

Digital Resource Development Team Evaluation Report

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Contents	Page no.
1. Purpose of report	3
2. Methodology	4
3. Project description	
3.1 Background	5
3.2 Project aims	5
3.3 Project planning	7
3.4 Organisational structure	8
3.5 Budget	8
4. Implementation	9
4.1 Project Management	13
4.2 Partnerships	14
4.3 Outputs and outcomes	
5. Conclusions and the way ahead	17
6. Recommended actions for final phase of DRDT	19
Appendix A – questions used for interviews	20
Appendix B – summary of project outputs	22

1. Purpose of report

The Scottish Executive launched the Regional Development Challenge Fund (RDCF) in December 2003. The aim of the fund was to develop the capacity and sustainability of the museum sector through active partnerships. The funding, distributed via the Scottish Museums Council has enabled museums to create active partnerships across local authority boundaries, between local authority and independent museums and with the national museums.

The Digital Resource Development Team (DRDT) project is an East of Scotland Museum Partnership project, funded by the Scottish Executive and managed by East Lothian Council. It is one of three RDCF projects run by ESMP, the others being *Scotland and Medicine: Collections and Connections* and *Regional Museums Training Development Programme*.

In December 2007 the DRDT project manager, Peter Gray, East Lothian Council, commissioned this evaluation report on behalf of the ESMP. At the point of carrying out this evaluation the project had almost completed its three year lifespan but, having received additional Scottish Executive funding, the project was planned to continue until September 2008. This evaluation report covers the period up to January 2008.

This report examines the outputs and outcomes of the project against its original aims as stated in the project Business Plan. The findings of the evaluation plan can be used to:

- inform future developments within the East of Scotland Museum Partnership. Regarded in combination with evaluation of the other two ESMP projects this report can help determine strategy and priorities for ESMP. It can also be used to support the delivery of the aims of the Museum Partnership Officer, a new post being established by ESMP to build on the outcomes of the three RDCF projects.
- support the work of the DRDT project officers during the final phase of the project, which includes a full impact evaluation and a conference. The findings of this report will raise issues that can be explored further through impact evaluation and provide substance for debate for the conference.
- share results with the rest of the museum sector in Scotland. ICT is recognised as a key tool underpinning all of the services provided by museums.¹ The experience of the DRDT project will be of great value to the sector in sharing information about the level of readiness in museums, the type and range of training required to build capacity, and the practicalities of developing and sustaining partnerships.
- contribute to Scottish Museums Council's current review of its ICT strategy. At the time of writing this report Scottish Museums Council is reviewing its first ICT strategy and is seeking views from the sector on priorities for further development. This report will be a valuable addition to this discussion.

¹ A National ICT Strategy for Scottish Museums, Scottish Museums Council, 2004

2. Methodology

Rachel Hunter Consulting conducted the evaluation of the DRDT project through a combination of desk research and face-to-face or telephone interviews during January and February 2008. Desk research consisted of familiarisation with the project Business Plan; a review existing evaluation and feedback from DRDT training events; examination of data held on the number and range of training and advisory activities and projects carried out by partner museums; and a general overview of associated paperwork and plans. A number of interviews were held² with the DRDT project manager and the two Project Officers and face-to-face or telephone interviews were held with a sample number of project partners and members of the project's Executive Committee. The chosen selection of project partners was intended to represent geographic spread and museum type. The number of people interviewed was limited slightly by availability and time.

Those interviewed:

Executive Committee

Ian Clark, Fife Council Museums
Ian Brown, Scottish Borders Council
Robin Chesters, Almond Valley Heritage Centre
James Brogan, Napier University

Project Team

Peter Gray, Project Manager
Angus Ferguson, Project Officer
Kyeran Ravenhill

Partner Museums

Ian Clark, Fife Council Museums
Helen Clark, Edinburgh City Museums and Galleries
Fiona Colton, Scottish Borders Museums
Elizabeth Henderson, West Lothian Council
Helen Urquhart, Fife Folk Museum
Linda Fitzpatrick, Scottish Fisheries Museum
Norman Myles, Methil Heritage Trust
Nuala Lonie, Linlithgow Heritage Trust

² See Appendix A for copy of questions used in interviews

3. Project description

3.1 Background

In December 2003 the Scottish Executive launched the Regional Development Challenge Fund, a £3million programme to support the development of regional museum partnerships. In response to this the East of Scotland Museum Partnership was established; a consortium of museums in Scottish Borders, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian, Edinburgh and Fife, including local authority, independent, military and university museums was set up with the aim of submitting applications to the fund for specific projects which would be of benefit to all partners.

The proposal for the DRDT project was built on previous NOF-digi³ funded projects led by East Lothian Council (SHELF⁴ and Scotland's East Coast Fisheries) and on the experience of Almond Valley Heritage Trust which has been responsible for the production of award-winning digital multimedia interactives. The proposal was submitted to Scottish Museums Council in March 2004 and an award of £300,000 was given in September 2004. (In November 2007 an additional £53,000 RDCF funding was awarded to the project which has enabled a final evaluation and development phase to be added.)

3.2 Project Aims

This section of the report looks back to the original Business Plan for the project to see how the aims of the project were stated. Section 4 of the report will look at how far these aims were fulfilled.

The following is all taken directly from the Business Plan.

The aim of the DRDT project is to appoint two Project Officers who will support:

- the digital publishing of exhibitions, publications and learning resources,
- training and skills development for paid and voluntary staff in partner museums in digital/web publishing,

with the intention that digital publishing will help to:

- preserve the fruits of research and collecting undertaken for temporary exhibitions, and making them permanently available
- engage visitors
- find wider audiences
- increase the reach of museums and availability of material, geographically and over time.

³ NOF-digi – New Opportunities Fund – National Lottery money for projects that put learning material on the internet

⁴ See www.historyshelf.org

The proposed development opportunities for museum staff will help build:

- **skills** – the knowledge required to create digital resources in future,
- **confidence** – to build on these skills, expanding their abilities into new areas,
- **knowledge** – of what technologies can (and cannot) achieve, how they work, and how they may fail,
- **understanding** – the technologies underlying the provision of web content.

The creation of a regional digital resources team will provide a mechanism to share skills and resources, offer advice and support and increase the overall capacity of the sector to appreciate and apply the benefits of digital technology as well as produce a range of resources for the public to use for education and enjoyment.

The planned outcomes of the project are:

- Enhanced skills base of museum sector paid and volunteer staff in the development, production and commissioning of digital projects
- Improved capacity to generate or specify digital media
- A substantial quantity of freely-available digital resources for public use for education and enjoyment from at least 12 projects, including, but not limited to, online exhibitions; education packs for teachers; education materials for school pupils and lifelong learners; interactive learning experiences; and downloadable publications
- Development of new, more efficient, methods of working
- Creation of a mechanism for sharing skills and other cooperation
- Creation of learning resources which extend audiences, and increase accessibility
- Opportunities to lever-in additional support
- Establishment of the project website as a continuing resource to the group, both for sharing knowledge and for promoting projects
- A regional digital publishing group, and
- Continuing partnerships in the production of digital educational resources

In summary, the main outcomes of the project were planned to be; the increasing of skills in the use of ICT, use of these skills to generate digitised learning resources, the creation of a mechanism for sharing skills and encouraging collaboration and the production of a website that would support all of the above. The DRDT would encourage project work within individual museums as the method for acquiring new skills and equipment and would encourage networking and partnership working between these museums, through the development of a forum and annual conferencing, so that skills and best practice could be shared and new project ideas could be generated.

3.3 Project planning

The project was planned to be delivered over the course of three years. The Business Plan sets out milestones for each year:

Year One

- Recruitment of project staff
- Needs assessment and from this develop annual project plan
- Develop the forum group and develop the management group
- Secure agreement to Project Plan
- Set up the project website, including online forum/bulletin board
- Complete and evaluate year one projects
- Project staff and Executive Committee meet to review and evaluate project plan

Year Two

- Complete and evaluate year two projects
- First collaborative touring/web exhibition begins touring
- Establish regional Digital Publishing Group; hold first annual meeting of the Group
- Project staff and Executive Committee meet to review and evaluate project plan

Year Three

- Complete and evaluate year three projects
- Second collaborative touring/web exhibition begins touring
- Identify funding for future partner projects
- Secure ongoing funding of partnership web site
- Second annual meeting of Regional Digital Publishing Group
- Complete development of exit strategy
- Project staff and Executive Committee meet to review and evaluate project plan, produce final report to Management Board
- External evaluation of project

3.4 Organisational structure

The organisational structure for managing the project was planned as:

Management Board

Remit – setting the overall direction of the project

Representation – one representative from each of the project partner museums

Frequency – meetings to be held twice yearly



Executive Committee

Remit – receive reports from Project Team and approve project plan and further developments

Representation – 6 to 8 members drawn from the Management Board

Frequency – meetings to be held every two months



Project Team

Two project officers, employed by East Lothian Council, line managed by ELC Museums Officer (budget holder) acting as Project Manager, based in ELC offices, reporting to Executive Committee, responsible for setting and implementing forward plan for the project.

3.5 Budget

The project budget made provision for:

- Staffing costs (including travel and subsistence and equipment)
- Costs of individual project work within partner museums
- Costs of contract staff, bringing in specialist skills as required,
- Cost of purchasing software, licenses, domain names, hosting fees
- Costs of two touring exhibitions

4. Implementation

The following section will look at how the project was carried out in practice by examining how the project was managed, how far it managed to achieve the development of partnerships and what the outputs and outcomes of the project have been so far. This section will compare what has happened in reality against the intentions set out in the Business Plan; look at the factors that have influenced the progress of the project; identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project; before bringing all this together in an attempt to draw conclusions in Section 5 that will inform the exit strategy for the remainder of the project and which may also be of wider benefit to the strategic development of the museum sector.

4.1 Project management

Organisational structure

The project was to have been run by a Management Board consisting of representatives from each partner museum and an Executive Committee working at a strategic level to oversee the direction of the project, with a Project Team working at an operational level to deliver the aims of the project. In practice it became apparent that it was more practical for many of the functions of the Management Board to be taken up by the Executive Committee. The project was managed by the Executive Committee but the possibility remained to reconvene the Management Board as a check and balance mechanism within the organisational structure of the project.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee was made up of representatives from Fife Council Museums, East Lothian Council Museum Service, Scottish Borders Museum Service, City of Edinburgh Council Museums and Galleries, Almond Valley Heritage Centre, Scottish Mining Museum, Napier University and Learning Teaching Scotland. The committee's role was to endorse the project plan, supervise the monitoring and evaluation of the project, receive financial reports from the Project Manager and operational reports from the Project Officers and approve amendments to the project (as and when necessary). In fact the nature of the project changed quite substantially, fairly early on, which had a rather negative and never fully resolved impact on the purpose and effectiveness of the committee.

At the outset of the project the Project Officers conducted two surveys: a museum survey examining the use of ICT by staff and public and the types of staff training available or already undertaken; and a survey of individuals, looking at the level of ICT literacy already in place. These surveys found that the use of ICT in partner museums was not as advanced as had been expected and the Project Officers took the decision to use the first few months of the project to work with partners to promote the project, demonstrate the potential of ICT, explain what types of training opportunities would be available and offer generic ICT training to groups of partner museums. It became an immediate priority to carry out this groundwork before partner museums would be able to carry out the types of projects originally envisaged in the Business Plan, and before museums would be ready to network and collaborate on joint projects and touring exhibitions, as had been hoped. This meant that the budget that had been intended for this work was not being spent and as other costs were much reduced (e.g. costs of IT

hardware having gone down substantially since the Business Plan had been written and the use of external consultants was not happening as has been envisaged in the Business Plan) the project was facing a significant underspend. The Project Team recommended to the Executive Committee that the budget for project work should be repackaged as a Project Challenge Fund. This recommendation was approved and the project changed direction. Effort was now put into preparing and promoting guidelines for the fund and the Project Officers spent time with partner museums helping to develop individual project proposals. The role of the Executive Committee became that of a grant-giving body, assessing and approving grant applications. As the scale of these projects was in fact much smaller than had originally been envisaged, it is possible to see with hindsight that much of this decision making could have been delegated to a sub-group of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee could then have met less frequently, say every six months, to oversee the strategic progress of the project.

At this stage the Executive Committee and Project Team did not return to the Business Plan to review the impact that this unanticipated change of direction would have on the intended aims of the project. The milestones of the project were not changed to reflect the new priorities of the project and it was therefore no longer possible to monitor and evaluate the project against its original aims. This resulted in some of the members of the Executive Committee losing motivation and commitment, with some members no longer willing to attend meetings.

With hindsight it is possible to see that the initial survey work carried out by the Project Officers was an important turning point for the project. Ideally this work would have been carried out in the planning stages of a project like this, with the results informing the Business Plan before it was submitted for funding. However, the speed at which partnerships had to submit applications to the Regional Development Challenge Fund meant that this crucial step could not be taken in advance. Even so, at the point when it became apparent that the delivery of the project would change, the Executive Committee should have conducted a fundamental review of the Business Plan and a new project plan should have been produced.

Project Team

The Business Plan identified three key components which underpinned the remit of the Project Team: a) developing lasting partnerships, b) skills development and c) service development.

Taken from the Business Plan:

a. Partnership working

The project will create a sustainable and inclusive partnership in the field of digital publishing through

- The creation and development of a forum group for sharing skills, ideas and knowledge of best practice
- the creation of a Management group for the project to identify good practice in partnership working and explore the potential of partnership with non-museum partners in the lifetime of the project
- using the opportunities presented by the creation of the forum group and the management group to lever in additional support to the project
- regular meetings, project launches, training days and seminars

- an annual 'conference' for the group to share ideas and celebrate successes
- developing ideas for future projects and identifying opportunities presented by technological developments
- using new technology to facilitate group meetings and group working
- building links with external agencies, such as tourism bodies and the education sector

b. Skills development

The project will produce an enhanced skills base of museum sector paid and volunteer staff in the development, production and commissioning of digital projects through

- training days and seminars
- sharing skills via regular meetings and through the web site forum
- and participation in digital publishing activities

c. Service development

The project will produce a substantial quantity of freely-available targeted digital learning resources for schools, the further education sector and lifelong learners, including, but not limited to

- stand-alone web exhibitions
- web versions of existing temporary and permanent exhibitions
- downloadable publications in a variety of accessible formats
- resource packs CD-Roms for distribution through schools and libraries
- online activities allowing visitors to explore collections and enhance their knowledge and understanding

The remit of the Project Officers, according to the Business Plan, was to:

- undertake an audit of existing capacity
- assess partners' needs and objectives
- identify opportunities for one or more pilot projects for each partner
- work closely with relevant museums(s) to deliver pilot projects and ensure transfer of knowledge and resources
- use forum to provide opportunities to exchange ideas and knowledge, to promote creativity and act strategically
- use forum website to document progress of the project, showcase outcomes and provide links to partners' sites

Also the Project Officers were expected to:

“work with partners, both individual museums and groups of museums, to complete individual projects identified in the overall Plan. This will involve a range of activities, from the direct production of materials to support, advice and assistance, depending on the nature of the specific project.”

To achieve this it was planned that in Year 1 small groups would be brought together to generate ideas for partnership projects. By Year 2 these groups would be established as working groups acting as peer support groups and key mechanisms for delivering project outcomes. The groups would be developed further in Year 3 to the point at which they would be able to sustain partnership working beyond the life of the project. The Project Team would be responsible for developing this partnership approach throughout the

three years of the project. In fact, as stated earlier, the initial surveys carried out by the Project Officers, revealed that the partners' facility with ICT was not sufficiently developed to be able to take on the method of partnership working described above. The needs and objectives identified by the survey suggested that the developmental role of the Project Team could not be fully implemented until the base level of capacity within museums was increased. This led to an early focus on training and the development of small scale individual projects as the means by which the results of training could be put into practice within partner museums. The side-effect of this has been that the partners have worked in isolation with the Project Officers and had very little opportunity to network, share experiences and learn from each other, or generate ideas for partnership working. With the Project Team putting so much emphasis on training the parallel requirement to develop networks or working groups was overlooked.

However it is important to recognise that the training and advice given by the Project Officers was, on the whole, highly valued by the project partners and many museums have benefited greatly from the experience, skills and confidence gained through training and project work.

The divergence from one of the key aims of the project (partnership working) was, it seems, not identified by the Project Manager as an issue that needed attention. This is where the importance of the monitoring role of the Executive Committee becomes apparent. If 'Partnership Working' had remained as a 'standing item' on the agenda of the Executive Committee (as had been intended for the defunct Management Board), this issue would have been kept in focus and an alternative way of achieving this aim could have been identified, agreed and implemented. Perhaps the project would have benefited from great discussion and agreement on the definition of partnership and what could realistically be expected in terms of the way that museums can work together collaboratively.

The Project Officers reported on a regular basis to the Executive Committee. These reports tended to be quite informal, offering a summary of activity undertaken in any given period (e.g. partner visits and training, meetings attended, updates on significant project work and a general overview of advisory work) and did not directly address the strategic aims of the project. Had an evaluation strategy been put in place at the outset, checking on progress towards achieving the project's aims, this gap may have been avoided.

Skills development has undoubtedly taken place (as will be examined in more detail in 4.3) and museums are now in a better position to engage in the intended aims of the project, but the mechanisms that would allow them to do so have not yet been built up. This should become the focus of the remaining phase of the project.

Monitoring and evaluation

As has previously been stated no new milestones were identified for the project when it changed direction. Without this there was no structure for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the project. The project Business Plan had stated that the project plan would include:

- a) Guidelines for project monitoring
- b) Proposals for involving beneficiaries and stakeholders in project evaluation

- c) Requirements for three monthly reports to be available to project partners and for a regular agenda item on evaluation at Management team meetings
- d) Annual telephone questionnaire based on key evaluation questions
- e) Proposal for external evaluation in year three
- f) Proposals to use regular project activity e.g. training courses, meetings as opportunities for evaluation and to collect data from these opportunities

As well as monitoring and evaluating the Challenge Fund projects taking place within the overall DRDT project, the Executive Committee and Project Manager should have been implementing an evaluation strategy for the DRDT's strategic aims.

Responsibility for carrying out evaluation of project activity should have rested with the Project Officers, with guidance from the Project Manager and Executive Committee. The Project Officers have implemented (f) above, by carrying out evaluation of training events immediately after the events and (e) has been realised through the production of this evaluation report. Working closely with partner museums on projects and as advisers, the Project Officers were also able to gain anecdotal feedback and they were able to witness improvements in skills and confidence. However, none of this was recorded in any formal sense and no evaluation was made of museums that were not participating fully in the project, for instance to find out why they were not participating and what might be done to overcome any barriers or misconceptions, (although over the duration of the project persistent promotion of the project by the Project Officers resulted in greater involvement) Museums that received grants from the Challenge Fund had to produce completion reports but no overview has been produced from these.

At one level removed, the Scottish Museums Council, as distributors of the Regional Development Challenge Fund, also had some responsibility for ensuring that monitoring and evaluation of the project took place. SMC employs an RDCF Manager who has an overview of all the RDCF projects. During the early stages of the project, when direction was beginning to change, this manager and Scottish Museums Council's ICT Manager offered advice on reviewing the strategic aims of the project which does not appear to have been taken up. Shortly after this the RDCF Manager post became vacant and there was a gap of some months before the new manager came into post. By this time the new direction for the project was set and the new manager was unable to get the level of information required, on finance and strategy, that would have made it possible to have input to the strategic development or completion of the project.

4.2 Partnerships

As described earlier, one of the main intended outcomes of this project was the development of partnerships, at strategic and operational levels. Strategically this did not occur, as explained in Section 4.1. Operationally, two conferences at the beginning of the project brought the project partners together to find out more about the project and to encourage the development of project ideas. However, as the Project Officers' surveys showed, it was too early for these types of partnerships to gel. Once the Project Officers' focus was diverted to working with individual museums, no further opportunities for partnership working were created.

Some of the museums in the ESMP area did not find out about the project until it was well underway, by which time their understanding of the project was that it was a source

of 100% project funding. They were not all aware of the partnership aspect of the DRDT project.

Some museums found out about the project through existing networks, for instance members of museum forums spread the word about the project to each other. The Project Team could perhaps have considered using these forums more strategically as a route to encourage partnership thinking and working, once the building blocks of skills, knowledge and confidence were in place.

The project partners have valued the support available from the Project Officers - the advice, training and 'helpline' that they provided - but while the Project Officers have been in post museums have automatically turned to them first rather than thinking of themselves as a broader network of peers, amongst whom knowledge and expertise has been building up as a result of DRDT. Museums interviewed for this report have stated that they are keen to find out what other partners have been doing. Some have suggested that using the project website to disseminate information about other ICT projects would help. Others are keen that networking should happen face-to-face, preferably in each others' museums so that the results of work done can be seen and discussed on site. This is something that could be addressed in the final phase of the project.

4.3 Outputs and outcomes

This section will provide an overview of the outputs⁵ and outcomes of the project up to February 2008, summarising the quantitative data available on the range of activities undertaken and qualitative information on the increased skills, knowledge and confidence that has resulted from the project.

Outputs

Training:

Approximately 180 training sessions have been held, benefiting 125 paid and volunteer staff. These sessions have all been facilitated by the two Project Officers and have included: website development, building, fixing, assessing and upgrading PCs; image manipulation, creation of visitor displays (e.g. touch screens), audio and video skills training, desk top publishing and photography. Training started with generic training for larger groups of project partners, leading on to tailored sessions, related to project work, for small groups and individuals within single partner museums.

Of the 180 events held 73 were for local authority museums and 107 were for independent, military and university museums.

Project website:

A new website was set up by the Project Officers, www.digitalimages.org which contains: news; copies of the single user and museum surveys for completion, along with results of the single user survey; downloads such as the project's monthly newsletter, Challenge Fund guidelines and application form, the project Business Plan and Partnership Agreement; a help and advice section which includes written and video material offering 'how to' guides on a wide range of

⁵ For a sample of project outputs to Feb 2008 see appendix B

uses of ICT; and a demonstration picture gallery which hosts images from East Lothian Council museums.

Touring exhibition:

Six museums, led by Fife Council Museums, collaborated to produce *Simply Samplers*, a touring exhibition of 23 embroidered samplers. The exhibition was launched in Kirkcaldy in February 2007 and toured community museums in West Lothian, Old Gala House and Hawick Museum in the Scottish Borders, John Muir's Birthplace in Dunbar and is booked for show at Hopetoun House in late spring 2008. The exhibition is accompanied by touch-screen interactive and an associated website which includes information about the touring schedule, the content of the exhibition, a history of samplers, frequently asked questions (audio only) and guidance on further reading and useful contacts.

Challenge Fund:

27 projects have received funding so far, ranging from £75 to nearly £11,000 (with most projects costing between around £500 to £1,400) allocated to 17 museums (5 local authorities, 11 independent museums and one university museum). Funds were used to purchase hardware and software such as touch-screen systems, scanners, cameras, audio equipment, laptop and data projector for use in projects which resulted in improved interpretation of collection through the use of touch-screens and audio or video material and improved collections management through digitising and documentation of photographic collections. Eight museums returned to the fund to build on work completed.

Newsletter:

The Project Officers set up a newsletter which was available on the project website. Partners were alerted to the publication of each newsletter by email. The newsletter was used to update partners on training opportunities, new equipment available and to encourage uptake of the Challenge Fund.

Outcomes

Although some of the planned outcomes of the project have not been achieved, for reasons explained in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, there have been many positive outcomes of the project. In some museums capacity has increased as capability has grown, leading to greater efficiency in some core museum activities. In one independent museum the DRDT challenge fund was used to buy scanning equipment for digitising images in the museums photographic collection. The resulting progress witnessed within the museum inspired (and continuing) input from 8 additional volunteers.

Several museums expressed a change in attitude towards ICT; they have been surprised that equipment has cost a lot less than they thought it would and that using it and maintaining it has not been as difficult as they expected. They feel more confident about using, talking about and commissioning ICT. This suggests that some museums are now more ready to enter into collaborative projects than they were before the project started.

The benefit of these outcomes tends to have been experienced mostly by smaller independent museums. This higher degree of impact may reflect the general lack of ICT support ordinarily available to independent museums and the lack of budgets to invest in ICT. With both available to them through the DRDT project, independent museums have

grasped the opportunity and made leaps of progress, applied both to work on collections and to visitor services, which they could not otherwise have achieved.

Initially local authority museums found it harder to take advantage of the opportunities made available through the DRDT project. All participated in training but some had difficulty in commissioning hardware and software to support their work. This was partly due to resistance from within Council IT departments. Commonly, ICT that is not part of the internal network of a local authority will not receive support from that authority's IT department. The priorities of local authority ICT departments are to set up and maintain internal networks and facilitate external communications. This meant that some local authority museum staff were uneasy about introducing ICT that has not been commissioned via their IT department. However, by building up their skills, knowledge and confidence through the DRDT project, local authority museum staff are now able to specify, install and use ICT independently as a tool for supporting their core museum activities.

5. Conclusions and the way ahead

Looking back at the planned project outcomes (3.2, page 6) it is possible to see that many of these have been accomplished. There are new and 'enhanced skills' within the partner museums as a result of this project and new 'digital resources for public use' have been produced (although not as many, or as extensive, as had been hoped).

A 'project website' has been created which is an important resource for the group, although more could be done to use this website to support the concept of a network of partners, for instance by presenting case studies of completed projects and sharing information about current or planned projects, so that museums can learn from each other and contact each other for advice and support.

Many projects have resulted in 'more efficient methods of working', mainly through the production of digitised resources that have opened up a range of possibilities within individual museums for improved access to collection related information. However, the project has not yet demonstrated whether new, more efficient methods of working can be generated through collaborative working. One of the planned outcomes that could have supported this development was the 'creation of a mechanism for sharing skills and other cooperation'. As stated earlier in this report the focus on building up skills, knowledge, confidence and understanding, through project work, has prepared individual museums to have the ability to embark on cooperative working but nurturing of this activity has yet to happen.

The project has not resulted in a 'regional digital publishing group' as planned. This group was to have had an important role in sustaining the outcomes of the project by producing a champion, or champions, for IT who would continue to develop collaborative working and generating new partner projects. This aim is still relevant and work towards this could continue in the final stages of the project and through the work of the ESMP Museum Partnership Officer. A digital publishing group for the ESMP could ensure that the benefits of bringing IT into the core functions of museums could continue to grow and have impact and support the final planned outcome of the DRDT project, 'continuing partnerships in the production of digital educational resources'.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the evaluation of this project is that although most of the planned outcomes have been achieved a disconnection between strategic and operational activity has meant that the sustainability of these outcomes has not been addressed. There is no denying that once the project got underway it was quickly apparent that training and awareness-raising were required in order to equip museums to be ready to work in partnership. The emphasis of the project correctly shifted towards work that would achieve this. But three years into the project there has been no further attempt to build the partnerships and networks that could lead to sustainable outcomes for the project. Emphasis should be put on creating an environment within which partnerships can evolve.

With partnership working an important aim for this project there was not enough work done to identify what museums need in order to be able to function as partners. To a certain extent this is a symptom of a sector that has had to be reactive to funding opportunities and which has not yet had the benefit of published evaluation of the funding scheme that led into the Regional Development Challenge Fund, the Strategic Change Fund. RDCF project proposals had to be generated at great speed, without an

adequate amount of time for the level of planning that could have prevented some of the issues described in this evaluation report. Organisationally, museums are very supportive of the idea of partnership, but within these organisations individuals have not been fully prepared for the implications of project working.

This project has shown that it is necessary to provide support for partnership working, not just the specialist support for ICT work that was, on the surface, the object of this project. This support is valuable to people working at senior levels but it is also important that it should reach people working at a junior level so that they can see how their work is contributing to strategic objectives generally set from above.

Much emphasis has been given to the role of monitoring and evaluation in this report. It may be useful to look at the way that the Heritage Lottery assesses applications for grants. Applicants must submit a project plan with milestones and an evaluation plan that indicates how progress will be assessed. The more watertight these plans are the greater the chance that the project will meet its stated objectives and that, in the case of HLF, the public's money will be used wisely.

The way ahead

The DRDT has received additional funding which extends it to the end of September 2008. The plan for this period is to:

- work with the project partners on developing new individual projects to submit for funding
- conduct an impact evaluation, identifying needs which have been met, and also those which have either not been met or new needs which have arisen through the course of the project, in confidence, skills, knowledge, hardware and support
- hold a conference on the use of digital resources in museums, looking back at what partners have achieved, and forward to where we want to go next. The conference will provide an opportunity for project partners to showcase their activities, to network and to learn
- produce a publication (both in print and online) summarising the project and the achievements of partner projects, including case studies and the impact evaluation

It is worth applying the findings of this evaluation study to this proposed work plan. There has been a great concentration on project work with individual museums and there is a possibility that this way of working could continue to dominate the final phase of the project. It is vital that resources should be put towards evaluation soon, so that lessons learned can inform the remainder of the project and can help the ESMP set future priorities. Priority should also be given to developing mechanisms for a sustainable network: project partners must be brought together soon to discuss what these mechanisms could be - networking opportunities via the *digitalimages* website/ networking through site visits to see the results of others' project work or to look at work in progress/ sharing case studies. It is extremely important that this is not left to the end of the project and the proposed conference. Bringing project partners together sooner rather than later means that any suggestions can be implemented by the Project Officers before the end of the project (or plans can be put in place for continuity, should it be

possible to carry on employing the Officers post-project). It also means that partners can be more fully involved in the planning process for the conference.

The final phase of the project coincides with the recruitment of a Museum Partnership Officer for the East of Scotland Museum Partnership. The main tasks of this post will be to support networking, set up a partnership website, co-ordinate the evaluation of existing ESMP projects, provide a reporting, monitoring and evaluation role for partnership work as well as a variety of tasks aimed at encouraging sharing of skills, knowledge, equipment and best practice.

Much of the work planned for the end of the DRDT project can feed into the work of the Museum Partnership Officer. There is an opportunity here for some of the intended and actual outcomes of the project to be sustained beyond the life of the project and to merge with the outcomes of the ESMP's other two RDCF projects. The Project Officers must work closely with the MPO to share their knowledge of the DRDT project in order to investigate ways of mainstreaming the work of the project for future benefit.

6. Recommended actions for final phase of DRDT

At the time of writing this report the project still has about seven months to complete. This evaluation report has identified a number of areas which confirm that the planned actions for this phase are appropriate, but has also identified additional actions that could strengthen the outcomes of the project:

1. Impact evaluation – as well as identifying needs that have or have not been met (as planned) impact evaluation should also evaluate the output and outcomes of the Challenge Fund projects, the impact of training and advice, the use made of the project website and newsletter, the range of educational output generated and the public impact
2. The museum and individual surveys conducted at the outset of the project should be repeated so that progress can be quantified
3. Information about Challenge Fund projects should be shared as soon as possible so that partners can begin to respond to and build on these projects, either individually or in partnership
4. Opportunities for networking should be identified and worked on as a matter of priority, especially for staff working at a junior level, so that experience gained through DRDT can be shared and sustained
5. The ICT elements of the touring exhibition *Simply Samplers* should be evaluated, from the point of view of both public use and staff use to show the impact of using ICT to support exhibition work
6. Invite partners to become involved in the planning process for the proposed end-of-project conference
7. Share evaluation and project knowledge with the ESMP Museum Partnership Officer once in post

Appendix A – Questions used for interviews

Project Manager

Project management:

1. Did the Management Board meet twice yearly as planned?
2. Did the Executive Committee meet every two months as planned?
3. Were any sub-groups formed?
4. Was a Project Plan produced with/for the Project Officers?
5. Was the evaluation plan developed and implemented?
6. Project costs – did it go to plan?

Partnership working

1. How successful was the development of partnership working?
2. Were there any barriers to success?
3. Was the role of the project officers developmental as well as training/advisory?
4. Was the Regional Digital Publishing Group set up?
5. Has the project resulted in increased capacity?

Project Officers

Outputs

1. Range and number of publications
2. Range and number of training events
3. Range and number of participants
4. Range and number of projects supported via the Challenge Fund

Project Management

1. Management structure – discuss effectiveness of structure
2. Project plan – was one created?
3. Evaluation – how much of the original evaluation plan was completed?

Partnership working

1. Developmental role – were you able to develop working groups as planned?
2. Did the idea of a forum work in practice? If not, why not?
3. Was a group set up to 'identify good practice in partnership working' as planned?
4. Annual conference – did it take place?
5. Were new ideas for projects generated from partner museums?
6. Any examples of links with external agencies?
7. Use of IT to facilitate meetings/group working – successful or not?

Exit strategy

1. Plans to set up a digital publishing group, have two or more projects ready for external funding, dates set for future meetings and establishment of an annual conference – were these achieved?
2. How will partnerships be continued beyond the project?
3. Any unintended outcomes

Partner Museums

1. How did you get involved initially in this project?
2. What did you hope to get out of taking part in the project?
3. What did you get out of it (e.g. skills development, digital publishing)?
4. What difference has it made to your organisation (skills, knowledge, confidence and understanding)?
5. Has it resulted in wider audiences/greater engagement by visitors?
6. Do you go to the Project Officers for advice?
7. Do you use the website/newsletter?
8. Do you think of your organisation as part of a forum now?
9. What has partnership meant to you?
10. Have you been involved in ongoing evaluation of the project?
11. Any unintended outcomes?
12. What would you pass on to others from your experience of this project?

Appendix B – Sample of project output, to February 2008

Factsheets, tips or on-line guides

In-depth user guide to Website Baker (the most commonly used content management system with our partners)

Basic Audio Recording and Editing

Basic Image Manipulation (2 versions – Gimp, PS Elements) including scanning

Basic HTML and Cascading Style Sheet site construction

Individual Guides to the following Content Management Systems – Easy Publish, Mambo, and Website Baker

Guide to basic video editing and a guide for video editing using tired, old equipment

Guide to providing and encoding video suitable for You Tube

Advice on using the RAW image format with digital cameras then in image manipulation packages

Advice on choosing digital stills cameras

Thoughts for implementing successful touch-screen displays

The ins and outs of white balance when taking digital images

Tips on Premiere Elements

Lexicon (of digitally related terms)

Video Guides (still in post-production) on PC assembly and installing a CMS on a web host.

Training

Series of regional group-training took place in year one for Fife, West Lothian and Edinburgh covering: basic HTML & CSS web page creation and editing; as well as basic image manipulation and scanning techniques training.

Project Updates

10 newsletters many containing hints and tips on various digital activities, recommended web-sites and useful free software as well as updates on work being undertaken with various project partners.

Public Access

Project websites: www.digitalimages.org and www.simplysamplers.org.

Partner websites the project officers have given training, help and advice on (please note some of these have only recently been created and still need content):

<http://www.elh.info>
<http://www.eastlothianmuseums.org>
<http://www.prestongrange.org>
<http://www.prestongrange.org/pcap>
<http://www.fifefolkmuseum.org>
<http://www.belhaven.info>
<http://www.mages.org.uk>
<http://www.dunbarmuseum.org>
<http://www.oureastlothian.org>
<http://www.stickssn.org>
<http://www.benniemuseum.org.uk>
<http://www.methilheritage.org.uk>
<http://www.jmbt.org.uk>
<http://www.rememberwhen.org.uk>
<http://www.trainingmages.org>
<http://www.scottishconservationstudio.co.uk>
<http://www.friends-of-kirkcaldy-museums-and-art-gallery.org.uk>
<http://www.crawfordarts.free-online.co.uk>
<http://www.fcac.co.uk>
<http://www.musselburghmuseum.org.uk>
<http://www.lucs.org.uk>
<http://crailmuseum.org.uk>
<http://www.linlithgowstory.org.uk>

Digital Touring Exhibitions Group

Venues scheduled: Kirkcaldy Museum & Art Gallery, West Lothian Council (multiple venues), Old Gala House, Hawick Museum, John Muir's Birthplace, and Hopetoun House.

(Others willing include: Bennie Museum, Fife Folk Museum tbc, Harestanes)

Partner: East Lothian Museum Service:

Main contact: Peter Gray – pgray@eastlothianmuseums.org

Digital components for –'Living from the Land', 'Park Life', 'Greetings From Dunbar' and 'An Ingenious Whittler' exhibitions.

Development work on 'East Lothian at War' (An interactive, cross-platform CD created with Adobe Director) sent to all East Lothian Schools.

Set up YouTube Director account for ELMS. Production of six videos now available on [YouTube](#) including Number 6 Escapes, Simply Samplers, Number 6 On The Loose as well as the award winning Prestonpans Library for the East Lothian Library Service. Help with production and post-production of numerous others. More videos are in pre and post-production stages.

Remedial work on three existing displays within John Muir's Birthplace then advice on complete replacements for two of them as well as training staff on their assembly and use.

Assistance with three successful Challenge Fund awards

Partner: City of Edinburgh Council Museums and Galleries:

Travelling Gallery (main contact – Alison Chisholm - alison.chisholm@edinburgh.gov.uk). Assistance with piecing together PC specifications for new Travelling Gallery bus (specifically the main display PC, driver's laptop, printer and possible internet connections including 3G mobiles, satellite and wireless broadband) then assistance and training with putting together main display PC including the interactive on it. Help has also been provided with updating the visitor display as well as problem solving when this has arisen.

ELCMs/Remember When/Living Memory Association (main contacts Jane Carnall - hjicarnall@gmail.com & Helen Clark – helen.clark@edinburgh.gov.uk). Training on advanced content management systems for their project website including html and css authoring, desk top publishing, image manipulation including panorama creation, audio and video capture and editing and online publishing.

Assistance with three successful Challenge Fund applications

Partner: Fife Council Museums:

Main Contact: Dallas Mechan - Dallas.Mechan@fife.gov.uk

Help with presenting themselves within the Kirkcaldy Museum Friends' [website](#). Since their Council controlled one was very difficult to update and gives them very little space (contact: Iain Clark – iain.clark@fife.gov.uk).

Tuition to a number of staff in setting up the digital components of the Simply Samplers exhibition (contact: Alice Pearson - Alice.Pearson@fife.gov.uk).

In-depth tuition to Methil Heritage Trust and various FCMS employees on system building, scanning and image manipulation techniques (for a successful joint bid to our Challenge Fund which is enabling them to digitise and make publicly available a huge number of images) as well as thorough training on the content management system on which their website runs.

Help and training on setting up and changing the digital component of the Simply Samplers exhibition for viewing separately within one of the council's libraries.

About to undertake training on two challenge fund projects (see below) that will bring a total of five touch screen systems and three large digital media frames for public display in multiple venues (contacts – 1. Lesley Botten - Lesley.Botten@fife.gov.uk. 2. Iain Clark – iain.clark@fife.gov.uk).

Partner: Fife Contemporary Art and Craft

Training on HTML/CSS and image manipulation as well as the use of content management systems to help with their website. Also received training, in the first year, on system building and maintenance for a visitor display which accompanied a touring exhibition – the equipment was funded by a Challenge Fund Award. They later received help pulling together a second application in partnership with Fife Council Museums. This resulted in the purchase of two touch-screen systems and 3 large digital photo-frames to accompany a bus derived mobile museum and art gallery. More training on system building as well as content creation is ongoing at present.

Partner: Scottish Fisheries Museum

Training on HTML/CSS, advanced Image Manipulation, printing, system building. For use with their own website and within for scanning, archiving and utilising their image archive. This latter part was assisted by a first Challenge Fund Award which allowed the purchase of a PC, monitor and scanner. More assistance was given towards a second bid to the Challenge Fund which and they were awarded two touch-screen PC systems – all training and help with utilising these will also be provided.

Partner: Trimontium Trust

Training on: HTML/CSS and content management systems; scanning and image manipulation; desk-top publishing; audio recording and editing; system building and maintenance. These skills have been used to make new audio guides for the museum utilising mp3 players (from a Challenge Fund bid) and will be used to make audio guides describing the Roman Fort site which will be downloadable from their new website. Their annual newsletter is now being completely produced in-house with a PDF file going straight to the printer as well as an optimised version being available on their website too. They also have a new PC on which they have a rejuvenated visitor display (again using money from a Challenge Fund application). The new, standards compliant, website itself is now updateable by a number of volunteers from anywhere with an internet connection using simple word-processing skills at any time the museum wishes.

Examples of Challenge Fund Awards:

N.B. All included identification of specific needs for skills and equipment, detailed help and advice on filling in the necessary application form and budget followed by thorough individual training, both one to one and group, from the project officers.

Round 1

Linlithgow Union Canal Society, equipment to make new visitor displays (£864)

Hopetoun House Preservation Trust, equipment to make kiosk type display and funding for outreach work (£1496)

Remember When/City of Edinburgh Council, improved content management system for their website (£80) to tie in with an exhibition within the City Arts Centre (Edinburgh)

Hopetoun House Heritage Trust, a PC and touch-screen for display including providing access to otherwise inaccessible rooms within the building's upper floors. (£690)

Round 2

Living Memory Association (City of Edinburgh Council), funding or a temporary post to create and maintain the Remember When website and related material. (£1450)

Crawford Arts Centre, a small PC, large flat-screen, display case and seating area to compliment a touring exhibition and to be used as part of future exhibitions. (£1004.04)

Scottish Fisheries Museum, a PC, screen and scanner to facilitate the move away from requiring a photographic technician and darkroom for image duplication as well as providing access to their image collection throughout the building. (£915.07)

Round 3

None Awarded

Round 4

East Lothian Council: Digital cameras and associated hardware (£1190.50)

Eyemouth Museum: Digital SLR, web-hosting and domain name (£687.00)

St Andrews University Collections: Touch screen, PC and projector (£1466.50)

West Lothian Council: PC and audio recording equipment (£760.74)

There have been 12 rounds of awards so far.