



# Kickstart Heritage

A toolkit to strengthen your relationship  
with audiences post-pandemic

June 2021



## Kickstart Heritage

It's been so long since we've seen the merry faces of audiences in person, and as heritage places are slowly reopening here in Northern Ireland, the warmest welcome back is in order.

Slipping back into old habits isn't on the cards. Knowing how people's lives have changed and how heritage now fits into their lives is essential to making a success of your reopening. It is about offering them an experience they'll enjoy but that will also make them want to come back again and again.

At the end of 2020, we ran [Culture Beyond Covid for Heritage](#), an audience survey for museums, heritage buildings and natural heritage. We uncovered insights into Northern Ireland audiences' engagement with local heritage and how they felt about returning to these spaces post-Covid.

The data revealed common themes that will be incredibly useful for the heritage sector going forward. This toolkit is a list of tips on how to turn these insights into action in your own organisation.

## Not sure what audience development is?

Audience development is about creating or strengthening relationships with audiences. We developed a series of 5 blogs going through each of the steps of audience development:

- [The real steps to developing your audience](#)
- [Getting to know your audiences: Data isn't scary](#)
- [The perks of being clumsy and how to embrace change](#)
- [Audiences in need of TLC: A talk about relationships and loyalty](#)
- [\(Good\) Evaluation is not a chore](#)

If you have any question about the data or want to have a chat about your own audiences, [get in touch with our Client Relationships Executive Claire Rose Canavan](#) to book a free Audience Appointment.

The pandemic has allowed heritage to take a more important place in people's lives. How can it be sustained?

### What the data says



- Our Culture Beyond Covid audience research showed that during Covid, **attendance of natural heritage was higher than before Covid**. Since the start of the pandemic, 80% have visited natural heritage and 68% agree visiting outdoor heritage has become more important to them since March 2020.
- **76% are interested in engaging with heritage online** in the future.
- People are attending indoor heritage less often than before Covid. Safety is the biggest factor in non-attendance: 72% want to avoid crowds, 32% are reluctant to travel.

### Our tips



Focus on the benefits outdoor heritage is often associated with: **mental health, wellbeing and safety**. People who are visiting natural heritage often speak of it as an opportunity to 'recharge batteries' and a safe place to meet up with other people. Swap your current message for one that shines a spotlight on these benefits. Check out the [National Lottery Heritage Fund's Wellbeing guidance](#). It's a great resource that covers all the **best practices to address your wellbeing outcome**.



**We've asked audiences what they want from heritage moving forward** and they want you to keep the good habits you've adopted since Covid. They want you to be closer to the local community and more personal in your storytelling so they can feel more represented. **Improving accessibility and offering more suited opening hours** were also mentioned.



Online heritage helps people to learn new things but doesn't connect them to their local area to the same extent. It's important to **be clear about your aims and what you're trying to achieve when developing online heritage experiences**.



**Passive** online experiences such as watching a tour or lecture, offering **behind-the-scenes** content and showing parts of the collection that isn't available on-site are heritage audiences' preferred type of online content.

People want to hear more from heritage organisations. How can you communicate better with your visitors?

### What the data says



- 50% have visited a museum since Covid. Although people are attending built heritage less often than before Covid, **communication has a big impact on people's decision making for attending indoor spaces.**
- While 82% are confident that museums and heritage buildings are doing everything possible to keep them safe, **only 56% are confident that they've kept visitors informed of their plan.**

### Our tips



**Communicating about your safety measures and booking system will encourage more people to attend and make visitors feel more comfortable.**

The more information you provide on your different communication channels, the better. We recommend adding a detailed FAQs to your website, and if you can, creating a video that will show what an experience within your space post-lockdown looks like. [This video from the Mauritshuis is a lovely example.](#)



**Is your ticketing system user-friendly?** It should be easy, quick and flexible. In our Culture Beyond Covid research, several respondents said they were happy to pre-book in advance but would also like to be able to book on the day.



People are spending more time online due to Covid and for this reason, **they may be more likely to engage with heritage organisations online.** Make sure you are responsive in a timely manner whether it is on social media, via email or on the phone.



People who have visited indoor heritage since March 2020 are more confident in visiting than the ones who haven't. Can you ask those who have already come back to leave you a review online? **Word of mouth is a powerful tool** and can increase confidence in people who are still hesitant.

People want to feel more involved and listened to by heritage organisations. How to strengthen your relationship with your audiences?

### What the data says



- In our research, we were also interested in people's motivations in visiting heritage spaces. Respondents talked with eloquence about why they visit heritage. For them, it is about **learning, knowledge** and **connections with the past**. They also mentioned **spiritual connections, wellbeing** and **shared experiences**.

### Our tips



Understanding why people engage with heritage is key in strengthening your relationship with them. **Knowing what motivates them will help you to structure a relevant programme and deliver a message that speaks to them.**



**Your front of house staff and volunteers know A LOT** about your audiences as they're the one meeting all your different type of visitors daily. Involve them in the conversation. We promise their input will be gold.



Other ways to know more about your audience include **traditional research methods** like surveys, focus groups and one-to-one interviews.



Some of the comments we received showed heritage audiences want to feel more involved with heritage organisations. What does this mean? They enjoy being asked what they think and for their feedback to be taken into consideration, but not only. Places like [14 Henrietta Street](#) in Dublin have involved their local community in planning and developing the museum and its heritage projects. **When audiences are involved and listened to, they feel a stronger connection to the place as they are directly represented.** This will result in them speaking highly of your space and recommending it to friends and family.