Providing varied routes in for community voices

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums wanted to ensure that anyone who engages with them knows that they can influence the organisation, and is aware of the different ways to do this.

After running a series of experiments throughout the three-year programme, they concluded that there was no one solution to bringing in community voices: they needed a range of varied approaches that took into account wider strategy, programming, and staff development. They developed six overlapping mechanisms:

Alternative Management Team: a parallel management team comprising community partners, volunteers and staff, offering alternative perspectives on strategic issues and meeting regularly with the senior management team to feed back.

Gate Openers: works with front-of-house staff to identify visitor needs and the changes needed to ensure a more intuitive, positive experience for visitors.

Open Minds: staff, volunteers and community partners work together as participants on a research topic, sharing their experiences and knowledge and learning together. The processes developed help to trial ideas for programmes, exhibitions or events at their earliest stages.

On a Mission: independent interviews with staff, to explore the ways their roles fulfil the organisation's mission: 'to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others'.

Communities and Collections: engaging communities in the development and future of a gallery.

Conversation Space: facilitated by an artist, a different way of staff having conversations, exploring organisational issues and proposing changes, through knowledge exchange, hot-desking mornings and creative office interventions – playful and disruptive.

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Extract from: No Longer us and them: How to change into a participatory museum and gallery. Available on the Our Museum resources website http://ourmuseum.org.uk/