

Welcome to

# Making the most of your collections

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020, 11am – 12pm

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Welcome

The webinar will start shortly



# Session aims & structure

**By the end of the session you will:**

- Know the key information in a collection inventory
- Understand how an inventory can help you plan future projects
- Know where to access further support and resources



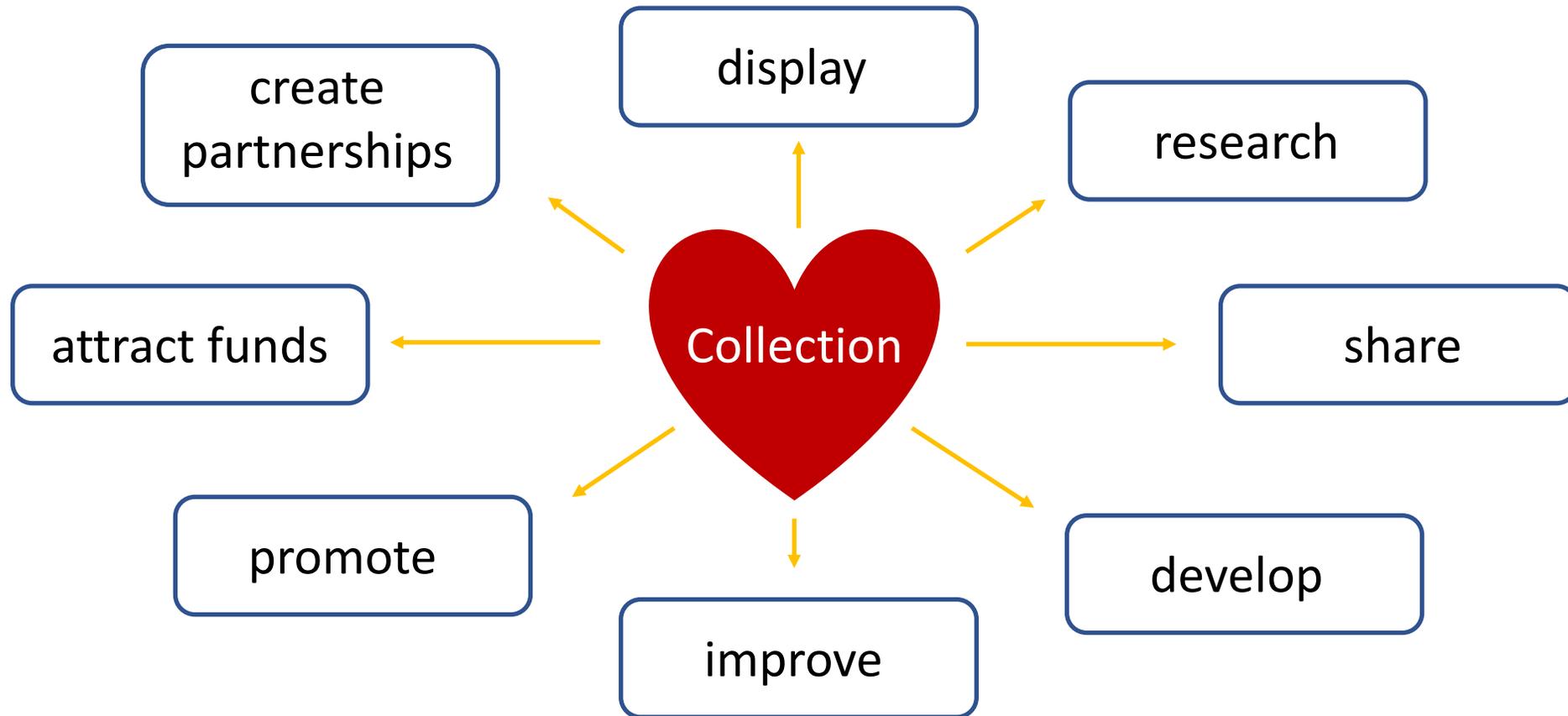
# Collections bring us together

"Collections matter to people. The millions of objects held in museums across the UK can be sources of knowledge, pride, inspiration, controversy and opportunity for audiences, communities and researchers. But there is still huge untapped potential in these collections. Museums can do more to uncover the stories that they hold, broaden participation, and ensure their long-term relevance."

***Museums Association, Empowering Collections, 2018***

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1262818>

# What would you like to do with your collections?



A close-up photograph of a fountain pen nib and its cap. The nib is in the foreground, pointing towards the left, and is engraved with the words 'GENIUS' and 'IRIDIUM'. The cap is lying behind it, slightly out of focus. The background is a warm, reddish-brown wooden surface.

# Inventory: The key to future projects

## What is an inventory?

- Detailed list of everything you hold
- Different from a catalogue

## Why create one?

- Accountability
- A “quick” finite achievable task
- Knowing what you have can be a springboard



# Before you start...

## Make a plan – how are you going to do this?

- Who will you work with?
- Who will you share your progress with?
- Whose knowledge might you need to draw upon?
- Record the decisions you make
- Work out how long it will take you by completing a sample number of items





# 1. Numbers & numbering

Each item in your collection will need its own unique number

Keep it simple      Be consistent

**How you number your collection depends on your starting point**

- 1. The collection has already been numbered and each item has been marked with its unique number**
  - Continue the existing system
  - Do not be tempted to start another system



# 1. Numbers & numbering

## 2. The collection has been numbered but the items have not been marked

- Use a system of temporary numbers e.g. T1, T2, T3...
- Work to reconcile the temporary numbers with the existing numbering system

## 3. The collection has not been numbered before

- Create your own unique numbering system
- Best practice:

**Prefix + number**   or   **Prefix + year + number**  
TH1, TH2, TH3...                      TH2020.1, TH2020.2,



# Labelling and marking

Each collection item needs to be marked with its unique number

The Collections Trust guidelines for Labelling and Marking:

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/labelling-and-marking-museum-objects-booklet/>

Reversible

Maintain the integrity of the item

**Do not use:**

pen

sticky labels

sticky tape

staples

tippex

blu tac

paperclips

nail varnish



# Labelling and marking

## At a glance:

### Archive material

2B pencil (with blunted tip) in a discreet but consistent place on all items e.g. back top right corner

### Artefacts

Tie on paper tags

### Textiles

Sewn in label of Tyvek or unbleached cotton tape with number written on with a permanent marker

### Awkward items

Grip seal bags labelled with permanent marker

Unbleached cotton tape tied round like a present with a tie on tag

*See Resource list for suppliers*

## 2. Simple name

Choose a **simple one or two word name** for your item for example:

Letter, certificate, photograph, socks, boots, hockey stick, tennis racket, newspaper cutting, magazine article,

Create your own **thesaurus of terms**

### Terminology decisions

- Flyer, pamphlet or something else?
- Brochure, programme, booklet or something else?
- When does a booklet become a book?

**Record your decisions**

**Be consistent**

# 3. Number of objects

Where possible list items individually

**but**

at inventory level you can bulk list items

**Useful if you have:**

- a large donation of personal papers
- large collection of photographs or a photograph album
- natural history or archaeological finds

Ideally only bulk list similar items





## 4. Brief description

Your description needs to:

- create an accurate picture of the item
- distinguish this item from another one that is very similar

How you will be able to use this item in the future will depend on the quality of the description you put here.

Examples of poor descriptions:

- Wartime photo
- Photo in Egypt
- Bob Stevens in Eastbourne
- Correspondence to Jane Smith
- Box
- Unidentified object



## 4. Brief description

**Suggested content for archive collection descriptions:**

Documents – purpose, who wrote it, date, number of pages, key names, places, events mentioned.

**Example:**

A4 certificate awarded by the Umpires Association to David Jones for completion of the advanced umpiring course on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1978. This certificate has a coloured decorative scroll border and gold foil stamp in the bottom right hand corner. No markings on the reverse.

Single sheet letter written by Sarah Tilley, Club Secretary at Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club to David Jones dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1980 confirming his selection to the first team for the 1980 season. This letter is typed on foolscap official club letter head.



## 4. Brief description

**Photographs** – detailed description of what can be seen in the photograph: people, background, clothing style, buildings, activity, date

### **Example:**

Black and white photograph of 4 male hockey players wearing white shirts and shorts. All are carrying hockey sticks as they walk out onto the pitch at the Lions Den club in Woking for a practise session. On the reverse, pencil writing identifies David Jones as third from the left. Dated 1991. 10 x 8 inches.

Small colour photograph of the captain of Sussex County Cricket team first XI being awarded the trophy for the league championship by League President in front of the match crowd. Date unknown. Kits suggests 1970s. Nothing written on reverse.



## 4. Brief description

Suggested content for archive collection descriptions:

**Books** – title, author, publisher, date of publication, ISBN, edition, any inscriptions, binding, dust cover

**Example:**

Leeds in the Great War written by Stephen Wade. Published by Pen & Sword in 1988. ISBN 1473861543. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Softback edition signed by the author. 136 pages.

A History of Cricket in 100 objects – From Duck Eggs to the Ashes Urn written by Gavin Mortimer. Published by Serpent's Tail in 2013. ISBN 978-1846689406. Hardback edition with dust cover (torn in front bottom left corner) 432 pages.



# 5. Images

**At least one good clear image of each item**

Name your image files to match your inventory number

**Best practice:**

E.g. TH2020\_1 – Certificate for John Smith  
TH2020\_2 – Football

The image name and where it is stored to be entered on the spreadsheet

**For archive collections:**

Where you can, scan the item rather than photograph it

1. Scan at the highest resolution you can – save it as a TIFF file
2. Re-save the same scan as a large JPEG file
3. Re-save the same scan as a smaller ‘working’ JPEG file

**Do what is appropriate and achievable for your organisation**



# 5. Images

**For artefacts and archive material which cannot be scanned**

You don't need to purchase expensive equipment if you follow the tips below:

- Use a well lit space
- Use a plain background
- Include a size guide
- Photograph 2D as square on as possible
- Think about propping some items up
- Try to minimise reflection and shadowing
- Photograph everything of interest for example maker's marks, the reverse of documents

*See the Resource list for some guides and a short film*



# 5. Images

## Benefits of a good quality photograph

- It will minimise the wear and tear on your collection
- You can use your images:
  - reports
  - website and social media
  - funding applications
  - exhibition planningAll without having to get your collection out again which can be time consuming
- It will mean you can get others to look at the collection:
  - insurance companies
  - other specialists
  - respond to enquiries



# 7. & 8. Current location & date

**Location** – It is key to know where each item in your collection is

**NB.** To do this accurately you may need set up a system

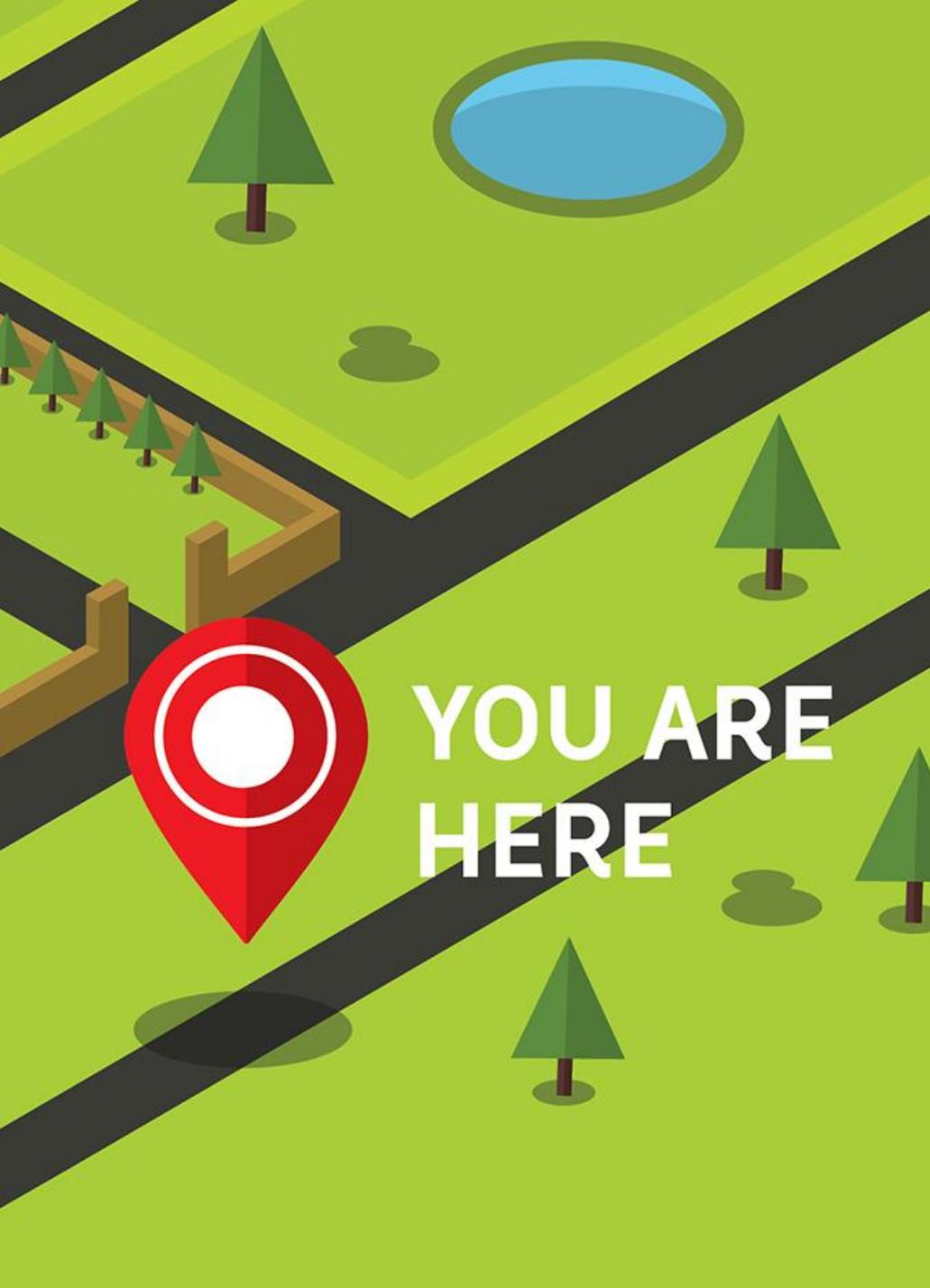
**Best practice:**

(Building), Room, shelf, box / folder

(Clubhouse), My office, shelf 4, box 1

**Date** – the date that it was last checked

**Top Tip** – create box / folder lists



# 9. Ownership

## Who owns the object?

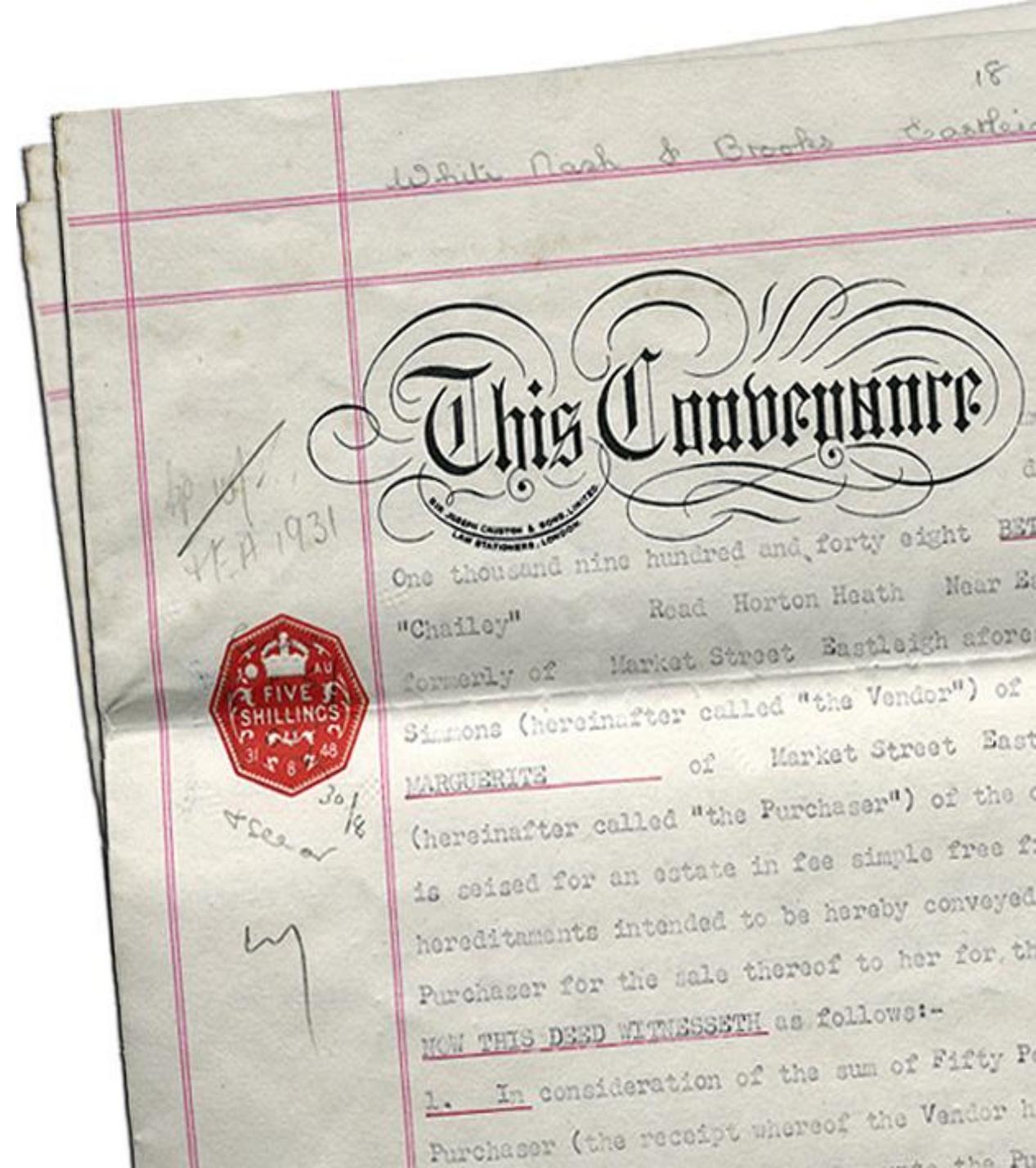
Collections can belong to a range of different people  
How do you record this? Is it clear?

## How the object came to be in your collection

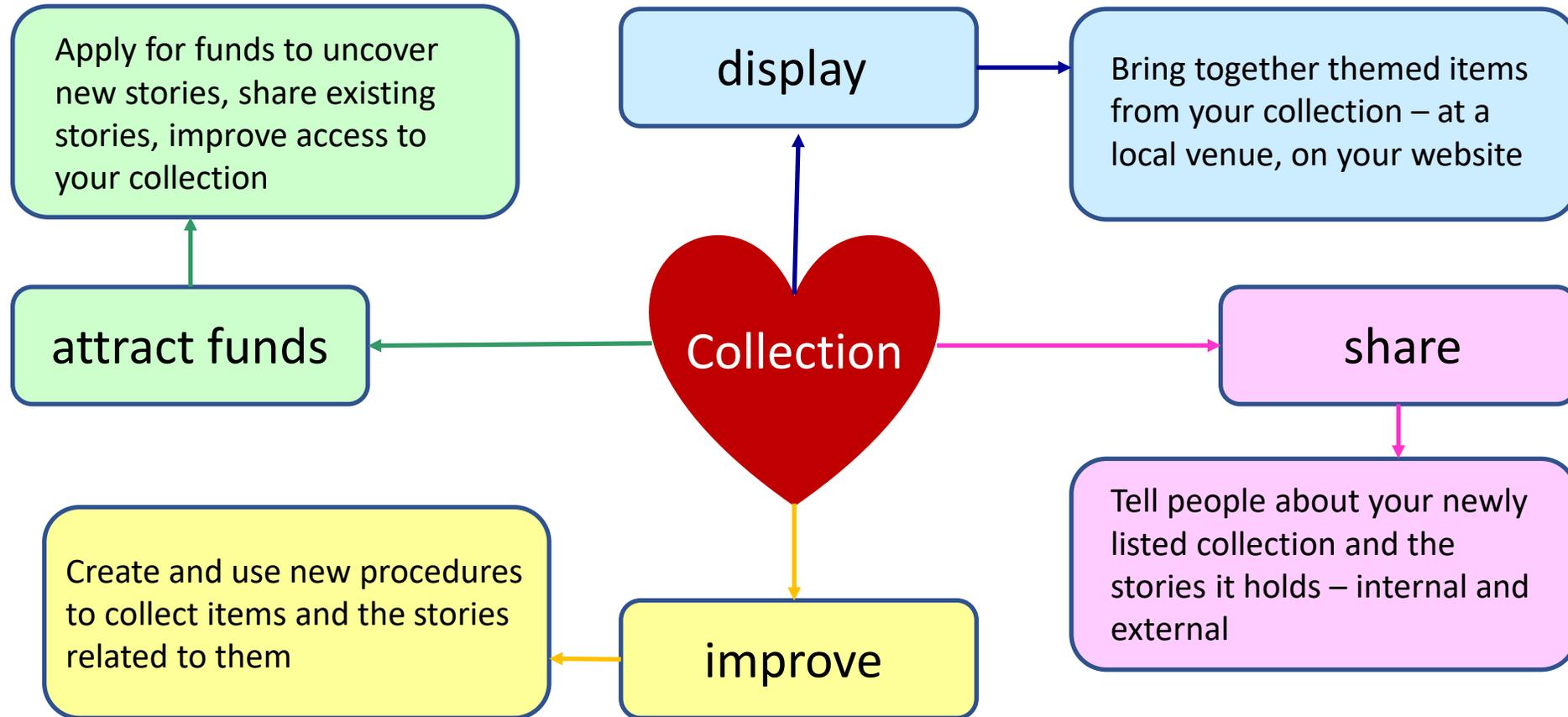
- Gift – accepted term for a donation
- Loan
- Unknown

# 10. & 11. Recorder & date

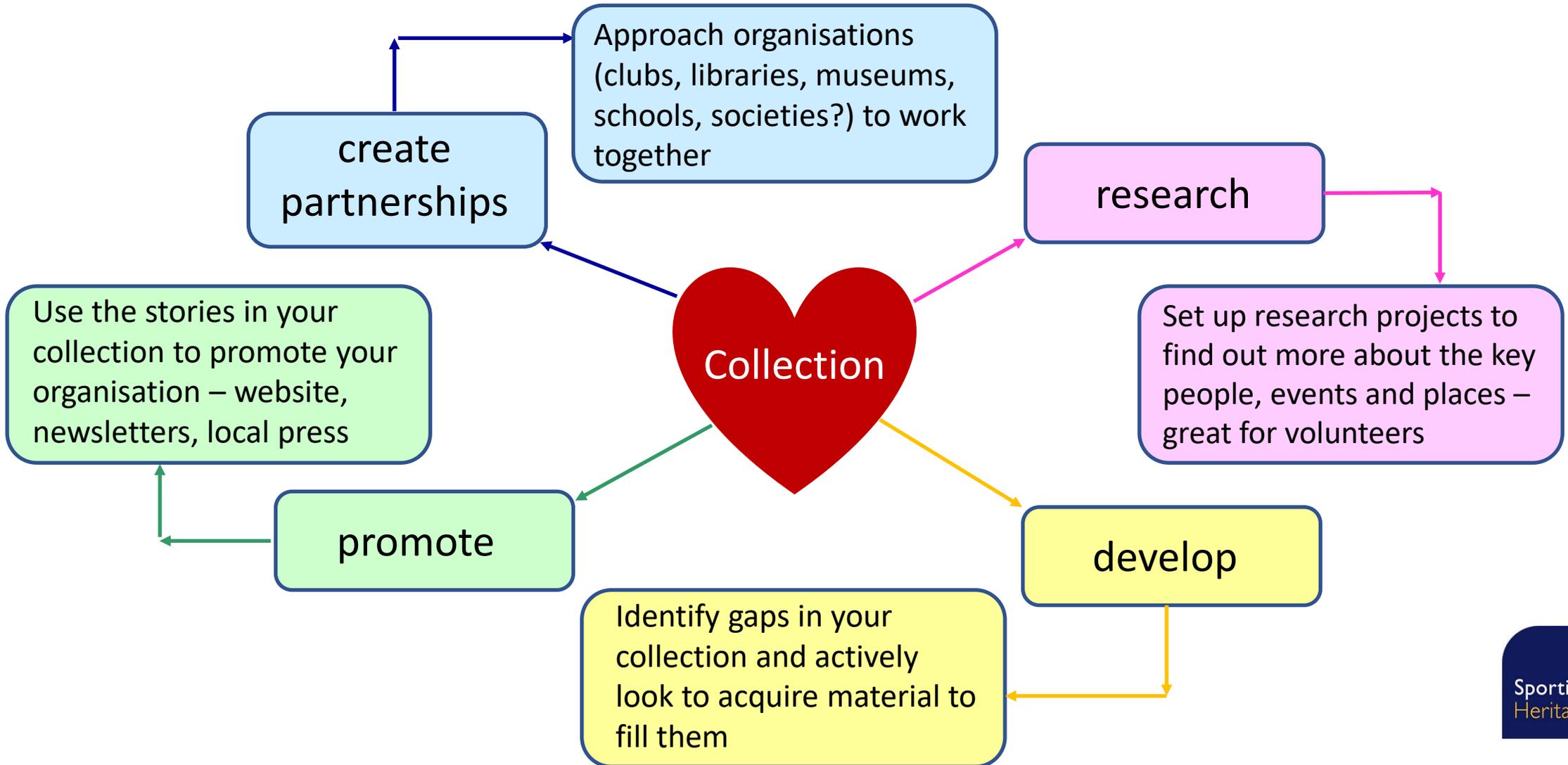
Your name or initials + date you create the record

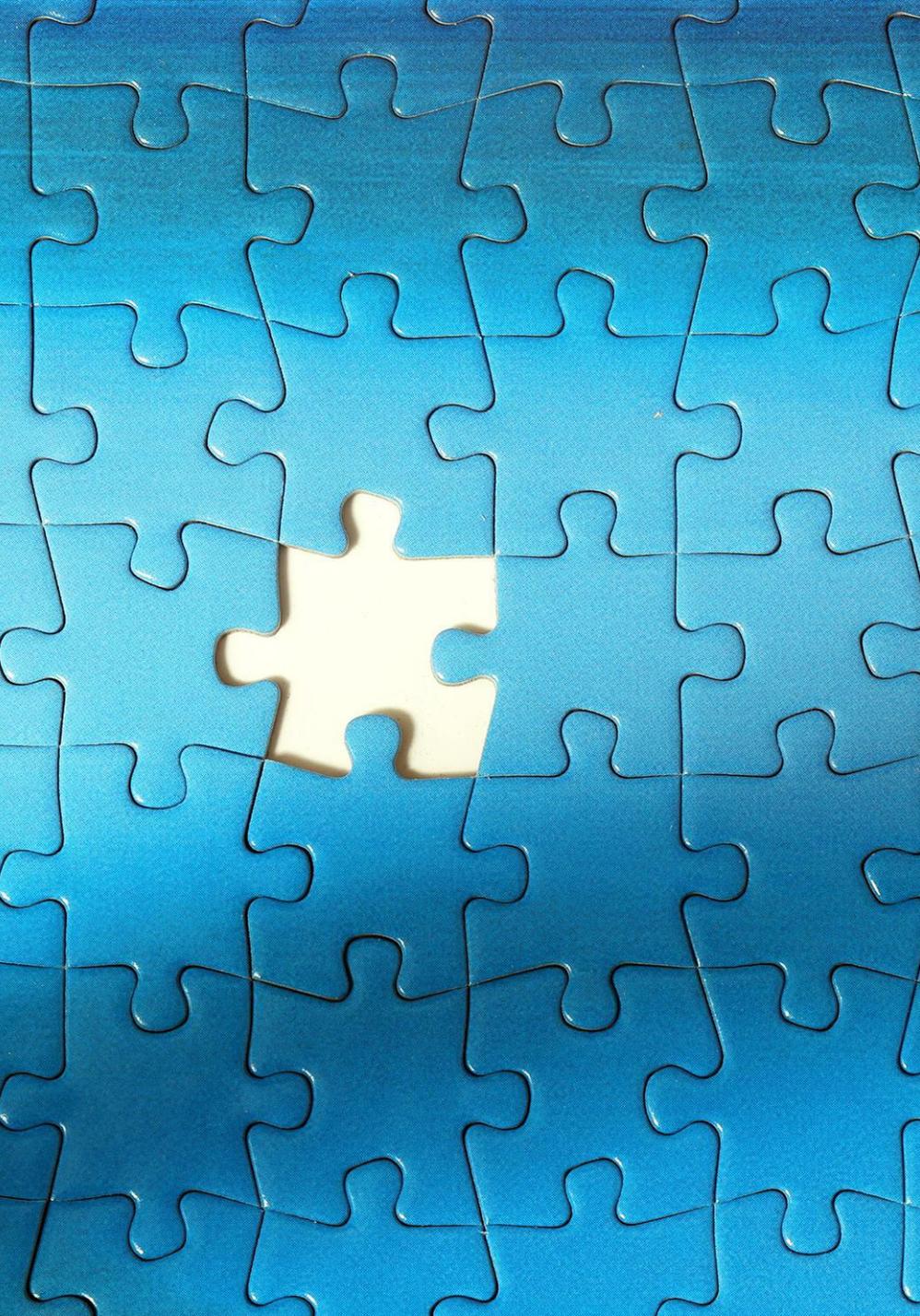


# What next? Get planning....



# What next? Get planning....





# Piece by piece

**Allow time to do it properly – it is worth the investment**

Work together

Share your progress

Record your decisions

Be consistent

## **Do it well, do it once**

**Any questions?**

# Thank you

After this session you will receive:

- Slide deck
- Resource list
- Evaluation link

Any further queries about this session:

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