



Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* Special Initiative

The *OUR MUSEUM* organisations
A summary of the journeys

Hackney Museum

Introduction

Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners was a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, established in 2012 and finishing in early 2016. The overall aim was to influence the museum and gallery sector to:

- Place community needs, values and active collaboration at the core of museum and gallery work
- Involve communities and individuals in decision-making processes
- Ensure that museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills and the skills of staff in working with communities

This was to be done through facilitation of organisational change in specific museums and galleries already committed to active partnership with communities. *Our Museum* offered a collaborative learning process through which institutions and communities shared experiences and learned from each other as critical friends.

In early 2012 nine museums and galleries were selected to join *Our Museum* from participants in an earlier consultation and research period.¹ The organisations reflected key differences in the wider sector in scale, character and location. Their different starting-points, different challenges and priorities and the different kinds of resources at their disposal, were recognised by the Foundation. The organisations selected were: Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales; Belfast Exposed; Bristol Culture; Glasgow Museums; Hackney Museum; Museum of East Anglian Life; The Lightbox; Ryedale Folk Museum; Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.²

Each organisation responded to the *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success framework and identified 'strategic change objectives' it anticipated would be the focus of its work during the programme. They also identified the members of their *Our Museum* 'engagement team': five people from the museum/gallery, ideally including the chief officer, and five people from community partners to work together collaboratively. The museums and galleries participating in *Our Museum* experimented with a wide range of approaches to achieving their strategic change objectives and create organisational change.

This document assesses the progress of Hackney Museum and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change. It is a supplement to the main evaluation report by Gerri Moriarty and Sally Medlyn:

Museums Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.

¹ The research was published as: Lynch, B. 2011. *Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

² The Museum of East Anglian Life and Ryedale Folk Museum were funded for two of the three years of the programme. After they left the *Our Museum* programme the Foundation supported them with organisational review and business planning.

The four *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success

Outcome 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

Outcome 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

Outcome 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

Outcome 4 Reflection

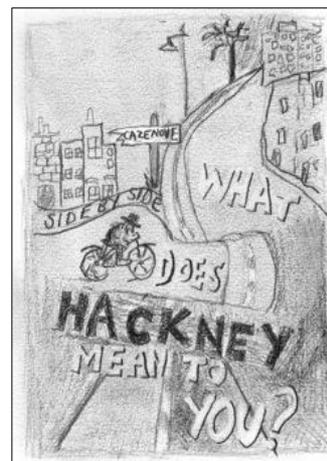
Museums and galleries embed reflective practice into their work: internally, with community partners and across the sector, to ensure on-going reflection, dialogue and openness to challenge, alternative values and working methods

Indicators of Success for each outcome set out key assumptions about organisations committed to active partnership with communities: core values; kinds of leadership; ways of working; the nature and purpose of partnerships which might help inform policy and support delivery; how community and staff capacity building might help to deliver all outcomes; what good practice in this area might look like; and the critical role of reflection and dialogue in the work.³

³ The Outcomes and Indicators of Success are set out in full on page 28 of the main report

Hackney Museum

This summary assesses the progress of Hackney Museum and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change against the four *Our Museum* outcomes; Rooted in Local Needs, Community Agency, Capability and Reflection. It has been written by the *Our Museum* evaluators Sally Medlyn and Gerri Moriarty and is a supplement to the main evaluation report which contains further details of the outcomes framework: *Museums Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.



Hackney Museum is located on one site in the heart of the London Borough of Hackney. Staffing and property costs are met by the local authority, which also provides a small operating budget. This is augmented by extra grant income from a range of charitable sources. During the period of the *Our Museum* programme, a significant restructure took place, resulting in reduced staff capacity.

Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs: Co-commissioning and co-creation

This museum positions itself as a 'community' museum; the focus of its collecting and throughout its displays and projects is on the relevance of the past to the lives and futures of people living in Hackney now. In Years 1 and 2 of the *Our Museum* programme, it decided to experiment with finding new ways of working that responded to the significant diversity of Hackney's residents by co-producing an exhibition with community partners who lived or worked in the Cazenove ward of the borough.

Its *Our Museum* engagement team of staff and community partners developed a co-commissioning process so that local groups and individuals could bid for funding for small-scale projects on the theme of 'What community means?' Successful bids included: Stoke Newington Common Users Group (SNUG)'s 'Knit the Common', project to create 'a novel, interesting, fun, visual textile representation of the Common – created by knitting, crochet, appliqué and any other appropriate textile method'; a proposal from North London Muslim Community Centre for a short film by young people; and a proposal from Campbell Works, an artistic practice based in Cazenove, for a cinematic art installation in the front windows of houses and business premises, based on the history of the street. These projects were brought together at the museum in an exhibition *Side by Side: Living in Cazenove* - a reference to the many different communities living together in a very small area - in January 2014. Over 6,000 people visited the exhibition, including many Hackney

residents who had never visited the museum before. It was accompanied by a programme of events and workshops in the local community, attended by an estimated 1,350 people.

In Year 3, it explored another model of working with community partners, described as 'participatory co-creation', to create an exhibition entitled *Hackney@50* and subtitled *The People's Choice*. Developing the *Hackney@50* exhibition involved posing a question to participants: 'What does Hackney mean to you?' People in the borough were invited to connect with the museum's collections and provide their personal stories. This created a diverse and alternative narrative to the exhibition and allowed display of sensitive stories in a wider context. Museum staff regard this 'place-based' approach, as a more useful starting-point than earlier experiments in directly investigating the nature of community in a contemporary context as some people found this idea quite abstract.

As the *Our Museum* programme ends, the connection between Hackney Museum's activities and the London Borough of Hackney's strategic purposes is becoming more clearly articulated. The Heritage Service, of which the museum is a part, is in the process of developing a social outcomes framework. This will relate the museum's work to local needs and be embedded in staff work plans.

Outcome 2 Community Agency: Shared objectives and clarity of purpose

Community engagement has been at the heart of Hackney Museum's work since it was founded in the 1980s, it has strong working relationships with a wide range of community partners and local residents and a range of mechanisms for consulting them. The *Our Museum* baseline assessment noted however, that it was difficult to understand how community involvement influenced the museum's decision-making processes.

Hackney Museum established an *Our Museum* community engagement team. However in Year 1 it was not always clear to community partners what the objectives of the initiative were or what the museum expected from them. Their initial perceptions were that they were taking part in a project, rather than supporting a programme of organisational change. This resulted in many more meetings than some community partners felt able to attend; numbers dwindled as a result.

Staff and community partners began working together on a written Community Partnership Agreement and Terms of Reference for the engagement team. This acknowledged a joint intent: '*to provide a sustainable mechanism for communication, decision making and partnership working*' and set out parameters for joint decision-making including recognition that: '*there may be circumstances when a final decision will be taken by Council officers*'. Benefits of working together became more

apparent, with staff and senior managers noting that they had developed contacts with a wide variety of community groups and individuals, some for the first time; that community partners had links to networks and organisations in other parts of Hackney and across London which were beneficial to the museum; that new objects were accessioned to the museum's collection through community partners; and that three community arts/gallery spaces were possible venues for outreach exhibitions. Some community partners began working together independently of the museum, as they also benefitted from increased access to networks and contacts.

The process of co-commissioning community partners to deliver projects for *Side by Side: Living in Cazenove* was difficult. It was initially not clear exactly what the criteria were, what budget was available and how decisions on the projects to be funded were to be made. Community partners felt the bureaucracy that comes with fair procurement was unnecessarily cumbersome and slow. Further uncertainty was caused by delay in confirmation by PHF of the Year 2 budget, related to Year 1's conditions of grant. The co-commissioning process also surfaced important questions for museum practice: to what extent should the museum agree 'briefs' with community partners as it would with guest curators, so that expectations are clear to all? How to ensure clarity about how, when and who might edit work? How to present exhibitions in ways that 'work' well for people visiting the show in the museum as well as those involved in the process? How to ensure such a brief is not overly prescriptive?

The museum wanted to widen its community partner network in Year 3, both to mitigate the dangers of a closed system and to draw in individuals and organisations with additional specialist skills and different interests from across the borough. Community partners - both those who had participated in its *Our Museum* programme and members of this widened community partner network - were invited to review the museum's permanent galleries to help it better understand how they could be used more effectively to meet the needs of different users. The museum saw this process as providing a new framework for a future redisplay, in interpretation and in the collections.

Hackney Museum believes it attracts community partners who are primarily interested in: '*activity, engagement and public outputs rather than governance, strategic direction, budgetary responsibility or developing frameworks*' due to its nature, reputation and size. It now invites community partners to develop and identify shared objectives with the museum to help achieve positive outcomes for participants and wider audiences. It balances this with audience development and collections-led approaches. For community partners, the important issue may be clarity, rather than use of a specific document. One community partner described

their *Our Museum* experience: *'The metaphor of 'fog' is good to describe how the programme felt at the beginning. Going into a fog is quite scary. Going into a nice bright, clear room with walls is much better – people know then what it is and how to engage.'*

Whilst it is clear how the museum intends to collaborate with individual organisations and with groups of organisations which share interests or purposes (such as disability organisations) it continues to develop a light touch mechanism which enables different community partners to work together to contribute to and influence its work. *Our Museum* community partners considered this to be important.

Outcome 3 Capability Building: Cross-departmental working, staff development, working with volunteers

Hackney Museum identified three priorities for organisational capability building. It aspired to work across departments in the local authority, contribute its expertise in community engagement to work on the broader wellbeing agenda and develop more systematic approaches to staff development and working with volunteers.

In Year 1, museum staff facilitated discussions with colleagues within the local authority, intended in part to identify the long-term potential for inter-departmental working. Progress on this was delayed because of the local authority's restructure and is now re-emerging, with the museum developing and delivering Continuing Professional Development for London Borough of Hackney staff as part of the Human Resources/Organisational Development Department's refreshed induction programme. The *Our Museum* coordinator also developed a Year 1 training programme designed to help equip staff and community partners to work together. This focused on conflict mapping, action learning inquiry, inter-cultural narrative and reminiscence work. Feedback suggested that:

- Although individual activities were well delivered and seen as valuable, an overall sense of purpose was missing
- There were missed opportunities to benefit from the skills of community partners and local community organisations.
- A short induction course to help community partners understand more about what the museum does and how it works and staff to understand more about the work of community partners would have been helpful

The Job Descriptions of all staff have been changed as part of the restructure, so that community engagement and volunteer supervision are part of the roles of all staff and staff development plans are used to identify and invest in skills *'to support active participation.'* There is a Volunteer Handbook with clear role descriptions, robust recruitment, induction and training processes, identification of development

outcomes and feedback so that the museum can better understand what volunteers expect from it. A budget line has been created to support volunteering through core revenue rather than on a project-by-project basis and on specific projects, community partners provide peer-to-peer training for museum staff to help develop their skills and audience knowledge to support deeper community engagement.

Outcome 4 Reflection: Evidence based Case Study Template

Hackney Museum staff understood joint reflection as a way of improving practice and strengthening organisational memory. However they found making time for joint reflection was a major challenge in a small organisation with many targets to meet. At the beginning of the *Our Museum* programme, there were few structured opportunities for museum staff and community partners to reflect together.

The design of the programme led to opportunities for regular joint reflection; these happened at the annual evaluation visits, at the peer reviews, in preparation for self-assessment reports and in the development of work plans. Museum staff were often highly appreciative of the time afforded for reflection through the programme: '*We have had much more time than usual to reflect – much needed and welcome when we normally 'stagger' from one project to the next*'. A more stable and supportive management structure and the focus of the *Our Museum* coordinator in Year 2 facilitated this process.

In Year 3, the museum used *Our Museum* funding to develop a reflective process focused on completion of an Evidence Based Case Study Template. Staff and community partners helped develop the template, which encouraged them to work together to plan, collect evidence of impact and identify lessons learned. This has been viewed positively by non-*Our Museum* community partners, who are keen to use the data captured for their own purposes.

The level of joint reflection required throughout the *Our Museum* programme was demanding for both community partners and museum staff. It may be too resource heavy to be replicated to the same extent in the longer-term. However the museum recognises the vital need to continue to encourage opportunities for joint reflection.

