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A conference report on the ‘Finding Funds for Fossils, Ferns and Flamingos: how to secure money for museum collections’ 30th January 2019

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Abstract

Natural Sciences Collections Association (NatSCA) hosted a one-day conference at the World Museum Liverpool on 30th January 2019. The conference entitled ‘Finding Funds for Fossils, Ferns and Flamingos: how to secure money for museum collections’ was dedicated to examining successful grant applications and fundraising methods including attracting donors and sponsorship. The conference had a variety of speakers from key funders such as the Arts Council England and The National Lottery Heritage fund. In addition to this, other speakers provided their practical insights on how to write successful grants and offered their personal tips on how to interest donors. The day was well documented on social media on the NatSCA Twitter page (@Nat_SCA) or by others using the Twitter hashtag #natscaffunding.

Keywords:

NatSCA; Natural History; Funding; Grant applications; Conference proceedings

Introduction

From small local museums to National museums, all have the need to fundraise in some capacity or another. Fundraising is multifaceted and can support anything from small independent projects to international exhibitions and re-developments of cultural spaces. The NatSCA fundraising conference captured different methods and techniques from various organisations offering different quantities of financial support. The conference successfully captured many voices, including those making the decision to accept or reject funding and from those who work in museums in a fundraising capacity. A culmination of information about specific grants, how to be successful in grant writing and hearing peoples successes and failures from different perspectives made this conference so informative and useful to apply outside of the conference hall.

Talks

The first speaker was Andrew Evans from National Museums Liverpool. Andrew provided an energetic presentation about writing successful funding proposals. He summarised the key elements of success with grant based fundraising including the importance of clearly articulating the vision of the project and what difference the project would make to the museum sector. He noted the importance of treating funders as people who are interested and inspired by the very same elements of a project as visitors. It’s also paramount to ensure that you do exactly what is asked of you by donors – be specific, align your institutional goals and the goals of the key donors, use vivid language and be aware that your application may only be skim read! Andrew emphasised in instances where there are no specific guidelines or application process to only provide a covering letter, a



supporting document to the project, one page budget summary, information on the audit process and only one additional brochure or document. The focus of these documents should be what difference your project would make in terms of output, outcomes and impact.

Abbey Janis-Dillion, the Development Executive from the Science Museum Group, provided an insightful presentation on the power of stewardship. Abbey highlighted several elements to ensure a successful stewardship relationship; building trust and being honest and accountable to the donor. The importance of upholding any agreements made by the donor which should be agreed in writing was emphasised as this is the best way to foster long term stewardship relationships. Abbey also provided her insights into writing the powerful stewardship reports including staying focused on the original aims of the stewardship, honing in on shared goals and updating them on the hard facts in combination with telling stories of the visitors experiences and sharing the emotional side of your project.

An interesting presentation on the value of friends groups to museums was given by Victoria Symes from the Institute of Funding North West. Victoria spoke about common mistakes made in the

relationships between museums and friends groups including 'mission drift' and the difference between behavioural loyalty and financial loyalty. Victoria provided her tips on avoiding relationship break down including clearly defining roles, carefully consulting with all parties and recognising the benefits the friends groups bring when provided with guidance from museum professionals. Victoria ended by summarising the strong and positive values that friends groups bring to the museum sector.

Graeme Wotherspoon, the Head of Individual Giving from the Royal Horticultural Society, spoke about using herbarium specimens to fund the new RHS Science centre. Graeme discussed different motivations behind donors - whether that be transactional, for a direct return of a product or benefit, or donors who are driven by hearing about how their money will be spent. Graeme also spoke about the different fundraising methods, benefits and dynamics used by the RHS to raise money including letter writing, hosting invite only events for donors, allowing the opportunity to sponsor herbarium boxes and providing tours of building sites and stores for donors (Figure 1). His talk highlighted the diversity of donors motivating factors and noted that a combination of methods is often required to maintain steady levels of donation.



Figure 1. Graeme Wotherspoon, the Head of Individual Giving from the Royal Horticultural Society shows a slide on RHS' the new fundraising approach of sponsoring herbarium boxes. [Image taken from Twitter posted by Donna Young]

Emma Coleman from the ArtFund gave a very interesting overview of current funding opportunities. There many funding opportunities for curators provided by the Art Fund. Emma spoke about the successes of the Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial fellowship aimed at senior curators which fund the cost of continued professional development, museum and exhibition visits, conference fees, training courses and programmes of study to further the careers of museum professionals. Grants are available from £200 to £2,000 or over £2,000. Annually, £75 000 is available to give away. Emma also spoke about the Headley Fellowships aimed at senior curators to build specialist skills or research. The funds backfill the curators time and £5,000 would be available to cover mentoring, work placements and study trips. Applicants were encouraged to consider what the public facing outcome of their training would be. Emma also discussed the Weston loan programme which was established to aid regional museums to secure loans from National museums. These range from £5,000 to £25,000 and cover the costs of insurance, conservation, transportation, cases, marketing, updating existing gallery spaces and other affiliated costs with the loan. This scheme would like to encourage applicants with natural sciences collections to apply. Emma also touched upon the new collecting awards, curatorial network grants and acquisitions opportunities funding.

Penny Thompson from the Arts Council England (ACE) gave an overview of ACE, the types of organisations regularly funded and key elements to keep in mind when applying for ACE funding. ACE would like to fund new ideas in museum practise, exhibitions, conservation, events and digital projects. She noted it was paramount to ensure applicants know who they are trying to reach through their project when applying for funding. Penny specified that retrospective projects or acquisitions could not be funded. Applications should be of high quality, encourage public engagement and include a project plan detailing the management and financing of the project. Penny finished by highlighting that ACE would like to encourage partnerships, especially with children or youth groups. It should be noted that for museum-based funding, museums should be accredited or provisionally accredited.

A captivating talk on digital fundraising was given by Emily Grint from Visufund. She highlighted that internet users are more diverse than previously thought and that using online methods, you should be able to engage all audiences. Emily ran through free tools for online fundraising including Facebook, Amazon Smile, Give As You Live, Every

Click and Easyfundraising. She stated that museums must keep up with the times by employing methods for donation such as using contactless technology, crowdfunding, running online articles to encourage donations, text donations and online sponsorship pages. It was noted that digital fundraising alone should not be relied upon solely for income, however by not following online trends and fundraising, museums may be missing out on a valuable income stream. Emily's main message was for people not to be afraid to openly discuss donations, attach online methods of donations to emails, newsletters, social media and display the efforts on the gallery floor.

Nathan Lee from the National Lottery Heritage Fund provided an overview of the new funding framework running from 2019-2024 (Figure 2). Nathan summarised how simple, stream lined funding has been established. Local committees now make decisions on grants from £3,000 to £5 million which will account for around 80% of funds. The structure has now changed to represent the North, Midlands and the South and London. Please see the website for more details on the application process. The National Lottery Heritage Fund is focusing on nature and communities and would like to promote environmentally friendly practises through their funding. Heritage priorities include landscapes and nature, reconnecting people to the UK's natural heritage and community heritage to help celebrate local spaces. Each application will now be assessed for inclusivity as funding will be targeted towards under represented and deprived areas. Nathan finished the talk by noting that from 2020 to 2021, the National Lottery Heritage Fund will be focusing on digital outputs.

Closing remarks were made by Clare Brown followed by tours of the natural sciences departments in the World Museum Liverpool, ran by Donna Young (Botany), Tony Parker (Vertebrate Zoology) and Wendy Simkiss (Natural Sciences). Thanks were extended to the World Museum Liverpool and NML for hosting the event, and all speakers for making the day so valuable and motivating.

Summary

The conference was insightful due to the mix of speakers; both those who grant funds and those working to fundraise for museums. One of the most poignant messages of the day came from Andrew Evans at National Museums Liverpool. Andrew highlighted that funders are inspired and enthused by the very same elements that visitors

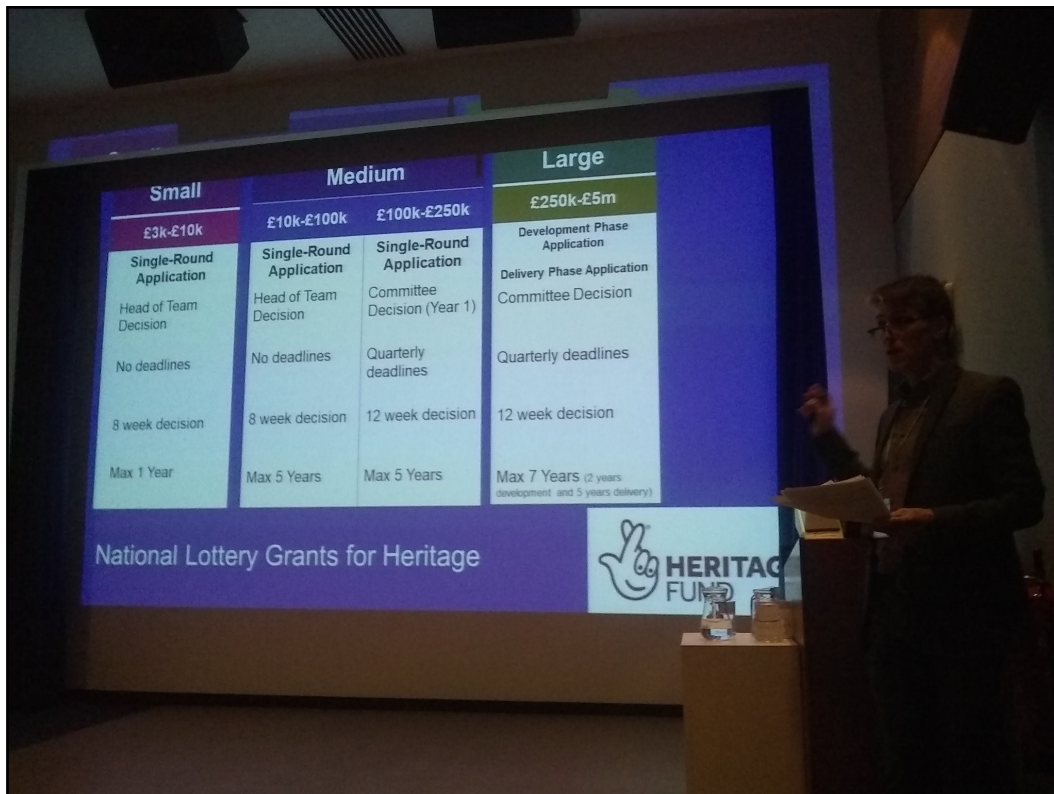


Figure 2. Nathan Lee from the National Lottery Heritage Fund elaborates on the new categories of funding available from 2019-2024. [Image taken from Twitter posted by Emily Grint]

are excited by and it is paramount to tap into that ‘human’ element when writing applications. The small details and personal tips from each speaker made the conference an incredibly informative day. The conference presented many opportunities for further research into funding streams and inspired many a creative thought into how to use collections for fundraising.

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