

MAYOR OF LONDON

Connecting Community Insights to Policy

A resource for communities and those working with
community data and stories



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How to use this resource

Resource Outline

This resource is for community groups and civil society organisations who are interested in collecting lived experiences that can have impact in a policy setting. It is for policy and decision makers to better understand the process and the value of these insights. It is a starting point for thinking about how collections of Londoners' stories and experiences can be shared with policymakers and beyond. It contains;

- background information about the project, its objectives
- prompts to guide your work
- case studies of organisations and individuals who have been collecting stories during the pandemic.

The resource is a living document that has been developed for participants of the Community Led Recovery Programme. It has been helpful to anchor this around one of the programme strands; the London Community Story (LCS). Whilst we will hear about Londoner's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the principles outlined in this document could be applied to any community collecting project in London and beyond.

Case Studies

This resource offers case studies of projects set up to collect objects and digital materials that highlight Londoners' lived experience during the pandemic. It explores the potential impacts that they could have on policymakers and emphasises the ethical considerations the work raises.

We hope that the following case studies will help you think about how to analyse, present and share your own insights as well as demonstrate how powerful they could be:

- an artist using Instagram to influence decision makers and media
 - community projects using photography and film to influence Camden Council
 - a local resident using photography to combat isolation and record life during the pandemic
 - how a local history library and archive dealt with copyright issues when gathering lived experience through photography
 - how a museum developed an ethical approach to collecting objects and oral histories during COVID-19
 - how a gallery collected conversations about care and community with marginalised groups and those experiencing social isolation
 - how a group of peer researchers analysed interviews with low-income households to co-design support and influence policy
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Thinking through your work

This section contains practical questions and prompts to guide you through the London Community Story programme:

- Useful Prompts 1 - About your collection and how to use it
- Useful Prompts 2 - Analysing creative materials

In this resource you will also find out more about the background to London Community Story, the Community Engagement team, and policy making at City Hall.

We recognise that 'Connecting Community Insights to Policy' is a challenging task and we are only at the beginning of the journey. We don't have all the answers and hope to refine our thinking along the way. We hope that we can update this resource over time to include the perspectives and learning of people participating in London Community Story and the Community Led Recovery Programme.

Please feel free to email us your comments to Community.Engagement@london.gov.uk

Background to the London Community Story Programme

GLA Community Engagement Team

“We have been bringing lived experience, human experiences of Londoners in all their complexity, into City Hall where we as policymakers and leaders usually lean more towards statistics and data. We often find safety in more traditional forms of evidence. However, as I have learned and worked in this setting, I’ve seen gaps emerge, not in accuracy, but in completeness of our understanding of communities - not just their needs but also aspirations and vision for people’s lives. LCS gives us an opportunity to explore how we translate lived experience into something that will be heard and seen and responded to in a tangible way by the people with the titles who are making the decisions. We want to be able to amplify human experience and imbue it with real impact over the long term...”

Jeanette Bain-Burnett, GLA Head of Community Engagement 2020

The mission of the Greater London Authority’s (GLA) Community Engagement team is to bridge the gap between City Hall and London’s communities. The team works with communities to platform their experiences, distribute funding and resources, and to be more actively engaged in the City’s decision making. Storytelling is a strong theme in our work: every Londoner’s story matters, and every community should have a voice in City Hall and an opportunity to shape the future of London. You can find out more about our work by using the links below:

[The Community Led Recovery Programme](#)
[The London Community Story Pilot 2019](#)
[The GLA Community Engagement Team Blog](#)
[GLA Recovery Programme & Missions](#)

Why the London Community Story?

In 2019, along with community partners, the GLA team ran a [pilot of the London Community Story](#) to test new approaches in amplifying community voice. The process explored creative methods for collecting insights, analysing them with community

researchers and interpreting these through short films and essays. This approach highlighted the power of stories in creating new ways of listening to each other. We felt that through future work, we could take these principles a step further by bringing these non-traditional insights closer to the policymaking process. We could see value in bringing policymakers on the journey by including them as partners with communities.

Then in 2020, soon after London went into its first lockdown, communities, arts and cultural, and heritage organisations began projects to start to gather people's experiences of the pandemic. Collections of films, poems, photographs, diaries, and much more were created, focusing on lived experience and generating a wealth of collections that could be tapped into by those responding to the crisis.

While these collecting projects were occurring, policy and decision makers were rapidly trying to research the impact of COVID-19 on London's diverse communities. What was not on their radar was the available creative material that they could have been utilising and unsure about how to utilise it if it was suggested to them.

The GLA Community Engagement team spoke with community organisations and heard that their project grants often only covered collecting. There were limited financial and staffing resources available at the end of the collecting project to analyse their materials and disseminate their work beyond blogs or web articles. When it was suggested that their insights could connect with work to respond to and rebuild after the pandemic, some groups stated that they had not thought about connecting with decision and policymakers. Others had tried to, and faced difficulties connecting to the right individual or department.

The Sprint

The beginnings of the next phase of the London Community Story was being coming into shape and it felt that a grants programme would be a good way to platform how collections could be analysed and connected to policy.

The London Community Story Sprint was a short, focused period of work to design this new programme and ultimately, this resource. Throughout early 2021, we have worked in collaboration with seven organisations and individuals to discover more about the collections they have gathered which are spotlighted in the case studies.

We discussed knowledge as a concept and the need for all knowledge to count in policymaking. In addition, what might need to change to ensure that the knowledge of London's diverse communities is also part of these decision-making processes. Topics of interest that emerged around ethics were centred on considerations of working with 'lived experience', representation, accountabilities, visual methods and power.

The Grants

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all but there is clear evidence that its impact has been and continues to be, felt differently by some communities in our city and beyond. We are aware that those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, those who are clinically vulnerable, deaf and disabled people, those with no recourse to public funds and many others have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Following the 2019 pilot and The Sprint, The London Community Story grants programme was launched to support these and other communities to tell their stories and amplify their voices during and about these hard times. This is so that those leading on London's recovery can ensure that the recovery process has a more complete understanding of Londoner's experiences and responds to lived realities to grow confidence in the city, minimise the impact on communities and build back better the city's economy and society. These principles are the backbone to the missions based approach for the [GLA's recovery work](#).

The London Community Story Grants Programme aims to:

- Support organisations to analyse their collections, then present and share them with decision makers, archiving them for future use.
- Demonstrate the richness & utility of creative responses to policy questions or crises for; funders, civil society, boroughs, and policy makers.
- Connect the Recovery Missions with programme grantees and their insights.

In March 2021, London Community Story grants were awarded to 20 community organisations with existing projects which capture Londoner's experiences of COVID-19, supporting them to be presented and shared with a wide audience. Grantees and policymakers will come together throughout the programme to exchange learnings.

[Find out more about the grantees.](#)

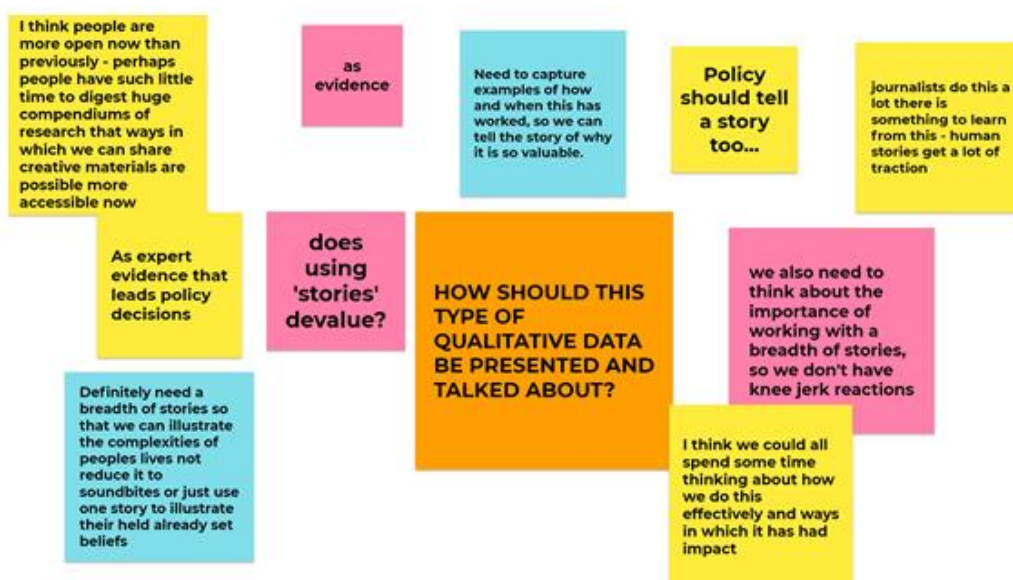
Lived Experience and Policy Design

Valuing different types of knowledge

To make decisions quickly, decision and policymakers often use information of a type that is familiar to them, but they also draw on social contexts and experiences. Using non-traditional visual contributions as part of evidence-gathering routines appeals to our empathic nature and can be a successful strategy to ensure these materials are part of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is important because these diaries, oral histories, interviews and visual materials contain the voices and experiences of those not well represented by current data and complete our understanding of experiences of Londoners. A photograph of life during the pandemic is an image, but it also contains evidence beyond the image itself. As a cultural text, the photograph requires interpretation and analysis just as statistics and data do. As forms of knowledge, both represent values, views, needs and aspirations.

We can also reflect on how we 'name' this kind of knowledge. What kind of shorthand language are we using and how is it understood across different settings? This 'post its' snapshot shows some quick thoughts from policy and decision makers in a workshop session feeding into this resource.



The London Community Story adds to the debate on the types of knowledge that are integrated into policymaking. There is a need to have a conversation about what counts as knowledge and how different forms of knowledge making are viewed across City Hall and in other policy environments (such as the Camden Council and Toynbee Hall case studies on p16 and p29). We recognise that this opens up complex issues of 'objectivism' that cannot be dealt with in a single programme of work. However, by treating the collections gathered during the pandemic as cultural resources we encourage decision and policymakers to take these materials and the meanings they contain seriously, in the same way they would a graph or a survey.

How is data being collected and analysed at the GLA?

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GLA City Intelligence Unit was capturing a wealth of insights from Londoners through our regular polling. This helped to track behaviours, views, and concerns around COVID-19 from a representative sample of the London population. However, the nature of quantitative research like this did not allow for new 'unknowns' to be captured. Existing engagement on [Talk London](#), City Hall's online community, also gathered some useful insights though, again, the content had been defined by the GLA and the depth of insight was limited to the set subject areas. Different kinds of insights are gathered depending on the question that is being asked, because quantitative and qualitative data tell you different things. For example, if you want to understand which groups of Londoners are more hesitant towards taking up the COVID-19 vaccine then you need quantitative data. If you want to understand why these groups are not taking up the vaccine, asking more open questions and collecting qualitative data could be a better option. Quantitative data allows you to produce robust statistics and identify patterns, trends, and differences among groups. Qualitative data is used to unpick and understand opinions, attitudes and motivations; answering questions that cannot be quantified with numbers.

The GLA also regularly analyses secondary data, such as from the Office for National Statistics or Government departments, whether that's population projections, labour force statistics, crime data etc. Data and analysis is presented in many ways, whether written reports, dashboards, or maps, and is regularly shared on the [London Datastore](#).

The GLA's COVID-19 Online Diaries

To capture more ground-up and in-depth insight and expand understanding beyond existing polling, the GLA's City Intelligence Unit designed the [COVID-19 online diaries](#). The study also allowed the Intelligence Team to conduct fast-paced qualitative research with a quick turnaround, helping the team to capture real-time insight and gather immediate responses to major developments, such as the re-opening of schools and non-essential shops. A key part of the research was Londoners recording video responses,

which were transcribed and analysed the same way as face-to-face interviews or focus groups. Reports were produced every fortnight and can be accessed via the London Datastore.

The COVID-19 online diaries were the first longitudinal (8-weeks in total) qualitative study that the GLA Intelligence Team had run, but it was not the first time the team had collected qualitative data in this way. The diaries taught the team that this type of online longitudinal qualitative research was feasible, and that there was great value in engaging with the same group of Londoners over a long period, many of whom enjoyed taking part in this type of research.

Community, Decision and Policymakers working together

Understanding each other's starting points is one part of the puzzle and we should be mindful not to think that policy and decision makers and story tellers are different species. We all belong to communities and all have stories. Yet we recognise we can move in different spheres and knowing how we can come together to stay closer to each other's work is an important part of this too. There may be existing peer to peer support groups where an open invitation can be valuable. Or thinking about creating new shared spaces for making sense of 'evidence' and insight. Cultivating long-term relationships is at the heart of this, working together to set agendas and determine courses of action.

Let's also remember, who has opportunity to be exposed to this work, is it people who are already interested/engaged? Who are the policy makers who never come across it? Whilst we think about a resource like this for communities, we can also use it to think about the kind of support and training decision and policymakers might need to engage in different types of knowledge.

Thinking Through your Work

We have developed two pages of prompts; one that focuses on collecting and another focusing on analysing community insights. They are designed as a 'way in' to collections and are for guidance rather than an exhaustive list of prompts. Based on The Sprint and wider consultation with communities at a networking event and with policy makers at a workshop in March 2021, there are 3 core areas that need to be considered in the early stage of any project.

Safeguarding/Safety

If you are working with children or vulnerable adults it is important that you have a safeguarding policy/procedure. You also need to ensure that you are carrying out your work and any training safely and in line with current social distancing guidelines, COVID-19 restrictions, and more general health and safety regulations.

Consent

Check out the Museum of London and THLHLA case studies (p23 and p20) for more guidance on this.

It's important to ensure that informed consent has been gathered to collect and analyse the data that you have (Informed consent is when permission is given after knowing all the information about benefits and risks). You should handle the data in line with GDPR guidelines if the materials contain any personal information.

When reflecting on your data, think about whether there are any individuals in your community who would not feel that their experiences are represented. Where possible, you should inform the creators of material that you are using about how their materials are being used. This is of course, not possible if people have donated information or materials to your collection anonymously.

Ethical

Check out the Museum of London and Autograph ABP case studies (p23 and p26) for more guidance on this.

When analysing and presenting it is important that the outputs remain true to what was initially captured. Be careful not to edit out the emotions involved in people's personal stories. You could also consider how you might involve those who have shared their stories in the analysis and interpretation/creation of any follow up output.

Useful Prompts: About your Audience and Collection

About your audience and collection

Use these prompts to help you identify a focus for your work. They have been provided to help guide your discussions and to encourage reflection on the opportunities presented by the material you have gathered. Some prompts will work better than others depending on the community insights you have and the goals you have set.

Ambitions

- What would success look like for us in this project?
- What aspects of the Recovery programme would we like to influence?
- How and where could this work best be presented (think about online and offline options)?

Material

- How did we gather the material? How do we want it to be organised?
- Are we working with the entire collection? If not, what material/groups of material do we want to use for this project?
- What equipment/software do we need to assure this material is available digitally?

Skills & Resources

- What skills do we need to use or develop to achieve our project's goals?
- How can we use this project to obtain these and safely?
- Do we need help to attain any of these skills?
- Which people and/or networks do we need to build relationships with?
- How can we communicate our message to/with them?
- What can they offer to us and what can we offer them?

Audience

- Who needs to see these stories?
- Which of the Recovery Missions is this relevant to?
- Which policy teams and/or other decision-makers do we want to communicate with?
- What other organisations could be interested in this work (think about funders, other government bodies, other civil society or special interest groups?)

Useful Prompts: Analysing your Collection

Analysing Creative Materials

There are multiple approaches to interpretation, informed by different understandings of how these materials will have meaning and for who. Whilst there is no one size fits all approach, the key is recognising emerging narratives and connecting patterns together.

This worksheet is designed to inspire you to think about how you might start to interpret the material you have gathered for the purpose of informing policy. An important reflection is that some projects may not have been collected with the intention to connect to policy. These prompts can still be applied, recognising that analysis will look different each time.

Organising Material - Tagging and categorising

Which tags can we add to each item in the collection to help us:

- Make sense of the message being communicated? E.g. demographics but also social issue. How can we capture the context of its creator?
- Identify the information it contains relating to how the COVID-19 pandemic is experienced? Is there other data speaking to the themes we can marry with?
- Gather our information together with others using key themes relating to the Recovery Missions, as well as themes that aren't covered by the Missions?
- You might look at your material and group issues into 'Areas of consensus' where there is agreement across material on an issue and 'Topics that need further conversations' where it's unclear what people think about an issue.

Insights for policy

How do these materials help us ask questions of existing policy:

- What matters to people? What do people want to see change? What are their needs and aspirations? What change has happened that can be drawn out?
- What resources are available to people to address these issues directly and what do they need from policy?
- How does current policy represent the 'problems' it is trying to solve? Do the proposed solutions match the 'problems' people are experiencing? Do our materials support or challenge that?

How can these materials influence future policy-making:

- What would a 'community-led' recovery look like for the groups represented in our materials? What would it mean to 'build back better' for them/us?
- What could the collection make people feel/experience? What might people's emotional responses be?

Case Study 1 – Still III: Corona Diary

Using Graphic Artwork and Social Media to influence and engage decision makers and the media

Introduction to the Project

The Still III Corona Diary is an independent creative project focused on raising the visibility of the impact of COVID-19 via an online graphic journal, drawn and written by artist Monique Jackson. The artwork is available to view via www.stillillcoronadiary.com and on Instagram. Although it began as a graphic journal, the project has become multifaceted; sharing related resources, information on Long COVID-19 from international organisations, sharing 'COVID-19 Culture Talks' webinars and live streaming "Lock Down Lock-Ins' talks hosted and designed by Monique, alongside surveys and polls.

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

The material is collected from online followers and guests collaborating with the project such as medical workers, creatives and chronic illness activists based in the UK and internationally.

What impact has/could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

The project has engaged with mainstream media outlets such as the BBC, The Times and Tortoise media and independent journalists to disseminate the artwork through print and online articles, podcasts and radio appearances. As the visibility of the project has increased, so has awareness of Long COVID-19 and the experiences of those living with it.

The [BBC article](#) published in August 2020 had over 400,000 views to the BBC webpage within the first 10 hours of posting and contributed to more coverage of Long COVID-19 in mainstream media. This led to a discussion in the UK parliament in the last quarter of 2020. Since the article, the NHS now lists 'Long COVID-19' as a recognised diagnosis. Many high-profile influencers have shared Still III Corona Diary to increase awareness and advocate for support for Long COVID-19, including Kensington Palace, who featured it on their Instagram story.

Still III Corona Diary has been commissioned by a number of organisations to increase awareness and to tell the stories of others, particularly those whose voices are not being heard. For Rising Arts Centre's 'COVID-19 who is left out of the conversation?' Monique used online polls to decide which stories to represent through her artwork. The Still III

Corona Diary has also mobilised the Long COVID-19 community into taking collective action through shared petitions and a co-designed email templates for use of writing to MPs advocating Long COVID-19 discussions in parliament.

Still Ill Corona Diary's use of illustrations to convey the complexities and challenges of living with Long COVID-19 has been recognised and adopted by key health decision makers and influencers. Monique has been commissioned to produce illustrations like those featured on the Instagram page for fliers for the Long COVID-19 SOS advocacy online group to promote a doctors' online webinar for MEDTX, a Long COVID-19 Support Website, and for UK Doctor Kerry Smith to accompany her blog research on Long COVID-19. The power of Monique's illustrations have also been recognised by National Institute Health Research (NIHR) who commissioned them for use on an e-flier for webinar on Long COVID-19. Following on from this, Monique was invited to become a public member involved in the process of selecting bids for Long COVID-19 NIHR research funding.

As well as increasing the visibility of Long COVID-19 and getting key media outlets and decision makers to engage with and acknowledge the illness, the Still Ill Corona Diary has helped the online community for 'Long COVID-19' to grow. Since July 2020, before the illness was recognised by the National Health Service, it has engaged broad audiences, and influenced medical professionals and policy makers to address public discourse.



Figure 1: Illustrations from Still Ill Corona Diary, A COVID-19-19 Graphic Journal, ©Monique Jackson, Instagram: @_coronadiary

Case Study 2a – London Borough of Camden, Fitzrovia Youth in Action

Using film to influence Camden’s Renewal Commission

Introduction to the Project

Fitzrovia Youth in Action (FYA) is a Camden youth action charity empowering young people to create a positive change in their community. They support local disadvantaged young people in developing projects which address issues they care about such as community cohesion, healthy living and life without drugs or alcohol.

During lockdown FYA created an [online media programme](#) where their members would create short films to voice their thoughts and feelings and share their views with others in a similar situation. In the videos they share their experiences, the impact of the pandemic on their mental health and their social life, coping strategies and how to stay safe. This media programme increased their confidence and provided structure to their week with something productive and social to look forward to.

The work is displayed on their website and they hosted an online digital showcase (to comply with COVID-19 restrictions) which included performances from young people as well as discussions on how they produced their films and generated ideas for them.

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

During the online engagement programmes FYA realised it was important to create a safe space for young people to talk about COVID-19-19, the effect on exams, Black Lives Matters, and climate issues.

What impact has/could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

Opinions from the young people at FYA were included within a Youth summit that was held in February 2021 within the framework of Camden’s Renewal Commission – a programme of work around missions aimed at tackling the effects of the pandemic. At the summit FYA members shared their views with other young people and key decision makers from Camden Council. This work, which is part of a larger We Make Camden campaign, brings the community together to tackle the issues they care about. The lockdown stories have provided key insights into how young people are feeling the changes they would like to see.



Figure 3a: Screenshot from 'Better Together' film,
<https://youtu.be/-qegkvnQzTA>



Figure 2b: Screenshot from 'Let's Talk Mental Health' film,
<https://youtu.be/wSSpwqakw-Q>

Case Study 2b – London Borough of Camden, Karishma Puri

Using photography to influence Camden’s Renewal Commission

Introduction to the Project

Isolating Together is a socially distanced doorstep photography project setup by Karishma Puri, a local photographer and the founder of Kentish Town COVID-19 Mutual Aid. Through the work of her mutual aid group, she met and got to know many of her neighbours. To deepen these relationships and help combat isolation, she took photographs of some of the people she interacted with and collected their stories.

Her work is displayed @isolatingtogether on Instagram and www.isolatingtogether.co.uk. Karishma felt the project helped her to build connection and community with her neighbours. She hopes to eventually share her photographs and stories in a public setting where the community can see them, meet, and connect.

What impact has/could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

Through her work, Camden Council has heard the stories of a series of residents across Kentish Town. Personal stories are a powerful way of hearing the challenges, fears and hopes of the community. Through her photography of community volunteers, the Council has evidence that a wider cross section of residents has been brought into community work and social action. Furthermore, the Council has also been able to hear their motivations. This piece of work helped shape the framing and focus of Camden’s Renewal Commission – a programme of work around missions aimed at tackling the effects of the pandemic. Alongside other stories from residents, the artwork from Isolating Together gave the first evidence the commissioners needed to understand what the pandemic has meant for Camden residents and helped ground their work and thinking in the actual everyday reality of COVID-19.



Figure 2c: Chris, © Kashmira Puri, <https://isolatingtogether.co.uk/Chris>



Figure 2d: Steven, © Kashmira Puri, <https://isolatingtogether.co.uk/Steven>

Case Study 3 - Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Capturing, Categorising and Copyright: Photographing Local Experiences of COVID-19-19

Introduction to the Project

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (THLHLA) endeavours to collect, preserve, manage and provide free public access to a wide variety of materials which record, describe or illustrate the borough's past and present. As part of this remit, this year THLHLA established a project to record the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local residents and organisations. The project consisted of two strands. The first, 'Making History: Documenting Coronavirus in the East End', is an online survey which allows any member of the public to upload digital files (images, videos, pieces of writing) through the council's Let's Talk Tower Hamlets public engagement platform. The second is a photography project ('Life During Lockdown') in which local residents have been enlisted to take photos recording the borough they go about their daily life.

These discrete strands of collecting were established to facilitate two different processes – (a) quick and straightforward one-off submission of materials and (b) accruals of images which are specific to a resident's experience of the pandemic over its duration. As of January 2021, THLHLA have received and catalogued 166 items through both strands.

The images and other materials deposited have been shared via THLHLA's social media channels ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) and in an exhibition in their entrance hall.

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

The survey was open to all those that live and work in the borough, to ensure that THLHLA would receive a diverse range of submissions. The project was promoted on THLHLA's social media channels, newsletter and the Council's events newsletter to make as many people aware of the survey as possible.

The photography project enlisted local residents. It was a way to keep THLHLA's volunteers involved, as many of them are based in Tower Hamlets and have excellent local knowledge, and a proven track record of delivering collections-based projects. It also provided an opportunity to attract new volunteers for whom remote working was more convenient than volunteering on-site.

In the course of the project THLHLA learned to overcome a number of challenges, including how to collect ethically during a national crisis and how to incorporate novel COVID-19-related terminology into their existing subject thesaurus. To ensure consistency when describing their collections library staff only use subject keywords from a controlled vocabulary based on the [UNESCO Thesaurus](#). As this contained virtually no terms relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. ‘Social distancing’, ‘Personal protective equipment’) a new mini-thesaurus had to be developed from scratch in order to usefully describe these new acquisitions.

Copyright and ownership were very important considerations when setting up this project. THLHLA explicitly stated that by answering the questions in the survey and submitting files, the copyright and ownership will be transferred to them and it was vital that the reasons were properly explained. Providing examples such as a future exhibition on COVID-19 in Tower Hamlets, has proven effective in explaining why this is essential for ensuring THLHLA can share submissions easily while respecting ‘authorship’, and that THLHLA aren’t just being ruthlessly acquisitive. The survey also outlines an alternative option of deposit that allows the depositor to retain the copyright of their submissions - through THLHLA’s standard deposit agreement form. This is something that was covered in the planning stages of the project and was dealt with on an as and when basis, for example with artists where issues like this affect them more.

What impact could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

We also gained valuable insights into our residents’ concerns and preoccupations during the pandemic through the emergence of repeated themes, such as loneliness and a lack of access to resources. The material we have amassed could therefore be used to influence policy and decision makers by providing qualitative information (such as illustrative images and residents’ accounts) which supports and contextualises quantitative data.

View the material

<http://www.thcatalogue.org.uk/TreeBrowse.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&field=RefNo&key=P>

<http://www.thcatalogue.org.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=P%2fCOV>

<https://talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/coronavirus-collection>



Figure 4a: Graffiti, P_COV_2_10_3, © Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives



Figure 3b: Lockdown Dog, P_COV_18_3, © Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Case Study 4 - Museum of London

Ethical Collecting of COVID-19 Objects to learn more about lived experience

Introduction the Project

The Museum of London started thinking about what to collect as soon as we went into the first lockdown in mid-March 2020, and the project began in earnest in early April. The museum's main aim was to acquire objects they could use in the future to talk about the different experiences of life in the capital during the pandemic.

Among the aims and principles were: devising and testing a methodology for rapid collecting; focus on objects that had already been made, rather than asking Londoners to do something especially for us; collect types of objects that Museum of London had not collected before.

A selection of collected items will be available on the Collections Online section of the Museum of London website in the next few months. In the meantime you can visit the [project webpage](#).

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

Museum of London split the project into three collecting methods, each overseen by one lead curator: museum-initiated; community engagement and partnerships; public call-out. As part of the community engagement and partnerships strand the museum worked with a number of individuals including families and a small group of young people to collect around Ramadan in lockdown, collaborated with a number of university partners, heritage and mutual aid support networks. As part of the project with Mutual Support Networks the museum recorded oral histories and collected objects telling the stories of Project Parker, Pepys Social Supermarket and Filipino food for NHS staff pandemic support initiative.

- Project Parker was set up to provide temporary accommodation for people who were homeless and living on the streets in Walthamstow with access to running water and rudimentary cooking and washing facilities. Museum of London also collected a tent that was going to be disposed of.
- An interview with Sistah Stella Headley covers COVID-19 pandemic support activities at Pepys Social Supermarket in Deptford and Rastafari Movement UK's Food and Wellbeing First initiative. As part of the project the museum also collected some pictures and a membership card of the social supermarket.
- Oral histories from the Filipino Food for NHS Staff pandemic support initiative address the development of the initiative, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Filipino workers, and the vital role immigrants play in the NHS. The museum also collected a wooden spoon used for cooking meals.

Ethical collecting

Making choices on what to collect for the future is the bread and butter of curatorial practice. Collecting and preserving Londoners' lived experience of the pandemic has required Museum of London to deeply question the criteria used to foreground certain stories over others. Museum collections of past pandemics, for example, have often overlooked the stories and experiences of marginalised communities, perpetuating narrative and representational inequalities. In order to overcome this challenge, at planning stage the team built a bank of concepts/experiences that they wanted to address and worked retrospectively to ensure our collecting would address a variety of lived experiences across London.

Grief and loss

This has been a time of profound loss for Londoners. There could be a temptation to shy away from collecting around difficult subjects resulting in silencing important stories and experiences of the pandemic. In order to respond to this challenge, Museum of London built partnerships with a number of community organisations that have the knowledge and expertise to sensitively approach this area of practice. For example, the museum are currently developing a project on grief in partnership with St Christopher's Hospice.

Self-care

Heritage professionals are not key workers, but they are certainly not immune to the challenges of the pandemic. Collecting COVID-19 has entailed a great deal of emotional labour particularly for those forging community collaborations. The heritage sector needs to create pathways of self-care to support professionals in their work.

What impact could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

The material collected is a testament to this city's ingenuity, generosity and community resilience. The stories and experiences articulated through the collection shed some light on the many grassroots community networks emerging in the pandemic. The material collected can also identify areas of interventions to further targeted policies in support of newly created community networks.



Figure 5a: Membership card for users of Pepys Social Supermarket in Pepys Estate, Deptford © Museum of London, Figure 4b: Wooden spoon from Baguio, Philippines, used at donor's home in Camberwell to cook meals for Filipino Food for NHS Staff initiative © Museum of London, Figure 4c: Tent used at Project Parker, Walthamstow © Museum of London

Case Study 5 – Autograph ABP

Collecting conversations about care and community

Introduction to the Project

Autograph was founded in 1988 and is based in Shoreditch. Through our exhibitions, publications, events and learning programme, we enable the public to explore themes of identity, representation, human rights and social justice through work produced by artists who use photography and film.

In 2019, Autograph worked with artist Elsa James and young women from community arts organisation All Change, with the aim of bringing urgent messages of compassion to a world which felt increasingly polarised and divided. The women browsed Autograph's photography collection for source material and inspiration, and created placards calling attention to the issues they faced in their lives and communities – from racism and gender stereotypes to period poverty and religious discrimination. The works were then taken out of the gallery and into the public, where the group asked people to take notice of the issues affecting those marginalised in society, and to consider how we care for each other. The placards were incredible. One in particular stuck in our minds, with the text CALL TO CARE alongside reproductions of Joy Gregory's 1990 *Autopportrait* series of photographs. That phrase – *a call to care* – has become a beacon for the programme at Autograph during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

Inspired by that phrase – *a call to care* – Autograph created a new series of video interviews with some of the extraordinary people we've worked with, who dedicate their lives to community work. Currently, the project consists of four video interviews, with the founders and members of four different community organisations: [Accumulate](#), [ActionSpace](#), [All Change](#) and [Caribbean Social Forum](#).

What impact has/could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

The videos have been published on Autograph's website, with more than 1600 page views as of February 2021. The project shares the views and experiences of those working with, and for, some of the most marginalised in our society - whose voices are not often heard or fairly represented. Accumulate works with young homeless people; Action Space work with artists with learning disabilities; All Change runs creative projects for a range of community groups who would not usually have the opportunity to participate in the arts;

the Caribbean Social Forum brings together elders from the Caribbean community in order to combat isolation.

We're showing how these grassroots groups, and the people they care for, are experiencing the COVID-19 crisis: finding new ways to build relationships, support each other, make community and create art. At a time of social isolation and challenges to fundamental human rights, our *Call to Care* series has been critical, and we're committed to keeping this essential community work visible. There's a lot for us all to learn, and policy should take its lead from the people who have dedicated their life to community work, and who have a thorough understanding of what their communities need in order to survive and thrive.

Videos

[A Call to Care: Pamela Franklin \(Caribbean Social Forum\)](#)

[A Call to Care: Marice Cumber \(Accumulate\)](#)

[A Call to Care: Suzanne Lee \(All Change\)](#)

[A Call to Care: Sheryll Catto and Thompson Hall \(ActionSpace\)](#)



Figure 5a: Screenshot of Marice Cumber from Accumulate, talking to Ali Eisa from Autograph, <https://autograph.org.uk/blog/a-call-to-care-marice-cumber/>

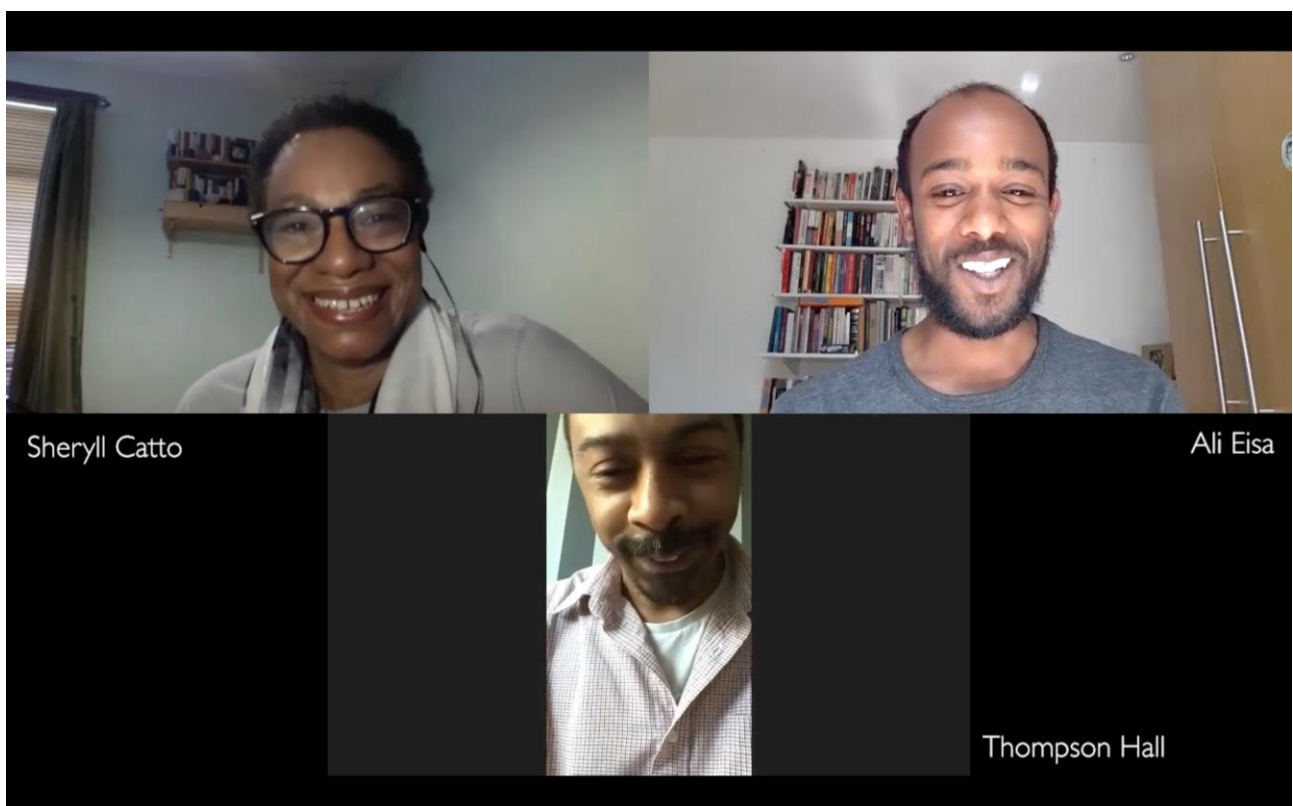


Figure 5b: Screenshot of Sheryll Catto and Thompson Hall from ActionSpace, talking to Ali Eisa, <https://autograph.org.uk/blog/a-call-to-care-sheryll-catto-thompson-hall/>

Case Study 6 – Toynbee Hall

Analysing interviews of low-income households to co-design support and influence policy

Introduction to the Project

Based in the East End of London since 1884, Toynbee Hall works with the local community and a wide range of partners to shape a fairer and happier future. As well as providing advice and community services, we support the community to identify systemic failures which create exclusion and hardship, design effective solutions, and influence for change. We have been training peer researchers and building a network of peer research and social action since 2017.

Since June 2020, we have been supporting a group of 17 Londoners to understand and address the impact of COVID-19 crisis on low income and other disproportionately affected households. The peer researchers come from “at-risk” groups who had an understanding of the impact on these groups and a good reach to research participants. We have also worked with Thrive LDN, who have kindly support us and worked with the peer research team.

Approach to collecting and Ethical Considerations

We collaborated with the peer researchers to decide and shape the research focus and methods, making decisions together at every stage. The group reached their goal of conducting 50 interviews, 50 surveys and some filming with their peers from ten London boroughs.

What impact has/could this material have on policy and decision-makers?

Together, we co-designed solutions and developed policy influencing based on the findings. The peer researchers shared recommendations with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Universal Credit and APPG on Ending the Need for Foodbanks. We presented at various events hosted by London Funders and other organisations. The research insights shaped our policy responses submitted to a Select Committee and other calls for evidence. Currently we are working with Thrive LDN and GLA to co-design mental health support with young people as a result of the project. Our learning from this work is that co-production is key and powerful in ensuring lived experience effectively informs policy decisions.

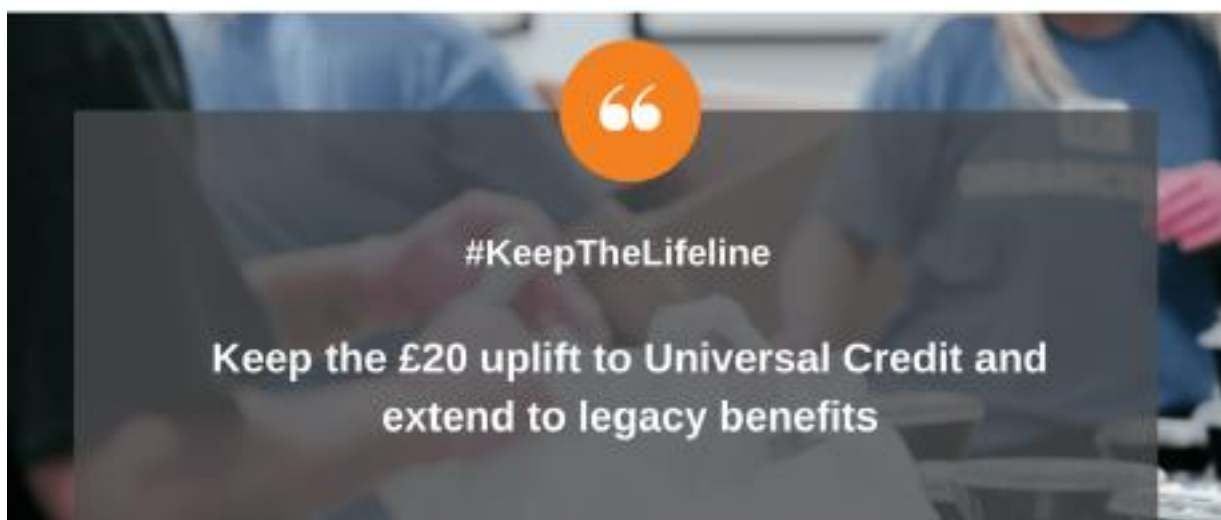
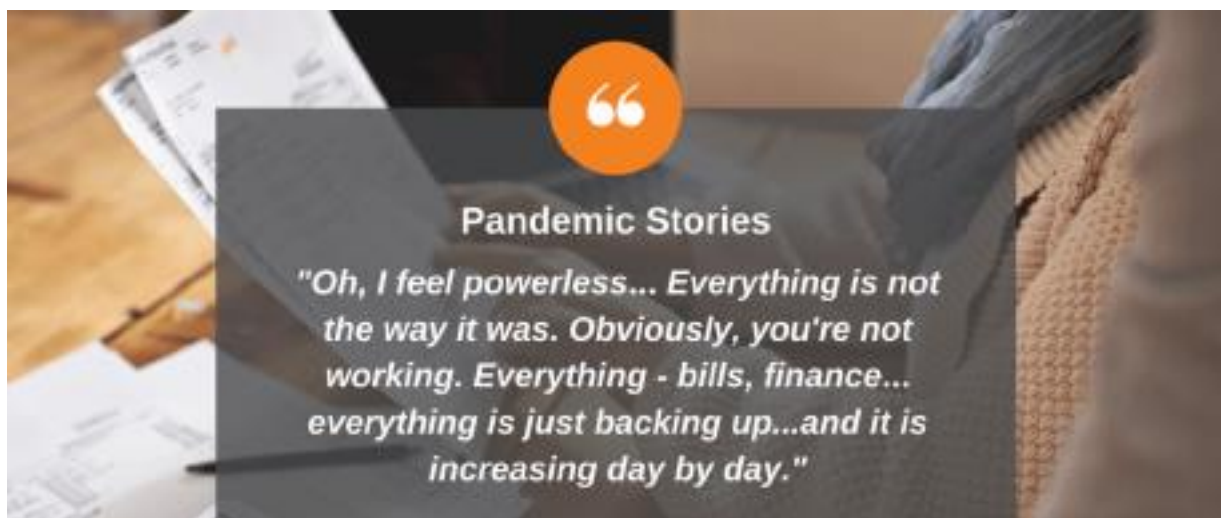


Figure 6: Quotes from the Pandemic Stories project interviews © Toynbee Hall

What's next for your work?

Analysing/Presenting/Sharing

Analysing, Presenting and Sharing are the three cornerstones to the London Community Story's vision of what can follow the collecting phase of your project. This resource has suggested a few ways to look at your collected insights with inspiration from case studies and prompts in the worksheets. We recognise that these are not exhaustive and that your work will have wider meaning in different contexts. For some organisations or individuals, 'presenting' their collections through short films or data visualisations may hold more value to someone in terms of how they speak their analysis. For other collectors 'sharing' their insights in a social media context (as in the case of Still III: Corona Diary on p13) or at community learning events (as in the case of Fitzrovia Youth in Action on p16) may hold value in a different way.

Community Insights Hub

The GLA Community Engagement Team is interested in how the final outputs from the London Community Story grants and wider Community-led Programme, can be valued and shared publicly. One of the ways this will happen is through a 'Community Insights Hub' - an online space that will host community-led insights collected through recovery engagement, providing a space for lived experience and policy to connect.

As a package, this essential work will paint a clear and collective picture of the experiences of Londoners impacted by COVID-19, accessed by the public, stakeholders, policy makers, local authorities, civil society organisations. The 'Community Insights Hub' is being developed in partnership with communities and will be ready in Autumn 2021.

Living Resource

This resource is intended to be a living document as the London Community Story programme develops within the wider Community Led Recovery Programme. We are keen to explore an updated version in Summer 2021 which highlights the next stage of thinking and reflections from grantees. It will also point to recommendations which address the longer-term impacts of such work which will come from the early findings of our evaluation.

Further Reading

A few links to what we've been reading. All articles are free to access.

Approaches to communicating with policymakers informed by research

Paul Cairney (2017) 'Three ways to communicate more effectively with policymakers'
<https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/three-ways-to-communicate-more-effectively-with-policymakers/>

Going beyond copyright forms when working with communities

Helen Graham, Rhiannon Mason, Nigel Nayling (2013) 'The Personal is still Political: Museums, Participation and Copyright'
<https://journals.le.ac.uk/ojs1/index.php/mas/article/view/228?acceptCookies=1>

Ethical collecting toolkit

Ellie Miles, Susanna Cordner, Jen Kavanagh (2020) 'Contemporary Collecting: an ethical toolkit for museum practitioners'
<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/projects/documentary-curators>

Selection of articles on how museums have responded to COVID-19

'Isolation as a collective experience': Museums' first responses to COVID-19 special issue of *Museum & Society* journal <https://journals.le.ac.uk/ojs1/index.php/mas/issue/view/202>

Other GLA data and projects

[COVID-19: online diary](#) and [GLA Opinion Research](#)

[Map of Community Views](#): Visual representation of themes arising from a series of virtual roundtable conversations and community meetings with groups and community leaders between April and September 2020.

[London Community Response Survey](#): This dataset presents results of a weekly questionnaire sent to a cohort of frontline civil society organisations from April 2020. The results are being used alongside a range of other pieces of intelligence to inform the pan-London response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Credits

We would like to thank the London Community Story Sprint Cohort for all their work on this resource and for all of the guidance they have given us throughout the development of the London Community Story grants programme.

Dr Bethany Rex, Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow, University of Warwick

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Dr Julien Danero Iglesias, Participation Lead, London Borough of Camden

Livvy Murdoch, Learning and Participation Manager, Autograph ABP

Medha Chotai, Heritage Officer (Archives), Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Monique Jackson, Still III: Corona Diary

Dr Nela Milic, Senior Lecturer, London College of Communication

Robert Jones, Heritage Officer (Library), Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives

Dr Xia Lin, Head of Research, Toynbee Hall

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Email us your thoughts Community.Engagement@london.gov.uk

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