

A co-curation project toolkit

The International Training Programme (ITP) 2023

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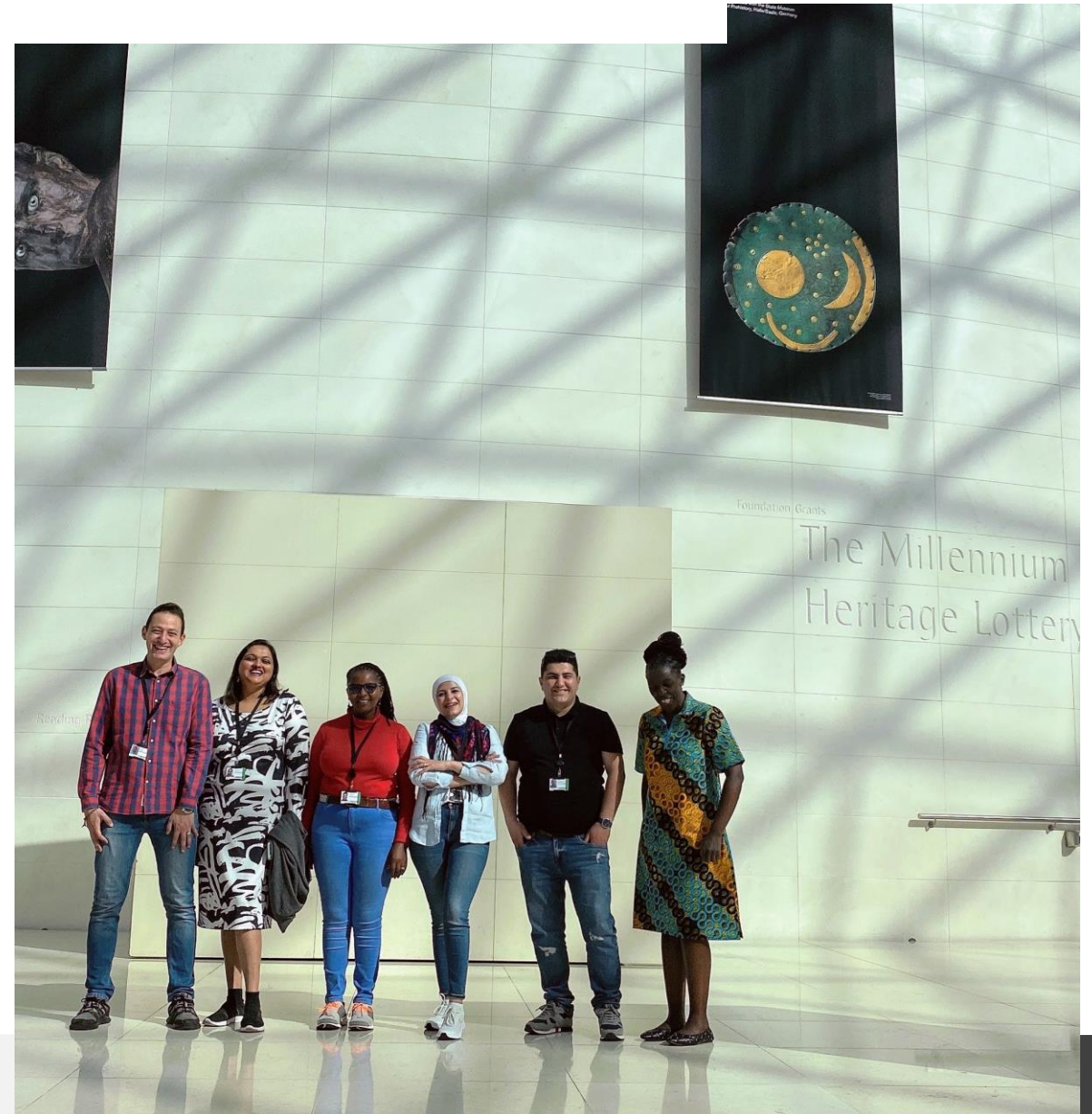


Every year, the British Museum International Training Programme runs a skill-sharing programme for museum and heritage professionals from around the world.

It seeks to expose participants to various aspects of museum work, to develop skills, disseminate current practice, increase specialist knowledge and create a global network of culture and heritage colleagues. Participants come from areas of the world integral to the Museum's international strategy, particularly countries who identify themselves in need of support and training for their museum sector.

This toolkit is presented by Heba Khairy, based on her recent experiences, as an introduction to help colleagues across the sector to create collaborative and effective co-curation projects that help bring together different voices and different perspectives while working collaboratively.

Introduction





What is co-curation?

Teamwork is often described as a key proponent to any successful project business.

Co-curation is the sharing of the duties of curation (acquisition, care and development of collections) with others.

Co-curation is working with groups and individuals with varied backgrounds and experiences, towards designing and delivering a project with specific objectives in a positive and participatory manner.

This kind of co-curation project is significant as it brings different voices and perceptions together in one place, which in turn evokes and promotes the exchange of experiences, skills and insights to create an innovative and unique museum experience for the visitor.



Tips for successful co-curation

‘Effective co-curation doesn’t just happen, it has to be built’



Tip 1

Decide

Generate a project idea.

Based on the project and narrative, decide if it would be only curated by you and your colleagues in the same institution or it would be better to bring a co-curator from a different institution, community, country or region who can bring new and different perspectives.





Tip 2

Define



Select the right co-curator(s) by defining a number of key qualifications, experiences and/or skills in compliance with your project goals and that you believe would effectively help you in your project, and will add value to it's development and delivery.



Tip 3



Develop

- After selecting the suitable co-curator(s), start to develop a work and cooperation plan.
- Manage expectations by determining clearly what you need and expect from the co-curator and in turn, the work practices and governance guidelines of the institution that will set the framework of the project.
- Set up a list of milestones and goals which define the work tasks, with time frames, that you will both work to.
- Identify the urgent tasks vs the important tasks.
- If your co-curator(s) will need to work remotely, set up online meetings, on a weekly or monthly bases, and a shared work space to monitor the progress of your work and to exchange thoughts and ideas.
- Keep the lines of communication open at all times.
- Be flexible and receptive!!



Tip 4

Discuss



- Discuss any new thoughts, ideas or updates that pop up within the stages of your project as a matter of priority.
- Engage your co-curator(s) in the decision making process.
- Actively listen to the co-curator's thoughts, fears, ideas and suggestions.
- Keep your co-curator(s) engaged in the project discussions and meetings with other stakeholders.



Tip 5



Deliver

- Agree on deadlines for the project deliverables (object lists, labels, panels, web site content etc.) but understand they will need to be reviewed and modified.
- Work together on quality control of the project deliverables in compliance with your project objectives.
- Support your co-curator(s) to be part of the project through to the end so they can see the results of their hard work.
- Appear together in any presentations, talks, or interviews about your project.
- Use your co-curator(s) to advocate for the project.
- Ensure your co-curator(s) are acknowledged for their work.
- Cooperate to evaluate and measure the success of your project – be honest about the project challenges, strengths and weakness.

The challenges of co-curation

‘The greater the obstacle, the more glory in overcoming it.’



Along the way of your co-curation project, you're bound to face some bumps in the road. With co-curation projects, some challenges may be more common than others, including issues regarding scope, communication, deadlines, and more.

In this section of the toolkit, we'll walk you through 6 of the most common co-curation challenges and briefly discuss what you'll need to do to overcome them.



Clear objectives & goals

Use TWO common approaches to setting your project goals:

1 - “SMART” means specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

2 - “CLEAR” means collaborative, limited, emotional, appreciable, and refinable.

Either of these methods — or a blend of the two — can help you to set goals to steer together toward project completion.

Scope creep

Scope creep is a challenge that refers to how the requirements of a project change from what was originally agreed on at project initiation.

Together you can prevent scope creep by being proactive when mapping out the project by focusing on specific goals while continuously reviewing priorities and plans.

Budget restrictions and changes

When there's a scope creep, usually the budget changes. As a result, you need to consider all possibilities during the planning stage and budget for them to prevent cost shortages or overruns.

Lack of communication

Good communication means the co-curation team works well together, tasks are allocated efficiently, and stakeholders are kept updated about the project's progress.

Bad communication can mean none of the above.

Mismatched team skills

Productive co-curation comes from matching tasks to team members with the right skills to deliver.

If there's a mismatch between requirements and skill levels, the co-curation project is bound to suffer inefficiencies that could lead to failure. For this reason, you should constantly be assessing whether every member of the team is being utilised effectively, based on their skills and workload.

Impractical deadlines

Impractical deadlines need to be tackled in the planning phase. To set up a workable deadlines, break down the project into small tasks and assign each task sufficient time and ensure there is a reasonable spread of workload.

Tutankhamun reimagined

1 December 2022 –
29 January 2023

Case study

ITP co-curation project



Step 1 Decide

The British Museum wanted to commemorate the centenary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, by creating a trail, small display and temporary exhibition. The Department of Egypt and Sudan thought it was essential to involve a colleague from Egypt to co-curate the project and ensure multi-vocality.

Step 2 Define

The British Museum International Training Programme team wanted to ensure an open and transparent selection process so created a framework for the role. After evaluating the applications, the ITP selected the co-curator based on the skills and experiences needed for the project.

The British
Museum

Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DG
britishmuseum.org

International Training Programme Tutankhamun display; co-curation opportunity 2022



Application Form

Step 3 Develop

The British Museum curators knew they wanted to explore the modern perception of King Tutankhamun among Egyptians today - 100 years after the discovery of his tomb.

This enabled them to share a framework with their Egyptian colleague who then developed new and creative ideas for the exhibition, collecting new data from local communities in Egypt, acquiring new modern objects and feeding this into the narrative.

Step 4 Discuss

The project co-curators held meetings every two weeks to discuss and follow up on the progress and deliverables of the exhibition.

The co-curator was invited twice to the British Museum to work on site and engage with the museum curators, collections and exhibition spaces.

The BM curators and the co-curator were engaged and updated with any new changes or developments.



Step 5 Deliver

- An Egyptian graffiti artist recommended by the co-curator travelled to the BM and participated in the exhibition design.
- The exhibition interpretation materials had been reviewed and agreed by the BM team and Director.
- The project had to meet immovable deadlines for its opening on 1 December 2022.
- The BM official website, ITP website and social media platforms promoted the exhibition.
- The BM curator and co-curator participated together in many talks and presentations about the project remotely and at the BM.
- The co-curator travelled to the Museum and was able to visit the exhibition and participate in the evaluation meetings.
- A team of volunteers took over the responsibility to make the surveys with visitors to gather feedback and to help the BM to evaluate the visitor experience.



Reflections

Reflections from the co-curator:

- This experience promoted my learning and knowledge sharing from diverse perspectives.
- I developed greater innovation skills as there were chances to share and build on new ideas.
- The project encouraged me to have generative discussions and to look at the project holistically.
- I was able to think creatively and the freedom to bring resources to support the implementation of the project and move it forward.



Outcomes

The Tutankhamun reimagined team wanted to ensure the longevity of the project and a legacy to the co-curation work after the temporary exhibition closed.

Following the link below will take you to the Tutankhamun co-curation project webpage. Here you can learn more about the project and get 'behind the scenes' access to the co-curation process.

<https://www.britishtpglobalnetwork.org/about-us/itp-legacy-projects/tutankhamun/>

Text from the temporary exhibition -

https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Tutankhamun_reimagined_large_print_guide_The_British_Museum.pdf

Follow the Museum trail -

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/tutankhamun-ancient-and-modern-perspectives>





Thank You