

Our Museum Influence

Summary Report November 2018



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THE OUR MUSEUM PROGRAMME

Our Museum worked with nine museums and galleries to support organisational change and embed participatory practice.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation's (PHF) Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners programme aimed to **facilitate a process of organisational change** within museums and galleries committed to active partnership with their communities. To achieve this the programme supported nine institutions across the UK to embed participatory practice. Between April 2012 and March 2016 the programme supported: Hackney Museum; Bristol Culture; The Lightbox, Woking; National Museum Wales; Belfast Exposed; Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums; and Glasgow Museums. Ryedale Folk Museum took part between January 2012 and June 2014 and Museum of East Anglian Life between January 2012 and February 2015.

The programme set out to learn and showcase what worked well and less well in embedding participatory practice. The programme also had an aim to **influence the sector more widely**, beyond those individual museums and galleries that directly participated in the programme.

Our Museum **programme outputs available online** included the reports and resources below:

- No Longer Us and Them: How to change into a participatory museum and gallery (2016)¹
- Our Museum Special Initiative: An Evaluation (2016)²
- Review of ways of working in Our Museum (2016)³
- A library of online resources⁴, including over 200 animations, films and written documents which gather learning from the Our Museum programme and beyond.

RESEARCH AIMS

In March 2018, ERS was commissioned by PHF to carry out research to assess the wider influence of Our Museum and its outputs across the UK museums and galleries sector.

There were 14 specific research questions, each fitting into one of the three overarching themes below:

- **Engagement Mechanisms:** What worked well and less well in engaging the wider sector with Our Museum's outputs and learning?
- **Participatory Practice:** What change can be detected in the sector as a result of Our Museum?
- **Lessons Learned:** What can Our Museum teach us about how to carry out an effective influencing strategy to inform future programmes?

This study ran alongside a follow-up review of the Our Museum participant organisations conducted by Dr Piotr Bienkowski⁵. ERS' study therefore does not aim to assess the effectiveness or legacy of Our Museum programme activities upon the cohort of nine participant institutions.

¹ phf.org.uk/publications/no-longer-us-change-participatory-museum-gallery-learning-museum-programme (Accessed 10/09/18)

² ourmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Our-Museum-Final-Evaluation_full.pdf (Accessed 10/09/18)

³ phf.org.uk/publications/review-of-ways-of-working-in-our-museum (Accessed 10/09/18)

⁴ ourmuseum.org.uk/?welcome=1#cat1 (Accessed 10/09/18)

⁵ phf.org.uk/our-museum-what-happened-next

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methods included a sector e-survey and telephone interviews to find out more about levels of awareness and engagement with Our Museum.

ERS' research was carried out between March and July 2018 and consisted of:

- **Our Museum Programme Team Consultation:** PHF staff and Our Museum's Project Director;
- **A Museum and Gallery Sector E-survey:** the online survey targeted those working in a museum or gallery in the UK, in any role. The survey received 493 responses, after data cleansing. Individual questions received different numbers of responses due to survey routing or because a respondent chose not to answer a particular question. Individual question responses ranged from 55 to 470. The survey was advertised via multiple sources. The response rate was good and the profile of respondents reflected a range of characteristics such as geography, organisation type and job role to provide a valid overview of the sector. However, as the sample was self-selecting (i.e. respondents were motivated to click on a survey link related to community participation) it cannot be regarded as fully and statistically representative of the sector.
- **47 Telephone Interviews:**
 - **Our Museum Steering Group Consultations** (eight): these focused on understanding the original influencing strategy and aims of the programme;
 - **Sector Stakeholder Interviews** (17): a 'blindfolded' method was carried out whereby Our Museum was not mentioned when scheduling the call or during initial questions⁶. Stakeholders included representatives from: arts funders; museum and gallery sector membership bodies and networks; and government department representatives;
 - **E-survey Follow-up Interviews with those *aware* of Our Museum:** a sample of (14) e-survey respondents who noted they were aware of Our Museum;
 - **E-survey Follow-up Interviews with those *not aware* of Our Museum:** a sample of (eight) e-survey respondents who noted they were not aware of Our Museum.

Further information regarding the methodology is available upon request (bristol@ers.org.uk).

OUR MUSEUM'S INFLUENCING STRATEGY

Our Museum adopted a resource efficient approach of 'influencing the influencers' in an attempt to initiate change across the museum and gallery sector.

The **influencing strategy** of Our Museum was that of 'influencing the influencers', whereby activities were focused on the leadership of museums and galleries in the UK, strategic museum sector bodies and third sector agencies. This approach was chosen as a way to **use limited resources effectively**.

Specific influencing **activities at a programme-level**, conducted between 2014 and 2018, included:

- **Workshops** with specific sector bodies such as the Arts Council England between December 2014 and January 2015;
- Papers and accompanying presentations at five consecutive **Museum Association conferences** (2012-2016);

⁶ The aim of the 'blindfolded' method was to see if Our Museum was referred to spontaneously to better assess sector awareness, attribution of any change, as well as to eliminate some sources of bias related to self-selection. Participants were fully debriefed and consent was obtained at two points within each interview.

- Targeted conversations with eleven sector stakeholder organisations;
- An end of programme event on 2nd December 2015;
- Showcase events hosted by each participant organisation to share and disseminate learning between January and March 2016;
- Production of online video resources (launched in April 2016);
- A communications campaign (July 2016 to February 2017).

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH OUR MUSEUM

A fifth of e-survey respondents were aware of the programme. Respondents had most often heard of the programme via colleagues.

The e-survey asked “Have you heard of the Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners programme?”. Just over **20 per cent of respondents had heard of the programme (base 493)**, either knowing ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ about it. Encouragingly, Team Leaders and Organisational Leadership Teams were proportionately more aware of the programme, aligning well with the original strategic approach. E-survey respondents had most often heard of the programme via colleagues, highlighting the importance of informal networks and word of mouth.

Of the **17 sector stakeholders** interviewed, seven were able to describe the principles or aims of programme, eight had heard of it and two had not heard of it at all. Stakeholders had most often heard of the programme via an Our Museum participant organisation, indicating programme participants may have been influencing ‘up’ (i.e. influencing strategic stakeholders within the sector), rather than exclusively disseminating ‘down’ (i.e. within their organisation).

Engagement with Our Museum Resources

The Our Museum outputs and resources served different purposes and were useful in different circumstances, for different people.

E-survey respondents familiar with Our Museum were asked to what extent it interested and engaged them (on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is “not at all” and 5 is “very much so”). Of the 99 respondents aware of Our Museum, the majority said that the programme had **interested and engaged** them to some extent, with almost 30 per cent indicating “very much so”. Only three per cent rated “not at all” in response to this question. Similarly, on the same scale, the majority reported that Our Museum was **relevant** and something their organisation could benefit from.

E-survey respondents aware of Our Museum were asked: “To what extent have you used any of the following Our Museum outputs or learning in your work?” (On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “not at all” and 5 is “very much so” [base 55]). Outputs used included reports created by the programme, for example *No Longer Us and Them*, and the online video resource library. The findings show that respondents had engaged with reports to a greater extent than video resources as part of their work, 13 per cent had used reports “very much so” and 2 per cent had engaged with videos to the same extent.

In terms of interaction with specific outputs, triangulated across all consultee groups, qualitative comments revealed that different resources served different purposes:

- **Reports** provided validation and evidence for influencing others;
- Inspiration was provided through peer-sharing at **conferences**;
- **Video Resources** provided practical guidance for implementation of participatory practice.

CHANGE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR MUSEUM

Our Museum made a *contribution* to ongoing change within the sector. Organisational change is a long-term undertaking and for a number of respondents this process is ongoing.

Community participation was a high priority amongst e-survey respondents and had become more important over recent years.

E-survey respondents who *had* heard of Our Museum were asked about the extent to which it had influenced change in: their own working practices, their organisation's practice and organisational strategy. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "very much so", the majority reported no or little influence (i.e. 1 or 2 on the scale). However, over a third reported **some change** as a result of engaging with Our Museum (i.e. 3 or above on the scale) across individual and organisational working.

Examples of change reported by e-survey and stakeholder respondents included **shaping and informing strategy** around community participation and **driving organisational change**. This took various forms, from amendments to job descriptions, to citing Our Museum principles within funding applications. This links to organisational change as it shows the embedding of Our Museum values as part of particular roles, responsibilities and ways of working.

Respondents highlighted that it was difficult to attribute change to Our Museum specifically, as **change had most often resulted from a culmination of ideas from different sources and initiatives**. Respondents perceived that initiatives such as Audience Finder, Museums Change Lives and Happy Museum, for example⁷, advocated similar components to the objectives of the Our Museum programme. The findings indicate therefore that Our Museum has been a contributing factor to change in the sector, working alongside other initiatives, organisations and motivated individuals.

Further, **organisational change is a long-term process**. It is therefore likely that ERS' research in 2018, two years after the four-year programme finished, will not capture the full extent of change in cases where respondents are early on in their change journey.

Examples of organisational change highlight that Our Museum has supported individuals with their own influencing activities.

Examples of change as a result of Our Museum highlighted by e-survey respondents and interviewees predominantly centre on individuals embarking upon, or attempting to kick-start an organisational change process in-line with the ethos of Our Museum. The research findings demonstrate that the benefits of engaging with Our Museum had a common theme of **supporting individuals with their own influencing activities**. Whilst this aligns with the original strategy of 'influencing the influencers', it should be noted that **those seeking to drive change** were not necessarily in leadership roles. Qualitative feedback from e-survey respondents and interviewees indicates that finding a leader willing to drive change is a critical component of success. Therefore, Our Museum resources suited to helping staff influence their leaders were considered particularly beneficial.

⁷ <https://audiencefinder.org/>; <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives>; and <http://happymuseumproject.org/>

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO CHANGE

There are a number of internal and external factors which enable and limit change. These range from attitudinal (e.g. apprehensive staff) to practical (e.g. resource) constraints.

To understand what may have maximised or constrained the influence of Our Museum, it is useful to consider barriers and enablers to undertaking participatory practice. Common themes have been collated from qualitative comments across all consultee groups. In most cases these two categories mirror each other (i.e. the converse of a barrier is an enabler). Whilst resource is a headline issue, many of the barriers are attitudinal (e.g. staff fear) or structural (e.g. siloed departments). Our Museum was set up in recognition of a number of the barriers below, so it is interesting to see that these still exist.

BARRIERS

- Lack of resources (funding, capacity, skills)
- Staff apprehension taking first steps in community participation journey
- Getting buy-in from leadership
- Starting difficult conversations
- Tension with “core” activity i.e. collections care
- Audience “myths” i.e. assumptions about needs- not based on evidence/data
- Siloes of working practice
- Community composition e.g. largely composed of tourism visitors
- Managing expectations
- Changes in staff members

ENABLERS

- Adequate resources (funding, capacity, skills)
- Staff empowered to see community participation as an opportunity
- Getting buy-in from leadership
- Open and honest conversations
- Demand-led community offers; audience research
- Knowledge-sharing
- Community composition e.g. remote rural areas
- Changes in staff members

It is also worth highlighting that qualitative comments from e-survey respondents show a perception that undertaking increased community participation requires additional resource. At a time of widely recognised resource constraints within the sector, Our Museum did not intend for participation to be seen as something “new” but hoped to emphasise embedding of participation as key to sustainability.

EMERGING LESSONS

Through analysing which influencing approaches have worked well and less well, a number of lessons have emerged with examples of good practice as well as areas for improvement. These should be useful when designing future influencing campaigns.

Lesson One: Ground an influencing strategy in a ‘theory of change’ or logic model to help clarify assumptions, help compare available resources against desired **influencing impacts** and provide routes to defining and measuring change.

Our Museum did not use a formal plan to document its influencing approach and objectives. These were considered to have evolved over the lifetime of the programme.



Lesson Two: To ensure a programme is both **widely known** as well as **deeply engaged with**, consideration should be given towards **balancing influencing activities** across those focussed towards achieving both **breadth and depth** of engagement.

Our Museum focussed influencing activity towards in-depth engagement with key influencers, and outputs were considered engaging. The lack of lighter touch contact may have led to a relatively low level of recognition of the programme across the sector as a whole. As a pre-requisite for influencing change it is necessary to “activate” individuals, first through fostering reach and awareness, and next generating interest or engagement.



Lesson 3: Influencing **approaches, objectives, and messages** should be tailored and defined for **each target group**.

Different Our Museum influencing tools worked well for different groups in different circumstances. At times, the core influencing activities/resources of the programme have not matched the preferences of the target groups identified and/or the influencing goal identified. For example, video resources were less useful in achieving buy-in from key influencers. Positively, targeted conversations were useful for engaging sector funders and stakeholders.

To increase relevance of messages, content could have been further tailored to specific types of organisation; for example, by size, geography (including Welsh language), or ownership type.

Lesson 4: Engagement can be maximised by **including a ‘call to action’**.

The content and principles of Our Museum largely resonated with those in the sector. Communications may be enhanced by providing ideas of how to make one small change or a ‘call to action’, or a way to become involved in the programme. This was particularly notable in the case of Our Museum as there was no open application stage to become a participant organisation.

Lesson 5: The opportunity to **learn and share with peers** represents a preferred and accessible communication channel, particularly through **regional networks and social media**.

Communication channels chosen by Our Museum increased reach in the sector through partnership, and also secured a legacy for programme outputs. Consideration of additional communication channels could have expanded the reach of the Our Museum programme and its outputs. The preferences given by respondents included regional networks and social media. These were also perceived to be more accessible, particularly by smaller and/or independent museums and galleries.

Lesson 6: Emphasising **what is different** about a particular programme approach as opposed to focussing on the rationale for engaging communities may be a more effective route to engagement.

Engaging with Our Museum usually required some level of baseline interest or engagement in participatory practice. This insight could inform how communications are pitched, specifically as it points towards emphasising what is different about the Our Museum approach, as opposed to focusing on the rationale for engaging communities. This is particularly important when considering the perception of e-survey respondents and interviewees that there are other initiatives doing similar work. Those who knew the programme well did indicate that it advocated a unique approach.

Lesson 7: A **longitudinal approach to dissemination** and maintaining a sustained presence is particularly important in relation to a programme advocating organisational change.

Respondents spoke of organisational change processes spanning many years, demonstrating the need for a sustained presence from Our Museum to encourage and guide the sector. Planning of influencing approaches and milestones across this extended timeline may have aided maintenance of engagement in the longer-term. This may have included, for example, a clear communication timeline for signposting individuals to resources that would be useful at different stages of their organisational change journey.

Lesson 8: It can be beneficial to review particular **organisational characteristics or milestones** which may indicate the likelihood of a target group to be more or less receptive to a process of organisational change.

In addition to target groups identified by Our Museum, findings suggest there are different characteristics/ways of defining potential key audiences for the programme. For example, qualitative comments from e-survey respondents indicated that museums and galleries currently focussed on survival or maintaining collections felt they were unable to engage with new ways to embed change. Ensuring Our Museum communications reflected the potential for participation to support sustainability may have alleviated the perception that those focused on survival are unable to engage.

Further, qualitative e-survey and interview comments suggest there are also key moments or milestones which could prompt organisations or individuals to engage with wider organisational change processes, such as:

- **Senior staff change:** those who had recently changed directors: staff change can both interrupt and instigate an organisational change process;
- **Ownership structure:** museums and galleries experiencing a change in ownership structure e.g. as had been the case with a number of local authority museums and galleries in recent years;
- **New museums and galleries:** new museums represented a useful opportunity to embed ways of working early and gain community input into organisation identity and focus;
- **Change within curatorial teams:** community participation was *perceived* in some cases to be in 'opposition' to collections-based activity, whether through perceived potential to make curatorial teams' knowledge and skills redundant, or diversion of finite resource to the detriment of collections activity. Comments indicated that this perceived opposition was a key originator of staff apprehension.

Lesson 9: Understanding **perceived and actual barriers/enablers** to change can support the design of **influencing approaches** designed to effectively overcome or align with this.

Our Museum programme staff were aware of the barriers to embedding organisational change, many of which were corroborated within qualitative comments provided by interviewees for example, lack of buy-in from senior leadership or "staff apprehension". These barriers could have been more proactively considered in terms of how they might affect the design of engagement strategies and outputs within the Our Museum programme. This may have informed influencing strategies and messaging designed to overcome particular barriers to engagement.

Lesson 10: It is beneficial to secure a **longer-term legacy for resources** produced as part of a programme, for example by securing an online legacy or partnering with a relevant sector body.

It is a deliberate approach of PHF to hand programmes such as Our Museum over to the relevant sector. This is to secure a longer term legacy from its targeted investment. The online resources remain live, and, positively, stakeholder and sector interviewees reported using the resources this year (2018).

To further support a lasting legacy some key considerations include: securing appropriately placed advocates to carry messages forward in the longer-term; decisions on future branding to support continued presence in the sector; and, strategies for future dissemination of progress e.g. sharing the recently completed Our Museum participant review.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

There are both examples of effective practice and lessons for improvement evident within the Our Museum programme's influencing strategy and activities. ERS' research found that:

- Our Museum successfully executed a **targeted strategy with limited resources** and achieved modest levels of awareness of the programme.
- Our Museum may have benefitted from implementing more tailored strategies to engage those less effectively reached, such as smaller, independent museums. Tailored strategies may also have maximised traction with key target groups through an understanding of which resources functioned well in achieving **influence**, as opposed to having practical application. **Targeted conversations (i.e. one-to-one meetings arranged by the Our Museum team to disseminate programme learning to external sector leaders and funders) and Our Museum reports** worked particularly well in achieving influence.
- Our Museum reports were well-received, with continuing relevance of the principles and messages apparent. Securing an **online legacy** for Our Museum outputs - which continue to be made available through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation website - is proving valuable. This is demonstrated by continued engagement with the resources to inform organisational change.
- The research also provided some key insights into how to run an effective influencing strategy. Overall a more **balanced** (a variety of activities supporting reach, engagement and influence) and **measurable** (clear, defined SMART objectives with allocated resources) approach may have facilitated greater reach. This would also have enabled more effective evidencing of success, as well as ability to respond and adapt in 'real-time' to what is working or not working.
- Our Museum has made a **contribution** to ongoing change within the area of community participation in the museum and gallery sector. The research found that the programme has made a contribution to change alongside other initiatives, organisations and motivated individuals. Interestingly, whilst community participation was defined as a high priority and having become more important over time by e-survey respondents, it still has some way to go to filter down into working practices. Further evidence of Our Museum's influence following successful implementation of change may be found in years to come.

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