

What was it like for you?

We have had a great first year as part of the *Our Museum* team. First we want to thank you for being so welcoming when we turned up on your doorsteps with the Evaluation Framework clutched in our hands and on our follow-up visits.

This e-newsletter is the first in an irregular series. It describes briefly what we've been doing and gives some examples of what we have learned about approaches and insights from OM participants during Year 1. It also signals a slight shift of emphasis for us in Year 2. In Year 1 the focus was on your work as essentially 'separate' and individual collaborative partnerships. In Year 2 we want to begin to reflect together on how everyone's work connects to the clear overall objectives the Paul Hamlyn Foundation hopes to achieve through OM.

Baseline Assessments

We asked you for information about your museum or gallery and spent time exploring your websites and publications, policy papers and funding applications. All of this was done so that we could prepare qualitative baseline reports for each museum and gallery in the programme. The reports were agreed with each of you and answered the crucial question 'where are we now?' in relation to the OM Outcomes and Indicators of Success. These give us a way of charting the progress you make in all of these areas over the life-time of the programme.

Our colleague Helen Corkery also analysed and summarised a wide range of quantitative data into a second baseline report for each organisation. This report focused on the social, economic and demographic context in which you are working and in some cases made suggestions about gaps in data or things that you might consider doing now to move closer to the OM outcomes and Indicators.

We plan to refer to both of these reports again as the OM programme unfolds. We will use them as key points of comparison to assess how much has changed during the three-year programme and how far you have moved towards your particular strategic objectives and the Outcomes and Indicators.

Visits and Key Issues and Questions paper

At the end of Year 1 we have visited each organisation twice and met with community partners, project co-ordinators, staff, Lead Contacts and Directors. We also posted a semi-structured on line questionnaire so that anyone not able to be part of the 'real time' evaluation could still share their views and experiences. After the second visit, we agreed with you a short paper outlining key issues and questions emerging from your experience at this early stage in the OM programme. We hope this external perspective helped flag up some issues and opportunities that will be useful to you in taking your OM programme forward.

Keeping in touch

Most of you are now keeping us regularly up-dated by sharing information about your activities and your learning. This is valuable and we do read what you send us. Do remember we are not asking you to prepare anything special or additional to what you are producing already. Let us have the things you are sharing with each other or with colleagues or with the public. We're after the stuff that helps us understand more about what you are doing as part of the OM programme. Please remember to add us to that email cc list or send us that web link – if you don't, we might not be aware of or be able to record some of the most important changes you are making.

PHF OM Steering Group

Every PHF Special Initiative has a Steering Group. In November 2012 we gave a brief presentation to the PHF OM Steering Group on progress and challenges to date, drawing on the baseline assessments and the Annual Evaluation meetings we had with everyone in the autumn. In Year 2, we will give a more detailed interim presentation to the Steering Group.

Support with Self-evaluation

Piotr Bienkowski, OM Director, asked us to write a guidance note to support community engagement teams in developing your self-evaluation plans for Year 2 and to visit any organisations that wanted some advice and support from us. We emailed out the guidance note just before Christmas 2012 and followed up with visits to 8 organisations during February and March to discuss evaluation plans for Year 2 of the programme. This was excellent for us, as it gave us another opportunity to meet some of you again and learn more about what you've been doing.

Evaluation of the OM Overall Programme Objectives: The Shift!

PHF talks about 'Grants Plus' as an ethos that underlies all of its work. While PHF's main activities are based around Special Initiatives, Open Grants and Research and evaluation, PHF wants to have impact beyond the funding provided, so it 'seeks to learn, share and influence others with its work.' This is definitely the case with OM.

In Year 2, we will be putting more emphasis on evaluation of the Overall Programme Objectives. The seven objectives are listed on page 5 of the Evaluation Framework which can be downloaded at: <http://ourmuseum.ning.com/page/our-museum-evaluation-framework>. It's worth re-reading them now to be reminded just how crucial your collaborative practice and organisational change is to creating significant change nationwide.

Examples of approaches and insights from OM participants in Year 1

The peer review this month in Cardiff is going to be a great opportunity for all of us to hear more about the work everyone else is doing. We wanted to share with you in advance of the meeting a few of the approaches and insights we have found interesting in Year 1 to start the ball rolling. Of course you will all have long lists of ideas and insights, exasperations and challenges to share. We look forward to learning more about what you have been doing in Cardiff.

Museums like The Lightbox, the Museum of East Anglian Life and Hackney are taking the opportunities offered by the OM programme to experiment with ways of finding out more about their local communities. It will be interesting to compare and contrast what their different approaches reveal.

The Lightbox has consulted widely during Year 1 with internal and external interests, organisations and individuals through a mix of forums and around 30 one to one interviews. In sessions with all members of staff, representatives of the Borough Council, the Friends, volunteers and Trustees the focus was on understanding differing perspectives of The Lightbox. Important themes included The Lightbox's relationship with its communities and the impact of its structure and ways of working on perceptions and connections.

The Museum of East Anglian Life has decided to appoint a 'museum activist', Sarah Allman, whose job priorities are 'to carry out research identifying contemporary trends and issues which are of interest to rural communities in Suffolk', 'to develop relationships with up to six geographical communities within the county to explore how heritage can inspire community activism' and 'to ensure that the research and community participation influence the public programming and collections activity within the museum.'

Hackney have decided to focus on 'exploring contemporary meanings of community with local people' through a programme of work with one street, Cazenove Road, as a way of responding to the significant diversity of Hackney and the complex interconnections between communities. In the early stages, this has involved discussions with a wide range of groups who live or work in the area, to build relationships and identify ideas, issues and concerns. A variety of contributions are planned and groups have been invited to propose their ideas to the Steering Group (governed by Community Partners) for their recommendation.

TWAM have experimented with ways of increasing community participation in dialogue and decision-making. These have included a pilot Alternative Management Team, which is considering three real problems facing the Senior Management Team of the organisation and working to propose ways of addressing them and a People's Parliament to find out more about the needs of communities and how TWAM might respond to these and involve people more in key decisions.

Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales is finding that formal Service Level Agreements with Community Partners linked to an agreed day rate for time is contributing to the partners' ability to embed the work in their own organisations and provide a sustained commitment: both time and depth of engagement. All the Community Partners represent organisations with a local, regional or national role relevant to the focus of ACNMW's strategic objectives on volunteers and volunteering. CPs found out first-hand what it feels like to be a volunteer at Sain ffgans on the CP Volunteer Day.

Belfast Exposed is working with a diverse range of community partners to explore challenges central to its strategic objectives that will also be familiar to others in the sector, for example, how to establish a set of common values and goals that join up the different strands of an organization's work, so that it has a clear identity which can be understood by the diversity of communities it serves. At the heart of the question for Belfast Exposed is building more effective communication, understanding and relationships of trust across the work of the gallery and community programmes.

It was encouraging to learn that the draft design of the overall evaluation framework for Glasgow Museums (GM) has been influenced by consideration of the OM outcomes and indicators of success. In particular, the draft includes measures related to reflective practice. As one of GM's strategic priorities for its programme was to use reflective practice to facilitate organisational change, this demonstrates one way in which it intends to embed this approach in all its work.

In Bristol reflection on use of a physical journal - a little black book - by each member of the Our Museum Team to capture the 'unexpected' has led to thinking about more flexible formats so that, for example, insights and ideas can be more easily shared within the Team and with others. Discussion has also begun on moving from an approach linking each OM outcome individually to a particular project or activity, to one that explores how to achieve multiple OM outcomes through one or more projects or activities.

Ryedale Folk Museum (RFM) thinks that paying attention to reflective practice has helped staff, trustees, volunteers and partners look much more closely at what it is doing, both internally and externally. It has led to more regular review and sharing opportunities, in-house, with wider communities and in the wider sector. This includes a PHF notice-board, which is part of their response to 'journaling' for the evaluation about unexpected insights or outcomes. They comment that 'participating in the Our Museum programme has led us to re-assess some of our practices and question what we have traditionally taken as a given.'

Thanks again for your welcome. We are looking forward to learning more about what you have been doing in Cardiff and also to Year 2. We hope you are too!

Gerri and Sally ... and Helen