

## Change and staff turnover

In an economic climate of financial austerity, the cultural sector faces continuing restructures, redundancies and staff changes. The Our Museum programme was interested in how an organisation can remain committed to a change journey that puts community engagement at the heart of its business, amid the constant disruption of key members of staff leaving or changing.

### Impact of change

Restructures and staff changes can lead to a number of issues including:

- reduced staff capacity
- lack of continuity with partners and current commitments
- lack of continuity with funding bodies and current commitments
- gaps in institutional learning

The challenge is making sure the institution as a whole learns about participatory practice. It is essential that there are good internal communications on current commitments to community partners and funders, and that institutional (rather than personal) relationships are maintained with community partners.

### Tips

As you go through an organisational change process to better community engagement, the change and learning need to be embedded in the institutional memory and not simply reside in key individuals. We have found certain techniques particularly helpful (but this is not an exhaustive list - you may be able to add more that are relevant to your organisation):

1. **Written agreements.** Either service level agreements or terms of reference with community partners. These need to be active documents. A mechanism for making them transparent to all staff, and given to new staff, is equally important as having them in the first place, e.g. <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/terms-of-reference/>
2. **Senior staff and trustees** attending community partner meetings. The level of this engagement will vary depending on the initiative, but senior, active commitment is vital to continuity in times of change. 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. Leaders can get more information about how to give active support here: <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/leading-participatory-community-engagement/>

3. **Trustee/governing board's** awareness and engagement (which is even more crucial when a director leaves), e.g. <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/trustee-involvement/>
4. **Wider staff buy-in.** Remember that, even with wider staff buy-in, when a new director arrives, many work streams stop in order to see which way the director will take the business.
5. **Staff collectively working in collaborative ways,** and continuing with community engagement, can set the scene for a new director, and trustees, governing boards and mission statements are, of course, central. We have multiple resources on wider staff-buy in here: <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/resources/staff-professional-development/staff-buy-in/>

## CHANGE OF DIRECTORS

A change of directors is also common. Some of the models below have been learned during the Our Museum programme, and others are taken from discussion, experience or observation of the sector.

### Outgoing Directors

#### Problems

Directors keep a tight grip on overseeing the participatory process or change process. There is a lack of delegation and staff buy-in.



When they leave, no-one knows what is happening, or what the organisation is committed to. All impetus is lost.



Some directors leave just before a financial crisis occurs that threatens sustainability.

#### Possible solutions

Local authority leaders /councillors, trustees and champions ideally get engaged in the change in the first place. Also, ensuring that recruitment of the new director emphasises the skills required and the direction of travel.

Outgoing directors should involve all staff in the process. A change process only owned by the director is not a change process at all. See <http://ourmuseum.org.uk/why-change-fails/>

Often the best way of dealing with this is for the governing body to appoint an interim director with a remit to institute a comprehensive business review of the organisation. In this situation, governance structures also need addressing. Even under these circumstances, conversations about why the organisation exists and what the priorities are can still promote a strong theme of participatory community engagement.

## Interim Directors

### Problems

Interim directors are often chosen specifically to 'hold the fort' and not bring in any more change.



### Possible solutions

Local authority leaders /councillors, trustees and champions have all the responsibility here: if they are committed to a process of change, then they need to see it through with an interim or new director, rather than play safe or become risk averse.

They are often (though not always) internally appointed, as a 'safe pair of hands'. As such they, don't always have the remit for change or the time to implement it.



The interim director themselves can still 'hold the fort' whilst being a champion. Simply bringing up participatory community engagement in meetings and presentations and keeping it on the agenda is 'holding the fort'. Letting it fall from the agenda is an action. Local councillors should ideally provide a specific brief too.

Interim directors can be in post for too short a time to get to grips with what has been happening, and what needs to happen next.



Managers can support an interim director who does not have the skills and experience in participatory community engagement, though progress may be slow.

Some interim directors don't have the skills or experience, or strategic vision, to understand the change needed. Or they are not interested in it.



Local authority leaders /councillors or trustees to identify interim director's skills and interest to lead change towards participatory community engagement before employing them permanently to the post.

Of course, sometimes interim directors DO have the skills; if they are eventually recruited they are perfectly good at leading change, once they are allowed to get on with it.



In these cases, trustees/local authority leaders and senior managers have a role in ensuring that the single, big specific task the interim director is focussing on has participatory community engagement at its core.

Some interim directors are brought in for a specific change or to get the organisation through a major funding bid. In these cases, the interim director can be quite experienced but not interested in staying longer than it takes to implement that particular task.



An interim director can be effective at kick-starting a change process or bringing in the first steps of change needed to become a participatory organisation.

## New Directors

### Problems

New director finds that the organisation is not ready for change to embed participation. Basic functions like finance and staffing need addressing.



### Possible solutions

The trustees' or local authority leaders' role is to ensure the new director fully understands where the organisation is and be realistic about what can be achieved in the short term.

Again, even when addressing basic functions, the principles of the organisation and the medium and longer term ambitions can be promoted by the new director.

New directors (and interim directors) don't always get the information they need to understand what an organisation is committed to, who is involved, and what the expectations from funders are. They don't know where to find the information.



Staff are fully involved in the change process and can support the new director