

Power to the **People**

A self-assessment
framework
for participatory
practice

MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION

Museums and communities working together

This framework has been developed to help museums understand and improve their participatory practice and community engagement. Its aim is to provide benchmarks of best practice, to showcase excellence in this field and to support museums to develop strong and sustainable connections to their communities.

The framework helps people who work in and with museums reflect and learn and to support a journey towards deeper and more sustainable community engagement and participation. It also provides a common language for museums, funders and other stakeholders.

There is a growing body of participatory work in museums and evidence that many want to improve their relationships and collaboration with communities in an open and equal way; this framework aims to support this work by providing:

- a working definition of participatory practice
- a guide to the qualities and principles of this work
- a framework to help museums to understand their current practice and support its development
- links to further resources, guidance, toolkits and reports to support participatory practice in museums.

This framework has been produced with oversight from a UK-wide steering group of museum workers, funders and stakeholders and is based on research interviews with over 20 museum professionals examining the current state of participatory practice. The steering group and funders involved in developing this framework encourage you to use it to support and develop your work with communities.

It has been produced with the support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.



Cover image: Museum of Homelessness.
This page: Glasgow Women's Library

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Definition

There are different understandings of participatory practice and community engagement in the museum sector; for the purposes of this report we are defining it as:

“Museums and communities working together as equal partners.”



As part of this research we asked people who work in museums what this work means to them and their institution. This is what they said:

“Creating environments that encourage conversations. A conversation to start with and then exploring by experimenting and trying things out.”

Zoe Brown, Outreach Officer, Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums

“It means active involvement in the museum - every aspect of it.”

Paddy Gilmore, Head of Programmes, National Museums Northern Ireland

“Participatory practice is getting people involved in what we do. And that isn’t just being on the receiving end, that’s also being involved in decision making.”

Karen Perkins, Director of Culture and Engagement, Luton Culture

“Moving from a state where the museum makes all the decisions to the community being actively involved in the public programmes to the extent that that is leading where the museum is going.”

Owain Rhys, Community Engagement and Participation Manager, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

“It’s being actively and meaningfully involved and it being led by those people, not by the museum.”

Victoria Rogers, Museum Manager, Cardiff Story Museum

“It’s taking the approach that we’re not doing something to you, we’re doing something with you.”

Marilyn Scott, Director, The Lightbox

“It’s about authentic participation that places people central to cultural and community life in a museum.”

Rachel Thain-Gray, Project Coordinator, Equality in Progress, Glasgow Women’s Library

What does community participation look like in museums?

There are different levels of community participation from those institutions that are beginning to explore relationships with community partners to those that have established deep and meaningful interactions, but whatever level you are operating at there are key principles and qualities that apply.

Principles:

- doing with, rather than doing to or for
- community involvement in decision-making on projects and wider strategy
- a sense of ownership from both the community and the museum
- change for everyone involved - including the museum
- a holistic approach that permeates throughout the museum
- part of the core work and strategic aims and objectives of the museum
- a people-centred approach
- giving voice to those outside the museum
- providing mutual benefit for the museum and the community.

Qualities:

- reflective thinking and practice
- learning processes
- organisations and individuals being open to change
- embracing risk and failure
- progressive and developmental
- involvement
- equality.



Why does it matter?

Engaging communities in the life of your museum will make it a more responsive, dynamic, and sustainable institution. Meaningful community engagement and participation will raise the profile of your museum and will have a positive impact on how you are perceived by stakeholders, funders and the public.



Communities across the UK are fluid and changing; the more we connect and make contact, include and embrace, the better the experience for all. Inclusive and participatory museums offer a better and richer experience for everyone and museums have much to learn, and gain, from working in this way.

Participation in museums can:

- have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of all involved
- help build a sustainable organisation
- generate new and exciting opportunities to be creative
- create a positive impression of the museum with stakeholders including communities, funders and politicians.

Participation in museums matters to:

- community partners
- the museum
- people who work in and with museums
- funders and stakeholders
- society.

How to use this framework

Museums are encouraged to use this framework with their community partners to reflect on their work in order to benchmark where they are and map how they might improve and develop their engagement. Different museums will be at different stages on the journey; this is a flexible tool to help you work out where your organisation is now, where you want to be and how you might get there. It is a self-assessment framework and should be used to encourage reflection, conversation and learning.





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 Organisation takes a proactive approach to championing participatory practice and sharing what works and supporting the wider sector

Image: Amgueddfa Genedlaethol y Glannau - National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
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Leadership and governance (are those in charge championing it?)

Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
<p>Passive commitment to participation/community engagement from the leadership of the museum</p>	<p>Individual leaders are aware of and make the case for participation/community engagement in the museum</p>	<p>Leadership team champions participation/community engagement throughout the museum</p>	<p>Leaders demonstrate active commitment to participation/community engagement and vocally champion it internally and externally</p> <p>Leaders attend internal and external events with community partners to jointly make the case for the value of participation/community engagement</p> <p>Leaders speak at sector and international events to share best practice and promote the value of participation/community engagement</p>
<p>Trustees are aware of participation/ community engagement work in museums</p>	<p>Trustees understand the case for and importance of participation/ community engagement work</p>	<p>Trustees champion participation/ community engagement work in the museum</p> <p>Trustees receive training in participation/ community engagement work</p> <p>Information about participation/ community engagement work is included in the trustee induction pack</p>	<p>Trustees champion participation/ community engagement work in the museum and externally</p> <p>Trustees attend internal and external meetings and events with community partners</p> <p>Community partners are represented on the board</p>



Commitment to action
(is it written into policies and enacted?)

Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
Project funding is sought in order to deliver participation/community engagement programmes	Core budget is set aside for participation/ community engagement work	Participation/ community engagement work is embedded in business and strategic plans and budgeted for across the organisation	Participation/ community engagement work is embedded in business and strategic plans and budgeted for and the work is used to advocate to stakeholders and funders
Participation/ community engagement work is carried out on a project basis with ad hoc community partners	Participation/ community engagement work is planned and embedded with long-term partners	Participation/ community engagement work is embedded and runs throughout the organisation	The museum builds sustained and lasting relationships with community partners

Engagement and decision making (who has a say in which areas)



Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
Participation/community engagement work is planned by staff and others working in engagement	Management/leadership team, trustees and staff are involved in planning participation/community engagement	Management/leadership team, trustees and staff are involved in planning participation/community engagement as part of overall strategic planning	Management/leadership team, trustees, staff and community partners are involved in planning participation/community engagement as part of overall strategic planning
Community partners are consulted on pre-determined programmes and activities	Mechanisms are in place for community partners to have a say in decision-making related to exhibitions and other time-limited projects Community partners are supported to engage with the museum	Mechanisms are in place for community partners to have a say in decision-making related to the museum's work across departmental areas	Mechanisms are in place for community partners to have a say in decision-making at the highest level in the organisation including strategic and business plans e.g. community partners on the board of trustees
			Participation in the museum is viewed as a shared endeavour, everyone has a role to play, and there is clarity about roles and expectations, mutual respect and recognition with good mechanisms for reviewing progress
Community partners are engaged on a project by project basis		Community partners have a long-term relationship with the museum and staff	Community partners have a long-term relationship with the museum and work on both core and time-limited plans

Workforce and professional development (are we confident and capable?)

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Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
<p>Understanding:</p> <p>Staff, contractors and consultants know about participatory practice/ community engagement through internal communications and meetings</p>	<p>Staff, contractors and consultants understand the case for participatory practice/ community engagement and there is shared language and understanding with community partners and other stakeholders</p>	<p>Staff, volunteers and trustees are able to articulate the case for participatory practice/ community engagement and there is shared language and understanding with community partners and other stakeholders</p>	<p>Staff, volunteers and trustees champion participatory practice/ community engagement both inside and outside the museum</p>
<p>Training and development:</p> <p>Staff training and professional development programmes make reference to participatory practice/ community engagement</p>	<p>Staff training and professional development programmes have modules and training related to participatory practice/ community engagement available for all staff, contractors and consultants</p>	<p>All staff including front of house, volunteers and trustees are given the opportunity to take part in training and/ or professional development related to participatory practice/ community engagement</p>	<p>Trustees and leadership lead and take part in training in and/ or professional development related to participatory practice/ community engagement</p> <p>Community partners deliver training for staff on what participatory practice/ community engagement means from their perspective</p>
<p>Recruitment:</p> <p>Recruitment materials for community and other related posts reference participatory practice/ community engagement</p>	<p>Recruitment materials for all posts reference participatory practice/ community engagement</p>	<p>Experience of and qualifications in participatory practice/ community engagement have equal status with other museum experience or qualifications</p>	<p>Experience of and qualifications in participatory practice/ community engagement have equal status with other museum experience or qualifications and community partners are represented on recruitment panels and take part in the whole recruitment process including shortlisting and interviews</p> <p>Recruitment processes take into account that candidates have different learning styles, qualifications and skills base</p>
<p>Job descriptions and person specifications for community and other related posts have relevant criteria and require the skills, knowledge and training necessary to undertake participatory practice/ community engagement</p>	<p>Job descriptions and person specifications for posts across the organisation have relevant criteria and require the skills, knowledge and training necessary to undertake participatory practice/ community engagement</p>		<p>All members of staff, including leadership, trustees, and volunteers, have participatory practice/ community engagement in their job description</p> <p>Community partners help to draw up job descriptions and person specifications</p>



Evaluation and evidence of change (are we learning from what we do?)

Starting off	Making progress	Best practice	Leading and championing
<p>Goals and key performance indicators (KPIs):</p> <p>Goals and KPIs for participatory practice/ community engagement work are set on a project basis</p> <p>Qualitative methods for evaluation of projects are in place</p>	<p>Goals and KPIs for participatory practice/ community engagement work are set in line with the strategic plan for the whole organisation</p>	<p>Goals and KPIs for participatory practice/ community engagement work are measured against baseline data and monitored regularly throughout the organisation</p> <p>Senior leadership is accountable against KPIs and qualitative measures</p>	<p>Goals and KPIs are measured and monitored with full scrutiny and reporting at leadership and trustee level and are shared with community partners</p> <p>Community partners have a role in setting organisational goals, KPIs and qualitative measures</p>
<p>Staff are introduced to reflective* practice and why it is important</p> <p><i>*thinking about your work experiences to improve the way you work</i></p>	<p>Reflective practice is used to evaluate the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work</p>	<p>Reflective practice is used with staff and community partners to evaluate the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work</p>	<p>Reflective practice is used collectively with staff and community partners across the organisation to evaluate the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work and all other areas of the museum's work</p>
<p>Internal evaluation/measures used to understand the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work</p>	<p>External evaluation/measures used to understand the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work</p>	<p>External evaluation is used to understand the experience and success of participatory practice/ community engagement work</p>	<p>Insightful challenge from experienced independent evaluators/critical friends supports staff and community partners to understand what works well and areas for development</p>
		<p>Questions and challenge from staff are encouraged</p>	<p>Questions and challenge from staff and community partners are encouraged and collectively reflected on</p> <p>Evaluation is used to create change and develop practice</p>

This is **how we do it**

Many museums are working closely with their communities but there is always room for improvement. Here are some 'how to' tips and further resources to support the key elements of the framework.

Engagement and decision making

One of the indicators of success for participatory practice is that communities are involved in governance, shared decision-making and authority, working with the museum in setting targets, monitoring and evaluation. Here are some of the ways which communities can be involved in wider strategy:

- 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 organisation. In addition, appointing community partners can help diversify a board, bringing in different skills and perspectives that enrich the conversations and is one mechanism for keeping track of community agendas.
- Community partners are involved in strategic discussions through advisory panels or participatory fora that focus on different areas of the museum's work. This can bring new expertise and perspectives into the museum, especially if they report regularly to the board.
- Community partners participate in workshops with the museum to develop long-term strategy. Consultation workshops involving staff, volunteers, trustees, stakeholders and communities can lead to a new strategic focus for the museum. The collaborative process can build consensus and buy-in from everyone and make community partners feel that they are included and their ideas are taken seriously.

"Communities were involved in workshops to develop our new strategy. It was a collaborative process which led to consensus: everyone felt involved and their ideas were represented in our forward plan."

Jenny Cousins, Director,
Museum of East Anglian Life



Image: Glasgow Women's Library
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Evaluation and evidence of change

An essential component of 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.

These are some of the models of reflection that can be built into daily practice:

- Set aside five minutes at the end of each meeting to reflect on what happened: what did you learn, how does it impact the rest of the organisation, what could you do differently?
- 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.
- Use formal debriefs of projects and programmes with community partners to focus on lessons learned and what you are trying to achieve.
- Use regular meetings with staff and volunteers to focus not only on operational matters but also include reflection by asking questions and sharing learning e.g. in the last week/month what went well and what could have gone better? Create an atmosphere that encourages shared learning rather than blame.
- Empowering staff frees up time for reflection. When staff understand and buy into the strategic aims of the organisation this allows managers to give them more freedom to take decisions within that strategic framework. As a result, meetings no longer need to focus as much on operational details and can be more philosophical and reflective.



"Becoming a more reflective organisation has been a very rewarding part of the work that's been taking place - building in time for discussion, building in time for lessons learned and pushing hard to make sure we take those lessons learned on board and change."

Christine McLellan, Logistics and Programming Manager, Glasgow Museums

Resources

Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Our Museum
<http://ourmuseum.org.uk>

Community partners working with a wide range of museums and galleries advise on how to sustain relationships:
<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/sustaining-relationships/>

Practical tips for collaborative decision-making from National Museum Wales:
<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/collaborative-decision-making/>

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

The Staff Ambassadors programme at Glasgow Museums:
<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/staff-ambassadors/>
and
<http://ourmuseum.org.uk/staff-ambassadors-phase-2/>

Museums Association,
Museums Change Lives (2017)
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives>

McSweeney, K. and Kavanagh J. (eds.) (2016) Museum Participation: New Directions for Audience Participation, Museums Etc.
<https://neweconomics.org/2008/07/co-production>

Simon, N. (2010) The Participatory Museum, Museum 2.0
<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>

Open Up Resources
<http://openupresources.org/>

Cultural Democracy in Practice, Arts Council England
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/cultural-democracy-practice>

