

**LONDON
MUSEUM
DEVELOPMENT**

London Museum Development Diversity Matters Programme 2018-2022

London Museum Development's Diversity Matters Programme encourages London's non-national museums to embrace Arts Council England's [Creative Case for Diversity](#) and engage a more diverse range of visitors with the collections they hold, as well as support them with long standing issues about the diversity of their boards and workforce. Over the four years London's non-national museums will be encouraged to make diversity a key issue in relation to the programming, audience development, leadership and workforce of museums. The national agenda focuses on increasing opportunities for people from protected characteristic groups¹ and overcoming the challenges and the barriers to participation and engagement across socio-economic barriers and across geographic location.

As part of the wider programme, London Museum Development asked museums to share their experiences of developing responsive and diverse programmes, exhibitions, collections, audience initiatives, workforce and trustee boards for all its visitors. The following case study is showcased on the website as it addresses one of the four key areas of diversity practice:

- How museums have worked with its diverse visitors to diversify its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community
- How museums have reached more diverse audiences and ensured its audience is more representative of its respective local community
- How museums have developed a more diverse board of trustees that is more representative of its respective local community.
- How museums have recruited and retained a diverse workforce which is more representative of its respective local community.

Royal Institute of British Architects Case Study

RIBA 

Royal Institute of
British Architects

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| Project Title: | Opening the RIBA: Architectural workshop and experiences for blind and partially sighted visitors |
| Timescales: | September 2019-March 2020 |
| Budget: | £1,000 |

¹ Diversity is defined by Arts Council England through protected characteristic groups, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty 2011. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation as well as class and socio-economic status.

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| Overall area of diversity practice covered as part of project: | | Yes |
| | Working with diverse visitors to produce, present and distribute its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity evidence area covered as part of project: | | Yes |
| | Integrating diversity in the museum's programme | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Engaging a diverse range of people in developing/delivering programmes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Supporting diverse practitioners | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Protected characteristic group museum worked with as part of project: | | Yes |
| | Disability | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Contact details for further information: | Wilson Yau, Learning Manager – Digital: wilson.yau@riba.org | |



Photograph of group in the gallery spaces

What were the project's aims?

The project aimed to:

- Diversify the museum's visitor profile visiting and engaging with the architectural collections

- Host a creative workshop for people who are blind and partially sighted
- Developing a whole organisation Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy to cover the whole of RIBA (not just the museum)
- Enable staff to gain valuable experience of working with blind and partially sighted people
- Build a relationship with this audience and support them in shaping the museum's future programming.

Who did the museum work with?

The museum worked with staff at [VocalEyes](#), an organisation with many years of experience in working with blind and partially sighted people and who focus on providing opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to access art and cultural venues. Working with them and partially sighted artist Sally Booth, the museum connected to and recruited 10 participants from the blind and partially sighted community. The event was open to all members of the blind and partially sighted community, irrespective of age or ability, consequently the museum had a good mix of ages participating, including families as well as participants over 60.

What did the project entail?

Museum staff began with meetings with VocalEyes and the artist to discuss the suitability of the museum's building and what could be offered to participants. The artist, VocalEyes and museum staff worked together to devise an event that would be stimulating for blind and partially sighted people. The museum also recruited additional staff to join the event as volunteers to provide extra support for participants for roles such as assisting with navigation around the large public building and to help carry items like travel stools.

Further work included making adaptations to resources, including modifying the 3D drawing pens, which carried a low-level risk of injury due to the heated tip, so blind and partially sighted people could use them safely and independently or with minimal assistance.

As part of the session staff successfully used the museum's exhibitions to explore architecture and participants were guided by the artist around the displays, with a large amount of time spent in the *Moholy-Nagy* exhibition due to the better lighting and open spaces. With the visual nature of the exhibits, staff were able to print several 3D architectural models as handling objects to accompany the artists audio descriptions, which proved incredibly popular with participants.

The number of participants was kept intentionally low to allow a high staff to participant ratio. This was to overcome any possible difficulties with navigating around the building and to ensure participants had as much help as they needed for the creative task. During the refreshment break following the tour staff received feedback about how to make the building and activity more accessible for blind and partially sighted visitors.

Following the break, participants were invited to participate in the 3D drawing activity, if they wanted to. All participants were very keen to get involved in the creative activity. Staff and the artist gave clear verbal instructions and demonstrated how to use the 3D drawing pens safely. Staff also provided large print instructions on the tables as well. Participants first drew on paper a design, inspired by the three exhibitions or by the buildings architecture and were then able to create it using the 3D pens.

Throughout the session staff informally and formally consulted with the group as to how to make the sessions and the museum’s public building more accessible going forward. Staff also asked participants, VocalEyes and the artist for detailed feedback to shape and inform the next steps with working with this audience going forward.

The project was shared afterwards via social media on the museum’s [Twitter account](#). This tweet had 1,370 impressions, 98 engagements, 13 likes and 4 retweets. The museum also wrote a detailed story about the project for the [website](#), which was also communicated to the wider public via Twitter to showcase how cultural venues can become more inclusive and diverse.

What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

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| Total of diverse practitioners worked with: | 1 |
| Total number of participants worked with: | 10 |
| Total number of sessions with participants: | 1 |
| Total number general visitors aware of the activities: | 98 |

Outcomes included:

- Participants expressed the desire to return
- From feedback it is clear that all participants felt welcomed, learnt something new and enjoyed themselves
- Although all the participants wanted to come back to the museum, they outlined that accessibility around the building (which dates from 1934) could be improved, which has been useful for staff to use internally to talk to managers about changes that they suggested to improve their experience and accessibility for future activities
- The session and work with the artist and VocalEyes has diversified the museum’s visitor profile and provided evidence that outreach activities to engage specific audiences does work and that there is an appetite for this kind of learning and experience.

What impact did the project have?

On the organisation:

- Gave staff in the Learning Team confidence and evidence to continue to design and advertise public activities to support under-represented groups of visitors, especially to build on this first event with blind and partially sighted audiences
- Staff are now planning ahead to see how working with diverse audiences, specifically blind and partially sighted visitors, can be embedded into the whole Learning programme and using internal budget to achieve this
- The activity also focused the whole organisation’s effort to develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Plan, not just embedding practices covering the public activities, but also providing internal actions across different teams to make the building more accessible
- As a result of the grant application an internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group was formed and met several times to support the practice and final policy and plan for the whole organisation, which has now been approved by RIBA’s Council
- To further support the policy, working groups have been formed this year to look at specific aspects of the policy, the most recent group has been tasked with looking at encouraging LGBTQ+ visitors to engage with the museum and organisation as well as support staff who identify as LGBTQ+

- The project has created a case study for staff to use internally to ensure the building and its activities consider how different people access them and actively reaches out to them to engage them with the collections in meaningful ways.

On the participants:

- For most of the participants, it was their first visit to the museum and by the end they felt more confident that this cultural venue was welcoming and accessible for them
- Many of the participants said they planned to return either by themselves, with friends and families, or as part of a future organised activity.

What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

Key lessons staff learnt included:

- Gaining confidence in working with blind and partially sighted visitors, as well as learning more about the collections and architecture in the process
- Maintaining a good staff to participant ratio was important, especially at the crucial and potentially difficult new activity of drawing using 3D pens
- Participants found the building tactile and were delighted at being able to explore the building as well as the exhibitions, suggesting the building itself could be a suitable object to visit and create a bespoke tour of in the future
- The success of the event was evident to staff and this came down to both good preparations before the session and working with knowledgeable and experienced partners and artists who have a long history of working with the local and national blind and partially sighted community, which staff plan to replicate as it starts working with other groups who are under-represented in the museum's visitor profile.

What tips does the museum have for other museums undertaking a similar project?

1. **Plan ahead:** Do lots of planning so you were prepared and have everything you needed; it's important to know the venue/building well so you know how participants will navigate from space to space
2. **Keep a good record:** Use photographs to record what you do as part of the session, this provides visual evidence of participant's work and can be used when talking about the project with internal and external stakeholders
3. **Talk and ask for feedback:** Talking to your community partners is vital before you start as they can do a lot of the recruiting; and then invite feedback during and after the event from all involved as it is informative and a useful record of the experiences of the participants and how things can be improved next time
4. **Communicate to all staff and internal stakeholders:** Telling other staff, especially those not directly involved, at all stages, is useful to avoid clashes in programming but also to get support and volunteers; afterwards, the success of the project was communicated at meetings and it has improved staff morale
5. **Take advantage of what you have already:** Museums are usually based in great venues, have good exhibitions and have access to a range of equipment (in RIBA's case a 3D printer and 3D drawing pens) which can all be used to fully support the planned event and activities and enable you to successfully engage with new and under-represented audiences.

Other photographs



Photographs of participants interacting and engaging with the museum's exhibitions



Photographs of participants engaging with the 3D drawing activity

 @LondonMusDev



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