

Our Museum: what happened next?



A review and further learning
two years on

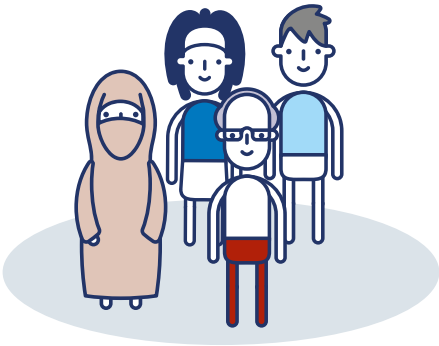
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Executive summary

Purpose of this report

This report is based on a review of the organisations that took part in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners*, two years after the programme finished. The report shares further learning from the review about embedding participatory practice in museums and galleries. The learning adds to and complements that published in the *No Longer Us and Them* report (PHF, 2016).

About the *Our Museum* programme

Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners was a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, which started in 2012 and finished in early 2016. The overall aim was to influence the museum sector to embed community participation in every aspect of the work of museums and galleries. This was to be achieved through facilitation of organisational change in specific museums and galleries already committed to active partnership with communities, and reflecting on what went well and what could have gone better. 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; and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

The outcomes for the *Our Museum* programme were shaped by thinking about the main barriers to community participation and how to overcome them. In order to address these barriers, and support active partnership with communities, the *Our Museum* programme developed four overall outcomes: Rooted in Local Needs; Community Agency; Capability Building; and Reflection.

The two key learning messages from the programme were:

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



What happened next: two-year post-programme review

The present report is based on review visits to seven of the *Our Museum* organisations in June and July 2018. The purpose of the review visits was to explore and describe organisational change and methods of participatory practice since the programme ended, and the key factors behind any changes. The report draws out overall learning about embedding participatory practice, extracted from issues that were common across the organisations, and/or that have wider applicability and are transferable to other museums and galleries.

It is clear that change in these museums and galleries is an ongoing, evolutionary process. They have all continued their change journeys since the *Our Museum* programme ended, but each still has challenges to address. Nevertheless, each organisation has a strategic commitment to change and recognises the need for further change, so there is little sign of complacency. This is an important lesson in its own right: effective change takes years, progress is not linear, and it requires commitment, patience and flexibility to know what and how to change.

Tracking change in the *Our Museum* organisations

The progress of the *Our Museum* organisations between the end of the programme in April 2016 and the review visits in June/July 2018 has been mapped against the original four outcomes, charting whether or not change has been sustained. Longer-term relationships with communities are working, and staff have developed the skills and confidence to work flexibly with communities. However, there is a lack of community involvement in overall strategy, and building reflection into daily practice is still a challenge for some museums.

Executive summary continued

Additional learning about embedding participatory practice

This section presents the additional learning on how to embed participatory practice, drawing on the experiences and learning of all seven organisations that took part in the review process.

Preparing for change

True participatory practice opens up the museum/gallery to community voices and agendas, and requires commitment and confidence to work in a reciprocal, flexible and less hierarchical way. Museums and galleries need to be ready for that challenge by preparing staff for change:

- Put basic infrastructure in place
- Ensure shared understanding of change
- Ensure that the organisation can sustain change.

Organisational processes

How to make participatory practice more effective:

- Constantly reiterate the participatory message
- Designate a board member responsible for participation
- Use practical tips on how to embed reflection
- Use facilitation as a tool so that all voices are treated equally
- Address museum systems that are a barrier to participation, especially those around collections and recruitment.

Relationships with community partners

How to work more effectively in partnership with communities:

- There are common elements in why relationships are sustainable, based on the experiences of the *Our Museum* organisations, and these are listed in the main report
- Community partners can be involved in strategy by sitting on a board, advisory panels, or taking part in strategy workshops with staff
- Bringing community partners together creates a joint voice that better reflects the wider community rather than individual group agendas.

Signs of success

The experience of the *Our Museum* organisations suggests that the participatory change journey can be measured qualitatively through three factors: the response of the community, the organisation's behaviour, and impact on individual staff. The review found that participatory practice is successful when:

- Community partners are the best advocates
- The organisation has the strategic confidence not to be driven solely by numbers
- Staff are confident and empowered to do things 'with' not 'to' communities.

Funding issues

The nature of much museum and gallery funding itself remains a barrier to developing sustainable partnerships with communities:

- Funders should be encouraged to be more flexible about their definitions of outputs and outcomes and understand the benefits of long-term relationships that do not start with a fixed project idea
- Funders should be encouraged to be more flexible in part-funding existing staff in order to create a legacy of learning and experience in an organisation, that is not lost when short-term contract staff move on.

A new framework, 'Power to the People', has been developed with the Museums Association and other funders, to help museums and galleries with evaluating and supporting participatory practice.

Online resources

The final section describes the *Our Museum* multimedia web resource, www.ourmuseum.org.uk, and how it is structured. This consists of over 200 animations, films and written documents which gather learning and practical tips from the *Our Museum* programme and beyond.

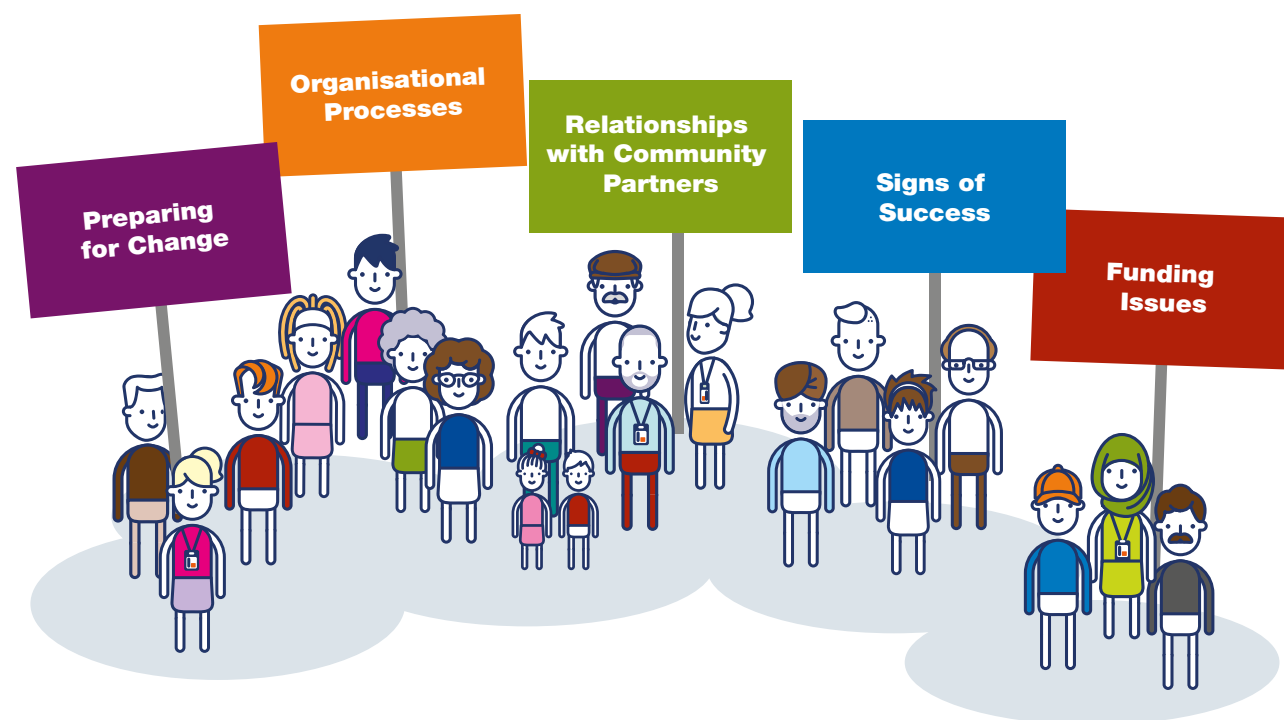


Purpose and structure of this report

The purpose of this report is to share further learning about embedding participatory practice in museums and galleries. It is based on a review of the organisations that took part in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners*, two years after the programme finished. The learning adds to and complements that published in the *No Longer Us and Them* report (PHF, 2016).

The present report outlines the *Our Museum* programme and briefly summarises its key learning. It then describes the two-

year post-programme review and charts whether the *Our Museum* organisations have managed to sustain or extend change since the programme ended in early 2016, reporting on what is going well and what still remains a challenge. The core of the report presents the additional learning under five headings: Preparing for Change; Organisational Processes; Relationships with Community Partners; Signs of Success; and Funding Issues. A final section describes the multimedia resource www.ourmuseum.org.uk and explains what is on it.



About the *Our Museum* programme

Aims and who took part

Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners was a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, which started in 2012 and finished 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 achieved 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 peers and 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, nature of collections, location and form of governance. Their varying starting points, challenges and priorities, as well as the different kinds of resources at their disposal, were recognised by the Foundation.

The organisations selected are shown on the map.²



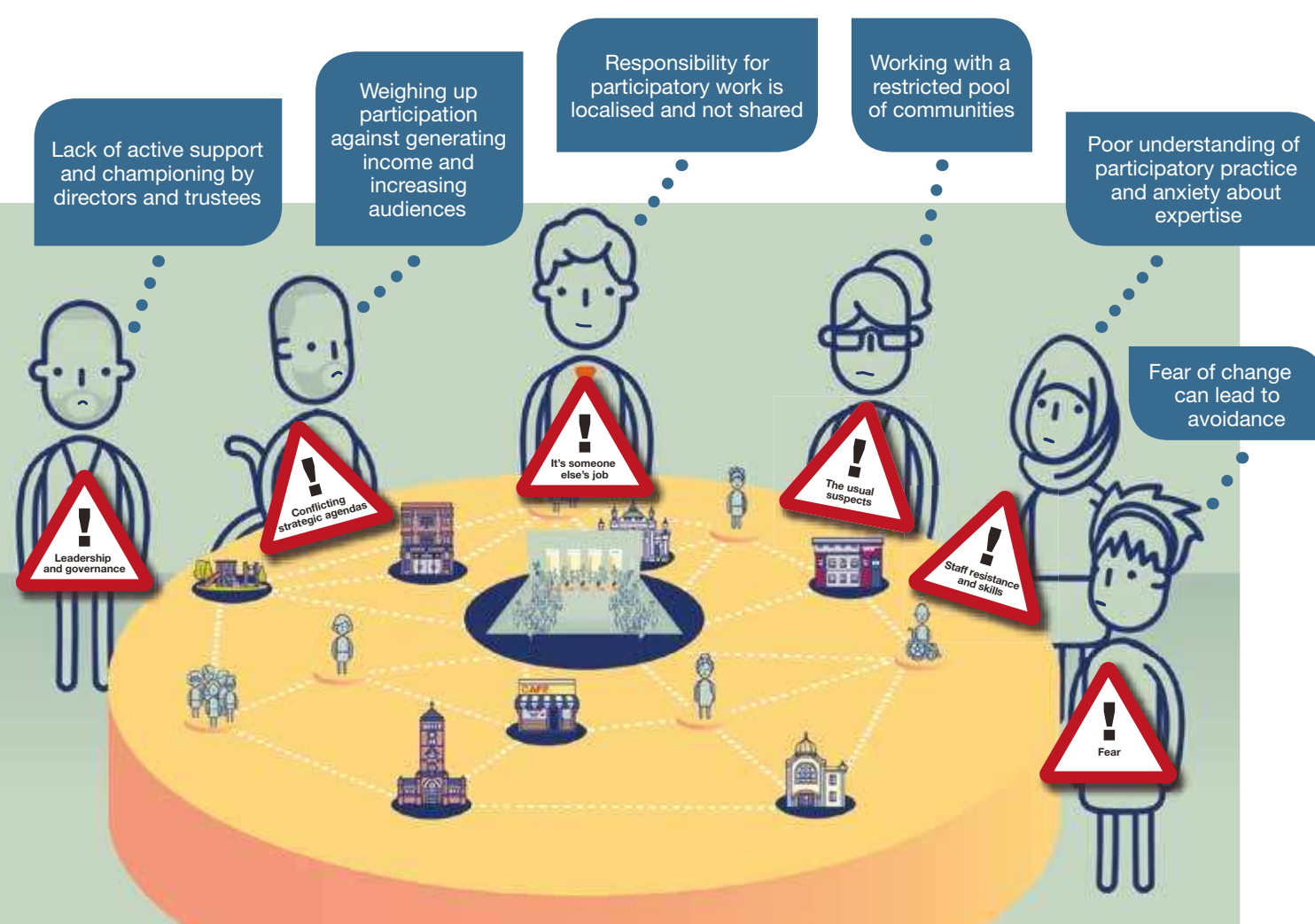
¹ The research was published as: B. Lynch, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2011).

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.

About the *Our Museum* programme continued

Summary of the main barriers to participation

The intended outcomes for the *Our Museum* programme were shaped by thinking about the main barriers to participation and how to overcome them. These barriers cut right across museums and galleries and their external relationships. They are detailed in the *No Longer Us and Them* report, pp. 8-9, and are summarised here:



The four *Our Museum* outcomes

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 Paul Hamlyn Foundation regarded as the characteristics of a participatory museum and gallery, and what it expected the museums and galleries

to strive for. Each of these outcomes had its own indicators of success (listed in full in the *No Longer Us and Them* report, pp. 12-13), all of them qualitative and not quantitative: the sort of evidence of organisational behaviour one would expect to see if the outcome were being achieved.

These outcomes and indicators of success formed the basis of the evaluation framework for the programme, against which the change journey of each organisation was assessed.

- ### 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.
- ### 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.
- ### 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.
- ### 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.

About the *Our Museum* programme continued

Key learning by the end of the programme

Each organisation developed a change programme which addressed the *Our Museum* outcomes in a unique way, depending on its local situation. They experimented with a wide range of

approaches to achieve their strategic change objectives and create organisational change. Critical to the programme was reflection on what went well and what could have gone better in all these different approaches, with the wider aim of learning effective ways of embedding participatory practice.

There were two key learning messages at the end of the programme:

Small changes add up

Small improvements and changes across the whole museum/gallery add up to significant transformation in participatory practice. Particularly crucial were: changes in governance and leadership; staff professional development; how to engage with community partners; evaluation and evidence of change, especially shared reflection; and the importance of the external voice, especially critical friends.

Participation is everyone's job

A truly participatory organisation is one in which everyone takes responsibility for participatory practice: trustees, directors, staff, volunteers, community partners, and funders.

This learning was shared through a final report, titled *No Longer Us and Them*, two evaluations, and a multimedia web resource, www.ourmuseum.org.uk (see page 30 for more detail about this resource).³

³ P. Bienkowski, *No Longer Us and Them: How to change into a participatory museum and gallery – Learning from the Our Museum programme* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2016); G. Moriarty and S. Medlyn, *Museums Galleries Communities Active Partners Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2016); S. Ahmad and J. Cummins, *Review of ways of working in Our Museum: Report to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2016).

What happened next: two-year post-programme review

Towards the end of the *Our Museum* programme, Paul Hamlyn Foundation committed to undertake and publish a further review in 2018, two years after the programme finished. There were three aims:

- To assess the longer-term impact of the programme on each individual organisation – to understand whether participating organisations were able to sustain and/or develop change once the programme had finished
- To assess the influence of the *Our Museum* programme on the wider UK museum and gallery sector, and if it had resulted in any impact on participatory practice
- To identify any new learning about how to embed participatory practice effectively, that added to and complemented the learning previously published in the *No Longer Us and Them* report.

The review of the influence of *Our Museum* on the wider museum and gallery sector was carried out by the agency ERS and is the subject of a separate report.⁴

The present report is based on review visits to seven of the *Our Museum* organisations, and draws out overall learning about embedding participatory practice. This learning is extracted from issues that were common across the organisations, and/or that have wider applicability and are transferable to other museums and galleries.

The review visits took place between June and July 2018. They included the two organisations that had left the programme after Year 2, Ryedale Folk Museum and the Museum of East Anglian Life, but did not include Hackney Museum and Belfast Exposed, both of whom opted out of this review.

The purpose of the review visits was to explore and describe organisational change and methods of participatory practice since the programme ended, and the reasons and key factors behind any changes. They included conversations with directors, chairs, trustees and stakeholders, and workshops with staff, volunteers and community partners. Among the issues probed were whether community partners influence the longer-term strategy of the museum/gallery or are mainly involved in short-term project work; in what ways community partners are involved in decision-making; and different perceptions and assumptions of museum staff and community partners concerning their relationship.

Each organisation subsequently received a confidential report from Paul Hamlyn Foundation that provided feedback on what was going well and the remaining challenges. These challenges were mapped against the four *Our Museum* outcomes and the barriers to participation, in order to clarify which barrier the challenge represented and still needed to overcome. Each report concluded with a summary of the key internal and external factors that had influenced the ongoing change process. In the following section of the present report, the progress of the *Our Museum* organisations against the original outcomes is tabulated anonymously, to show what is going well and what still remains a challenge across the cohort.

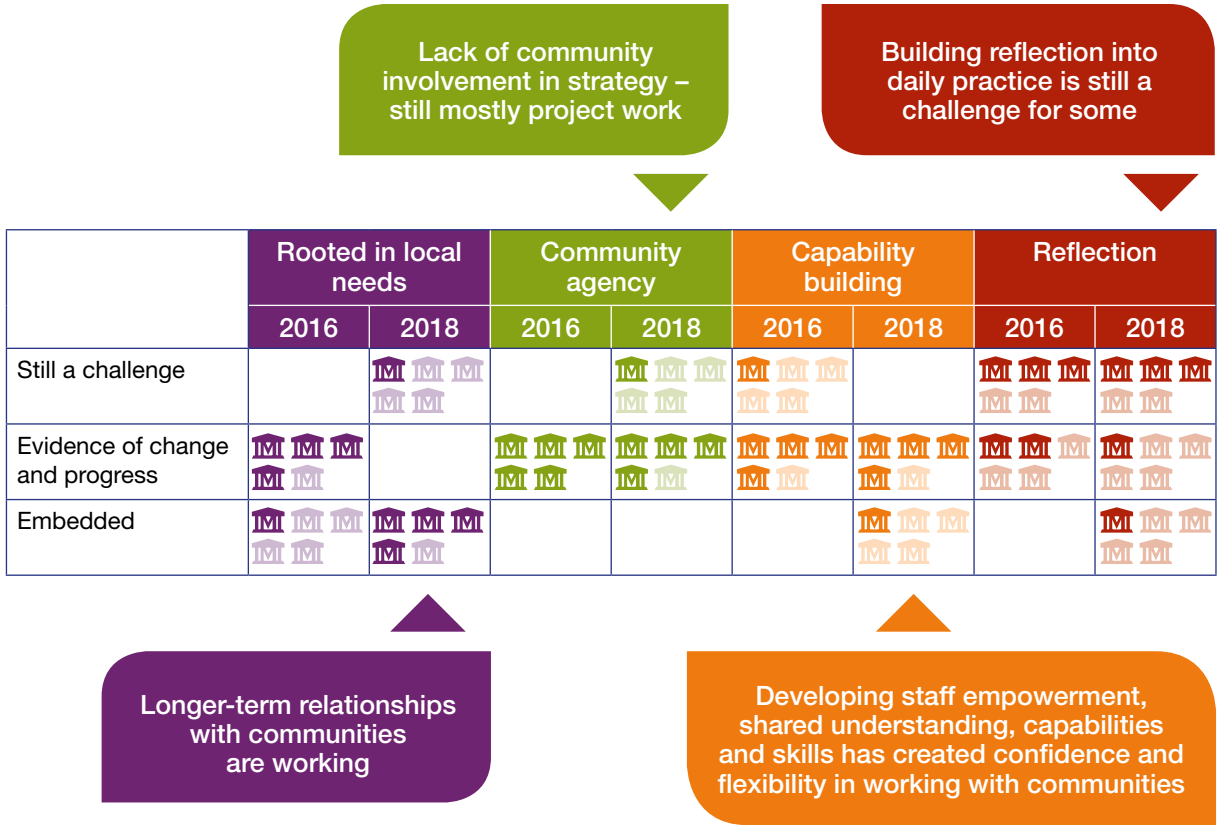


⁴ F. Haswell-Walls, K. Vittle and A. Hale, *Our Museum Influence: Summary Report* (London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2018). phf.org.uk/our-museum-influence-summary

Tracking change in the *Our Museum* organisations

The table below maps the progress of the *Our Museum* organisations since the end of the programme (for reasons of confidentiality the individual museums and galleries are not named).⁵ It is a ‘before and after’ table that charts whether or not change has been sustained. It shows where the *Our Museum* cohort was against the original four outcomes when the programme ended (April 2016) compared with where it was at

the time of the review visits (June/July 2018), and what has gone well and what remains to be further improved. The coloured boxes outside the table highlight the key issues across the cohort for each outcome, which inform the additional learning presented in the next section: how and why successful approaches are working, practical ways in which the remaining challenges can be tackled, and how to measure success.



⁵ The five organisations tabulated are those that completed the full *Our Museum* programme and took part in the two-year post-programme review. The table does not include Ryedale Folk Museum or the Museum of East Anglian Life, which left the programme after Year 2, or Hackney Museum and Belfast Exposed, which opted out of the review.

The biggest change since 2016 has been that most of the organisations have been successful in sustaining long-term relationships with their communities, and are genuinely rooted in local needs, understanding and responding to local agendas. There are common factors in why these relationships are sustainable, and these are shared below on pages 22-23.

There has been some improvement in capability building, with one museum particularly successful in creating a pool of people across the organisation who understand participatory practice, have grown in confidence, and respond flexibly to community proposals and approaches. Across the cohort, staff empowerment and confidence, and a shared organisational commitment to participatory practice, have been key factors in sustaining change.

Most of the organisations are still struggling to find time for reflecting on their work, internally and with their communities, rather overwhelmed by the familiar ‘treadmill of delivery’ of projects. Nevertheless, one has succeeded in embedding reflective practice and self-criticism into its daily work, and these successful mechanisms are shared on page 20.

Another struggle has been how to involve communities effectively in decision-making around long-term strategy and policy, not just projects, and it is telling that not a single one of the *Our Museum* organisations has managed to embed this level of community agency. Sharing decision-making around individual exhibitions and events is relatively straightforward compared with involving communities in that broader sharing of authority. Two key constraints were regularly voiced by organisations and communities: that individuals cannot ‘represent’ the community, and that museum governance

mechanisms were time-consuming and not a priority for most communities. Nevertheless, there are mutual advantages to bringing communities together to discuss wider strategic issues, and the review visits demonstrated that there is widespread community interest in contributing to such discussions. Three models for how this can work effectively are shared below on page 24.

Not all the *Our Museum* organisations managed to sustain the momentum of their change journey after the end of the programme. The table records drop-off in some areas: this was due to the dismantling of one community panel as a result of poor attendance and the subsequent lack of any mechanism for dialogue with community partners, and frequent changes of director in one organisation which resulted in discontinuity and changes in focus and organisational priorities. These are important factors to bear in mind when embarking on a change programme – whether the organisation has the capacity to maintain change, and judging the level and nature of interest from the community – and they are integrated into the additional learning below.

Overall, it is clear that change in these museums and galleries is an ongoing, evolutionary process, and each still has challenges to address. Not surprisingly, these challenges are often rooted in the main barriers to participation, and were identified at the end of the programme as issues still to address.⁶ Nevertheless, each organisation has a strategic commitment to change and recognises the need for further change, so there is little sign of complacency. This is an important lesson in its own right: effective change takes years, progress is not linear, and it requires commitment, patience and flexibility to know what and how to change.

⁶ See the section ‘What could have gone better?’ in the *No Longer Us and Them* report, pp. 40-43.

Additional learning about embedding participatory practice

This section presents the additional learning on how to embed participatory practice, drawing on the experiences and learning of all seven organisations that took part in the two-year post-programme review process, including Ryedale Folk Museum and the Museum of East Anglian Life, which had left the programme after Year 2. All seven had valuable lessons to share, which are scalable and transferable to other museums and galleries, whatever their nature and size. The learning is presented as a guide to practice, with practical tips drawn from the experiences of the *Our Museum* organisations.

Preparing for change

True participatory practice opens up the museum/gallery to community voices and agendas, and requires commitment and confidence to work in a reciprocal, flexible and less hierarchical way. Museums and galleries need to be ready for that challenge:

Prepare for change

The *Our Museum* programme has shown that it is helpful to carry out a self-assessment to check if there is good practice across the organisation in basic infrastructure: governance, finance, staff management. A business review can be a very effective first step in a staged change process. A business review helps clarify aims, ensures proper processes are in place, and can create a shared vision in which everyone feels involved.

‘If you are constantly fire-fighting and dealing with critical financial issues, it will be harder to build relationships and be open to community voices. But this is not an excuse to delay change.’

Our Museum participant

Ensure a shared understanding of change

The single biggest reason why change can be difficult to achieve is that people do not really know what the change might be, they do not know what to expect, and do not know what they are committing themselves to. Staff at *Our Museum* organisations reported that ‘change’ is often understood as shorthand for ‘redundancies’, and this can create resistance before you even begin.

It is crucial to explain and discuss the purpose and likely impact of the change within the organisation before the start of the journey, so that everyone understands the reason for change and is prepared for it. Among the things to clarify are whether the need for change is a result of political or community pressure, a new director, or a funding stream that encourages participatory practice; whether the objective is to make the organisation more permeable to community voices, change governance, share decision-making, policies, values and behaviours, or change staff roles and job descriptions; and how long the change process is likely to take (three years? five years?).

To maximise support and understanding of change, these issues should be widely discussed beforehand throughout the whole organisation. The same is true of the term ‘participatory practice’: everyone understands this in a different way, so it should be discussed widely in order to reach a shared understanding.⁷

‘I don’t think we really understood what was meant by organisational change at the start.’

Our Museum participant

Sustain change

In general, the *Our Museum* programme found that organisations in which there was continuity of directors through the programme and beyond have made better progress. Changes of directors can lead to slow, patchy and discontinuous development of a participatory culture, with lack of continuity in relationships and in transferring learning. But directors brought in with a mandate for change can also be extremely effective. Directors have a huge impact on an organisation’s values, vision and mission and how it is perceived externally. The question to ask is: is change strategically embedded as a priority in the organisation and can it be maintained over five years or more?

Part of sustaining change is to acknowledge the reaction of those impacted by the change and to provide support. All of the following reactions during a change process were experienced within the *Our Museum* organisations: fear for one’s job; misunderstanding and confusion about the process; disagreement with the change; a feeling of threat to one’s professional status; resistance; a wish that everything would go back to normal; nostalgia; bitterness; anger; and resentment. These are all normal reactions, and there is no excuse not to anticipate them and provide support; otherwise, their cumulative effect may slow down or undermine the change process.

i Further resources

What is participatory practice?
ourmuseum.org.uk/what-is-participation

John Holden talks about the nature of organisational change:
ourmuseum.org.uk/thinking-about-change

and why change fails:
ourmuseum.org.uk/why-change-fails

Nina Simon talks about rigorous methodology in participatory practice:
ourmuseum.org.uk/rigorous-methodology

Sustaining change during director/ staff turnover:
ourmuseum.org.uk/change-during-staff-turnover



⁷ These issues have been covered in more detail, based on learning from the *Our Museum* programme, in P. Bienkowski, ‘Why change fails (and what YOU can do about it)’, *Journal of Education in Museums* 37 (2017), pp. 13-21.

Additional learning continued

Organisational processes

There are a number of internal actions that can make participatory practice more effective:

Constantly reiterate the participatory message

The importance of participation needs to be constantly repeated, not said just once and then forgotten. It begins with induction of new staff, a clear understanding of how everyone's role contributes to participatory practice, and affirmation of the strategic direction of the organisation and its commitment to participatory work. Many staff in *Our Museum* organisations stressed that this message must be constantly repeated at all levels and at all meetings, to ensure it is acknowledged as a priority.



Designate a board member responsible for participation

Best practice in governance recommends that each member of a board takes responsibility for a particular portfolio, e.g. finance, marketing, human resources. If participatory practice is a priority for a museum or gallery, then it should become one of the allocated roles, rather than relying on the enthusiasm of individual board members. In this way, it will not become side-lined as board members change.

Use facilitation as a tool

One of the *Our Museum* organisations has integrated facilitation training and methodology into its work. Internal and external meetings are not led by a manager, but facilitated by a trained member of staff, or external facilitator where appropriate. The museum finds the approach can be transformative, as it levels things out between groups and individuals with strong agendas, and no-one is perceived as having the power and control, ensuring that all voices – staff and community partners – are heard and treated equally.

Address museum systems that are a barrier to participation

There is shared recognition among many *Our Museum* staff and community partners that museum/gallery systems and processes are themselves a barrier. This relates mostly to processes around collections and recruitment, and community partners express frustration with bureaucratic processes that respond too slowly.

Museum systems were developed in an era when safeguarding collections by restricting access was the overwhelming priority, but expectations are changing and more flexibility is required if we are to engage communities effectively. These processes need to be looked at and adapted, especially around collections and who is involved in access, handling, loans, documentation, interpretation, acquisition and disposal, to widen the pool to include a broader range of staff and community partners.

Where this conversation has happened successfully, it has involved a museum's human resources department in the discussion about change: as a result, in some museums community partners are involved in recruitment and in strategic discussions around collections.



Additional learning continued

Embed reflective practice

An essential component of true participation is reflective practice, internally and with community partners. Reflective practice is thinking about and questioning one's actions, being self-critical, and constantly learning from what went well, what could have gone better, and what might be done differently. It includes the ability to listen, to have an honest dialogue that is about learning not blame, and being open to challenge, alternative values and

working methods. Building reflection into daily practice remains a challenge for some, though not all, of the *Our Museum* organisations, who acknowledge its importance but struggle to find time for it. The ideal situation is where several processes overlap and encourage continual reflection and learning.

Here are five models of reflection built into daily practice which have been successful in the *Our Museum* programme:

Set aside five minutes at the end of each meeting to reflect on what just happened: what did you learn, how does it impact the rest of the organisation, what could you do differently, was everyone there who should have been there, were all voices heard equally?

Use regular meetings with staff and volunteers (i.e. weekly or monthly meetings) to focus not only on operational matters but to include reflection by asking questions and sharing learning: in the last week/month, what went well and what could have gone better? It is important to create an atmosphere that is not about blame but about shared learning

Create a regular forum for debate, including staff, community partners and peers from other museums. Use it to bring in new perspectives, share, feedback and reflect on practice

The most reflective of the *Our Museum* organisations found that staff empowerment frees up reflection. Where staff understand and buy into the strategic aims of the organisation, this has allowed managers to give them more freedom to take decisions within that strategic framework, and to feel empowered. As a result, meetings no longer need to focus so much on operational details, but can be more philosophical and reflective

Use formal debriefs of projects and programmes – ideally with community partners – to focus on lessons learned and what the organisation is trying to achieve

i Further resources

Bernadette Lynch talks about the importance of reflective practice and how it works:
ourmuseum.org.uk/reflective-practice

and about reflection with stakeholders:
ourmuseum.org.uk/reflection-with-stakeholders

Janice Lane on how to be a reflective practitioner:
ourmuseum.org.uk/reflective-practitioners



Additional learning continued

Relationships with community partners

How to work more effectively in partnership with communities:

How to sustain long-term relationships with community partners

The majority of *Our Museum* organisations have managed to embed long-term relationships with community partners. The review visits explored how and why these have worked. There are common elements in why these relationships are sustainable:

The museum/gallery is welcoming, non-threatening, relaxed

The museum/gallery is pro-active, supportive, flexible, and ready to accommodate different groups and their changing plans and needs

Relationships often begin with open conversations about what they might want to do together; ideas are then jointly developed, rather than fixed projects imposed by the museum

The partners feel they have agency in decision-making, are valued, and the relationship with the museum is creative and mutually beneficial

Some projects are led by community partners

Reflecting on how the relationship has developed, community partners single out the building of trust, the knowledge that it is not tokenistic but for the long-term and constantly developing



Museum/gallery programmes are designed around the needs and interests of community partners

It is important to have a lead museum staff member who is passionate, welcoming and open

Why long-term relationships with community partners are sustainable

There is constant reinforcement of messages internally that one of the museum/gallery's important priorities is to help the rest of the community

Collaboration is often in-kind rather than monetary, which makes it more sustainable

Community partners feel able to challenge the museum/gallery and have the freedom to raise all sorts of issues – although there is acknowledgment that it takes time to build sufficient trust to be able to challenge

Working with the museum/gallery opens up new opportunities for community groups, including networking with other organisations, learning about funding opportunities, and involvement in different projects

Community partners are always kept informed, sent minutes of meetings, and given feedback about the progress of the project/relationship, the impact of the partnership on the museum, and aspirations for the future

Certain community organisations reflect that working with a museum/gallery takes away the stigma of being an 'alternative' organisation: the museum/gallery treats them and their clients as if this partnership is normal, and not a treat or something out of the ordinary

Additional learning continued

How to involve community partners in strategy

One of the indicators of success for the *Our Museum* programme was that communities should be involved in governance, shared decision-making and authority, working with the museum/gallery in setting targets, monitoring and evaluation. The *Our Museum* organisations have been less successful in embedding that strategic partnership with communities, and most of the collaborative work is still based on individual projects. Nevertheless, we have encountered three different models through which communities can be involved in wider strategy:

1

Community partners sit on the board or equivalent governing body

It is accepted that their role is not to 'represent' the community or their own organisation, but to bring particular skills and knowledge as a 'good trustee' responsible for the governance of the museum/gallery. However, appointing community partners helps diversify a board, brings in different skills and perspectives which enrich the conversations, and is one mechanism for keeping track of community agendas.

2

Community partners can be involved in strategic discussions through advisory panels or participatory fora that focus on different areas of museum work

While these may not be formal layers of decision-making, they bring new expertise and perspectives into the museum, especially if they report regularly to the Board.

3

Community partners can participate in workshops with the museum to develop long-term strategy

This was very successful in one of the *Our Museum* organisations, in which consultation workshops involving staff, volunteers, trustees, stakeholders and communities led to a brand-new strategic focus for the museum. It was a collaborative process with consensus and buy-in from everyone: everyone felt involved and felt their ideas were included.

Benefits of bringing community partners together

The danger of reverting to working with community partners on individual projects is that an opportunity is lost for a joint partner voice that better reflects the wider community rather than individual group agendas. In several of the *Our Museum* organisations, the staff wrongly assumed that community partners only wanted to be involved with their own projects and not in wider strategic discussions. In contrast, the community partners themselves were clear that they would welcome some sort of collective forum, to share knowledge and experiences with the museum and with each other, discuss wider local issues, and occasionally work with more diverse groups, as long as it was not too time-consuming and delivered mutual benefits.

i Further resources

Community partners advise on sustaining relationships:
ourmuseum.org.uk/sustaining-relationships

What to do and what not to do when engaging communities:
ourmuseum.org.uk/mapping-to-engage

Practical tips for collaborative decision-making:
ourmuseum.org.uk/collaborative-decision-making



Additional learning continued

Signs of success

How does a museum or gallery know that it is changing in a positive way and that its participatory practice is working well? It is difficult for quantitative measures to show quality or depth of relationships with the community, and how the museum/gallery and community influence each other. The experience of the *Our Museum* organisations suggests that the participatory change journey can be measured qualitatively through three factors: the response of the community, the organisation's behaviour, and the impact on individual staff.

Community partners can be the best advocates

During the *Our Museum* programme, it was clear that something was going right when community partners were outspoken in public about the benefits of the partnership work, rather than the museum/gallery being its own main advocate. The ideal outcome is when community partners value the relationship with the museum/gallery, are proud to be associated with it, and publicly advocate the mutual benefits and the impact on their own lives and organisations.



Strategic confidence not to be driven solely by numbers

Museums and galleries are generally expected to deliver to key performance indicators that are about numbers: visitors, events, generated income. Among the *Our Museum* organisations are those that, over several years, have developed an inner confidence not to be driven solely by visitor numbers or income, but by the depth of the engagement with the community. The former obsession with just getting people into the building has been replaced by a recognition that much of the important work happens outside. While acknowledging the necessity of generating income, there is nevertheless something strong about taking the work out – staff getting out more and being seen taking part in the community – that reflects the values and practice of participatory work. It takes confidence in the value and impact of this work to make the case to funders and stakeholders that it is of at least equal importance to quantitative indicators of visitors and income.

Staff confident and empowered to do things 'with' not 'to' communities

'Confidence' was a word heard a lot during the review visits. Individual confidence is intangible and difficult to measure, but it is an important factor in change.⁸ In these organisations, it has grown from trialling different collaborative approaches; feeling able to take a risk; openly discussing what works well and less well; having a shared understanding of what the organisation is trying to achieve; and as a result feeling empowered to make decisions. It is also a counter to common organisational attitudes to risk and blame which lead to a generally risk-averse culture. The language used within organisations, and the sorts of conversations that are possible, are also a measure of change. Many staff reported that they had developed the confidence to move from doing work 'to' or 'for' communities to doing it 'with' them. Significantly, the dominant discourse within these museums and galleries is now around community and participation, and that can only happen when staff are confident to use that language and start those conversations.

i Further resources

How evaluation can support organisational change:
ourmuseum.org.uk/evaluation-for-change

A case study of successful change:
ourmuseum.org.uk/successful-change-case-study

⁸ Lack of confidence was reported as the main barrier to progression as a leader in the report by TBR, *Scoping the Leadership Development Needs of the Cultural Sector in England* (December 2013), pp. 26-7.

Additional learning continued

Funding issues

The nature of much museum and gallery funding itself remains a barrier to developing sustainable partnerships with communities. The short-term nature of project funding was already highlighted as an issue in Bernadette Lynch's report for Paul Hamlyn Foundation, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway?*⁹

The problem of short-term funding

Most non-revenue funding streams for museums and galleries insist on project submissions that specify particular outputs and outcomes in advance. These measures of success are usually short-term, and are less understanding and supportive of work with communities that is open, flexible and longer-term (and that still requires resourcing). Yet, as we have seen, the most effective long-term relationships with communities work precisely because they do not start with a fixed project idea, often imposed by the museum/gallery, but with open conversations about what the museum and community might do together. Firm proposals may take a long time to come to fruition, and so this sort of slow-burn work falls outside the scope of much project funding. In this way, current funding is not supportive of museums and galleries developing long-term relationships that respond to how their communities want (or are able) to work with them. Funders should be encouraged to be more flexible about their definitions of outputs and outcomes and understand the benefits of long-term relationships that do not start with a fixed project idea.

The problem of short-term contracts

Our Museum organisations were concerned that some funders insist on new, short-term project staff for participatory projects rather than agreeing to part-fund existing staff. This is a barrier to developing a learning organisation that responds effectively to its communities. Funders should be encouraged to be more flexible in part-funding existing staff in order to create a legacy of learning and experience in an organisation, that is not lost when short-term contract staff move on.

The benefits of qualitative outcomes and a new framework

Excellence in participatory practice cannot effectively be measured through numbers of people, events, or income. Best practice in collaborative decision-making, mutual benefit and sense of community ownership of the museum/gallery requires a different assessment, and yet most funders still ask only for quantitative measures which cannot capture the good work that is being done. Paul Hamlyn Foundation has worked with the Museums Association and other funders to develop a new framework for evaluating and supporting participatory practice. It is hoped that this framework will provide a common language for museums/galleries, funders, communities and other stakeholders, and will form an important legacy of the *Our Museum* programme (see box on page 29).



Mission, values and vision (how embedded is it?)

Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
References to participation/ community engagement in mission statement	Mission statement promotes participation/ community engagement	Mission statement promotes participation/ community engagement and the mission is actively used to guide the work of the whole organisation	Mission statement actively promotes participation/ community engagement and is understood and used by staff and trustees to deliver and champion the work Community partners have an active say in creating and reviewing the mission statement
Organisation values contain reference to participation/ community engagement	Values encapsulate the principles of participatory practice such as equality, fairness, openness and inclusion	Values encapsulate the principles of participatory practice and are actively promoted and guide the work of the museum	Values encapsulate the principles of participatory practice and the museum is a values-led organisation

A NEW FRAMEWORK Power to the People: A Framework for Participatory Practice

This new framework aims to help museums and galleries understand and improve their participatory practice and community engagement. It has been developed as a legacy of the *Our Museum* programme with the Museums Association and a UK-wide steering group of museum workers, funders and stakeholders.

The framework is progressive, with four 'levels'. It showcases what excellence is in participatory practice, and what steps

can be taken to develop and embed it in all aspects of a museum's work.

Museums are encouraged to use the framework with community partners to reflect on their work in order to benchmark where they are, and map how they might expand the depth and reach of their participatory practice.

The framework can be found at: www.museumsassociation.org/download/powertothepeople

⁹ Lynch, *Whose Cake Is It Anyway?* (see note 1 on page 9), pp. 6, 10 and 18.

Online resources

Throughout this report, the ‘further resources’ boxes provide links to videos and written documents on the *Our Museum* multimedia web resource, www.ourmuseum.org.uk. This consists of over 200 animations, films and written documents which gather learning from the *Our Museum* programme and beyond. They are a sort of ‘travel survival kit’, practical tips based on experience of embedding participatory practice, to help organisations on their change journeys to become more participatory and build active partnerships with their communities.

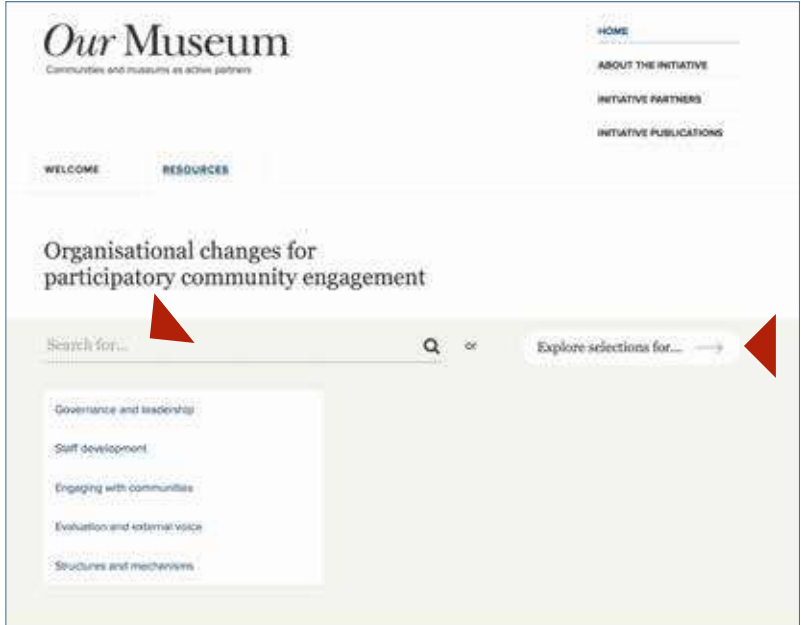
What is on ourmuseum.org.uk

The resources are organised into five categories, each with an animated introduction:

- Governance and leadership
- Staff professional development
- Engaging with community partners
- Learning and evaluation
- Structures

As well as using these five categories, there are two other ways to explore the web resource. We have created selections for people and groups (for example, community stakeholders, or sceptics); or you can enter your own keywords into the search bar.

Most of the resources are audio-visual: each has an accompanying written transcript, and you can switch on subtitles. They are free to share. Please download, show and share them widely. They are there to provoke discussion and inspire new ways of working across the museum and gallery sector.



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Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation was established by Paul Hamlyn in 1987. Upon his death in 2001, he left most of his estate to the Foundation, creating one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK.

Our mission is to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives.

We have a particular interest in supporting young people and a strong belief in the importance of the arts.

www.phf.org.uk

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