



An update for SHOAL and Centres & Associations

June 29th marks the one-year anniversary of the SHOAL online forum for Centres & Associations. Anniversaries provide an opportunity for reflection before continuing along a journey, so it feels like the ideal time to check-in.

During the first lockdown, we connected a few chairs who wanted to learn from other Centres & Associations. Weeks later, SHOAL was formed and has grown into a space for chairs and secretaries to discuss issues that all groups are facing, ask questions, post ideas, and find support.

Themes emerged from your conversations, and a working group turned these into a proposal to the Trust covering longstanding concerns and how we might tackle them together. It started a new dialogue and helped us identify some practical first steps we could take to improve your experience in the short term, including:

- **Autumn Magazine** – When the Magazine lands on doorsteps in September it will include a 4-page feature on Supporter Groups. Thank you for your overwhelming response to our call-out for stories. There were far too many to include in the article, but we will be looking for other ways to use them in the future.
- **New members pack** – New members joining the National Trust will now receive an updated pack that includes information about Supporter Groups in the booklet. We will keep looking for other opportunities to encourage Trust members and volunteers to join their local group.
- **Supporter Group Directory** – We are working to reinstate a directory on the website ahead of the Magazine, and we'll need your help. We'll soon be asking you to check, and possibly change, your Group's contact details so that we create an informative directory that also protects the privacy of individuals.
- **Online resource page** – We are in the process of finalising an online resource page for Centres & Associations, and we'll send you an access link in the coming weeks. This page will contain documents and links to resources that will support you and your committee

in the operation of your Group. We are also exploring how to turn this resource page into a new permanent resource hub for Centres & Associations.



Visitors on a guided group tour with a volunteer guide at Hidcote Manor Garden ©National Trust Images/Arnhel de Serra

In a short time, SHOAL has already proved a valuable resource. Together you have provided the Trust with insights, and you have compiled a wealth of intelligence that can benefit all our Supporter Groups. The challenge for all of us now is to take the lessons we have been learning together and find ways to include even more voices in these conversations.

As the Trust recovers from the Covid crisis, we are concentrating on stability and growing support. For our Centres & Associations, this means focusing on practical, long-term stability measures over the coming year to ensure that:

- We are sharing best practice and new ideas between groups
- Centres & Associations are easier to find and contact on the National Trust website
- Committee members know where to turn first for information, resources and support
- More staff and volunteers know their local Centres & Associations and understand how to best engage with their groups
- Centres & Associations feel connected to the Trust and one another through SHOAL and other means

We will need the support of our groups more than ever, and we have the opportunity to rethink what our relationship with Centres & Associations has been in the past and where we want it to be in the future. We hope we can continue working together with you to improve the experience of Centres & Associations, stabilise our groups, and find the best ways for you to support our cause and the places you love.



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National Trust

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