



Working with different communities, reaching new audiences

Defining what constitutes a 'community' or your 'local community' can be difficult. A good many people attending your event will reside in the area that immediately surrounds your property/event but will define themselves in ways other than 'locality'. Religious belief or ethnic origins are amongst the most common ways we tend to think about different communities, but the list is almost endless. What you can do to broaden the appeal of your event will depend on the particular circumstances of your property or event and what resources you can bring to bear.

For most organisers it will simply be a question of making your event as accessible as possible on the day and making sure that your publicity 'strategy' addresses how you might engage with those parts of the community who do not traditionally attend HODs.

- Look at what you currently offer for HODs and who accesses it. Is there an identifiable section of the local community who do not attend and if so, what do you think are the barriers?
- Without the means to run projects targeted at community groups, you can still develop your image with groups you want to visit your site. Public perception can be a key barrier.
- Display your publicity at places where your 'missing' group meet. Make what you display accessible and eye catching to the group you wish to engage.
- For example, you may wish to display a 'welcome' message for community groups on your promotional literature. We have translated the phrase 'Free to Explore' in a format that is downloadable from the website (www.heritageopendays.org.uk/org-marketing.shtml). The phrase (and the alternative, 'Celebrate your Community') is translated into Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.
- Directly inviting a small group from the community to your property prior to HODs can be a good way to initiate 'word of mouth' that your property is an interesting and welcoming place to visit.
- Giving a presentation or take a selection of materials to the community group where they meet is even better. Think about surprising your audience; show them how what you offer is different from their expectations.
- Consider if physical access around the property or event might be difficult for sections of the community? Think about how people move and rest safely at your event. Provide alternative interpretation for inaccessible areas.

- Think about where you are located. Is it difficult to get to by public transport? If not, include bus routes etc in your publicity. If it is, are there avenues that could be explored with community support organisations, the local council or other organisers in your area to address the issue?
- Does the content of what you are displaying make cultural or educational assumptions? Is the form itself accessible (Jargon free/ in 'Plain English' / Available in Large Print or with a magnifier etc?)
- Many organisers worry about how to address community groups. Websites such as the Council for Racial Equality (www.cre.gov.uk), or the Museum, Library and Archives Council's 'Disability Portfolio' (www.mla.gov.uk) can help with terminology.
- Make sure your event and your volunteers are welcoming. Visitors feel most nervous when they first walk in. So how you make them welcome will determine how long they stay. Make it obvious that visitors are in the right place.

If you have the capacity to do some work prior to HODs you might like to consider some of these ideas.

- In return for a 'VIP' tour, a group may be willing to give feedback on how accessible it was to them, what their impression was before the visit, what parts interested them more than others etc.
- Invite a local school to your property prior to HODs. Schools can be a great way of spreading messages amongst the community. If possible, allow pupils to contribute to publicity (e.g. designing posters for HODs) or interpretation (e.g. what they found out during their visit). This can liven up your 'offer' but also be a way to get proud parents in to your property to see their children's work during HODs!
- Contact the local agencies and service providers who regularly work with community groups for advice and ideas. Remember that the HODs 'idea' is quite flexible. Be creative - forging partnerships can help your group and the agencies reach the same people.
- Remember that some sections of the community will be unavailable due to Friday prayers, the Jewish Sabbath or any number of religious or cultural activities. Most local authorities publish multi-faith calendars that can assist with your planning.