



Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* Special Initiative

The *OUR MUSEUM* organisations  
A summary of the journeys

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

## **Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums**

This summary assesses the progress of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) 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.



## **Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM)**

manage a collection of nine museums and galleries across Tyneside and the Archives for Tyne and Wear. It is supported by the five local authorities in Tyne and Wear and Newcastle University, is a Major Partner Museum (MPM) funded by Arts Council England and has Core Funded Museum status. It is governed by a Joint Committee of twelve members drawn from the local authorities of Tyneside.

### **Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs: Front-of-House staff identifying local needs**

TWAM is proud of a twenty-year history of commitment to community engagement and a decade of sustained investment in the work of the dedicated community outreach team. TWAM wanted to develop ways of working that were more informed by a comprehensive understanding of the issues people wanted them to address.

In Year 1 TWAM hosted *Partners Together*, an event attended by eighty individuals, including museum staff, community partner service providers (such as Drug and Alcohol Action Teams, Mental Health Services, Housing Associations) and service users. A report was produced which summarised the different needs of service users/members, of service providers and of commissioners and identified ways in which TWAM could collaborate more effectively with them.

Staff working at each of TWAM's sites were asked to have a conversation with a community organisation, group or venue with whom they did not have direct links, in order to find out more about their needs and aspirations. The Laing Art Gallery talked to families at local Sure Start Centres and identified that providing more information about where to park in the City Centre, better signage for baby-changing facilities, investing in more toys for smaller babies and other resources for under 5's would encourage them to visit. Shipley Art Gallery worked to develop relationships with the

user groups who use its Lounge area for their own purposes; this has led to a revival of the Gallery's work with babies and very young children and their families.

TWAM built on this approach, asking members of the museum's Front-of-House teams to contribute to this information gathering activity, through a project called *Gate Openers*. They were asked to: *'develop strategies and techniques for speaking with visitors (and, if they choose, members of their own local communities) about what needs are met by visiting our museums; about other needs that the museums may be able to meet; and about what needs our museums may think they can meet, but which are more effectively met through other means or organisations'*. TWAM staff commented: *'For a long time TWAM has gathered visitor data - feedback and statistics mostly through written methods such as surveys, comments cards and internet use. Involvement in the Our Museum programme has allowed us not only to trial, but to see the value of more conversational interaction with visitors and non-visitors, staff and volunteers.'*

TWAM also addressed a specific local need through *Our Museum*. Saltwell Park Museum, Gateshead, had closed in the 1960s; there was disappointment locally when the restored Saltwell Towers, refurbished with Heritage Lottery funding and re-opened in 2004, did not reinstate the museum and its collections. TWAM engaged with local people as to how best to use this 'lost museum' as a resource to tell different stories about Gateshead, through displaying its collections at the Shipley Art Gallery, in an ongoing programme of co-produced exhibitions.

During the course of the *Our Museum* programme, TWAM needed to develop and implement an income-generation plan, in response to cuts in local authority expenditure. It organised a facilitated management symposium to look at the perceived tension between income generation to meet financial targets and engagement: an issue with the potential to adversely affect its ability to be needs-led rather than resource-led. The symposium concluded there was no conflict in principle between deeper community engagement and other strategic objectives, but recognised the need to be more aware of and more open to directly addressing potential tensions, as well as opportunities, when making hard decisions.

### **Outcome 2 Community Agency: Alternative Management Team, Community Engagement Framework**

TWAM set up an *Our Museum* engagement team, with members of staff from across the organisation and community partners, including a long-serving volunteer. The team met regularly although there were a few changes in membership over the course of the programme. Members were involved in discussions about the direction of the programme and took part in *Our Museum* evaluation visits and peer reviews.

TWAM proposed a radical experiment in terms of developing community agency – an Alternative Management Team - piloted in Year 1.

The Alternative Management Team, which included staff and community partners, were asked to consider three real problems facing the museum: the balance between venue opening hours and work in the community: the balance between different programmes of public engagement and collections care: the balance between working towards economic investment (i.e. tourism) and community development. They were briefed on the issues involved by the Senior Management Team and worked together with them and the *Our Museum* coordinator to explore similarities and differences in the ways they approached the problems. The Alternative Management Team carried out its own research and identified two issues: the need to charge for certain exhibitions and activities and communication with communities. It felt that charging, in itself, was not necessarily a barrier but that TWAM needed to develop new ways to ensure that charging did not exclude people and should consider whether people could be asked to buy an additional ticket that somebody else could use when visiting charged exhibitions (in the same way as people purchase ‘suspended’ coffees.) TWAM are exploring ways of making this happen at some of its venues. AMT members will also help to shape how the organisation can use in a socially valuable way some of the information it collects through the new free loyalty card scheme that is being developed as part of its 2015-18 programme.

The Alternative Management Team is now playing an important role in helping TWAM to develop a draft Community Engagement Framework. Entitled *Valuing Voices*, ‘*this will make explicit the ways in which people outside the organisation can engage in, and influence, its activity*’. The AMT will help to pilot the new framework at one of TWAM’s venues initially, and to roll it out further across the organisation over time.

The experience of developing the Alternative Management Team highlighted additional challenges for the organisation to consider. For example, TWAM has many advisory groups, but these are often called upon only by those staff who have direct contact with them, when the experience and knowledge of members of these advisory groups also has value for other people and teams within the organisation.

### **Outcome 3 Capability Building: Cross-organisation and community partner training**

TWAM identified capability building for its staff as a key element in achieving its *Our Museum* strategic objectives. An initial survey of staff and volunteers indicated that only half of respondents were confident about making contact with communities.

In Year 1, there were early discussions with the museum's outreach team about how best to create an in-house programme. The outreach team were keen to avoid a sense of there being 'experts' and 'non-experts' and wanted to create more of a sense of knowledge exchange, with team members learning more about how others in the organisation worked with community partners, as well as sharing their own skills and experience. TWAM experimented with 'active listening' collaborations between members of the outreach team and venue managers. For example, a venue manager who was interested in encouraging older visitors to visit her site worked with a member of the outreach team; she was introduced to community partners with considerable knowledge of older people's networks and needs. Through these informal conversations, a range of practical initiatives were suggested.

TWAM then developed a training programme called *Enquiring Minds* (later *Open Minds*), modelled on Glasgow Museums' Staff Ambassadors programme. This provided training and participation sessions for staff, volunteers and community partners on alternative ways of communicating through valuing difference; on non-verbal communication; on asset-based approaches; and on improvisational theatre techniques to remove the barriers to creative thinking and invention. Community partners facilitated some of these training sessions. The programme encouraged participants to re-frame thinking and ways of working. For example, a member of TWAM's development team identified how she could frame funding bids to include meaningful community consultation from the start. Feedback demonstrated that the process of sharing and joint exploration was valued by participants although they felt learning and outcomes needed to be fed more effectively into TWAM's internal structures.

TWAM believes that programmes like *Open Minds* will be difficult to sustain post *Our Museum*, but regards them as an exploratory process which could be valuable: '*as a means of trialling an idea for a programme, exhibition or event in its earliest stages in a joined up way which will allow the organisation to be influenced at the development stages, and will give those involved time to reflect before going ahead with a potentially larger programme of activity.*' A process similar to *Open Minds* is planned as part of *Valuing Voices*, the new Community Engagement Framework, which is also intended to support the development of staff capabilities.

TWAM's *Try New Things* (TNT) initiative, which was recently set up by a small group of non-management staff, also aims to encourage innovative practice within the organisation, make connections between staff, and challenge existing decision making structures, by inviting staff and volunteers together, with or without a community partner, to apply for a small grant to trial a project exploring new ideas to engage new and existing audiences.

#### Outcome 4 Reflection: People's Parliament, Conversation Space

TWAM experimented with several different methods of encouraging reflective practice. In Year 1, it set up a Critical Friends Group, made up of community members, TWAM staff and volunteers. This represented a wider group of people and preliminary discussions focused on how TWAM might become more rooted in local needs. In Year 2, this group were invited to attend a People's Parliament, which was attended by staff who had been involved in *Our Museum* activities, other staff who had not been involved and by community members who hadn't been involved before. The People's Parliament helped to shape TWAM's Year 3 work plan.

Reflection was an integral part of other strands of TWAM's programme. Staff commented that the work of Front-of-House staff *'involved the delivery of an intervention, reflection and then re-delivery that allowed us to develop our thinking.'* TWAM's experience in *Our Museum* and advice from *Open Mind* participants - who had noted the value of informal, inspiring spaces in encouraging reflection and dialogue - led them to create a 'Conversation Space' at the Discovery Museum. Artist Alexia Mellor supported Discovery staff to shape a programme of experimental activity to help them identify what they would like to use their 'Conversation Space' for, and what it might look like. Design plans for the 'Conversation Space' are in place, and its refurbishment is expected to be complete by March 2016.

TWAM also embarked on a series of reflective conversations, aimed at finding out what staff, community partners and other stakeholders thought of its mission. They believe this has *'enabled staff to articulate and communicate more clearly the ways in which they connect their individual work plan with communities and our organisation's mission statement.'*

