

Communications

Support to address the challenge of increases in cost-of-living



Introduction

Rebuilding Heritage was a UK-wide support programme designed to help heritage organisations navigate the challenges presented by COVID 19. It was coordinated by **the Heritage Alliance**, funded by the **National Lottery Heritage Fund** and delivered in partnership with the **Chartered Institute of Fundraising, Clore Leadership, Creative United**, and **Media Trust**, with support from additional providers.

In October 2022, Rebuilding Heritage was awarded funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to provide an additional six months of support for heritage sector organisations, helping them to address immediate challenges arising from increases in the cost of living. The support focussed on three areas: Business Planning, Fundraising and Communications.

This infographic summarises the Communications support provided from November 2022 - April 2023.

Overview of support provided

Webinars



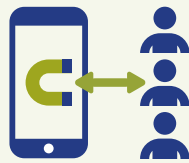
Communicating effectively
in times of change

71

individuals

65

organisations



Engaging your audiences
on social media

56

individuals

53

organisations



Repurposing social
media content

34

individuals

31

organisations

1-2-1 support




Action learning set



Action learning sets are structured group sessions in which participants collaborate to solve problems while learning from each other's experiences and insights.



Resources

-  Article: Digital communications on a budget
- Article : Communications for time-poor heritage organisations
- Sector Snapshot: Digital Communications Challenges and Opportunities for Heritage Organisations
- Interviews with Experts:
Top 10 Tips for Heritage Communications in Times of Crisis

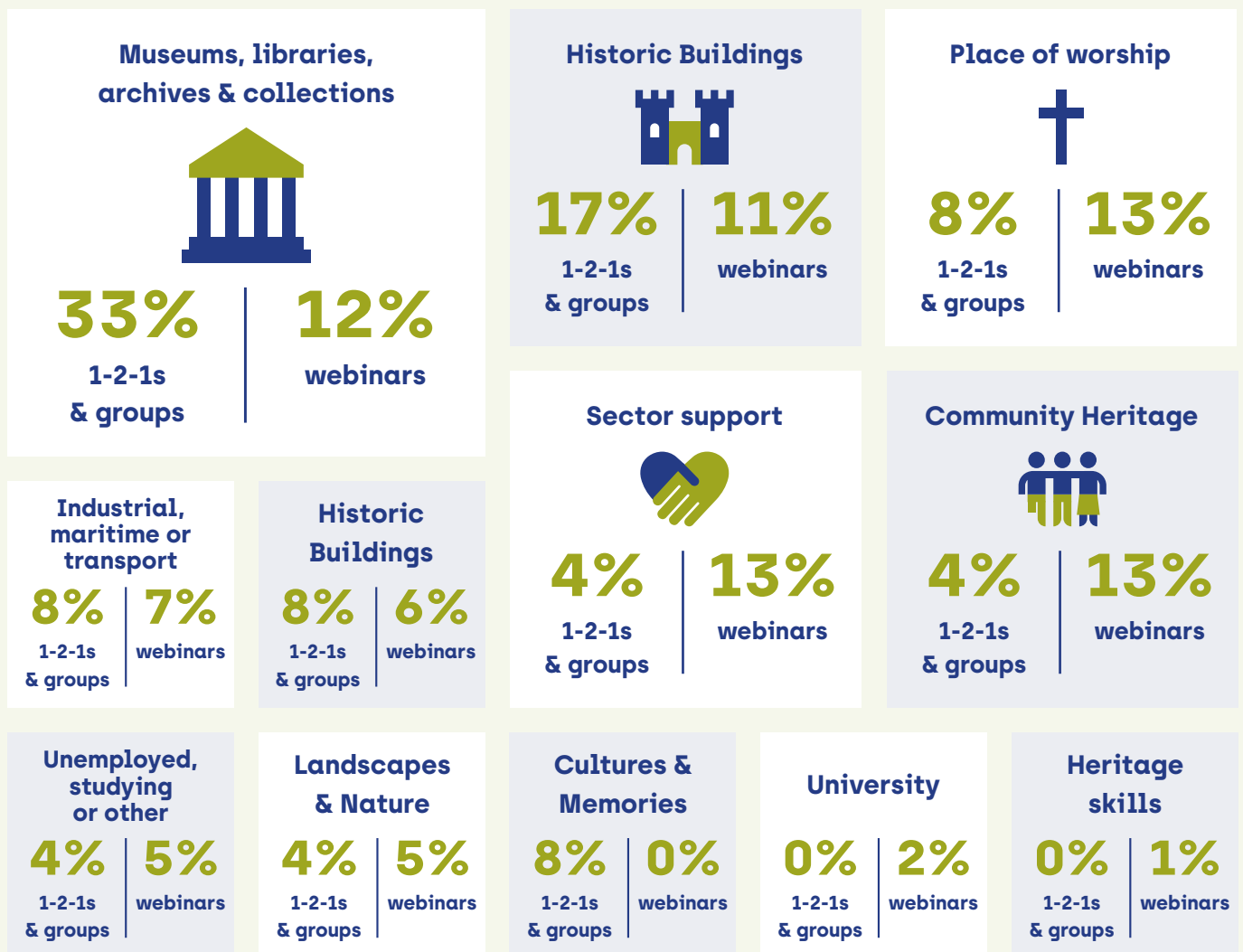
Who the programme reached

Over the six months spanning November 2022 to April 2023 the Communications strand of Rebuilding Heritage: Cost of Living reached

The programme saw engagement from all parts of the heritage sector. Information on organisations taking part in the 1-2-1 consultancies (or group sessions) and attending the webinars shows that **Museums, libraries, archives and collections** and **Historic buildings and monuments primarily managed as heritage** were the two largest categories of engagement with the 1-2-1 support, whilst engagement with the webinars is more evenly spread.



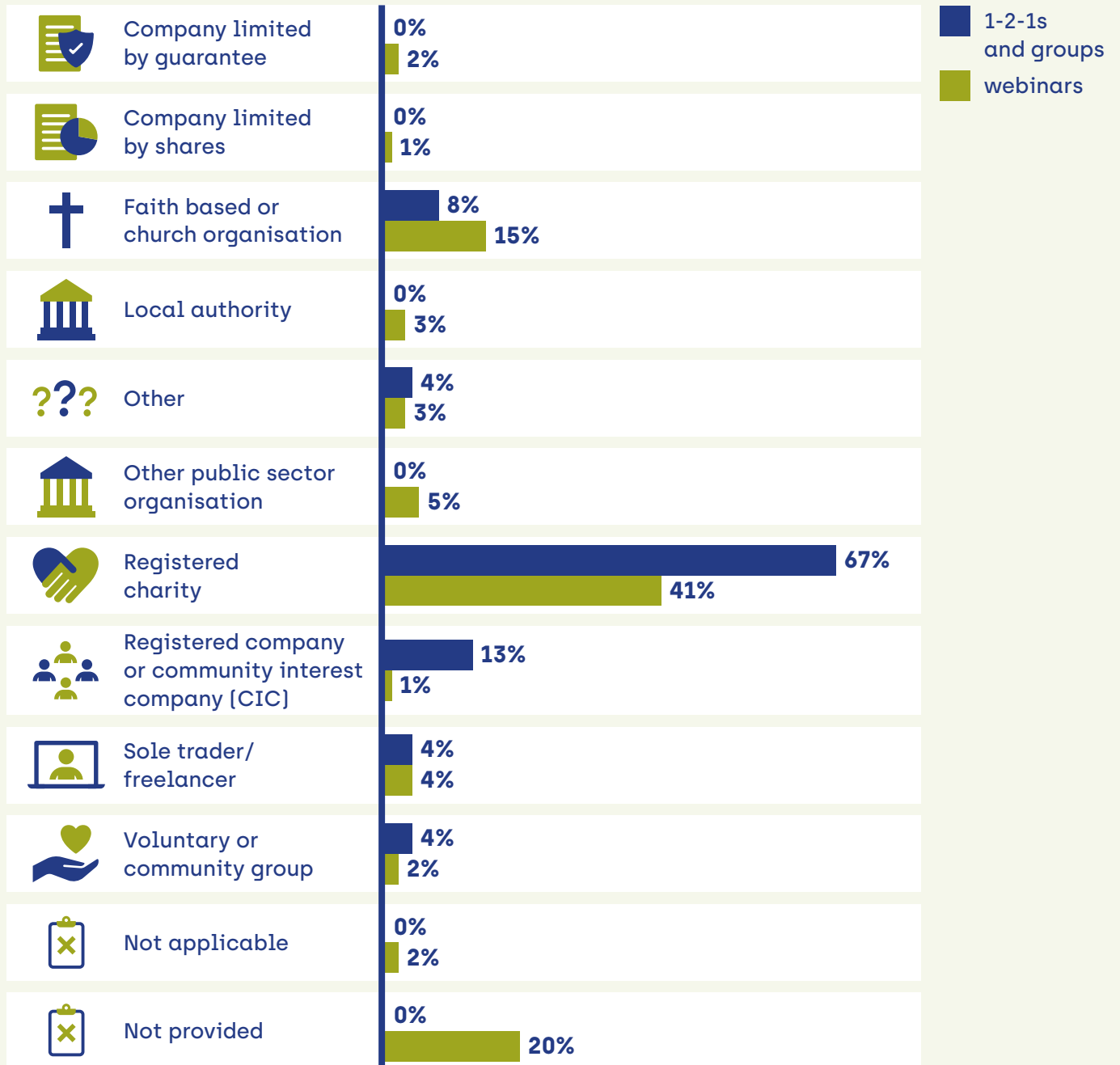
Type of heritage



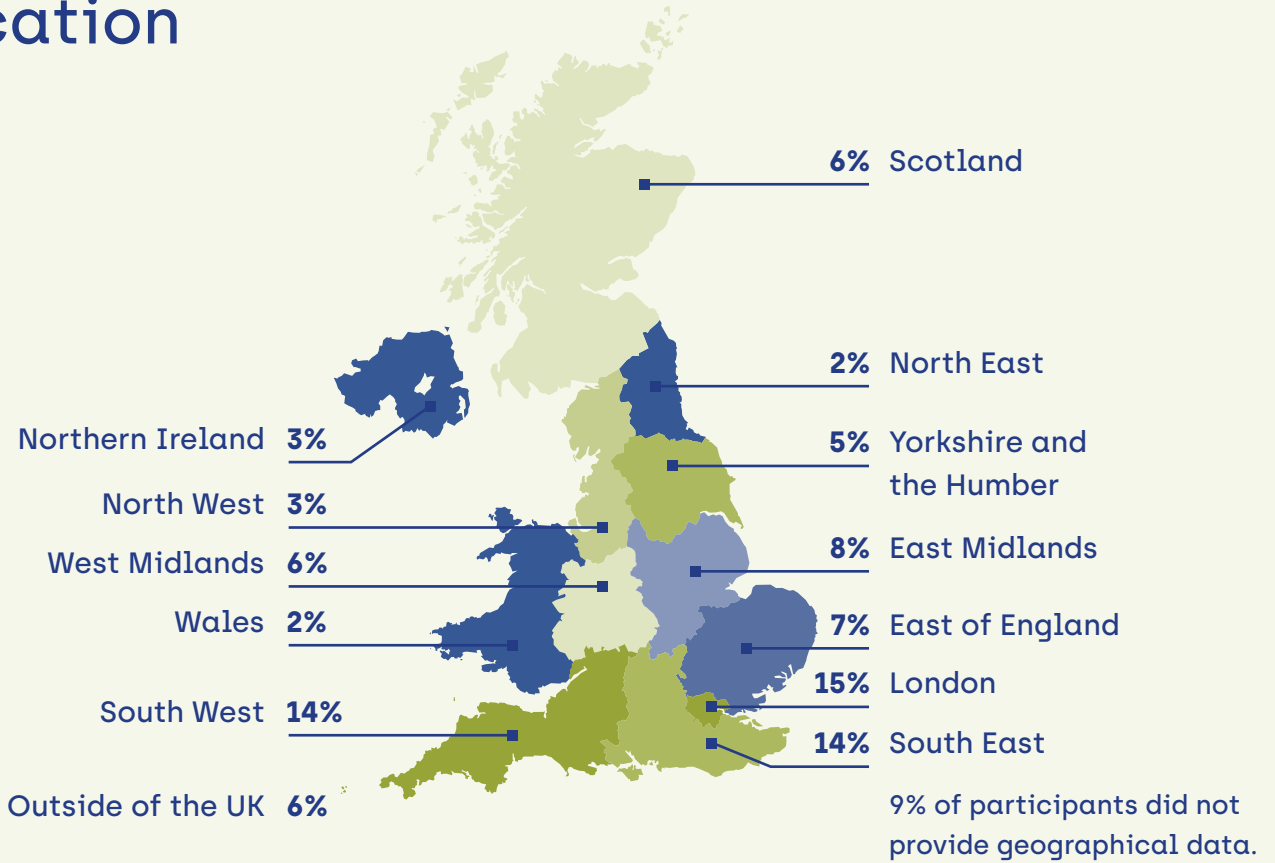
Not provided = 0% 1-2-1s & groups, 11% webinars

Type of organisation or business

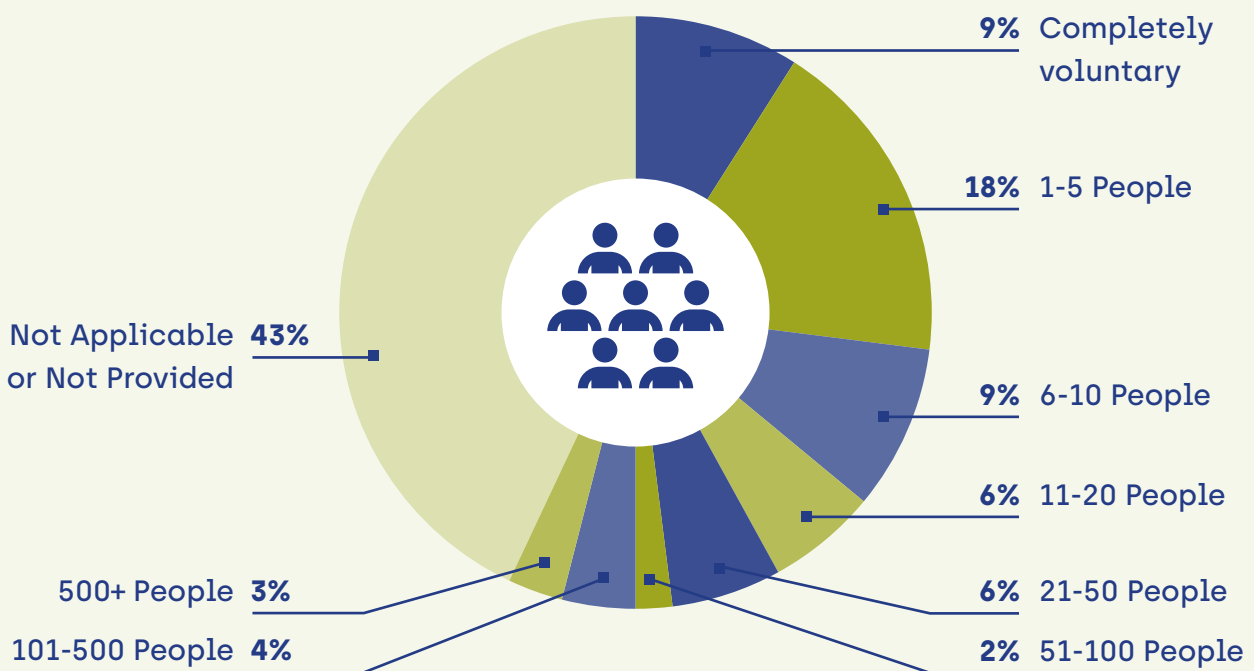
The majority of organisations taking part were charities; faith-based organisations was the next largest category.



Location



Size of organisation or business



Challenges faced by the sector

The ongoing impact of COVID-19

The cost-of-living crisis has added to the difficulties faced by heritage organisations, many of which are still coping with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

85% of organisations that applied for Communications support gave examples of how the pandemic continues to affect their activities. Common themes are:



An ongoing reduction in footfall and visitor numbers



Reduced volunteer numbers
(and the consequent loss of knowledge and experience)



Difficulties with fundraising and income streams

All contribute to a decrease in capacity and activity and are behind the reasons for organisations wanting support to raise their profile and reach new audiences.

“

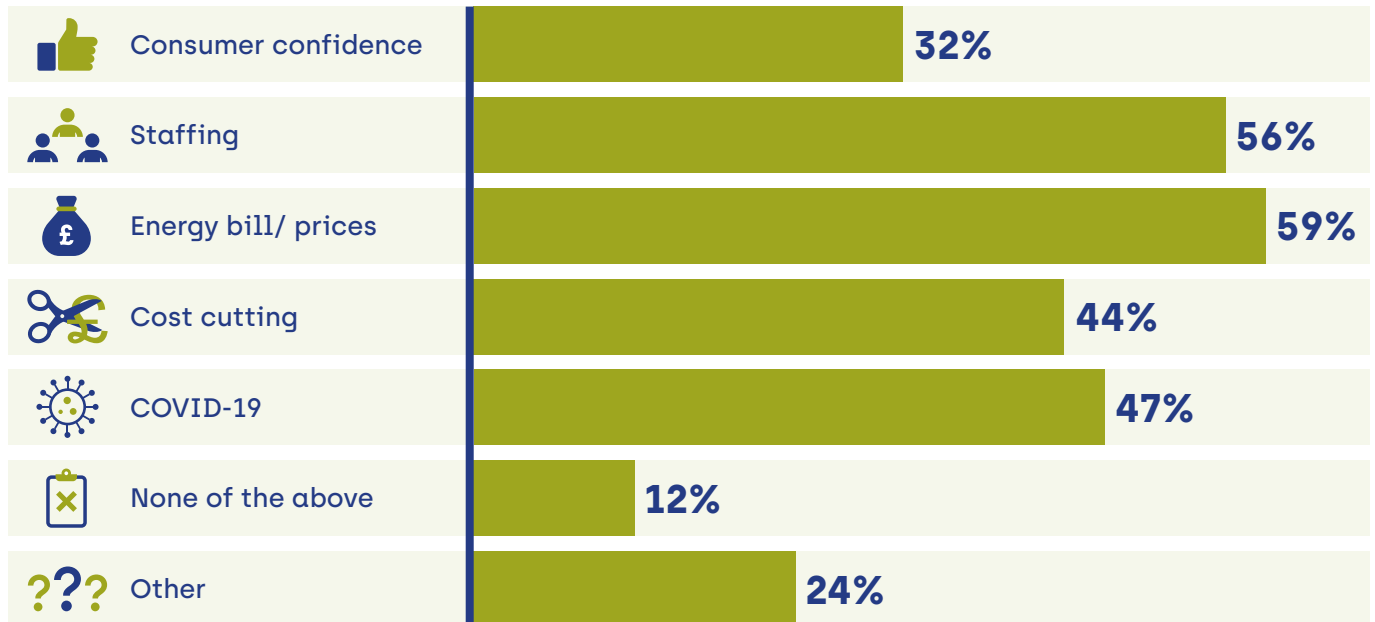
“Whilst we are now fully operational we have experienced lower footfall over the period since covid with fewer people attending events generally and no-shows being higher than before the pandemic.”

“

“As a volunteer group many of our most experienced members pre-COVID were in their 80s. After lockdown many of them found it hard to return. Not only has our volunteer base shrunk we have lost those with the most experience. We are in the process of rebuilding our knowledge, and trying to preserve this knowledge better.”

Recent issues

The Rebuilding Heritage: Cost of Living Crisis support programme asked all applicants for 1-2-1 consultancy which of the following issues had impacted their organisation over the last 6 months.



Energy bills/prices and **staffing** were of greatest concern; but all the issues resonated with applicants.

“

“Our key revenue-generating activities have all been affected by Covid 19 and cost of living. We run a visitor attraction, retail offer and events programme that aren't reaching the levels expected when planning was undertaken in 2017-19. We foresee another tough winter with people likely to reduce spending and the area still suffering from reduced tourism. This will continue to have a detrimental effect on our revenue and plans for growth.”

“

“Our capacity continues to be much reduced, with fewer staff, volunteers and no cafe. This is having an impact on the way in which we are able to engage with the community, and our ability to develop new volunteer initiatives and income generating initiatives, which hampers our ability to recover and grow.”

“

“We are a small museum and the prices of heating and electricity which we need to keep the museum open are increasing, as is the cost of producing the tea and cakes in our tearoom which helps us give a small profit”

Communications needs

Applicants for Communications consultancy support gave examples of the specific communications or media challenges with which they needed the most help. These challenges fell broadly into three themes:



Help to address lack of, or reductions in, capacity



Help to start developing plans or strategies



Help to target specific audiences both internal (trustees, colleagues, parent bodies/structures such as local authorities) and external (visitors, local communities, funding bodies).

“

“We no longer have an externally funded marketing budget so I need guidance on how best to launch a digital marketing strategy with limited resources, or an external marketing budget.”

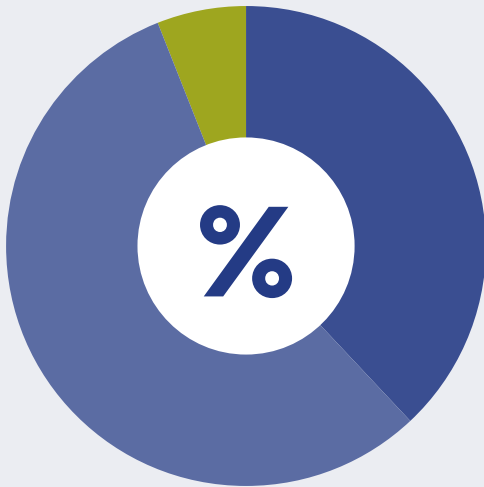
“

“External communications - audience and marketing plan development. We previously had someone in this role but are now struggling to recruit”

“

“We don't have a dedicated comms person so our social media, newsletters and websites all need dedicated work. We need to be able to reach people more effectively.”

Current communications or marketing experience (staff or volunteers)

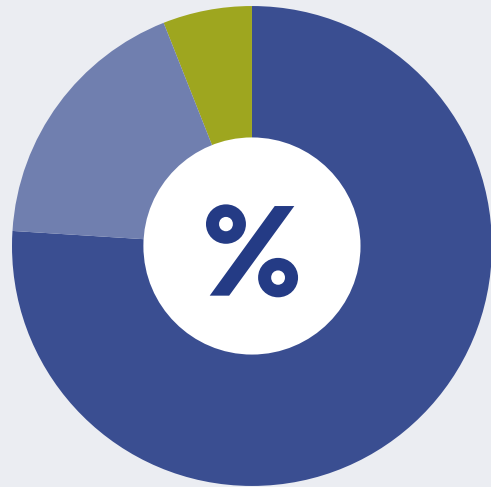


38% None

56% Some

6% Dedicated role(s)

Most applicants did not have a communications strategy



76% Do not have a communications strategy

18% Do have a communications strategy **but** it needs updating

6% Do have an up-to-date communications strategy

n = 34 [number of organisations applying for communications support]

How the support helped



100%

of 1-2-1 consultancy support was rated 4/5 or 5/5 in evaluation responses

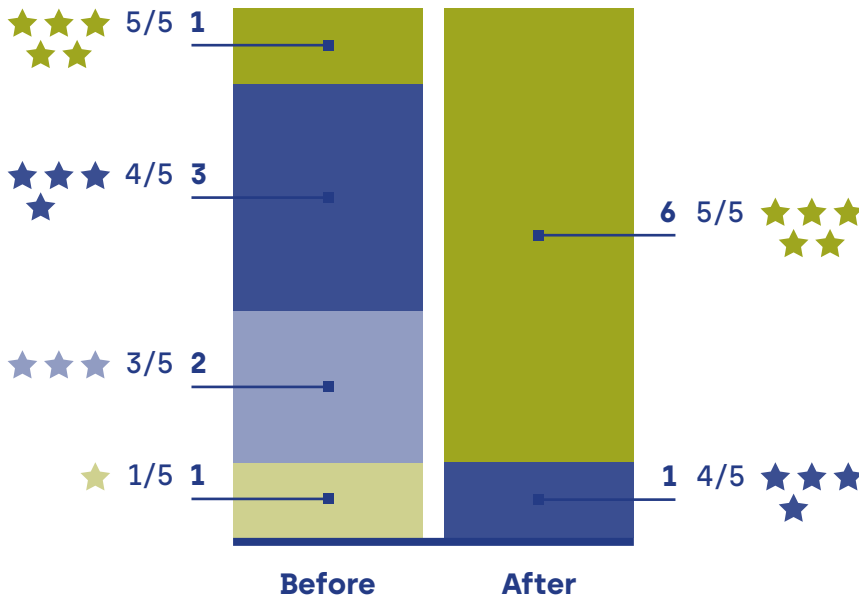


85%

of webinars were rated 4/5 or 5/5 in evaluation responses

Skills, knowledge, confidence

How would you characterise your overall confidence before and after your 1-2-1 consultancy support? (1 low, 5 high)



“This support has been invaluable. Having a critical friend to give confidential support and guidance is exactly what our group needed at this time.”

In all cases, confidence levels were higher after 1-2-1 consultancy sessions than before.

The webinars provided information and resources that inspire people to try new approaches and in many cases, adopt a more open approach to communicating the challenges faced by their organisations.

“Learning to keep a constant dialogue with our audience is key.”

“A reminder to frame changes positively and to be careful about the language we use.”

“It just firmed up the importance of being open, being real and addressing issues across our channels.”

“I think it will hopefully help us to recapture our message.”

Immediate actions

Both 1-2-1 consultancy sessions and the webinars generate a range of immediate actions. It is heartening to see the need for good internal communication given so much importance and knowledge shared with

colleagues, volunteers and trustees. Next steps included following up resources and tools mentioned during the webinars and thinking about how they can be applied to individual circumstances.

“

“Our political campaign is now taking a different route”

“

“

“I have already tested some of the suggested tools”

“

“I have started re-drafting my material”

”

“

“Will build actions into our next forward-plan”

“

“Written a one pager of info about company”

“

“Shared the follow-up information with colleagues”

”

“

“Take my learnings to the trustees”

“

“Ensure our comms copy is understood and interpreted well by our staff”

“

“

“Consider the goal for each post and tailor the content towards achieving this”

”

Longer term benefits

When asked about longer-term benefits (the next 3 to 6 months), anticipated changes include: a revised tone in communications; content that is tailored more effectively; the use of different platforms for different audiences and better planning of communications activities.

““

“As a new museum, I feel this will help us raise awareness of our presence in the local community and beyond.”

””

““

“We are looking forward to future potential work as we are beginning to communicate and plan in advance for the first time.”

““

““

“I found the cost of living section helpful and will amend the way I talk about donations and where the spend goes according to tips from the webinar.”

””

““

“We are planning to produce an Engagement Strategy and this is very relevant.”

““

“Updated forward plan, clear comms action plan and responsibilities. Appointment of volunteer web master.”

““

“We’ll have a better media profile.”

””

Conclusion

**Rebuilding Heritage:
Cost of Living has reached**

168

individuals from

148

organisations

in the past six months.

All the organisations providing feedback on 1-2-1 communications support indicated it would help their organisation to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and cost-of-living pressures.

Many of these organisations had not previously benefited from the Rebuilding Heritage programme and 71% of those completing evaluation forms for 1-2-1 support say they would benefit from further Communications support, with check-ins on progress the most popular request.

Although the live programme closed in March 2023, a wide range of resources are available on the Rebuilding Heritage website to help heritage organisations to strengthen their communications and reach new audiences.

Resources



Webinars

[Repurposing Social Media Content with James Berg](#)

[Engaging Your Audiences on Social Media with Jade Staiano](#)

[Communicating Effectively in Times of Change with Phil Hayes](#)

Articles

[Digital Communications on a Budget](#)

[Communications for Time-Poor Heritage Organisations](#)

Snapshot

[Sector Snapshot: Digital Communications Challenges and Opportunities for Heritage Organisations](#)

Interviews

[Interviews with Experts: Top 10 Tips for Heritage Communications in Times of Crisis](#)

To find all Rebuilding Heritage resources, please visit: www.rebuildingheritage.org.uk/resources

Sign up to our mailing list to keep informed about the project's developments: <https://bit.ly/3NaykFi>