

# No longer us



# and them

## How to change into a participatory museum and gallery

Learning from the *Our Museum* programme

By Dr Piotr Bienkowski

April 2016







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# Foreword

I am delighted to have been involved with the *Our Museum* programme from inception to conclusion. In 2008, as Adviser to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Arts Programme Committee, I identified various options for strategic interventions to benefit the museums and galleries sector. After some discussion, we agreed that the focus should be on how community engagement and participation can effectively permeate whole organisations.

We commissioned market research company LUCID to manage a consultation programme to identify what participation currently looked like in the sector, and to recommend options for action. This process involved 20 one-to-one interviews with key individuals, as well as three participatory regional workshops in Liverpool, Bristol and London, attended by 58 museum professionals and community members. In December 2008, LUCID's report mapped existing participation and made a number of recommendations – in particular,

Being embedded in one's community and addressing that community's needs are key elements in attracting sustainable support and funding.

to commission a study of participative structures and processes, acknowledging that little was yet known about how to create a successful participative organisation.

In January 2009, PHF hosted a round-table discussion for senior figures from the museums and galleries sector to test LUCID's findings and recommendations and explore how they might be taken forward. As a result, the Foundation commissioned Dr Bernadette Lynch to carry out research to help understand what good engagement practice looked like and what impact it might have in terms of public benefit. Paul Hamlyn Foundation then identified about 40 organisations with reputations for community engagement and participation. Through a process of selection, a study group of 12 organisations emerged – representative of the museum sector in the UK in terms of geographical location, size, nature of collections, and type of governance.

Dr Lynch's report on that research, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway?*, published by PHF in 2011, made a considerable impact in the museum and gallery sector because of its uncompromising conclusions: that the funding invested in recent years in community engagement and participation in the UK's museums and galleries had not succeeded in shifting the work from the margins to the core of many organisations. Most engagement work and staffing were short-term, project-funded and vulnerable, with communities remaining passive beneficiaries rather than active partners.

The Foundation subsequently commissioned Dr Piotr Bienkowski to develop and direct a strategic initiative – *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners* – in order to address the issues



raised in what has become known as the 'Cake' report. As part of the management of the programme, we put together a Steering Group in early 2012, and I would like to thank them for their thoughtful and robust input.

The defining characteristic of *Our Museum* was that it was not about short-term project funding, but about facilitating organisational change, so that participatory work became core, embedded, sustainable and less at risk of being marginalised when specific funding streams ran out. I also wish to acknowledge the courage and conviction of all the participants, who were ready to try out new ways of working and take risks.

Our aim was for the *Our Museum* programme to have an impact both on the participating organisations and on the wider museum sector. What we could not predict at the start of the programme was that it would coincide with a period of financial austerity, which has made life difficult for museums and galleries, some of which

have cut their community work. Although *Our Museum* was not explicitly designed as an alternative, community-focused approach for financially challenged museums and galleries, the Foundation strongly believes that being embedded in one's community and addressing that community's needs are key elements in attracting sustainable support and funding.

The Foundation itself has changed during these years, and has become much more committed to maximising the impact of its work. We hope that this publication, and the substantial multimedia resources available on [ourmuseum.org.uk](http://ourmuseum.org.uk), will show other museums and galleries, community organisations, and funders how to change into a participatory museum and gallery, and how to support and facilitate this work. It is more vital now than ever.

**Kate Brindley**

Director, Arnolfini Centre for the Contemporary Arts, Bristol  
Chair of the *Our Museum* Steering Group



# What did *Our Museum* set out to achieve?

This publication shares what we learned about how to embed community participation from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners*, which ran for four years between January 2012 and December 2015.

*Our Museum* supported a number of museums and galleries in the United Kingdom to embed community participation in every aspect of their work. Addressing the findings of Bernadette Lynch's report *Whose Cake Is It Anyway?* (PHF 2011), the programme took as its starting point her conclusion that, to embed community participation effectively and sustainably, a museum or gallery has to go through a process of organisational change. So the programme was not about delivering short-term community programmes and events: it was about a process of change

to place collaborative work at the heart of the organisations, to build sustainable partnerships with communities, and to involve them in decision-making.

The Foundation aimed to have an impact on the wider museum sector, beyond the individual museums and galleries that directly participated in the programme. To that end, all the way through, we rigorously evaluated each organisation's journey of change, what worked well and why, what did not work so well and why, the challenges encountered in creating change, and the tensions which museums and community partners may experience in bringing about change.

This publication brings together what we learned about embedding community participation from the practical experiences of the whole *Our Museum* cohort. Not everything went as well as it could have, and not all the organisations changed as much

as they hoped they might: but this has been the most extensive action research ever undertaken in the museum sector on how to embed participation.

The learning forms a coherent story, and there are two key messages:

- Small changes add up.
- Participation is everyone's job.

## Small changes add up.

### Small changes add up

To embed community participation, many things need to change inside and outside the organisation. This publication identifies the areas those changes should be made in and makes practical suggestions, based on experience, trial and error, as to what those changes might be and how to implement them. While we recognise that some readers will pick out certain individual learning points, we emphasise that it is the holistic approach that creates real and lasting change.

### Participation is everyone's job

From the top to the bottom, inside and out, trustees, directors, staff, volunteers, community partners, and funders all have a role in developing a participatory organisation. The challenge is often to find out what each individual role is in practice, and we hope that the learning in this publication and in the online resources ([ourmuseum.org.uk](http://ourmuseum.org.uk)) will help that process of discovery for everyone.

## Participation. It's everyone's job. It's *your* job.



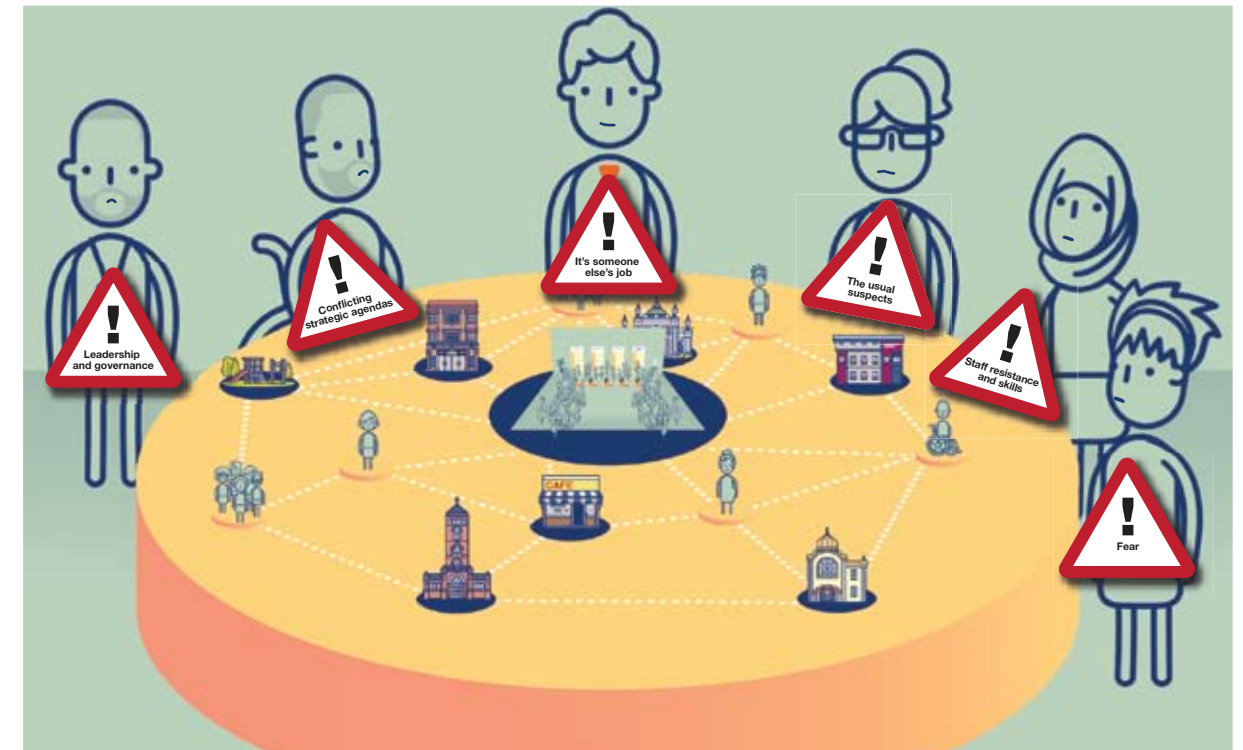
# The main barriers to participation

The outcomes for the *Our Museum* programme were shaped by thinking about the barriers to participation and how to overcome them. These barriers became clearer throughout the programme.

The major reason why embedding participation can only be achieved

through a process of changing lots of things across an organisation is that the barriers to participation cut right across museums and galleries and their external relationships.

It is not just one barrier, in one place: it is lots of barriers, across the whole organisation.



If trustees, directors and senior managers give only passive, tacit support to participation, the work is not championed and can be effectively blocked. It needs active commitment and championing from the very top, and to be at the heart of the museum's mission and business model.



In an age of financial austerity, a key strategic aim for most museums is to be enterprising, to generate income, and to increase audiences. When it comes to making hard decisions, these are often perceived as conflicting with deeper community engagement and participation, which as a result can be relegated to a lesser strategic importance and left poorly resourced.



In many museums, one staff member or group is tasked with working with communities, rather than the responsibility being shared across the organisation and embedded. In this way, the work remains peripheral and never influences the way the whole organisation works.



Museums and galleries often choose to work with communities who are already known to them and who are perceived as less challenging. This is a barrier to true participation as the pool of community partners is very restricted and unrepresentative of an area's diversity.



Staff resistance to participatory work can be conscious or unconscious – it can be poor understanding of community engagement, lack of interest, or issues of staff time and capacity; and staff often lack the skills to listen to and work with different communities and to share decision-making in practice.



Fear can lead to paralysis and avoidance and be a barrier to change. We have encountered fear related to financial survival, fear of participation as a perceived threat to professional expertise and status, and fear of an uncertain future that change might bring.



# Intended outcomes

What should we expect from a participatory museum?

In order to address the barriers to participation, and support active partnership with communities, the *Our Museum* programme developed four overall outcomes – these were what we expected the museums and galleries taking part to strive for. Each of these outcomes had its own indicator of success, all of them qualitative and not quantitative – the sort of evidence of organisational behaviour we would expect to see if the outcome were being achieved. These formed the basis of the evaluation framework for the programme, against which the change journey of each organisation was assessed.



The outcomes and indicators of success are listed in full here, because they essentially define what the Foundation expects a participatory museum or gallery to be. We also believe that they have the potential to form the basis of a shared, transferable framework for assessing participatory organisations – a framework that does not otherwise exist.



# 1

## Rooted in local needs

Museums and galleries understand their role within their localities: they are effectively informed of, and respond to, the range of their communities' needs and values, and are aware of and initiate opportunities for partnerships with communities and other sectors to meet local needs.

### Indicators of success:

- Pro-active and outward-looking leadership, defining roles of staff working to find out about community needs and issues
- Tried and tested mechanisms whereby museums and galleries keep themselves informed of community needs, priorities and wishes
- Tried and tested mechanisms whereby museums and galleries develop local partnerships outside the sector and understand potential partners' priorities
- Initiation of/involvement in local partnerships responding to local needs
- Respect and trust between museums/galleries and communities, and acknowledgment and implementation of alternative values, stories and different styles of communication
- Removal of barriers to community participation and collaboration, including physical barriers: e.g. how space is allocated to different uses and the character of the physical environment
- Feelings of shared ownership and pride in the museum/gallery, reflecting how embedded it is in the community (e.g. is it 'my museum' or is it still marginalised?)
- Achievements celebrated jointly.

# 2

## Community agency

Communities are sustainably at the core of all the values, strategies, structures and work of museums and galleries: actively and regularly participating and collaborating in dialogue and decision-making about the work of the museum/gallery.

### Indicators of success:

- Visionary and value-based leadership committed to participation by diverse communities
- A clear community plan and strategy, and a clear shared understanding of it between museums/galleries and communities
- Engagement, participation and collaboration as core values of the organisation
- Engagement embedded across the organisation, so that all staff, volunteers and trustees recognise that it is core
- Community involvement in governance, shared decision-making and authority, setting targets, monitoring and evaluation
- Collaborative exhibition development, including community authoring of proposals, text, and associated programmes
- Community voices, stories, histories and interpretation throughout the museum/gallery
- Community participation sustainable beyond PHF funding, through different business models and income streams (e.g. social enterprise, partnerships).

# 3

## Capability building

Museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills, capabilities and creativity: preparing and helping people to be engaged in their communities, to articulate their voices, to find employment or volunteering opportunities in the heritage sector and elsewhere; and supporting staff to learn how to work with communities.

### Indicators of success:

- Commitment to development of the community and of individuals within it as core values and purposes of the museum or gallery
- Museum/gallery working in partnership with the community and other sectors locally to identify and understand employment, volunteering, training and capability needs within the community
- Museum/gallery development of community potential, skills and enterprise (e.g. through social enterprise models, volunteer programmes, apprenticeships)
- Training and capability building of community partners (e.g. through placements, mentoring)
- Training and capability building of staff to learn how to work with communities (e.g. through placements in community organisations, mentoring)
- Community organisations and individuals involved in developing and delivering staff training and enhancing staff capabilities.

# 4

## Reflection

Museums and galleries embed reflective practice into their work: internally, with community partners, and across the sector, to ensure ongoing reflection, dialogue and openness to challenge, alternative values and working methods.

### Indicators of success:

- Ongoing reflection and dialogue with partners about practice
- Clear and ongoing museum/gallery management discussion about 'community': who?, why?, what?, when?
- Internal and external self-criticism within the organisation: staff and communities feel able to challenge assumptions, disagree and speak freely and openly without fear
- Sharing good practice about engagement and participation
- Willingness to take risks with new ideas and innovative practice.



# What did we do?

The essence of *Our Museum* was to support the participating museums and galleries through a programme of organisational change which addressed the four outcomes and their indicators of success. As this was also an action-research programme, and we wanted to learn what worked, what didn't, and what was transferable to other museums and galleries, it was crucial that the cohort be as representative as possible of the UK museum sector.

To that end, the PHF Trustees decided not to solicit open applications, but to invite the 12 carefully selected organisations that had taken part in the research phase with Bernadette Lynch. Not all took up the invitation or came through the rigorous selection process.

## Who took part and how?

Between January 2012 and December 2015, the *Our Museum* programme worked with the organisations mapped opposite.

We believe this learning is transferable to other museums and galleries, whatever their nature and size.

We also worked with Ryedale Folk Museum between January 2012 and June 2014, and the Museum of East Anglian Life between January 2012 and February 2015.

Each participating organisation developed a change programme which addressed the four outcomes in a unique way, depending on their local situation. Crucially, the Foundation requested them to develop and manage their programmes jointly with community partners, so that collaborative working was built into the process from the start (although we learned that this was not always straightforward).

You can get an idea of each organisation's approach on the *Our Museum* website: <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/perspectives/>



The different programmes and experiences of the organisations – including the things that did not go so well and the two steps forward one step back moments that we documented and analysed carefully – provided us with a broad and rich range of approaches to embedding active partnerships with communities. It is this broad range of trial and error that informs the learning in this publication – and, because the participating organisations reflect the diversity of the UK museum sector, we believe this learning is transferable to other museums and galleries, whatever their nature and size.





# The programme's key mechanisms

Peer learning and exchange were seen as essential to the success of *Our Museum* right from the start. We built a number of mechanisms into the programme to facilitate these, as well as to provide opportunities for feedback, critique and support. These proved to be an important element in the change process, evidenced by museums copying and adapting processes from each other. For the evaluation process, see page 32.

## Peer reviews

Annual peer reviews brought together staff and community partners from all the organisations over two days. As well as structured sharing through case studies, workshops and open space sessions, we learned not to over-schedule the programme, to allow space for just talking and exchange, and always built in an informal social element. Over the three years, it was notable how much trust developed among the group, and any barriers between museum staff and community partners faded. It was a community partner who, reflecting on the spirit of one of the later peer reviews, inspired the title of this publication: 'It's no longer us and them'.

## Steering Group

Paul Hamlyn Foundation appointed a Steering Group to advise on the programme, make recommendations on funding, and give feedback to the organisations on their plans and progress. At times, this feedback could be very blunt and uncomfortable, but in retrospect everyone agreed that it led to an increase in frank dialogue and new, shared insights, and pushed them usefully in a better direction.

## Critical friends

After staff from the participating organisations requested input from a critical friend to help them with their change programmes, *Our Museum* resourced critical friends as part of its support. The critical friends provided an objective view of the organisations, gave feedback, prompted honest reflection, and ensured that uncomfortable issues were discussed and not avoided. This became one of the most influential mechanisms within the programme. There is more on critical friends on page 38 and on the *Our Museum* website (<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/critical-friends/>).



## Lead Contacts meetings

Representatives from each museum or gallery – called Lead Contacts – met quarterly as a group with the Project Director to share, exchange, learn from each other's experiences, plan reciprocal visits, and to develop future aspects of the programme jointly, such as the peer reviews. Over three years they got to know each other well, and this became an important element in the sharing and exchange process, helping to build the sense of a community of practice.

## Directors' meetings

The directors of all the *Our Museum* organisations met several times as a closed group. This was an opportunity to network and share strategies for participation, and especially to discuss the critical issue of how participation affects the financial bottom line. Some of these meetings were facilitated, some not, and we respected the confidentiality of these meetings, which were not expected to report their discussions to the Foundation or the evaluation team.



# What did we learn about embedding participatory practice?

Counting the initial research phase led by Dr Bernadette Lynch, the museums and galleries involved in *Our Museum* spent six years systematically exploring how to embed participatory practice, four of those years as part of the intensive organisational change programme. Between them, they have found effective ways of addressing all the main barriers to participation noted above.

But we need to acknowledge some caveats. Anybody who has undertaken such work knows that there is no easy toolkit or magic wand for participatory work, and we are not pretending that *Our Museum* has all the answers. Truthfully, we cannot point to a single organisation that took part in the programme as the perfect exemplar, as the one to copy to guarantee success. Each organisation achieved a huge step change, especially in certain aspects; but each could have gone further, in other aspects. On page 40 we say more about the challenges and what could have gone better.

Between them, they have found effective ways of addressing all the main barriers to participation.

Anybody who has tried to embed participatory practice, or any kind of organisational change, also knows that, above all, it takes time. We acknowledge that any large-scale organisational change takes at least five years – and at least that long before we know if it really is succeeding – whereas *Our Museum* was a change programme funded for only four years. Nevertheless, from the start we knew that the funded programme could only be the beginning of a much longer process for the participating organisations. Their change programmes are all continuing beyond the period of PHF funding, and we have planned a longitudinal evaluation to judge the longer-term impact of those changes (see page 44).

Those caveats are important, but they do not take away from the very practical lessons of the programme. Being a 'participatory' museum or gallery is not a binary condition: yes or no. Participation is a continuum, and some of the *Our Museum* organisations are further along it than others, or better at some aspects than others. But taking as our starting point the barriers to participation, between them, the *Our Museum* organisations have developed lots of practical approaches to overcome all of them – and that is the focus of the next sections of this publication.

## Small changes add up

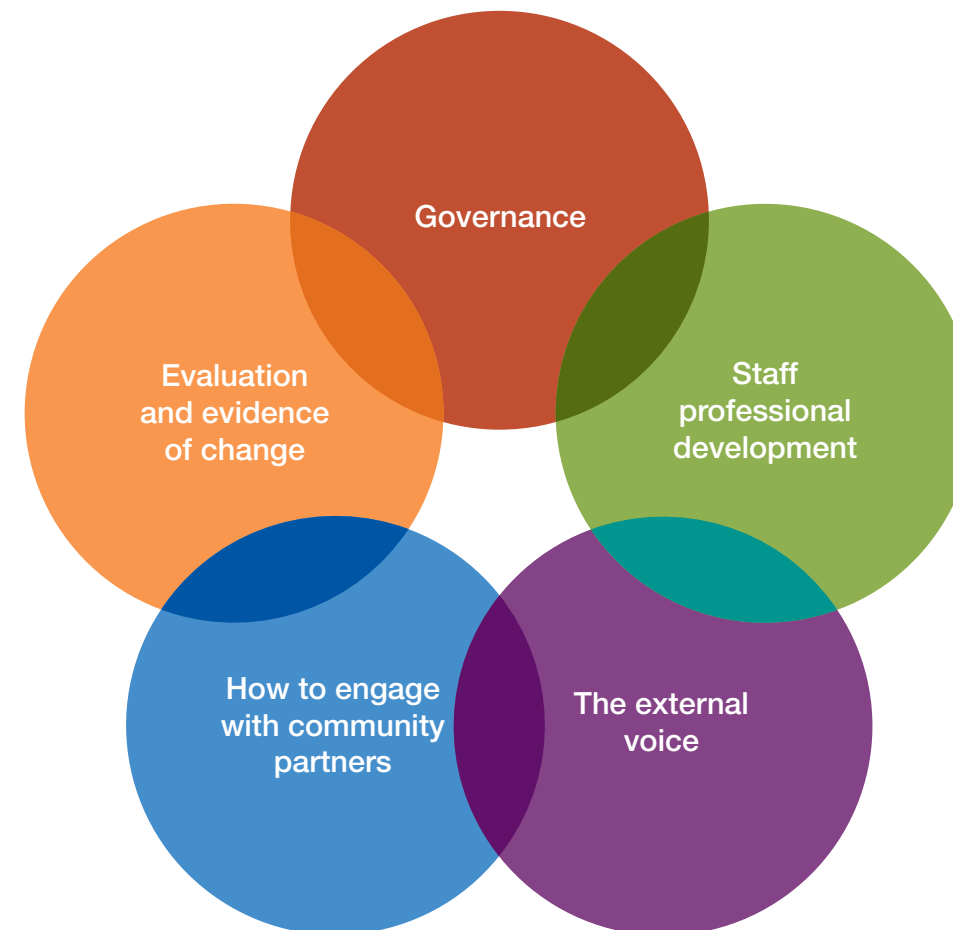
To overcome all the barriers to participation, we have learned that you need to change lots of things across the whole organisation. Small improvements and changes in many different areas, across the whole museum or gallery, add up to significant transformation in community engagement and participatory practice.

Five key areas of museum practice and management are particularly critical for participatory practice:

## Participation is everyone's job

These five areas involve everyone, inside and outside the museum. It takes time, patience and commitment from everyone: the trustees, directors, staff and volunteers within the organisation, as well as its community partners, strategic sector bodies and funders.

In the pages that follow, we look into these five areas in more detail, giving practical examples of actions taken by *Our Museum* organisations, as well as things to watch out for.

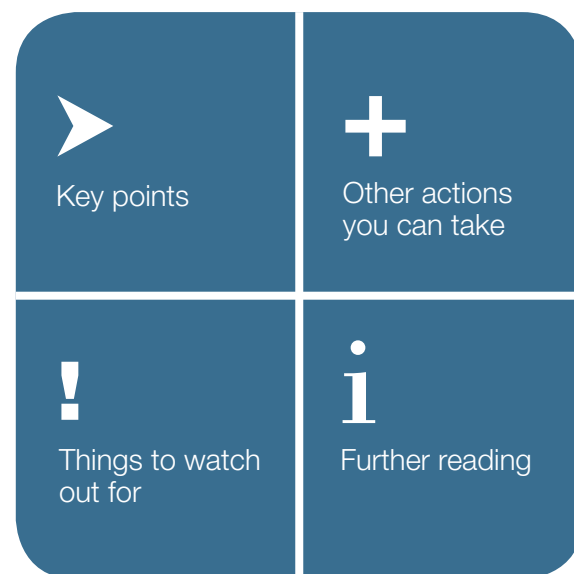




## Organisation of information

The following sections use case studies to illustrate practical approaches the *Our Museum* organisations have developed to overcome barriers to participation. The approaches taken in these case studies are all transferable to any museum or gallery, irrespective of size or nature of collection. Many more case studies, from all the participating organisations, are available on [www.ourmuseum.org.uk](http://www.ourmuseum.org.uk).

Throughout, we have used symbols to highlight this information.



# Governance and leadership



The director, senior staff and trustees – or equivalent governing body – all need to be active champions for change to embed and sustain community engagement and participation.





## Trustee involvement

### Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales

Longer-term, sustainable change is only effective if trustees (or equivalent governing body) actively support and understand participation: they need training, ongoing development and evaluation of their involvement.

At Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales, four trustees, recognised for their skills and expertise in participatory practice and public engagement, agreed to become champions of the *Our Museum* programme. They regularly attended meetings with community partners. Their role as champions on the Board of Trustees was to help to advocate the work with other trustees, internally across the museum, and externally with funders, politicians and others.

The museum organised a training day on participation for the whole trustee board, to discuss the meaning and importance of participation for their organisation, and how it can be rolled out, embedded and sustained across the whole organisation and all its museums. Trustee involvement in the programme was formally evaluated, with trustees, staff and community partners all asked for their views about how to further develop that involvement.



See more on this case study at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/trustee-involvement/>



### Other actions you can take



Ensure participation is at the heart of your business model, and ensure everyone knows it (see more at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/business-rationale/>).



If participation is core work, but you are still struggling to pay for it, do other things that raise enough money to pay for it: this is what The Lightbox in Woking has done.



Delegate and empower staff to be able to work in a participative way without being stuck in layers of bureaucracy and decision-making – work in a participative way internally as well as externally (see more at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/governance-leadership/staff-empowerment/>).

## Active championing by leaders

### Belfast Exposed

Leaders must show active, championing commitment to participation, not just passive support. Leadership is not just the director, but the wider management team – which can be a block to change – and they too need to be committed to participation.

At Belfast Exposed, no-one is in any doubt of the director's active commitment to engagement and participation: she is vocal about it in public. All staff, community partners, funders and stakeholders recognise her commitment. Coming into post part-way through the *Our Museum* programme, she recognised that the organisation could be even more participatory. She tackled silo working, including the physical layout of staff offices, so that staff worked together towards the same participatory goal. She addressed longer-term structural issues with the board, to broaden its diversity, reach out into the community, and get its support for embedding and sustaining participation.



Other case studies on governance and leadership can be found at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/governance-leadership/>



### Things to watch out for



As a director or leader, make sure that participation is not all about just you and your passion. Make sure the organisation around you also changes, so that participatory work continues should you leave.



How can you identify the blockages to participation in your organisation? Make sure that actions and decisions throughout the museum support the participatory rhetoric. Be especially sensitive to the body language of staff at meetings, which can be more revealing of where they really stand than what they actually say.



# Staff professional development



For community engagement to be truly embedded and sustained, **all** staff need to understand its relevance to their own work and to the museum overall, how they can contribute, and how to work with different communities.



## Developing staff buy-in Glasgow Museums

Responsibility for community engagement should be shared across the organisation. Glasgow Museums introduced an innovative programme to develop all-staff buy-in, understanding and skills around community engagement and participation.

They needed to get staff to understand that this was fundamentally about changing the way they worked with communities. They designed their Staff Ambassadors programme to address this. Very different from traditional training, this offers opportunities for staff to learn what real, meaningful community engagement looks and feels like. It is a self-directed programme, 10.5 days over a six-month period, with staff choosing from a menu of opportunities: field visits to community arts projects, involvement in live projects, work swaps, coaching and mentoring. It has changed the way staff across this large and complex organisation understand the purpose of their work and increased their confidence, skills and knowledge of working in a more collaborative way with each other and with community partners. Significantly, it has created staff champions for participatory work right across the museum.



See more on this case study at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/staff-ambassadors/>

### Things to watch out for



The principles and practice of community engagement (and what it even means) seem simple and easy to some staff, but profoundly obscure and frightening to others. Don't assume all staff share the same understanding of it.



Not all staff will know who your local communities are or feel comfortable about going there. Bristol Culture organised staff tours to local communities, led by community partners, which helped with familiarisation (<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/staff-community-tours/>).



When communicating the museum's strategic approach to participation with staff, don't assume everyone understands just because you have sent an all-staff email. You need to use every conceivable method of communication to ensure the message gets through: meetings, talks, workshops, training sessions, leaflets, as well as emails.







## Support champions and influencers to counter staff resistance

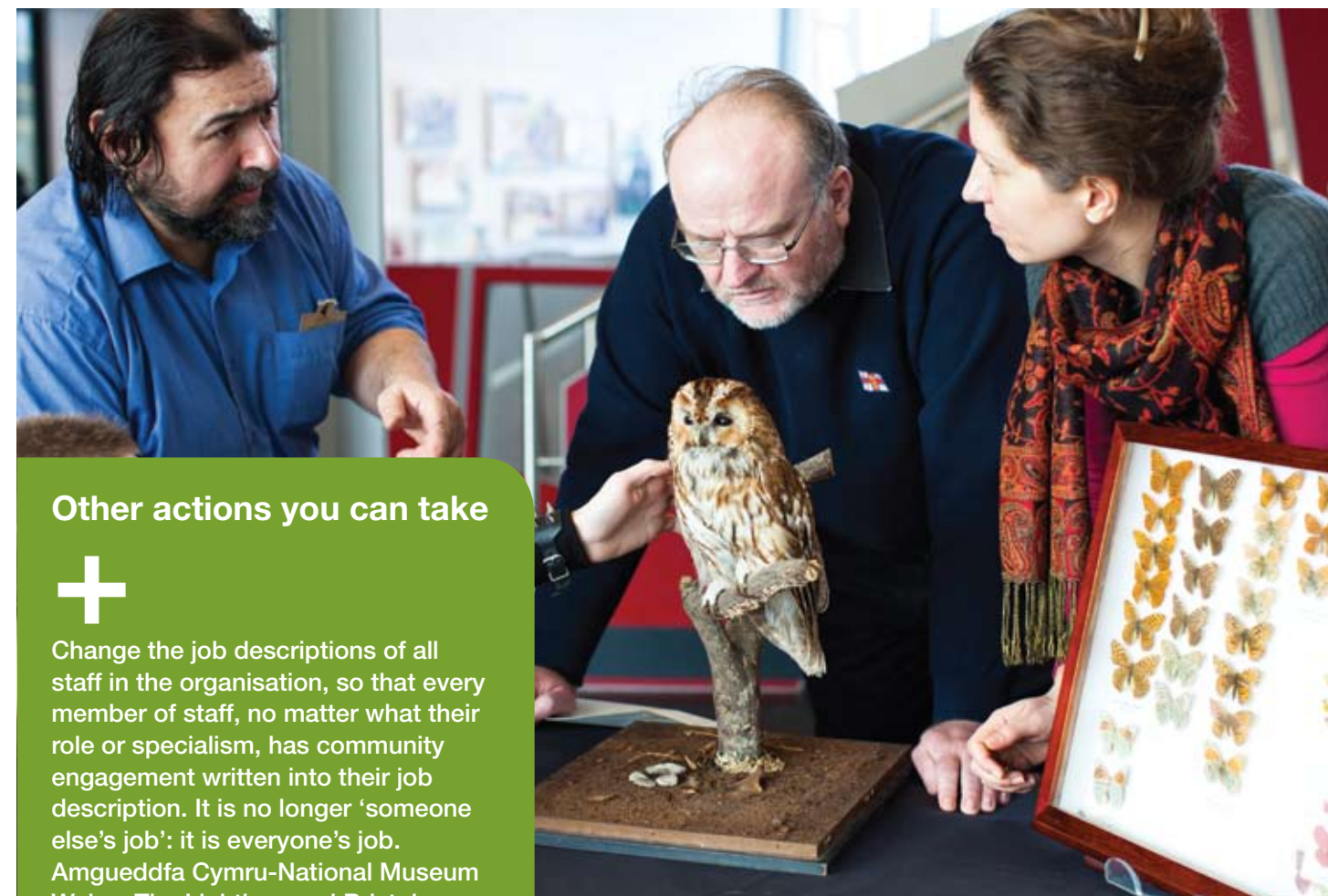
### Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales

Staff resistance to working in a participatory way is a common issue. Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales experimented with different ways of tackling this. Focusing on developing those staff who were reluctant to change was both time and labour intensive, and even with these investments some staff members were still unwilling or unable to change.

A more effective approach was to work solely with staff who had a passion or interest in working in a participatory manner. Time was spent more efficiently, as staff were not getting drawn into a barrier conversation which tends to be circular in nature and can obstruct progress. Staff who are already engaged tend to come with practical ideas and are keen to press forward. A group of positive voices creates a more fertile and supportive working environment for ideas

to flourish. Staff with a positive approach to community engagement return to their own departments enthused with the work being undertaken; this has a ripple effect on colleagues who may have been previously disengaged.

This organic process of bringing staff on board has been far more successful than a mandatory approach. It was described by one member of staff using the analogy of a river. Participatory work is like the water, carrying the positive work and impacts with it. Staff who are unwilling to change are like rocks in the river; the water can't displace them so instead flows around them. Over time, the water wears down the rock, or as the current gets stronger it can eventually move the rock.



### Other actions you can take



Change the job descriptions of all staff in the organisation, so that every member of staff, no matter what their role or specialism, has community engagement written into their job description. It is no longer 'someone else's job': it is everyone's job. Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales, The Lightbox and Bristol Culture all changed job descriptions.



Ask community partners to deliver training to museum staff on issues they have expertise in. This is an important element in acknowledging that museums do not hold a monopoly of knowledge, and that communities can be real 'partners' rather than beneficiaries. It is also a recognition that community partners have skills and experience that museums need.



Get your human resources department on board as early as possible. You will need them to develop a robust training programme that supports all staff to work in an inclusive and participatory way.



Other case studies and resources on staff professional development can be found at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/staff-development/>



# How can museums and community partners engage with one another?



Museums should work strategically to develop partnerships with communities, rather than relying on ‘the usual suspects’.



Museums should provide lots of different routes in and varied opportunities for community voices to be involved.



## Building community partnerships with third-sector agencies

### Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales

Museums benefit by actively seeking out partnerships with community partners who have the strategic remit, specialist knowledge and community networks to support them with major changes to their policies and practice.

When planning the redevelopment of St Fagans National History Museum, Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales actively engaged with over 200 organisations across Wales, involving them in the planning and decision-making process. They mapped the communities they might work with, and set up 10 participatory fora looking at different areas of work, such as volunteering, diversity and informal learning. This approach brought new expertise and perspectives into the museum.

The organisations were mostly third sector agencies, including Diverse Cymru, DrugAid Cymru, the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, and homelessness agencies. They took part in decision-making and helped plan and deliver staff training (for example, with DrugAid Cymru, training staff in supporting people with substance misuse). These agencies had their own wide community networks, and involved their clients in the museum’s programmes, in particular revolutionising and diversifying its volunteer profile.

### Other actions you can take



Map your communities: who are they, what are their needs and assets, what can you offer each other? Start slowly, build the relationship, don’t rush in.



Written terms of reference help community partners and staff to understand what is expected of them and what kind of involvement they can have in decision-making (see examples of actual agreements from Hackney Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/terms-of-reference/>).



See more on this case study at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/building-community-partnerships/>





## Providing varied routes in for community voices

### Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums wanted to ensure that anyone who engages with them knows that they can influence the organisation, and is aware of the different ways to do this.

After running a series of experiments throughout the three-year programme, they concluded that there was no one solution to bringing in community voices: they needed a range of varied approaches that took into account wider strategy, programming, and staff development. They developed six overlapping mechanisms:

- **Alternative Management Team:** a parallel management team comprising community partners, volunteers and staff, offering alternative perspectives on strategic issues and meeting regularly with the senior management team to feed back.
- **Gate Openers:** works with front-of-house staff to identify visitor needs and the changes needed to ensure a more intuitive, positive experience for visitors.
- **Open Minds:** staff, volunteers and community partners work together as participants on a research topic, sharing their experiences and knowledge and learning together. The processes developed help to trial ideas for programmes, exhibitions or events at their earliest stages.
- **On a Mission:** independent interviews with staff, to explore the ways their roles fulfil the organisation's mission: 'to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others'.
- **Communities and Collections:** engaging communities in the development and future of a gallery.
- **Conversation Space:** facilitated by an artist, a different way of staff having conversations, exploring organisational issues and proposing changes, through knowledge exchange, hot-desking mornings and creative office interventions – playful and disruptive.



Other case studies and resources on engaging with community partners can be found at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/engaging-with-communities/>

### Things to watch out for



Be clear about your starting point when you approach communities – are you starting from zero, where everything is up for discussion, or are there existing constraints, e.g. it has to be an exhibition, or a particular theme, a set schedule, fixed or no budget. Some communities prefer to be given a framework, some don't. The Lightbox has found starting from zero can produce ideas the museum would never have thought of itself.



Not all community partners will want to get involved deeply, all the way, especially in strategy and governance. It's good to provide opportunities for both deeper and less involvement.



In a large, multi-site museum, where each venue has different communities, resources and needs, how can you roll out participatory working across all venues? Pilot the work at one venue, then you can support other venues to map their local communities and identify potential community partners.

Workshops with staff in different venues/departments help develop a focus and understanding for that particular site. It is particularly powerful when one venue's community partners share their perspectives and understanding of the experience – it gives new potential partners a chance to hear a voice outside the museum which understands their reservations.



# Evaluation and evidence of change



Organisational change processes benefit from a rigorous approach to qualitative evaluation, action based on shared reflection and ongoing critical dialogue with all stakeholders.



## A clear evidence framework for mapping organisational change

All the organisations participating in *Our Museum* shared an agreed evidence framework. We commissioned an independent evaluation team to measure each organisation's journey of change against the four outcomes and their indicators of success, and to help draw out the overall learning. They first undertook a baseline evaluation, so that each organisation could be assessed against its own journey since the start of the programme and against its own goals, and not against other organisations or against objective criteria.

The team gathered many types of evidence, and involved both staff and community partners in discussions about what went well and less well, and to unearth 'emergent' or avoided issues, recording new developments and achievements and identifying areas which required attention. Importantly, they gave ongoing feedback to the organisations, which was integrated into their change programmes.

### Things to watch out for



Many evaluations are undertaken internally by museums and galleries themselves, and there is a temptation to 'spin' the information for funding, advocacy and PR purposes. The advantages of independent evaluators are that they bring an external perspective, raise concerns, ask questions, ensure every voice is heard, and give constructive critique. All of these are a huge benefit to a change process, and far outweigh any advantages of 'spin'.



For more on this case study, and for a copy of the *Our Museum* evaluation framework, see <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/evaluation-for-change/>



## The importance of shared reflection

Reflection is important as a tool for change, and it needs to be built into everyday working practices.

All the *Our Museum* organisations experimented with different ways of including reflection as a normal way of working – reflecting, internally and with community partners, on what had gone well, what could have gone better, and what to do differently.

Some organisations scheduled reflection days for all the staff. The most successful approaches integrated reflection into regular meeting agendas, providing space to reflect and evaluate together, challenge working practices and help with problem-solving. Some meetings moved away from a traditional structure: instead, they encouraged a more participatory approach by including practical mini-workshops, open space and group discussions.



For more on reflective practice, see <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/reflective-practice/>



## Other actions you can take



Use evaluation to help your change process. It is not useful for an evaluation just to be written up at the end, put on a shelf and completely forgotten about. It is important that it is formative – that it informs the process – so people have the chance to change things as they go along.



Glasgow Museums asked its Staff Ambassadors (see page 25) to keep journals of their experiences of learning about community participation. These have proved an invaluable tool in understanding the difficulties staff can face when applying lessons learned in the everyday working environment.



Other case studies and resources on evaluation and evidence of change can be found at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/evaluation-external-voice/>



# The external voice



Museums and galleries should involve people from outside their own organisation in open and honest conversations about the process of change underway in their institutions. This brings fresh and independent perspectives to bear, encourages reflection, and helps ensure that difficult issues are addressed and not avoided.



## Community partners as an external voice: aiding reflection

Early in the *Our Museum* programme, we thought community partners might make effective critical friends. In practice, we learned that community partners can best help an organisation by helping it to reflect actively and regularly, on what has gone well and not so well, on the next steps, and on their relationship.

This is quite a different role to that of a critical friend, who is more of an objective facilitator. The closer the relationship between an organisation and its community partners, the less able a community partner is to be objective and critical – essentially, they become part of the team; but they continue to have a different external perspective which can aid in reflection and bring new thinking, support and problem-solving to a process of organisational change.

Staff and community partners at Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales include reflection as the final agenda item at their meetings, to ensure they reflect regularly together on the meeting and the wider programme. Community partners are also part of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums' Alternative Management Team, which offers a different perspective on strategic issues to the senior management team.

## Things to watch out for



Peers from other museums and galleries are an obvious source of an external voice, but generally do not make effective critical friends. Mostly, the relationship is about mentoring, the sharing of experience, knowledge, information and learning, or acting as a sounding board. Feedback from peers is most effectively done in a structured way, but for it to work you need to build trust beforehand with a small, safe group which encourages openness.



External voices are a good way of influencing a governing body, which likes to hear external perspectives about the work of its organisation.



Artists are external voices who bring fresh and creative perspectives to how an organisation functions. But an artist intervention does not appeal to all members of staff: some find it an irrelevant distraction and can respond negatively.



Museums can act as external voices for community partners too. Third sector agencies partnering with Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales took different perspectives back to their organisations which impacted on their own ways of working.



## Critical friends

Most of the *Our Museum* organisations worked with a critical friend during their change programmes.

A critical friend is a trusted person outside the museum who takes the time to fully understand the context of the work and the outcomes that the organisation wants to achieve, asks provocative questions, provides additional data, evidence or lessons from elsewhere that give a fresh perspective, and offers a critique of work.

It is a relationship of trust, but an ability to ask the difficult question, or bring the question into the open that perhaps others are avoiding. It is a balance between being positive and constructive, and teasing out the real challenges an organisation is facing. It is about listening to what is said, and what is not said, and being alert to the significance of the body language of the participants, which can be more revealing than words. Crucially, it is about ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and given value, and that no-one dominates a conversation or tries to shut it down.



See more on critical friends at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/critical-friends/>

## Other actions you can take



Think about your needs as an organisation and choose the most effective external voice to meet those needs. The external voice can come from several sources. In the *Our Museum* programme, these included peers, critical friends, funders, evaluators, community partners, and artists. Each of these offers something specific. Below is a table which summarises the roles of different external voices, based on the experiences of the *Our Museum* organisations:



Other case studies and resources on the external voice can be found at <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/evaluation-external-voice/external-voice/>

|                                  | Critical friend | Peers | Community partners | Artists | Funders | Evaluators |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------|--------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| Teasing out challenges           | ✓               | ✗     | ~                  | ✗       | ~       | ~          |
| Mentoring                        | ✗               | ✓     | ~                  | ✗       | ✗       | ✗          |
| Sharing experiences and learning | ✗               | ✓     | ~                  | ✗       | ✗       | ✗          |
| Feedback                         | ✓               | ✓     | ✓                  | ✗       | ✓       | ~          |
| Reflection                       | ✓               | ~     | ✓                  | ~       | ✗       | ~          |
| Fresh perspectives               | ✓               | ✗     | ~                  | ✓       | ✗       | ~          |

### Key:

- ✓ Yes: this external voice is very suitable for this role
- ~ In some cases, this external voice might be suitable, but check that the understanding and skills are appropriate
- ✗ No: in most cases, this external voice is not suitable for this role



# What could have gone better?

The challenges of embedding participation



Not surprisingly, most of the barriers to participation that we identified at the beginning of the *Our Museum* programme (see page 8) continued, in some way, to affect the work in individual organisations, and some remain to be addressed as the change journeys continue beyond the funded programme.





## Diversity of community partners and sharing of authority

A characteristic of the *Our Museum* programme was that museums and community partners were expected to manage the change programme jointly. In some cases this worked very well. In others, throughout the programme there was a lack of diversity in the community partners, so that the group was not representative of the diversity of the area; or the museum/gallery never succeeded in developing an effective joint team to manage the programme and make decisions.

Analysing the reasons behind this, it seems that it is easier for some museums and galleries to develop mechanisms for co-production around programming of exhibitions and events – as these are little more than an extension of consultation processes which they are mostly familiar with; but it is harder for them to develop mechanisms for truly sharing authority and long-term strategic decision-making. In some cases, strategic decisions are made at a level ‘above’ the museum, at which community partners can have little involvement and impact. This is an issue particularly for local authority museums and museums that are part of larger parent bodies (though see case study on page 30 of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, a large local authority service, who have experimented with involving community partners in strategic decision-making).

## The tension between income generation and participation

One of the original aims was for participatory work to become core, embedded, sustainable and less at risk of being marginalised when specific funding streams ran out. The picture across the *Our Museum* cohort was varied. We continued to hear that finance departments were not supportive of this work, as it did not generate income – and so there still appears to be some expectation that community engagement requires separate funding, or it is at risk. One approach, taken by Hackney Museum and The Lightbox, has been for the museum or gallery and community partners to develop proposals together and fundraise for them jointly.

Nevertheless, some of the organisations have made changes by financially underpinning participatory work from earned income or core budgets. There was a recognition that different audiences or events generate different levels of income. In cases where participatory work generates less income or even makes a loss, its cost can be covered by other activities. This so-called ‘Robin Hood’ strategy pays for high priority ‘poorer’ activities by using income from the ‘richer’ activities. However, we have yet to see this approach embedded into a clear business model with participation firmly at the centre.



## Keeping community partners interested and involved

Community partners get involved with museums for different reasons. They have varied interests, priorities and capacity. Some of the *Our Museum* organisations found that initial enthusiasm waned, and fewer people maintained their interest and attendance at meetings or responded to information. Despite museums’ interest in involving community partners at a leadership, governance and strategic level, very often the partners are interested in project work which directly matches their own interests and activities. There are still lessons to be learned about how to keep them involved. It is important to constantly revisit and review community partner membership. The introduction of new people changes the make-up and focus, and ensures that discussions are not stagnant, and that the space is still used to challenge and evaluate the work. The challenge is to find a balance between fluidity and sustainability in the group.

## Impact of restructures and staff changes

The *Our Museum* programme overlapped with a period of financial austerity. Most of the organisations were subject to restructures, redundancies and staff changes. This resulted in reduced staff capacity, lack of continuity and of transferring learning about the programme, and in some cases poor understanding of what the organisation had previously committed to. The challenge remains how to pass on institutional learning about a participatory way of working, and keep the relationships with community partners going, in the face of such a lack of staff continuity. Hackney Museum, a local authority service, maintained momentum through a series of council restructures because of the support of senior managers and elected members, which was crucial.

## The ‘real work’ of the museum

Convincing all staff of the importance of working with communities remains an ongoing process. This is normal in any organisational change: not everyone is persuaded of the need for change at the same time. Some staff still see participatory work as secondary to the ‘real work’ of the museum; and some are defensive rather than supportive, worried that professional issues could be de-prioritised. It is a major cultural change to shift the notion of this work away from consultation to one of strategic partnership and co-production with communities. There has been undeniable progress, and there are mechanisms in place to address this, but for many of the *Our Museum* organisations there is still a long way to go to get full staff buy-in.



# Longer-term impact

The museums and galleries that took part in the *Our Museum* programme have all changed substantially as a result of their experiences, and all are much more participatory than they were at the start. Together, they have learned how to address all the barriers that prevent participation from being embedded.

That is not to say that they have all succeeded in completely removing every one of those barriers within their organisations. That will take more time and effort, and their change journeys continue. Paul Hamlyn Foundation recognises that we need to allow more time before we can judge the full impact of the *Our Museum* programme and its collective learning on those organisations. The Foundation will therefore undertake and

publish a further longitudinal evaluation in early 2018, two years after the programme finished, to assess the longer-term impact on each individual organisation and on the wider UK museum sector.

As part of its focus on arts access and participation, PHF is committed to continue to fund museums and galleries wanting to effect change (see <http://www.phf.org.uk/our-work-in-the-uk/arts-access-participation/>).

We end this publication with a joint statement of intent from the participating organisations. Together, they produced this 'advocacy statement', which affirms their commitment to participatory work and the changes that it entails.



## Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners

### What We Believe In

Seven museums and galleries across the United Kingdom have been working with Paul Hamlyn Foundation on a process of change to ensure that community engagement is firmly at the heart of our organisations. Arising out of the work we have been doing, together we wish to state our belief that:

- **Community participation** in our work is vital
- We must be **responsive to our communities** rather than imposing our own agendas
- Community partners should be encouraged to be **active collaborators**, not passive recipients of our offerings
- Community engagement is **not an extra** – it has to be at the heart of what we do, as this gives life to the museum or gallery
- *Our Museum* is **not project work** – it is a process of ongoing engagement, learning and change; and
- Community engagement is not only in one department, and not only for the duration of any one piece of work, but needs to be **embedded** in the whole organisation.

national  
museum  
wales  
amgueddfa  
cymru

**BX**  
BELFAST  
EXPOSED

Bristol  
Museums  
Galleries  
Archives

Glasgow  
museums

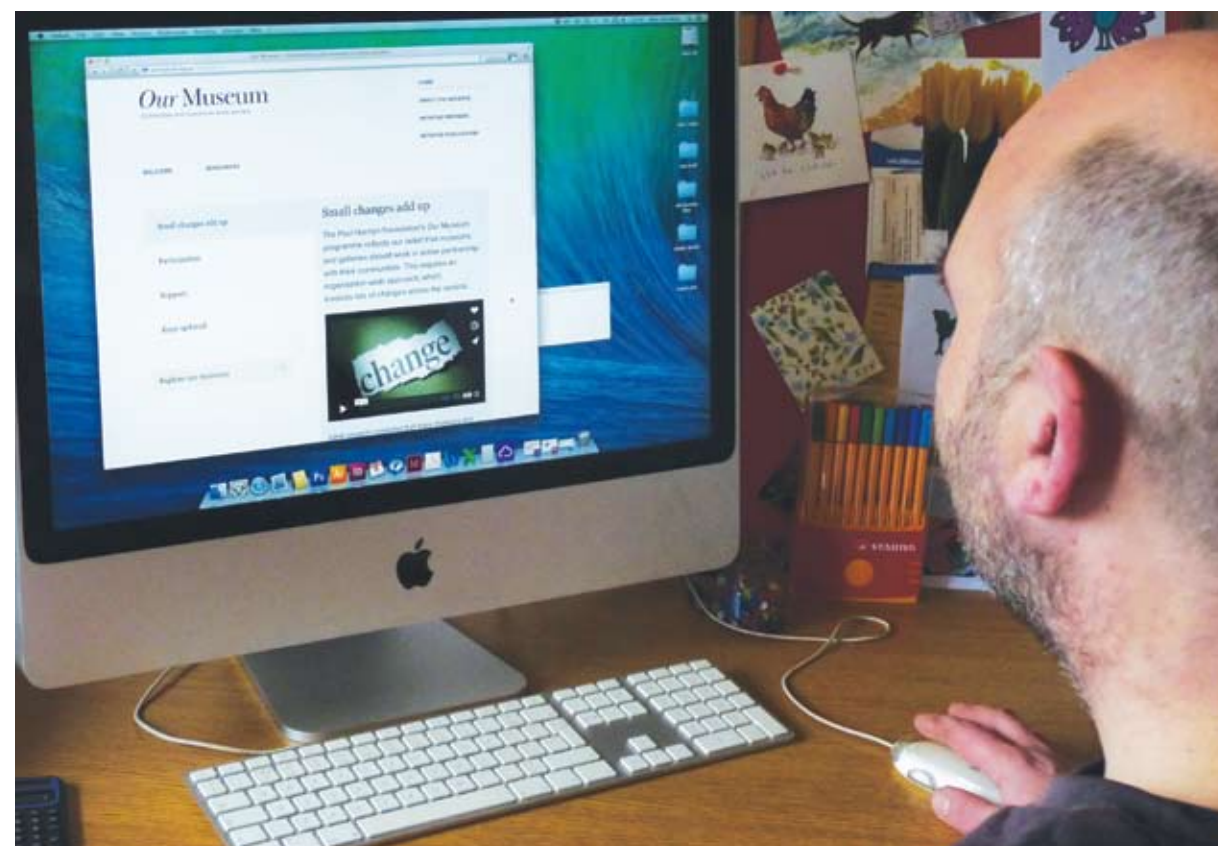
**Hackney  
Museum**  
The world on your doorstep

The  
Lightbox

TYNE & WEAR  
archives &  
museums



## Other resources to help you



The lessons and case studies in this publication are only a small part of the resources that the *Our Museum* programme has produced for the museum sector and its communities. Throughout, we have included links to specific resources on the *Our Museum* website:



[ourmuseum.org.uk](http://ourmuseum.org.uk)

More than 100 resources – films, animations and written documents – share the learning and experiences of the *Our Museum* organisations, and others inside and outside the museum sector, on how to embed participation through a process of organisational change. They are a sort of 'travel survival kit', a guide to help other museums and galleries, and community partners, on their change journeys to become more participatory and build active partnerships with their communities.

On the website you will also find other reports published by PHF as part of the programme, from Dr Bernadette Lynch's 'Cake' report to the final report by the evaluators, which provides the context and evidential base for the learning described here.

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# Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn was an entrepreneurial publisher and philanthropist, committed to offering new opportunities for less fortunate members of society. In 1987 he established the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to enable individuals, particularly young people, to experience a better quality of life. Our enduring values draw on his belief in a fairer society in which people can realise their potential. Social justice is the golden thread that links all our work and we firmly believe in the importance of everybody having access to the arts.

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