training received for the benefit of the museum in an effective way. Hopefully this may occur in the future to make better use of this aspect of the project." **Museum participant**

Top tips for museum groups who will be looking to work in partnership to leverage funding and work together on a digital engagement project (the below also applies to general partner projects)



Outline your project aims

- Who is this for? what outcomes will you be looking to achieve?
- Be honest from the beginning about what everyone's expectations are and if there is enough collective need for this work to be a priority. *For this, project the Digital Engagement Officer conducted a diagnostic survey for every museum and the outcome of this informed the sessions. Outside of the pandemic context an individual one to one using these findings may have been a good way to ensure priorities align, realistic expectations and commitments required for the project.*
- If you are seeking external funding what are the aims of the funder? These will need to be clearly addressed in the funding application .



Who will be involved

- Scope the participants and stakeholders – do you want commitment from them before submitting funding applications?



Map out a realistic timeline

- Break the project down into stages where viable and identify what would be done when.
- Be generous with the estimations .
- Do you have any milestones / key dates that you will need to meet as part of the project?



Define responsibilities:

- Will you have a Project Manager or Project Coordinator recruited as part of the delivery?
- Or will someone from the partnership take this on for the duration? (Check capacity)
- Outline what commitments each partner will take on.



Factor in external expertise / support

- If this is new territory for you and the partner organisations then scope that external support you might require e.g. in this instance it was the digital engagement skills development to:
 - 1) review the museums' current digital work to benchmark progress and ensure appropriate content.
 - 2) deliver tailored support for the participant museums.



Budget appropriately

- Seek quotes if relevant.
- Include contingency.
- Think about additional project expenses: travel, meetings, marketing materials.



Scope time commitments and capacity of partners and contributors

- Include contingency discussions in case lead person leaves or for other unforeseen disruptions.



Draw up a project agreement for each participating organisation / partner

- Outline the project, include the agreed partner responsibilities and projected timeline.
- Sign the agreement with signatures from the person who will deliver the work and one senior leader.