

# Mass Observation Archive strategic plan

September 2021- August 2026

The Mass Observation Archive is dedicated to collecting, preserving and sharing personal accounts and observations of everyday life in modern Britain.

It is owned by the Mass Observation Archive Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), the purposes of which are to advance education for the public benefit by operating and maintaining an archive specialising, but not exclusively, in the modern social history of Britain. The Archive is supported in its care and administration by the University of Sussex Library and is used extensively by many disciplines at Sussex and elsewhere.

This strategic plan will set the goals and guide priorities and activities for Mass Observation over the next five years, September 2021 until August 2026. The success of our strategy will depend on taking time to implement, evaluate and embed the activities outlined in this plan:

- Years 1 and 2: implementation
- Year 3: evaluation and review
- Years 4 and 5: embed the successes into our working practice.

The plan is relevant to the staff team, Trustees and collaborators, project partners, professional colleagues and all participants in Mass Observation activities.

## Our Pillars

Our strategic plan is underpinned by three pillars that encapsulate its activities since 1937 and that continue to endure today and into our future.

<b>Archives</b>
Mass Observation has collected data in the form of written records since its inception in 1937. This archive of material is the unique foundation upon which all our activities are built. <b>We will maintain Mass Observation’s integrity as an Archive with Designated Status.</b>
<b>Research</b>
One of Mass Observation’s founding principles was to make the data it collected available to any researcher regardless of discipline <sup>1</sup> . The Archive continues to encourage and promote research, giving access to an exceptional volume of historical and contemporary material. This narrative data has been generated by our volunteers for over 80 years. <b>We will fulfil Mass Observation’s potential as a renowned form of research.</b>
<b>Engagement</b>
The founders of Mass Observation also stressed the importance of the data being open to ‘the widest possible public’ and recording the voices of those whose are most often unheard. <sup>2</sup> <b>We will ensure that we continue to fulfil our obligations as a charity delivering Public Benefit.</b>

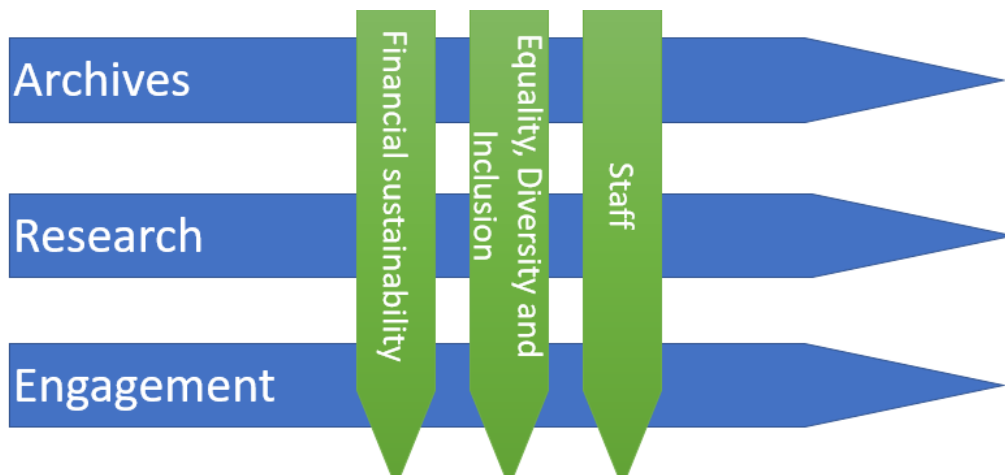
<sup>1</sup> Mass Observation 1937. *Mass Observation* (available at <https://www.massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/Documents/Images/Publication-Mass-Observation/19> )

<sup>2</sup> Mass-Observation 1937. *Mass-Observation* p.40

## Our drivers

Our Strategic plan identifies three strategic drivers that will guide our activities for the next five years.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
We recognise the value of our activities being inclusive and accessible to the broadest audience possible whilst being a true representation of contemporary British society.
Staff
We recognise that our staff team are crucial to the health, development and success of Mass Observation.
Financial sustainability
We understand that as a charitable organisation financial stability is crucial to be able to plan for future development.



Our staff		
Archives	Research	Engagement
<p>We will commit to ensuring that our collections are professionally managed.</p> <p>We will establish a volunteer and placement programme which will take advantage of physical and virtual opportunities to involve others in our work.</p> <p>We ensure that our staff are trained and supported to apply for funding to extend our collection management projects.</p>	<p>We will encourage collaborations that bring externally funded research positions to extend our knowledge of our archives.</p> <p>We will give staff the opportunity to generate in-house research to build a strong, active and engaged research community that is driven by Mass Observation.</p> <p>We will participate in networks to establish our profile and increase our reach.</p>	<p>We will ensure that projects are adequately funded to attract high quality project staff.</p> <p>We will establish partnerships to strengthen project delivery.</p> <p>We will establish a student placement programme with year-round opportunities.</p> <p>We will develop virtual and in-person work experience placements.</p>

#### How will we do this?

- Review our core staffing capacity in light of the strategic plan
- Ensure an adequate budget to support staff development as required to fulfil our strategy
- Build capacity within the team to host student placements year round
- Ensure that additional staff capacity is always factored into funding
- Pilot virtual work experience placement. Foster links with schools and colleges
- Pilot a volunteer programme based around digital activities
- Allocate an annual expenses budget to support an increase in the number of volunteers we recruit
- Utilise social media, blogs, podcasts and online events to promote research findings and opportunities

Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion		
Archives	Research	Engagement
<p>We will create and update our catalogue metadata to encourage access and increase awareness of our panel demographics.</p> <p>We will update our catalogues to ensure that our language is inclusive and appropriate for all audiences.</p> <p>We will create a more diverse collection, including material in accessible formats.</p>	<p>We will provide enhanced biographical data on our panel.</p> <p>We will diversify the profile of our panel whilst maintaining its longitudinal strengths.</p> <p>We will celebrate the value of those voices in which our existing collections and strong (i.e women, older people).</p>	<p>We will establish our reputation as a provider of accessible and inclusive engagement nationally.</p> <p>We will develop partnerships and engagement with targeted groups to diversify our collections and support the inclusion of those who may not be represented.</p>

#### How will we do this?

- Work with University of Sussex colleagues on digital preservation initiatives to safeguard the long-term care and accessibility of our collections
- Engage in decolonisation training and groups within and beyond the University of Sussex to ensure a more inclusive collection
- Work to improve our catalogues to increase knowledge about our collections
- Increase our 'open-calls' which build on the success of our 12<sup>th</sup> May and Covid collections.
- Develop collaborative research bids to include an outreach offer
- Undertake a regular collection and analysis of biographical data to identify who our Observers are.
- Develop and nurture safeguarding practices for our panel of volunteers and researchers
- Develop our online offer and implement a new website with themed resources
- Design and promote an Engagement Programme of online talks and courses
- Plan partnership project activity and submit bids to build our outreach offer
- Make our collections more accessible and inclusive by digitisation, creating resources and themed curation of materials for different audiences

Our Financial Sustainability		
Archives	Research	Engagement
<p>We will prioritise funding applications and projects that are initiated by ourselves, or in which we are equal partners, and in which funds are available for resources (especially staffing) in addition to our core.</p> <p>We will engage with publishers and our Literary Agent to actively support the marketing of products that promote our collections to wider audiences.</p>	<p>We will prioritise funding applications and projects that are initiated by ourselves or for which we are equal partners and in which funds are available for resources (especially staffing) in addition to our core.</p> <p>We will ensure that our charges represent not only the cost of administration, but also the value of the data collected.</p>	<p>We will establish a sustainable public engagement programme that generates income by incorporating virtual engagement with a national reach.</p> <p>We will prioritise funding applications and projects that are initiated by ourselves or for which we are equal partners.</p>

#### How will we do this?

- Ensure our staff have appropriate fundraising training and adequate time to prepare funding bids
- Work closely with our partners in publishing to look at how we can support sales and boost royalty incomes
- Re-evaluate the Directive commission pricing scheme to ensure that costs are representative of the value that commissioners receive.
- Explore alternative sources of core funding, including investigating potential affiliations with research units.
- Identify appropriate areas of our engagement programme that can generate an income whilst maintaining our Public Benefit obligations.

## Appendix 1: timeline

### Timetable

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Years 4 & 5
Financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review budget for development and delivery</li> <li>Balance delivery of core service with time to develop funding applications and Directive packages by enhancing core staff hours to 0.8</li> <li>Make funding bids for project activity</li> <li>Anniversary programme</li> <li>Scoping funding bodies, benchmarking with other research centres and building advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot public engagement programme</li> <li>Charge for some aspects of public engagement programme to ascertain potential for income generation</li> <li>Developing partnerships and sustainable income streams</li> <li>Profile previous and current research projects via website and social media channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established public engagement programme</li> <li>Sustainably funded project &amp; outreach activity</li> <li>Generate income from public engagement programme</li> <li>Increased income through Directive collaboration packages</li> <li>Increased profile as a valuable national source of qualitative narrative data</li> </ul>
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope limited representation and inclusivity of collection</li> <li>Scope INCLUSIVITY of content</li> <li>Anniversary programme</li> <li>Planning programmes of activity for engagement and promotion, and revised directive packages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of online offer and implementation of a new website with themed resources</li> <li>Work on making collection more accessible by creating resources, digitisation, themed curation of materials for different audiences</li> <li>Delivering public engagement and consultancy programmes and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established reputation as provider of inclusive engagement opportunities nationally</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance staff to 0.8 to build capacity to deliver strategic plan</li> <li>Pilot virtual work experience placement. Foster links with schools and colleges</li> <li>Review student placement programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop funding bids which allow for additional staff</li> <li>Build project partnerships to strengthen capacity</li> <li>Reviewing and measuring outcomes and outputs against strategic objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff in post with optimum capacity. Three 0.8 posts</li> <li>Funded project staff</li> <li>Student placement programme established year round opportunities</li> </ul>