

ORIGINS OF WEALTH TOOLKIT

A GUIDE FOR FOUNDATIONS
EXPLORING THE **ORIGINS OF
THEIR WEALTH** IN CONNECTION
TO HISTORICAL ENSLAVEMENT



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The impact of racial injustice and colonial legacies still exists in society. Those whose wealth was accumulated through the violation and exploitation of people and planet have the opportunity to address those harms through their action today.

Understanding the origins of wealth allows organisations to take intentional action toward understanding the root causes of social injustices and repair past harm through investing back into those communities, people and places.

This work is not only important for current foundations, but acts to support emerging endowments and new philanthropists, allowing them to consider how they generate their wealth and the legacy they want to leave behind.



ROWENA ESTWICK,
DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION, GUY'S AND ST THOMAS' FOUNDATION

A FORWARD FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CAROL MACK



Pivotal events in recent years have been a prompt for reflection and action within the UK and indeed globally. From the unequal impacts of the pandemic to the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, established institutions have been moved to confront their histories and connections to systems of oppression such as enslavement and colonialism.

This reckoning has extended to charitable foundations and their origins of wealth.

As statues of once-revered philanthropists toppled, some foundations with deep-rooted histories found themselves facing uncomfortable questions about their financial roots and ties to historical injustices.

This deep reflection has sparked a necessary dialogue within the philanthropic community, urging us to delve into our pasts and re-evaluate our present actions.

At ACF, we recognise the importance of peer support and shared learning in navigating complex issues. Our members have voiced a collective need for an opportunity to share their experiences and learn from one another's journeys. It is in response to this call that we present this toolkit.

This toolkit is designed to be an introductory resource for any UK charitable trust or foundation interested in conducting research work to understand more about the source of its wealth.

We are grateful to the independent experts whose guidance enriched the development of this resource. Special thanks are due to Barrow Cadbury Trust for their commissioning support, which made this project possible.

While this toolkit primarily addresses the challenges associated with historical connections to enslavement, it is important to recognise that this is not the only form of problematic history that philanthropic organisations may encounter. However, this area commands considerable attention from our members, hence our dedicated focus in providing guidance here.

Whether you are considering embarking on this journey of introspection, seeking guidance on where to start, or simply curious about the process involved, this guide is intended for you.

CAROL MACK
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ADVICE FOR THOSE LEADING THIS WORK

Our reference group members found exploring the origins of their foundation's wealth to be deeply enriching and worthwhile. They acknowledged that the journey was extensive, intricate and presented its own set of challenges.

Leaders should anticipate a variety of perspectives from their staff, trustees and stakeholders. Views may differ on the significance of this work, its alignment with political contexts or potential reputational concerns. Some may feel that more could be done.

For organisations accustomed to consensus in decision-making, navigating these differences might pose difficulties. At times, leaders may need to challenge prevailing attitudes and navigate through disagreement.

Reference group members emphasised the necessity of support structures. Peer support, coaching or engaging with a learning partner can offer valuable assistance, facilitating not only support but also the sharing of insights and experiences. They can also aid in addressing challenges and devising strategies.

Some of our reference group foundations found that a learning partner facilitated the integration of reflective practices and the adoption of action learning within their organisational approach to this work.

Advice from the reference group

Throughout this document, you will see snippets of advice from our reference group. These are boxed in with the blue lightbulb icon you see to the right >>>



Supporting global ethnic majority staff and trustees

Members of the foundation team from global ethnic majority backgrounds may be more affected by discussions and research that examine historical racist practices as well as the lasting impact of those practices on society today.

Leaders must be sensitive to this dynamic, acknowledge the impact of this work and actively support staff and trustees of the global ethnic majority from the outset of the journey. A psychologically safe environment for all team members to engage with the foundation's research work should be created.

In addition to internal communications guidance on [page 24](#), leaders should consider integrating the following into their approach:

- Ensure support systems are set up in readiness. For example, culturally appropriate counselling, coaching or mental health support (resourced by the organisation).
- Regular opportunities to check in with global majority staff and trustees for wellbeing support.
- Engaging with anti-racism training for all staff and trustees.
- Workplace policies and procedures in place for identifying, reporting and managing racist and discriminatory incidents.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to be an introductory resource for any UK charitable trust or foundation interested in conducting research work to understand more about the source of its wealth.

“There is **so much to gain** from understanding the origins of your organisation. Transparency and openness **builds incredible trust** in your most important partnerships.”



“The research is an **iterative, ongoing process**. Even the most high-quality research may not provide all the answers or find all connections. There may be follow-on discoveries and foundations should appreciate that.”



This is a flexible guide, designed to accommodate various stages of readiness, whether you are reading this from a place of early curiosity or already have research work underway. You can navigate through the sections of the toolkit that align with your current needs or areas of interest.

At ACF we recognise that every foundation is unique. It is an individual decision for each organisation to consider how understanding their past and the origins of their wealth and existence applies to their current and future practice.

This toolkit is not intended to answer that question for every foundation. It is designed to provide sufficient information to guide a foundation through its thinking and offer relevant advice from foundations who are already well-progressed on this journey.

For more information about this toolkit or about foundation wealth origins please email policy@acf.org.uk.

What is in scope for this toolkit?

This toolkit primarily addresses historical wealth associated with historical practices of enslavement. We acknowledge that problematic histories come in many shapes and forms and extend beyond connections to enslavement, such as exploitation of the natural environment or certain labour practices.

However, for the purpose of providing clear guidance, we have chosen to keep the focus targeted.

This guidance is targeted to provide guidance for foundations exploring their own institutional history.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF LANGUAGE

Language matters

The language that we use when talking about this subject will shape the perceptions and attitudes of others towards the historic practice of enslavement. Therefore, it is **essential that we use language that does not hide the reality of this brutal system of race-based oppression and which also recognises the harm caused to enslaved African people and their descendants.**

By using terms like “enslaved person” we recognise their enslaved status as imposed on them and not intrinsic to their identity as human beings. It also acknowledges their agency and resistance. Whereas “slave” reduces identity to mere property, perpetuating dehumanisation.

Choosing sensitive language honours the dignity of those affected and fosters empathy and understanding. It is crucial for accurate historical reflection and combating modern forms of exploitation.

Subject matter experts on our reference group recommended the following terms as the most culturally sensitive and therefore appropriate to use:

“transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans” instead of “transatlantic slave trade”

The term “slave trade” tends to sanitise the high level of violence and mass murder that was inflicted on African peoples and societies. “Trafficking” recognises the inherent immorality and criminality involved in practices and processes of enslavement.

“enslaved person/people” instead of “slave/slaves” and “enslaver” instead of “slave owner”

The word “slave” is objectifying and dehumanising, and “slave owner” assumes the power of the enslaver as intrinsic, without acknowledging the enslaver’s active participation in perpetuating the violent practices of oppressing fellow human beings. “Enslaved person” acknowledges and restores the full humanity of the enslaved.

“Get advice from others. Most are **more than willing to share their work and their learning.**”

“**Don’t make assumptions** about anything at the start of this work, including how colleagues will respond.”

HOW HISTORY AFFECTS SOCIETY TODAY

During the colonial era, British wealth was significantly bolstered by the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, wealth generated from plantations in British colonies and later from the compensation awarded to enslavers following the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833.

This exploitation and unjust enrichment formed a foundational aspect of the country's economic development, with profits from industries such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco directly contributing to the accumulation of wealth.

Acknowledging the historical context of wealth accumulation is an important element of understanding contemporary movements seeking racial justice, redress and repair.

One of the most visible and enduring legacies of African enslavement is structural racism. This is ingrained in our society and manifests itself in inequality in wealth, access to land, education, housing, health, employment and the criminal justice system.

The legacy of African enslavement is responsible for entrenching racial inequality within Western society that led to direct, indirect, systemic and institutional forms of racism and structural violence.

For example, the case of Black deaths in police, prison, psychiatric custody and immigration detention in the UK. Or in institutional failings to provide sufficient support and care for global ethnic majority communities, such as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on racialised people in the UK.

The murder of George Floyd and the subsequent global protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement have reinvigorated widespread conversations about structural racism and the legacies of historical injustices. Racial justice organisations have been working hard for many years to explore or address structural racism in the voluntary sector in the UK.

For many foundations, this has served as a reminder of the need to confront and address the roots of inequality and injustice embedded within society.



"This is an opportunity to **build incredible trust** in your most important partnerships."

Without understanding the history of slavery and colonialism, we cannot understand the extent to which societies today are shaped by systemic racism, unfair distribution of assets, inequality and violence – and how all of these have led to despair, marginalisation and disenfranchisement in parts of the population. ”

OLIVETTE OTELE,
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF THE
LEGACIES AND MEMORY OF SLAVERY,
SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

By examining the historical sources of wealth, foundations can better understand any potential connections to systems of oppression and discrimination.

This awareness can inform more equitable and inclusive approaches to organisational strategy and operations.

It's now quite common for institutions of all kinds to explore their wealth origins and acknowledge ties to historic enslavement practices. Recent examples include the Bank of England, the Church of England and several UK universities.

As well as foundations, other charitable organisations are engaged in this space, such as the National Trust and Historic Palaces. In 2023 Buckingham Palace signalled King Charles' support for a research project on the monarchy's involvement in historical transatlantic enslavement.

In addition to ACF, other voluntary sector membership bodies, such as **Bond** and the **Museums Association** have also produced resources for their members.

A thorough examination of active organisations that were financially connected to the transatlantic trade in enslaved African people, the **Register of British Slave Traders** project led by Professor William Pettigrew at Lancaster University, shows that charities dominate.

"Size doesn't matter. You might feel you are a small player in the sector, **but your decisions matter to your partners.**"



A chair's perspective



Our journey started in 2020 and is continuing. Our endowment derives from the Cadbury chocolate business. We became aware of enslavement on São Tomé and Príncipe off the coast of Africa as part of our supply chain at the end of the 19th century.

Some of the board are direct descendants of those involved and it has been difficult to acknowledge the actions of our forebears but it led us to make a public apology.

We are now aware that addressing the history is not enough and there is much to be done to become a more anti-racist organisation through the exploration of our current power and privilege, as individuals and as an organisation. ”

ERICA CADBURY,
CHAIR OF BARROW CADBURY TRUST

WHY EXPLORE WEALTH ORIGINS

Charitable foundations hold a unique position in shaping societal change, with the potential to drive transformative progress and allocate resources to pressing issues.

The foundation sector in the UK has a rich historical context and deep-rooted legacies. Many trusts and foundations are reflecting on their role in this historical tapestry and want to understand more about the role their own organisation has played throughout its history.

Many foundations are exploring the origins of their wealth due to potential ties to colonialism, enslavement and historic racist practices.

For foundations established or operating during 17th, 18th or 19th centuries, there might be a heightened sense of concern regarding links between philanthropic endowments and wealth associated with enslavement.

Notably, even foundations established long after the abolition of slavery are adopting a “you don’t know what you don’t know” mindset. They are embarking on a journey of curiosity and discovery, remaining open to exploration without preconceptions.

Understanding history in its entirety is widely regarded as beneficial. While this may involve confronting uncomfortable truths, many foundation boards have found this is preferable to being unaware of all the facts.

“

The philanthropic sector is not immune to the historical injustices and power imbalances that persist in society today.

The significance of addressing these legacies is not confined to history books, it resonates vividly in the present. There is a current and lasting impact of these historical injustices on Black and other racialised communities in the UK, causing profound and enduring consequences that ripple through generations, affecting lives and communities.

As they strive for a more equitable world, foundations are increasingly recognising the present day repercussions of these historical legacies and the implications for wealth creation and redistribution. ”

ESTHER XOSEI,
DIRECTOR, MAANGAMIZI EDUCATIONAL TRUST

“This work was **highly rewarding and enriching** for us.”



Each foundation will have its own reasons and motivations for embarking on work to understand more about the origins of its wealth.

The key driver should be the fit with the foundation's mission and there may be a combination of other motivators, such as:

Fit with the foundation's mission, vision and values

For those who want to apply a racial justice lens to their grant-making, investments and operations, the first step may be to understand and acknowledge racial history.

One area of funding focus for Trust for London is racial justice, therefore exploring the trust's origins of wealth aligns with their existing strategy and could strengthen their mission. Many foundations work to alleviate and address poverty – one of the structural inequalities affecting communities as a legacy of historical enslavement.

Transparency

Transparency fosters trust: understanding, acknowledging and communicating wealth origins can build confidence with stakeholders, enhancing trust in the relationship and enhancing collective impact.

Awareness of likely connections between founding wealth and enslavement

Barrow Cadbury Trust and trusts founded by Joseph Rowntree are examples of foundations that became aware of the connections between their founding wealth and enslavement and decided to conduct further research. Corra Foundation also cite (indirect) connections to enslavement through the banking sector as their starting point for research.

In response to specific events or movements

Barnwood Trust reference the death of George Floyd in the US and the growing Black Lives Matter movement as the catalyst for their work researching the origins of the foundation's wealth. With criticism rising against statues linked to the trafficking of enslaved people, Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation examined the history of their Guy and Clayton statues, exploring how these men made their wealth.

Striving for racial equity within the foundation sector

Data highlighting the lack of diversity within foundation boards has led many ACF members to initiate work to bring greater diversity, including racial diversity, to their boards and staff.

The Ubele Initiative's **Booska paper** in 2021 highlighted structural racism in the voluntary sector and set out issues to be addressed for a more racially equitable society.

Understanding and acknowledging foundation history may be a valuable activity to support individual foundation and sector responses to these challenges.

To enhance collective understanding

Individual organisations commissioning and publishing research contributes to a greater pool of knowledge, increasing awareness and understanding of the roots of considerable amounts of British wealth.

Reputation and credibility

Foundations tend to acknowledge that a full understanding of the organisation's history allows for some control of the narrative. Accepting and confronting uncomfortable aspects of that history can also be an important element in attracting and retaining a strong, diverse workforce.



The process applies regardless of the foundation's size. Whether you're big or small, funding regionally or nationally, it's essential. Even if you feel like a small player, you still have the power to decide how to use your assets.

SALLY BYNG,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, BARNWOOD TRUST

ACF's **Stronger Foundations** initiative helps foundations to work towards stronger practice across all aspects of their work. Informed by engagement with our members and external experts, Stronger Foundations highlights several reasons why some foundations might choose to explore the origins of their wealth and its implications.

Strategy and governance: This sets out the importance of taking account of the foundation's history, and the legacy it seeks, in its strategic thinking. *"There may be concerns expressed internally or externally about the source of a foundation's money that have come to the surface due to shifts in social attitudes"; prompting them to consider "whether there is a need for healing or reparation".*

Transparency and engagement: A stronger foundation understands the importance of transparency and engagement and articulates its approach. Our report notes that *"telling the foundation's story includes openness about aspects of the foundation's history that may feel out of place in today's society, including the origins of its wealth."*

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): A stronger foundation considers how DEI relates to its history, mission and current work. *"In 21st century UK, with all its plurality, diversity, societal opportunities and challenges, a stronger foundation is one that understands how its history (including how its wealth was created) and mission relate to DEI."*



Any organisation thinking about its mission should have an interest in its origins, history, legacy and whose wealth it is originally. It is an ethical and moral duty. ”

PAUL KISSACK,
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION



"Be strategic and intentional in your approach: if you move at pace regardless, it can actually be harmful."



Foundations embarking on this process will need to ensure that the board and leadership team:

- have documented the decision making process that led to this project with clear minutes following the usual principles for trustee decision making.
- have explained clearly how the project relates to the charity's objects.
- can show that they have considered and prepared for the possibility that the project will be controversial.
- ensures that those involved in the research are prepared for the possibility of divided and strongly held responses. ”

SHIVAJI SHIVA,
CHARITIES PARTNER, VWV

OPENING CONVERSATIONS BEING CLEAR ON “WHY”

There is no single approach to understanding your foundation’s wealth origins.

“Keep conversations **open**.”



Foundations in our reference group reported value in spending considerable time and effort at the outset exploring why this issue felt urgent or important to their organisation.

This reflective exercise helped to form a way forward that felt right for their foundation’s mission, vision and values and was achievable within their organisation’s resources.

Being able to articulate why this work is worth doing will be crucial to successful internal and external communications, to engage and motivate the staff team and respond to questions or challenges.

Our reference group encouraged other organisations to learn from the work already done by foundations, but to be confident in their own unique approach.

“

First you need to work out why this is important to your organisation. Only then are you ready to start. You’ll come back to this point again and again during the journey so it is important to get it right.

”

CAROLYN SAWERS,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
CORRA FOUNDATION

“

For family foundations it is crucial to hold conversations with any remaining family members and, equally, for corporate foundations to engage with the company (or successor companies). They will have a different set of reputational issues to navigate and need to be heard during the early stages of this work, whether or not they are part of the formal governance structure.

”

PAUL RAMSBOTTOM,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WOLFSON FOUNDATION

In these early conversations, these are some areas you might wish to explore:

- ➊ **Mission and vision:** how does the foundation's core purpose, and the communities it serves, intersect with the legacy of historical enslavement practices?
- ➋ **Organisational values:** what do your values tell you about how you should approach and share this work?
- ➌ **Strategy:** how will this work enable you to progress your organisation's strategy or further your charitable objects?
- ➍ **Governance:** for example, for a corporate foundation the corporate entity might be better placed to lead the work.
- ➎ **Stakeholders:** how do your stakeholders feel about this issue? How closely might they want to be involved?
- ➏ **Investing, grant-making and wider operations:** are you prepared to make changes to these as a result of what you find out?
- ➐ **What do you know already:** What information is already in the public domain? Is there an institutional archive; who can access it? Are there starting assumptions you can make such as industry connections?
- ➑ **External environment:** what are comparable organisations doing and what can you learn from their experience? Are you equipped to manage external interest or criticism of your work?
- ➒ **Risks and opportunities:** balance the risks of doing versus the risks of **not** doing the work. You might find you are criticised either way: focus on responding to the audiences and stakeholders that are most important to your organisation's mission.

"This is one of many ways that foundations can **contribute positively to collective understanding** and awareness of British history."



A trustee's perspective:



It was important for us to know the origins of our wealth beyond the fact that the organisation was set up 135 years ago by an altruistic woman called Edith Smallwood.

Smallwood Trust commissioned a researcher to look into our history and the origins of the original funds that Edith raised. The outcome of this work was complex and nuanced.

Smallwood have since been working with communications experts to ensure we can get across the complexity of what we found and believe to be the long lasting impact on society of our colonial past.

We will publish the research and an action plan so we can acknowledge our past and move forward even more intentionally to address the inequity that has embedded itself in society as a result. This I believe is made easier by the fact that this work has been part of a wider journey Smallwood Trust and the board have been on in relation to our work on equity, diversity and inclusion. ”

DR AMBREEN SHAH,
TRUSTEE, SMALLWOOD FOUNDATION

Transparency and the importance of being visible

Foundations tend to be reflective by nature, with boards often keen to examine their approach and understand their impact, striving for continuous improvements in their grant-making, investments and operations.

Examining the origins of their wealth may feel similar to taking steps to change investment strategies to avoid investments that conflict with the charity's mission, in that both can prompt a polarised response. Foundations should be transparent on why they are taking action and be prepared for any criticism it might attract.

As this work often involves re-examining British history, foundations may face critique for undertaking research or publishing findings. This reflects wider societal discussion about how identity, culture and heritage are important to many of us.

In our current times, there is a noticeable rise in division regarding issues of identity. This shift is felt differently among various age groups, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and political viewpoints. The polarisation is exacerbated by changes in politics and media, which significantly impact how public discussions unfold.

An example of the polarisation on this issue is where:

- ❗ The Ubele Initiative have called for foundations to engage with sources of wealth in their **2021 Booska paper** exposing structural racism in the third sector.
- ❗ Charities' attempts to address historical links with enslavement have been **branded "woke"** by senior politicians.

Whilst foundations may receive criticism from some quarters, it is important to remember that transparency and visibility of this work can also lead to increased support and solidarity from others.

The risks of NOT doing this work are often as great as the risk involved in doing it. The key consideration for foundations should be listening and responding to the stakeholders and audiences that are most important in their mission.



"Make time for staff and trustees to talk multiple times. **Views change over time** as people's education and awareness grows."

CHOOSING YOUR PATH



Following initial conversations within your organisation, you may be ready to decide whether progressing to research is the right step for your foundation.

You might want to consider organisational readiness against the following six aspects:

- 1 Your “why”.** Are you clear about why further research into the origins of the foundation’s wealth will help to further your strategy and charitable aims?
- 2 So what?** It can help to have an idea at the outset of what you might do with more information about your wealth sources. This can help facilitate conversations after the research is done.
- 3 Organisational alignment.** Consistency of expectations and pace across staff and trustees will help to coordinate efforts and reduce the risk of any confusion.
- 4 A commitment to continuous learning.** Recognition that building organisational knowledge and understanding on the subject matter is part of the process.
- 5 Identifying who to engage.** Many foundations choose to involve external stakeholders including grant holders, community organisations and advocacy groups.
- 6 Resourcing the work.** As well as financial resources, a foundation also needs sufficient leadership time and focus to commission and project manage the research and to lead internal and external communications.
- 7 Don’t underestimate the emotional turmoil** this can create. Have a plan for dealing with this. See [page 24](#) for more on this.

You will need to think about what the end goal looks like for you and whether you want to break the work into smaller components and pace yourself. For example, depending on the information and expertise you already have, there might be some elements of the work you want to do in-house and others that are better to commission.



John Ellerman Foundation was founded in the 20th century; our wealth didn’t originate directly from the enslavement trade.

Instead, our funds are derived principally from shipping, an industry that like many others is intertwined with colonialism and exploitation, highlighting the complex historical connections that inform discussions about wealth, even for “newer” foundations and the need for understanding and addressing these legacies. ”

SUFINA AHMAD,
DIRECTOR, JOHN ELLERMAN FOUNDATION

RESEARCH APPROACHES STARTING OUT

Most foundations that decide to undertake research exploring their wealth sources will commission external expertise to conduct at least some of this research.

It is unusual for a foundation, even a larger one, to have the necessary expertise internally to undertake methodologically-robust research and present historical data within context.

Having an expert historical researcher will help the organisation understand what is relevant to the foundation, present connections within context and offer some points of comparison to help a foundation gauge the significance.



The past actions of individuals, companies and institutions can present legacy issues for foundations in the here and now. However, we cannot claim to unpick modern day injustices without understanding the origins of our philanthropic wealth. ”

MANNY HOTHI,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TRUST FOR LONDON

If you decide to pursue an external research approach, the following is an overview of a typical commissioning process:

1 Agree governance and decision-making arrangements:

- Who will be involved at all stages of the journey, including the board, staff, grant holders or other stakeholders. Explore how governance and leadership has worked well for other foundations, such as having a lead trustee.
- Whether you decide to work with advisory groups, to bring in stakeholders important to you. Ensure this approach is meaningful, recompensed and not extractive.
- Consider using a framework (such as **RAPID**) to define who plays what role in decision-making.
- Ensure good project management arrangements are in place.

2 Prepare a brief, based on:

- Why you want to do this work – the “why” will help to set the “how” for the research.
- Your preferred learning approach e.g. focusing on oral history, archival research, company history or legal research.
- How you want to communicate findings e.g. a published research report or findings for consideration internally.
- The period of history of relevance, any work previously undertaken and availability or nature of archives.



③ Launch an open call for expressions of interest.

- Recognise organisational limitations and the importance of independent research: go beyond approaching those you know already and run a transparent commissioning process.
- www.jobs.ac.uk or the [Royal Historical Society's](#) notice board can be useful channels to reach academic researchers.
- Ask within your networks and look at what else has been done – organisations will generally be happy to tell you who did their research and provide feedback.

④ Appoint researcher(s) based on assessment of responses.

- Finding someone experienced at completing high quality academic research AND communication of findings to non-academic audiences is key.
- It may also be advantageous to find someone with:
 - specific, broad expertise in financial and colonial history.
 - skilled in working with the media.
 - experience comparing research findings to other organisations' work.

- Review the researcher's past work and/or seek references. Ensure the work will be academically rigorous and can withstand external scrutiny.
- Recognise that junior researchers are more likely to be needed for archival research, and senior researchers for analysis and contextualisation.

⑤ Project management of the research work.

- Connect the researcher into internal knowledge about the organisation's history.
- It can be useful to provide a deliberative space for the researcher. You may wish them to present and discuss the findings with stakeholders, and this may help broaden understanding and advance any educational remits foundations may have.
- Try to build in time for the researcher to share an early draft with your staff and advisory groups. This will ensure findings are presented in the right way for your needs.



"Be aware of your biases and anticipate **some people will hold views that are antithetical** to your own."



Philanthropy is at an important reflection point. We strive for a socially just world, yet more often than not the resources to do so are far from that, and in the past and present were accumulated in ways that subjugate bodies and biomes.

To meaningfully redistribute wealth and to be in solidarity with the partners we resource, humility and an understanding of where this money comes from and the harms this accumulation has and still causes is crucial. Not doing so impedes true social justice. ”

VANESSA THOMAS,
RACIAL JUSTICE CONSULTANT

Further points to consider before you start

the research:

- 1 Once you have your governance arrangements in place, spend time working out what you want (a) the research approach to focus on and (b) what you want the outputs to look and feel like.
- 2 Consider what **evidential bar** (see right) you are setting: what will you recognise as a “connection” to enslavement; what is a “finding of concern” between foundation wealth and a source of wealth or a historical figure, for you.
- 3 How do you want to make the distinction between the particular wealth source of your organisation and the wider contribution of historical enslavement to the wider economic and social fabric (today and historically)?
- 4 Who owns the completed research? Can researchers use material for their own purposes? If you want to consider confidentiality clauses, you will need to balance this with commitments to full transparency.



“You’re never going to know enough to feel absolutely confident about starting the journey **BUT that doesn’t mean you’re not ready to start.**”

The evidential bar

All organisations beginning this work should understand that in many cases, it will **not be possible** to establish a proven, specific financial connection between wealth from enslavement and a foundation’s wealth.

This is because individuals who endowed foundations often did so at the end of a life in which they had many financial interests. It can be very difficult to disaggregate profits from one trade from capital generated in every other aspect of someone’s business affairs.

It is important to set expectations with stakeholders about the evidential bar. It may be possible to establish that a person who endowed the foundation participated in enslavement or the trafficking of enslaved people. It may also be possible to establish that this activity predated their donation (establishing the sequencing is very important).

However, it may not be possible to establish that any profits from enslavement were the specific funds donated to the foundation.

It is important to be transparent about this and manage expectations accordingly.



It is important that foundations recognise that because of the pervasiveness of wealth generated in Britain from colonialism from the 17th century onwards, that most large foundations with financial roots across this period are likely to have some material connection to colonialism. ”

PROFESSOR WILLIAM PETTIGREW,
LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

ENGAGING WITH FINDINGS

Set time aside for reflection

When the research has been completed, try to set aside some time and space to reflect on the findings. Some questions to ask yourself during this time might include:

- ? Did the research answer the question you set out with?
- ? Are there any gaps in the findings? Has the research raised any new questions?
- ? How do the findings change your understanding or perception of the foundation?
- ? How do your staff, trustees and stakeholders feel about what the research has said?

The findings may give rise to some uncomfortable or difficult feelings, so it is particularly important to support your staff in this stage (see [page 24](#)).



Reflection time can be very valuable, but your staff teams or stakeholders may be expecting to see action immediately and this isn't always possible. A clear message to your teams at this stage is vital: any vacuum in that message can create a worry. ”

CAROLYN SAWERS,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CORRA FOUNDATION

Consider next steps

Having done the research, it is time to consider the options for action. It is important to ensure this is not just a historical enquiry but evidence for a change in practice.

Options for action are likely to be informed by your original aims and goals for this work – your “why” when choosing to explore your foundation’s origins of wealth.

- ? For instance, if transparency was a goal, do you know enough to communicate externally?
- ? Alternatively, if “righting the wrongs” was an aim of exploring the origins of your foundation’s wealth, how might the findings impact your grant-making activity, investments or wider operations?

If there is evidence of unethical practice involved in the accumulation of your foundation’s wealth, you will want to consider whether this requires a change to your strategic approach and how you operate today.



“Everything will take longer than you expect. Use this as an opportunity to **engage meaningfully** with your partners and stakeholders.”

Looking forwards

Engaging in this exploratory work can be a valuable learning opportunity for your foundation. Though the findings may be challenging to acknowledge, the insights garnered can impact long-term sustainability, by helping to inform the foundation’s future strategies and decision-making processes. Being adaptable is key to ensuring foundations remain effective and relevant.

It is also worthwhile to consider how your foundation’s origins of wealth might impact its mission and objectives. Consider whether taking certain actions aligns with the foundation’s goals and contributes positively to its intended impact.

FROM DISCOVERY TO ACTION NEXT STEPS

Following the completion of the research stage and consideration of the findings for your foundation, you may want to reflect on the actions you take as a result.



Many foundations have grant-making programmes and/or endowments. Using all of a foundation's assets in pursuit of its mission means that action resulting from research findings might cut across a number of areas.

These are some of the actions taken by UK foundations to date:

- ❗ **Publish the research or a summary of findings:** John Ellerman Foundation and Corra Foundation are examples of foundations that have made their findings available publicly by publishing independent research reports in full and/or providing summarised versions. If your foundation has an institutional archive, giving full transparency and professionally managing the archive might be a step to consider.
- ❗ **Make a statement of acknowledgement, apology or make a commitment to change:** A number of foundations have acknowledged direct (eg trusts founded by Joseph Rowntree) or indirect links with enslavement. Barnwood Trust has committed to "become an anti-racist organisation" and Barrow Cadbury Trust has "renewed our commitment to deepen our engagement with modern day racial inequality across all of our work".
- ❗ **Review investment portfolio:** You may decide to divest from investments linked to industries or practices associated with harm. This divestment can include reallocating funds to impact investments benefiting affected communities.
- ❗ **Change funding strategy:** Corra Foundation highlighted their ongoing ringfencing of grant budgets "for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic led organisations" up to 2025 "then a deeper review ... will take place, in which a racial justice lens will be applied".
- ❗ **Examine grant-making practices:** grant-making foundations might wish to consider examining practices embedded in grant-making norms that potentially "repeat harm". Ubele Initiative's research shows that funding processes can result in lower proportions of grants to Black and minority ethnic led organisations than expected. Without practice change, the lack of resource flow to affected communities continues.
- ❗ **Ongoing learning and education:** many foundations commit to continuous engagement with understanding how historical actions and practices continue to shape society.
- ❗ **Leadership and governance changes:** Barnwood Trust opened up opportunities for new trustees and Barrow Cadbury Trust are seeking to bring more diversity to their board and decision-making panels.
- ❗ **Reparative and restorative actions:** we explore this in more depth on the following page.

"It can be messy: **lean into** the discomfort."



Reparations and reparative or restorative action

There is a complex and ongoing debate on the topic of reparations within UK society.

These terms are about addressing the lasting consequences of historical injustices on contemporary populations.

This can be done through initiatives which seek to acknowledge the wrongs of colonialism, harms caused by the enslavement and dispossession of African and Indigenous peoples, returning or redistributing wealth or land that has been extracted or denied to communities and redressing systemic inequities.

The United Nations has set out **principles for reparations**, based on the assertion that “victims” and other affected groups and communities have a “right to reparation” for “gross violations of international human rights”. Also relevant are the **Belfast guidelines** which share good practice on the implementation of effective reparations in post-conflict situations.

Applied to the impact of historical enslavement in the UK today – in terms of inequities, structural and systemic injustices, lack of equal enjoyment of human dignity and rights. These frameworks advocate acknowledgment, restitution and redistribution of wealth and land, compensatory redress and community participation to address historical injustices and promoting societal healing.

In September 2023, the UN secretary general called on countries to consider financial reparations for transatlantic trafficking of enslaved people.

In the UK context reparations tends to focus on “holistic repairs” going beyond purely financial actions and emphasises the need for structural and systemic change.

Examples of where UK organisations have taken reparative action:

- ❗ **Glasgow University** which, in 2019, became the first British university to set up a restorative justice scheme, pledging £20m to build a research centre in partnership with the University of the West Indies.
- ❗ **Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust** has acknowledged the historical links between its founder and colonialism. The organisation is actively exploring ways to address the impact of this history, including potential reparative actions.
- ❗ **Church Commissioners for England** announced in January 2023 they will create an “impact investment fund” of £100 million to mitigate the long term consequences of its fund’s connection with the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans. In March 2023 this was boosted to a £1 billion fund, with co-investors being sought.

Organisational experience of reparative action is limited within the UK. Institutions in the US including charitable foundations, are more progressed in this area.



“Embrace the paradoxes, they are naturally part of this work.”



Groups that advocate for reparations almost never seek only money ... At the heart of demands for reparations is the understanding that the past cannot be erased and must not be ignored. Former colonial powers cannot undo the damage they inflicted on enslaved and colonised people, but they can engage in good faith with the descendants of those people, and work to address the systemic inequalities that exist today.



OLIVETTE OTELE,
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF THE
LEGACIES AND MEMORY OF SLAVERY,
SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY

In the UK there has been a noticeable lack of widespread education and awareness regarding the country's involvement in colonialism or the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved African people. This extends to understanding the economic links between historical enslavement and contemporary organisations like foundations.



My experience teaches me that overall those organisations that proactively, thoroughly and publicly assess their connections to historic injustice stand to gain more reputationally than those who opt for selective, private or defensive enquiries into their history.



PROFESSOR WILLIAM PETTIGREW,
LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Many people in the UK do not recognise or consider important the connection between what happened 200 years ago and today.

Our reference group consistently cited the importance of increasing curiosity, knowledge and understanding by staff, trustees and stakeholders involved in this work.

The group advised openness by leaders, encouraging reflection on what is collectively and individually known and understanding where more knowledge will be valuable.

Sources for building education and understanding could include holding learning conversations with stakeholders and subject matter experts; working with a learning partner; accessing case studies from other foundations or non-charitable institutions, including outside the UK; and podcasts, blogs and other educational resources (see list on [page 28](#)).

Action learning approaches can be valuable to provide a framework for leadership and peer development as well as reflective practice

- ! Staff, trustees and any external advisory groups should be involved. Knowledge and grounding should be well spread throughout the organisation and not just with a few people leading the work.
- ! If your foundation has a diversity, equity and inclusion or anti-racism group or learning series, ensure it is connected to this work.
- ! The purpose of building organisational knowledge is not to know a certain amount before starting. If you attempt to wait until you know "enough" you're never going to get started.

TALKING ABOUT THIS WORK

Effective communication is at the heart of the journey of exploring your foundation's wealth origins. It's about more than just transmitting information; it's about fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration both within and outside your foundation. The success of your efforts relies on how well you communicate your intentions, your progress, and the potential changes ahead.

A clear connection between your organisation's mission and your desire to learn more about your foundation's wealth will help you to communicate, both internally and externally.

Our reference group stressed the importance of internal communications to this work, to underscore that this is a fundamental part of how you think about your foundation. Whilst external communication is also important, too little emphasis on internal communications risks positioning this as a public relations exercise rather than organisational transformation work.

"Aim for **confidence and not comfort** in talking about the material."



"Be aware of "supportive resistance"; resistance **isn't always open** and can take many guises."



Internal communications:

From the outset, try to be clear in communications about the "why" and the "how". This will give the work legitimacy and anchor it clearly for staff teams.

Other considerations include:

Clear intentions and key messages:

- ❗ Communicate your "why" for doing this work as well as what you intend to do with the findings (even if only indicative at this stage).
- ❗ Develop key messages and FAQs to address common questions and provide consistent information.

Create a consistent leadership approach:

- ❗ Ensure a joint leadership approach in delivering consistent, credible messages to all stakeholders.
- ❗ Create opportunities for leadership to share their fundamental beliefs and non-negotiables at an early stage, to support aligned working.
- ❗ Consider appointing a board champion to lead and advocate for the work, as well as providing a touchpoint for staff.

Be clear about how decisions will be made...

- ❗ Define how decisions will be made, being clear on roles and involvement of all involved.
- ❗ Specify the role of staff and how they can contribute their input, ensuring inclusivity and diverse perspectives.

...and what changes might be ahead:

- ❗ Acknowledge that this process may bring about fundamental changes in how your organisation operates. Be as specific as you can about this and provide updates as decisions evolve.

Nurture open communication with staff:

- ❗ People will respond differently; be prepared for a variety of reactions.
- ❗ Keep communication channels open with staff through regular updates and a transparent approach.
- ❗ Provide opportunities for staff to contribute, give feedback and ask questions and foster a safe space for open dialogue.
- ❗ Assess the need for collective staff training or development to support staff to contribute.

External communications

For external communications there are two key moments where you will need to consider whether and how you communicate externally:

- 1 The decision to begin research
- 2 Publishing research findings

Considering your audience

Your audience is anyone who might take an interest in your work. This could include partners, community organisations, grant holders, advocacy groups, regulators and the media.

You will need to identify which audience groups matter most to you and ensure you are communicating with them in mind. Your “why” will help with this.

Framing your messaging:

Clarity: it is important to recognise that for some audiences it won't be self-evident why you are doing this. You will need to spell out your “why” at every step along the journey.

Choose your language carefully: consider your audience and use language that creates resonance and trust. Be aware of the impact your words can have and ensure your language recognises the legacy of historical actions on communities today. Use this opportunity to build bridges: consider how you can engage your priority audiences and avoid language that is likely to put up a wall between you and them or provoke anger or cynicism.

Setting the right tone: consider your “why” and what you hope to achieve. Reflect this approach in the tone of your communications as well as the impact this process might have on your audience. For instance, be sensitive to how your stakeholders might react to a change in your strategy or activities.

Key talking points: establish a set of key messages to maintain consistency and clarity in your communications. These should include why exploring your foundation's wealth origins is essential; your foundation's dedication to transparency and the expected outcomes of this journey.



When communicating about this issue, it is really important to focus on the audiences that matter to you and not the noise that others may seek to make, often in bad faith.

Be visible on the reasons for undertaking the research and the actions you are taking as a result, using language that will build bridges to those audiences that matter to you the most.



PETER GILHEANY,
BOARD DIRECTOR, FORSTER COMMUNICATIONS

Managing your approach

Visibility: acknowledge from the outset that undertaking this work is likely to create polarisation. Take this into consideration and find ways to actively manage it.

Be proportionate: recognise that this is an important piece of work but it is not your only focus. Balance your external communications on your wealth origins with sufficient air time for your other priorities too.

Reiterate the “why”: and the fit with the organisation's mission and vision. Remember that this is an important part of giving the work legitimacy and removing the risk of a perception of performative actions.

Relationships: working closely with media contacts can help to convey the complexity of the research and ensure it is fully understood.

Transparency: the more detailed and nuanced the research, the more difficult it will be for media organisations to simplify it and therefore place the findings into a polarised political debate. Consider being as open as possible with your findings. Media organisations tend to be very keen to report on work of this kind. There is an incentive for them to be guided by the foundation briefing them and to do due justice to the complexity of the research.

HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS TOOLKIT

How we developed this toolkit

- 1 A rapid scoping exercise of work undertaken within this field by ACF members, other UK trusts and foundations and major UK charitable organisations.
- 2 Review and input by our reference group.
- 3 Consultation with experts including legal, regulatory, research and public relations specialists.

Our reference group

ACF members:

Sufina Ahmad, director, John Ellerman Foundation
Sally Byng, chief executive, Barnwood Trust
Rowena Estwick, director of diversity, equity and inclusion, Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation
Manny Hothi, chief executive, Trust for London
Colin Kinloch, trust funding director, Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation
Paul Kissack, group chief executive, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Sara Llewellyn, chief executive, Barrow Cadbury Trust
Carolyn Sawers, chief executive, Corra Foundation

Non-ACF member subject matter experts:

Vanessa Thomas, racial justice consultant
Esther Xosei, director, Maangamizi Educational Trust

With additional thanks to:

Paul Ramsbottom, chief executive, Wolfson Foundation

Olivette Otele, distinguished professor of the legacies and memory of slavery, SOAS University of London

Professor William Pettigrew, Lancaster University

Shivaji Shiva, partner and charity law solicitor, VVV

Peter Gilheany, board director, Forster Communications

REFERENCE GROUP FOUNDATIONS' WORK EXPLORING ORIGINS OF WEALTH



Barnwood Trust

<https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/blog/our-journey-to-become-an-anti-racist-organisation/>



Barrow Cadbury Trust

<https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/news/statement-on-the-origins-of-bcts-endowment-and-racial-justice/>



Corra Foundation

<https://www.corra.scot/our-statement-on-a-review-of-corras-historical-funding/>

John Ellerman
Foundation



JOSEPH ROWNTREE
FOUNDATION

John Ellerman Foundation

<https://ellerman.org.uk/about-us/our-story>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/news/a-statement-from-the-joseph-rowntree-foundation-jrf-trustees-and-joseph-rowntree-housing-trust>



Trust
for London

Trust for London

<https://trustforlondon.org.uk/about/our-history/>

Guy's &
St Thomas'
Foundation

Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation

<https://gsttfoundation.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>

FURTHER RESOURCES

Recommended by Esther Xosei,
director, Maangamizi Educational Trust

Academic studies

Legacies of British Slavery Database

Register of British Slave Traders, Professor William Pettigrew, Lancaster University

Slavery and charity: Tobias Rustat and the African companies, 1662–94 by Michael Edwards

Slavery and charity: Tobias Rustat and the African companies, 1662–94* | Historical Research | Oxford Academic (oup.com)

Reparations as a pathway to decolonisation briefing by the Gender and Development Network

Neo-colonial philanthropy in the UK (2021) by Fozia Irfan, Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing

Ethics in Philanthropy report by the Grantgivers Movement

Philanthropy's Role in Reparations and Building a Culture of Racial Repair by Aria Florant, Tonyel Edwards, Cora Daniels, Alexandra Williams, Vikas Maturi, and Maurice Asare

Anti-racism and decolonising: A framework for organisations

Reparations and climate justice What are climate reparations and why are we talking about them? Global Justice Now Supporter Briefing

Podcasts

Derek Bardowell – Philanthropy, Justice & Giving Back (philanthropisms.com)

Talks

How Do Atonement And Reparations Address Planet Repair (greenparty.org.uk)

Routes to reparations talk by Esther Xosei at the Next Frontiers in Funding, Philanthropy and Investment, Joseph Rowntree (2023) Routes to reparations (youtube.com)

Land As Reparations and How to Get There @ Oxford Real Farming Conference (2024) Land as Reparations and How to Get There – YouTube

Books

Post Capitalist Philanthropy: Healing Wealth in the Time of Collapse by Alnoor Ladha, Lynn Murphy (2022) Post Capitalist Philanthropy (2022 Book)

Reconsidering Reparations by Olúfemi O. Táíwò (2021)

Giving Back: How to do good better by Derek Bardowell (2022)

Decolonizing Wealth, Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance Second Edition by Edgar Villaneuva, Bishop William J. Barber II (2021)

Sustainable Finance: Using the Power of Money to Change the World by Molly Scott Cato (2022)



ORIGINS OF WEALTH TOOLKIT

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