COMMUNITIES & CROWDS

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW

FINDINGS

V 0.1

# Research Background

The Communities & Crowdsproject aims to strengthen the relationship between museum concepts of participatory practice and online crowdsourcing efforts within cultural institutions in the UK and US. In doing so, the project will examine how institutions can incorporate **volunteers** into the process of digitising collections – both locally and globally – with a focus on decolonisation and democratisation.

Prior to the commencement of this research, the project team had appointed the first four volunteers to take part in this project, and they had started to explore the *Daily Herald* archive at the National Science and Media Museum (NSMM).

## Research Aims

In interviewing these four volunteers, the project team seeks to better understand:

* + - **The volunteers’ motivations for taking part in the project;**
    - **Their expectations of the project;**
    - **If there are any concerns about the project that might be addressed/any specific support needed.**

Research will initially be used internally by core members of the project team – both to evaluate the project to date, and to improve the volunteers’ experience going forward.

# Methodology

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were carried out with all four current Communities & Crowdsvolunteers between November–December 2021.

Three interviews took place over the phone, and one via MS Teams as requested by the interviewee. All participants signed a detailed consent form prior to the interview, and were given the chance to ask questions or raise concerns about the project and the methodology during the interview itself. Written and verbal consent with regards to recording the session was obtained as well, and all interviews were recorded after consent had been obtained. Recordings will be deleted following the submission of this report.

For further information, please see appendix A (Research Questions and Scope).

# Headline Findings

1. Volunteers’ motivations for participating in the project are varied, but included:
   1. Personal interest in museum work (e.g. archiving) and curiosity related to topics covered in the archive (e.g. history);
   2. Showing their communities that museums can be a place for them, and exploring topics related to their heritage;
   3. Learning and developing transferable skills.
2. Volunteers were confident that they had understood the aims of the project, and were supportive of the project’s (and NSMM’s) perceived mission to not only preserve history via the archive, but make archival content accessible to Bradford and wider communities.
3. All volunteers were excited about getting to spend time in the archive, and they felt supported in their work by the project team.
4. One volunteer highlighted ongoing issues with accessibility of the archive, but pointed out that they were working with the project team to resolve the problem.
5. All volunteers were optimistic that this project would allow them to explore personal interests – and this was one of the aspects of the project that excited them the most.
6. None of the volunteers were particularly knowledgeable about Zooniverse, but they felt confident that the project team would provide further information in due time.
7. Volunteers were aware that digitising images would be part of their responsibilities, and most saw this as a necessary, if not very exciting, task.
8. Overall, all volunteers seemed incredibly positive about their experience so far and most saw being ‘allowed’ to explore the archive as a privilege.

# Recommendations

1. **Continue to support volunteers as they learn to navigate the archive, and learn new skills.** The project team’s current efforts to support the volunteers have been very positively received, and the expectation is that this will continue as the project progresses.
2. **Work with volunteers to ensure that accessibility issues are addressed.** One volunteer has problems with physically accessing the archive. The project team is aware of this and is working with the volunteer and NSMM to find a solution.
3. **Ensure that volunteers can pursue personal interests in the archive,** as getting to do so is one of the aspects of the project volunteers are most excited about.
4. **Explore opportunities to further engage Bradford’s communities in the project.** Most volunteers explicitly mentioned the potential a project such as this one has to include communities in Bradford that might not see museums as places ‘for them’.
5. **Provide further training on Zooniverse, once this becomes relevant.** Zooniverse was new to everyone, and volunteers will require further training on how to use the platform, once the project reaches that stage.

# Detailed findings

## Motivation

### Volunteers’ motivations for getting involved in this project were varied.

Most volunteers cited a range of reasons for getting involved in Communities & Crowds:

*“So it’s sort of coming from all different places really. It’s coming from, I used to work there. Love the collection, know a bit about it. I’m also historically keen to be involved in volunteering stuff because I feel it’s just a good way of doing things.”*

### Among the most frequently mentioned motivating factors for getting involved were:

1. **INTEREST & CURIOSITY:** all interviewed volunteers expressed they had personal interests they felt this project would cater to, especially curiosity related to history, archiving, museums, and historic newspapers and images.

*“I love literature. I go to the book festivals. Not just in Bradford but in Leeds, and Huddersfield. So I just have a love of books as well. And I also just love...I do have a passion for history. And then (…) I saw this [project]. I thought ‘wow’. Such a great privilege and opportunity.”*

*“Well, essentially, a) it’s curiosity, and b) trying to understand how visual image…sort of what I would call impacts on what I would call disadvantaged communities. I’ve done a number of exhibitions in the past and the reactions can sometimes be quite surprising or unsurprising depending on the subject nature. So it’s just a further…sort of presenting people with an image and sort of trying to analyse or critique the way they react to the presentation of certain images.”*

Most volunteers had also worked or were currently working in the cultural sector, and thought this volunteering project would be a good fit for them:

*“I’ve been involved with the Museum for quite a while (…). So I really enjoyed doing stuff with the Museum.”*

One participant had worked for NSMM and with the archive previously, so felt that this project was a great opportunity revisit the archive.

1. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**: Several volunteers noted that they wanted to help their communities see NSMM and museums more generally as a place for them:

*“I would like to see more of…my community or other communities and accessing the museum, you know, and I guess in a way, I just think that sometimes if I’m seen to be doing something. Then obviously people will feel like, well, you know: If I can do it, they can do it as well.”*

*“If I’m doing what I’m doing, it breaks down some of those stereotypes."*

1. **LEARNING & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**: Volunteers also highlighted that they were expecting to pick up valuable, transferable skills from their volunteering experience, and were keen for this work to serve as a learning experience more broadly:

*“Trying to learn a little bit more and trying to understand how to curate images and trying to understand the idea around presenting visual material. So that’s where I am coming from. And also learn a little bit of history myself because I can’t possibly know everything there is to know about my community or my communities or diaspora or whatever it is.  
So it’s just a learning experience for me.”*

## Project aims as understood by volunteers

### All volunteers felt that they had a solid idea of what the project was aiming to achieve.

For them, the project is about:

1. **Preservation:** Preserving history for future generations.

Volunteers expressed how impressed they were by the vastness of the archive, and seemed very excited by the prospect of getting to play a part in ‘preserving history’:

*“I think once again it’s about preserving history as well, isn’t it?”*

*“I think it’s a really great thing that they’re doing, you know (…) preserving all this. You know the* Daily Herald*... it’s an amazing archive, isn’t it? There’s a lot in the collection. There’s no doubt about that. So many...so many different topics as well.”*

1. **Community engagement:** Working with Bradford’s communities and highlighting relevant stories in the archive.

A few of the interviewed volunteers were quick to highlight that this project would allow NSMM to include Bradford communities in their work in a meaningful way, and they felt that surely this must be an ‘organisational priority’ for SMG as a whole:

*“I think an organisational priority is to work with people from the community in Bradford. Yeah, and just to get a different insight in the* Daily Herald*...because it’s such an incredible collection, but there are...you know, you can look at it in any number of ways.*

*You could take like 20 different groups of people and they would all be interested in different stuff.”*

1. **An archive for the people:** digitising the collection, and sharing findings via Zooniverse.

Volunteers recognised the value in making the archive more accessible and in sharing its content. They also understood that digitisation would make it possible to share stories contained in the archive even more widely ‘across border and communities’:

*“Yeah. I mean, it’s (...) being engaged more with the world as opposed to archives being shut away and never being seen by anybody. A sense of allowing* [the] *wider community to see what you have in your archives. And unless it’s out there in the public domain for everyone to access there is little point to having a museum in the first place. It’s sharing of the images and also the expertise and the knowledge. And I think it is a good way to be able to say to the world really that we have these images, and they haven't been digitised before, but now we are in the process of digitising them and we’d like to share them with you.”*

## Working with the archive

### All volunteers were excited to explore the archive and develop new skills along the way.

When the interviews were conducted, volunteers had just recently started their volunteering journey. Given that, they all expressed how excited they were to be involved, and how keen they were to start exploring the archive and to learn new skills along the way:

*“I’m still excited at this time. You know, it’s just...a whole new...opportunity to learn some new skills. There’s nothing nicer to me than learning new things, so...well, that kind of grabs me...*[to find out] *what else is there in this big, massive collection ’cause I know, I know it’s quite a large place.”*

All volunteers mentioned that they were anticipating exploring topics of particular interest to them or the group (see also section 5.5).

### The archiving process itself was of great interest to volunteers, as was Zooniverse.

A few volunteers pointed out how interesting they found the archiving process overall, and how keen they were to learn more:

*“It’s also about how you store things, yeah? The glass, like the glass plates. Yeah, yeah. It's all been really, really, really, really, really interesting.”*

*“Obviously some things could be fragile and delicate. So I found that, really, I found that really interesting was the what’s it called, and the ‘rehousing’?”*

One volunteer was particularly excited about Zooniverse, and learning more about all the platform was capable of:

*“We had somebody talk about it*…*Zooniverse. That seems quite exciting. What other*

*people are doing around the world as well. See that platform looks very informative and you know that looks, you know so many different things that people are sharing and doing and recording as well.”*

### Most volunteers also viewed their volunteering experience as a social one.

Volunteers were looking forward to getting to know and working with their fellow volunteers:

*“Interesting to be part of this group, whose background and interests are perhaps different from what mine have been historically.”*

## Concerns and support

### All volunteers felt supported by the project team, and most hadn’t encountered any issues that need to be addressed.

Three out of the four volunteers interviewed did not express any concerns related to their volunteering experience, apart from some minor nerves and excitement to do with starting something new:

*“From my point of view – I am going to enjoy the process and am committed to it so I don’t necessarily see any problems at this moment in time. It’s one of discovery. I can’t go in with any preconceived notions about what I might find or not find. I’ll just go with the flow, as they say.”*

They mentioned that their induction had been very thorough, and they felt very well supported by the project team. It was understood by all that they could speak up if they run into problems in the future, and they were generally happy with the level of support provided:

*“All the support are in place already and I wouldn’t necessarily expect any extra support, because you go by standards that everybody work by, so it’s a question of just making yourself comfortable within that particular environment. And I am sure that if there were things that I am uncertain about, about what I am doing, then it should be up to me to raise the issue.”*

*“No, I wouldn't say* [I need any more support] *at the moment. The team’s really, really supportive. Yeah, they’re really, really, really supportive. They’re always checking in with us, yeah, so that’s really nice.”*

### Volunteers, while aware, were mostly unconcerned about potentially encountering problematic language or sensitive images in the archive.

Volunteers acknowledged that the project team had warned them about language and/or images contained in the archive that might be upsetting, but they all felt that they were equipped to deal with this:

*“I am not necessarily concerned at all to be honest. Because it’s like, if you are watching a film and it has a specific certificate you would naturally expect some unpleasant scenes. And it is the same with archiving. There is the possibility that there might be some things that aren’t nice to see, but you deal with it.”*

Several volunteers pointed out that the project team had explicitly told them to let them know if they need a break, or any support when encountering challenging content in the archive, and they felt very supported as a result:

*“I’ll just let them know that, you know, if I don’t feel comfortable today.”*

### One volunteer with extended access needs was working with the project team to improve accessibility of the archive at the time of the interview.

The volunteer was very clear that the archive was not sufficiently accessible for wheel chair users, but were satisfied that their concerns had been heard by the project team, and that NSMM was looking for solutions:

*“No, no, I don’t think* [I need any further support]*, ’cause I think all the conversations that I’ve been having (…) it’s all just moving in in its own time and for me as an individual, all those things will get put into place in institutional time and that’s fine.”*

## Pursuing personal interests

### All volunteers were optimistic that this project would allow them to explore personal interests – and this was one of the aspects of the project that excited them the most.

Interviews suggest that the group of volunteers had settled on an overall geographic area of interest (Cuba, Jamaica, the Caribbean), which, for all except one participant, was connected to their own ancestry:

*“Because I am a Caribbean person it’s personal, but that’s not to say that I wouldn’t have similar interests within other ethnicities. But at the moment the Caribbean is of particular interest to me.”*

*“So you know, I think the group as a whole will be...they’re interested in Africa, Caribbean stuff, so they're looking at Jamaica and they’re looking at migration and they’re looking at, you know, they’re interested in politics and social history, and so am I. They have specific knowledge and interest that I don’t. It’s not that I’m not interested in it, it’s just that I don’t have that knowledge so I think that will be really cool. So yeah, so in a way I’m looking forward to that. I think...I think from me I’m like I said to you, I’m sort of keen to follow the group.”*

### The volunteers felt that the archive would not only give them a glimpse into how communities of interest had lived in the past, but also how they had been presented in the press.

Taking this one step further, one participant suggested that this project might even allow them the present their community in a new, more positive light:

*“I think the area that I’d like to take a closer look at is around Caribbean islands and Caribbean communities. Just to understand how certain sectors of the community were portrayed in the press. Whether it’s around resilience or resistance or whether it’s around housing or employment or care, social care. Just to sort of get a sense of the environment at that particular time, as to what was being said in the press. (…) For quite a while we’ve been sort of underrepresented in the media as a whole and there’s always been negative stereotyping of communities. So I’d like to see some positive aspects within the archive about the Caribbean communities as whole. And even if it’s negative it’s about how can you present this negative into a positive light.”*

## Digitising and Zooniverse

### None of the interviewed volunteers were overly familiar with Zooniverse as a platform.

Beyond what the project team had told them, all volunteers were new to Zooniverse, and most were interested in hearing more about it:

*“No, no, I have never used it, so yeah. Well, I’m quite interested in it. (…) I know of it as a concept...and I like the idea of...almost like crowdsourcing in getting other people’s inputs. So yeah, I mean, that’ll be great. It will be interesting. I just understand what we are going to do with it.”*

*“I was very impressed. Yeah, yeah. It’s new to me as well. I didn’t know before I joined this project, that that’s even a thing.(…) We just had a brief little look. (…) But it just seemed really interesting.”*

One participant wanted to focus on getting to know the archive at this stage in the project, but was open to the idea of learning about Zooniverse as the project progressed:

*“Well, yes, with Zooniverse...I am new to it. (…) At the moment I just want to feel my way into the process. If there is an opportunity further down the road then I would possibly – in discussion with the Science Museum – and then if it’s something we could have a look at and it’s of interest. For the moment I just want to find my way.”*

### Volunteers were aware that digitisation of archive material was required for Zooniverse, and none of them were concerned about being involved in this process.

Opinions varied, but most volunteers suggested that digitising was a means to an end, and probably not the most enjoyable part of their volunteering experience:

*“That's just something you need to have to do to get to the other side, really.”*

*“I'm not interested in digitising it for his own sake, it's just, it needs to be done. It's like a necessary step to get to kind of where you want to go. Yeah, it has to be done so that other people can see it.”*

*“I am fine with that sort of thing. Perfectly happy to participate in the not-so-fun bits as it were. And sometimes a lot of images can sort of suggest to yourself you are never going*

*to see the end of it. And it’s like reading a very large volume of books, you think ‘I am never going to get to the end of it.’ You are only reading one page a day, there is no end in sight. And digitising is really the same – you can only digitise so many per day.”*

# APPENDIX A

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCOPE

Prior to the research being conducted, the audience research team agreed the following research questions and scope with the project team:

### Core Research Questions

The project (researchers) will address six key questions over four phases:

1. How can we create a volunteer programme which starts with selecting and digitising collections, and ends with deepening the metadata information on those collections through a citizen science platform?
2. How can we address questions of ethnic and racial (or other forms of) inequality in our collections through better classification and interpretation and by enabling volunteer-led input and leadership earlier in the process?
3. How do we encourage engagement with audiences earlier in the typical process of creating and running online crowdsourcing projects (i.e. while the project is being designed/ conceived, rather than post-launch)?
4. How can we optimise the Zooniverse ‘Talk’ message board platform to encourage/ nurture this type of collaboration between project leads (research/archival teams) and volunteers?
5. What can traditional museum volunteer practices learn from online crowdsourcing projects, and vice versa?
6. How do volunteers experience different levels of engagement and agency with collections in person and online?

### The Volunteer Community Researchers will explore these questions plus:

1. What untold and under-represented stories are there in the *Daily Herald* archive that you think are important to share?
2. How can we make these stories more visible and shareable through digital technology?
3. What would you like to do/What can we found out…by developing a project on the Zooniverse platform?
4. How can an international online community of volunteers help us answer the questions you think are important to explore?

### Method

1:1 semi-structured interviews

Carried out over the phone and recorded on a hand-held recorder Notes taken

### Objectives/Questions

* + **To better understand the volunteers’ motivations for taking part in the project**
    - Why do they want to be involved?
    - is there anything specific they want to learn as part of the project?
    - Is there any specific questions they would like to explore/aims they have for their research?
    - Are there any specific outcomes they want to achieve?
    - Who do they think will benefit from the work they are doing? Are they doing the work primarily for
      * Themselves
      * The museum
      * Their community
      * The city/nation/world (more knowledge)
      * All of the above

### To better understand their expectations of the project

* + - What do they think is the main purpose or aim of the project?
    - What is their aim for the project?
    - What are they looking forward to doing?
    - Is there anything/any aspect of the work they are not looking forward to?
    - Do they expect they will have agency in the work that they do?
      * That they will be able to define their area of interest/research question
      * Select the material they would like to work with
      * Make decisions about the types of work/process they do as part of the project
      * Change/adapt the digitisation processes
      * Shape the Zooniverse project
      * Define the outcomes of the project
      * Stop at any point in the process
      * Is there any aspect that they think they will not have agency in/is this an issue for them?
    - How would they describe their expectations of what it will be like to do the work of digitisation/carry out the scanning, inventorying and rehousing of photographs?

e.g. interesting, boring…

* + - How would they describe their expectations of what it will be like to look through the archival material in the *Daily Herald*?
    - How would they describe their expectation of what it will be like to develop an idea for a Zooniverse/digital volunteering project (is this appealing, interesting, confusing, off-putting, etc)?

### To better understand if there are any concerns about the project that might be addressed/any specific support needed.

* + - Do they have any concerns about being involved in the project?
    - How do they feel about encountering and working with problematic (racist/ outdated/offensive) language in the *Daily Herald* archive?
    - How do they feel about encountering and working challenging/sensitive images?
    - How do they expect to feel when encountering such material?
    - Do they feel prepared/comfortable/supported in doing this emotionally challenging work?
    - Is there anything that could be put in place to better support you emotionally or physically in doing this work?
    - How do you feel about doing this work on a voluntary basis? Do you think this is appropriate for the work involved?

### How will the research be used

* + - Internally by core members of the project team to improve the volunteer’s own experience on the project/adapt the project as necessary.
    - Internally by core members of the project team and volunteers to evaluate and reflect upon their experience, to improve the digitisation process and in planning future projects of this nature. To inform the development of a second case study specifically.
    - There is a possibility that the research might contribute to an online or print publication (could be co-written or written by the academics involved). Quotes or naming of people involved would not be done without explicit permission being sought.
    - It will be anonymised.