

Creative Café

Discussion paper – June 2014

Background

Feedback from those GM staff that attended the Dragon's Den event in December 2013, as well as comments from the GM Community Forum, indicates that for any such ideas generation event, there are five key ingredients for success:

- **Clarity** of goals: what are the overall GM programme goals towards which we are working? These need to be clear to all participants for the event to feel meaningful and generate purposeful outcomes.
- **Creative thinking** must be central to any event. Ideas that could use objects from across the collection and encompass cross-cutting themes should be actively encouraged.
- **Cross-pollination** is an important function of such an event, requiring a format that allows for the fluid sharing of ideas through meaningful conversation
- **Communication** before, during and after such an event is critical. There must be effective communication about the purpose of this event as well as how the ideas generated will be taken forward. Ongoing communication about current research, priorities and strategic objectives (via the annual GM research conference, Insight cafes etc) need to be considered alongside any such ideas generation event.
- **Consistency:** any such event should happen regularly, at designated intervals and should form part of existing structures.

Suggested event format

Based on the central issue of the time commitments of external partners as well as GM staff, the following event model looks at a half day (eg: 10am-1pm) session.

A **World Café** style event model could be considered. This has an informal and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue which facilitates diversity of perspectives and the cross-pollination of ideas.

There are five key components to any World Café style event.

1. *Setting:* Create a "special" environment, most often modelled after a café, i.e. small round tables covered with a tablecloth

2) *Welcome and Introduction*: The host begins with a warm welcome and an introduction to the process, setting the context, and putting participants at ease.

3) *Small Group Rounds*: The process begins with the first of three or more twenty minute rounds of conversation for groups seated around the tables. One person remains as the "table host" for the next round, who welcomes the next group and briefly fills them in on what happened in the previous round.

4) *Questions*: each round is prefaced with a **question** designed for the specific context and desired purpose of the session. The same questions can be used for more than one round, or they can be built upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction.

5) *Harvest*: After the small group discussions (and/or in between rounds, as desired) individuals are invited to share insights or other results from their conversations with the rest of the large group. These results are reflected and recorded in a variety of ways.

The GM Creative Café: how it could work

There are six key steps to this event which need to be carefully considered.

1. Setting the context: clarifying the purpose and broad parameters within which dialogue will occur

A compelling and clear invitation will need to be crafted for the event and consideration given to who will be invited to attend and how the invitation will be issued. Will this be done digitally, via social media, directed via existing Community and Advisory Forums etc? The invitation needs to be simple and clear so that people understand what they are being asked to participate in.

For the first of these Creative Cafes, it will be important to give a substantial amount of context and information. Starting with a blank page can be intimidating and it will be important for the quality and relevance of ideas generated that they are rooted in a good understanding of Glasgow Museums and its programme goals.

The recommendation is that 30-45 minutes be devoted to an informal panel discussion to provide the necessary context about GM, its collection strengths, its programme goals and priorities. The emphasis here should be sharing information in an engaging and responsive way rather than a series of presentations by museum staff. The panel discussion should demonstrate and model conversation, ideas sharing and different perspectives coming together so as to set the scene for subsequent conversations.

For future iterations of the Café, such a Panel discussion may not be required as information may be shared more effectively through other mechanisms, such as the research conference, Insight Café series etc.

2. Create a hospitable space: assure a welcoming and safe environment that nurtures personal comfort and mutual respect

It is important to consider carefully the sort of environment that this event will be hosted within. When people feel comfortable, they will do their most creative

thinking. The set up of the space and the hospitality extended are therefore key considerations for the effectiveness of this type of event.

The recommendation is that the event is not hosted in a museum venue.

3. Explore questions that matter: focus collective attention on powerful questions that attract collaboration and engagement

While participants should know what they are attending the event to talk about, each conversation round will require a focussing question. In most WC style events, a single question is addressed through all conversation rounds.

Alternatively, a scaffolded approach to the conversation rounds could be adopted so that a sequence of questions, that build and feed into each other, could be utilised.

Either way, these questions must be carefully considered and framed to ensure the event generates relevant outcomes that can be taken forward.

4. Encourage everyone's contribution

Each table should have a permanent table "host" who facilitate the conversations happening on their table and take notes of the conversation as it unfolds. These people should be selected in advance for this session. For future iterations of this event, as the process becomes more comfortable, the job of "hosting" a table could be left to participants to decide themselves.

5. Connect diverse perspectives

At the end of each round of conversation, participants stop and move to different tables. At this point, everyone is instructed to spread out and mix. This ensures cross-pollination of ideas. The table hosts briefly summarise the conversation that has emerged at their table.

The number of question rounds will need to be considered, depending on whether a single question or scaffolded series of questions is used. A recommendation for this event might be five to eight rounds.

6. Listen for patterns, insights and share collective discoveries

For this event, it will be important to bring together the ideas being generated at different tables through the conversation rounds. The resulting notes are the key output of the event. Making these visible to the group provides a satisfying closure to the event and makes tangible the ideas that have been generated.

A suggested way to make visible the ideas being generated and to look for the patterns, common themes they contain is to have a team of volunteer scribes with laptops connected to a screen. After each conversation round, volunteers collect the recorded notes and enter them quickly into their laptops. At the end of the conversation rounds, patterns/themes can be summarised and projected via a screen back to the room. This then leads to concluding facilitated discussion where next steps can also be reiterated.

Participants can attach their name to those ideas that they would like to be part of developing should they be selected to be taken forward by Glasgow Museums.

It is important that communication goes back out to the event attendees about which ideas will be worked up further and put through MORPHE system.

Resources required

- Facilitator
- Table hosts x 5-8
- Scribes x 3
- Panel discussion members
- Large room with flexible layout for tables and chairs to be arranged cabaret/café style
- Laptops and screen (networked)
- Catering