

A review of 'Ways of Working' in Our Museum : a note from PHF

PHF commissioned this short piece of work in Autumn last year, as Our Museum was drawing to a close. We wanted to find out more about the perspectives of those involved in the initiative. In their experience, what had worked more or less effectively in the structure of roles, relationships and responsibilities? As experience is one of the best teachers, we wanted to reflect on the range of experience and its implications for future work in different contexts.

It has proved to be a useful and illuminating exercise and we are very grateful to the 55 people who gave their time and shared their reflections.

I was particularly struck by the existence of multiple perspectives on a shared situation. PHF now has the opportunity to examine the implications of this divergent understanding of what happened during the programme. The implications seem to be particularly pertinent for PHF in three parts of our current strategy:

- Reaching and maintaining a shared understanding of a shared endeavour is surprisingly difficult, even for those with extensive experience in managing complex programmes. It requires continuing effort and attention. The challenge is made greater by a high level of staff turnover, as was the case in Our Museum participants and amongst many of PHF's grantees.
- There are particular challenges in communicating and understanding the purpose of non-project funding. This is particularly relevant to the Youth Fund, Growth Fund and Teacher Development Fund. We support work in sectors that are dominated by a tradition and expectation of project funding, rather than core funding. Many participants in Our Museum said they were slow to grasp the nature of organisational change involved and that a project approach would not achieve it.
- As PHF does more to bring grantees together to share knowledge and learning, we are increasingly aware of the time and careful processes required to facilitate effective peer learning and support. Our Museum offers the perspectives of different participants on this part of the programme and the factors that helped, over time, to build the relationships of trust that are needed for an open approach to sharing experience.

The summary report suggests 10 points for PHF to consider in the future and five points for organisations considering joining a programme. These are based both on what people felt worked well in Our Museum and what might be approached differently in the future.

Jane Steele

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