

London Museum Development Re-opening Projects 2020–21

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Introduction

At the end of the first lockdown in May 2020 it was clear that for those museums planning to re-open there would be considerable immediate challenges in terms of ensuring that appropriate measures, equipment and training are were in place for a safe re-opening. London Museum Development therefore launched the Re-opening Grants fund in July 2020 to support London museums with costs associated with re-opening. This fund was directly aimed at organisations at particular financial risk due to their reliance on revenue from visitors, trading and commercial activities.

The grants ranged from £500 – £2000 and were offered as part of a rolling programme.

The grants were used to:

- Support activity to assess risks, viability of and readiness for reopening
- Purchase materials and equipment to support restart activities
- Support the health and wellbeing of the paid and volunteer workforce, through to recovery


Successful applicants were asked to confirm that they met the 9 key considerations for museum re-opening as set out in section 1.2 of the NMDC guidance.

Summary of awards


Museum	Grant award
Florence Nightingale Museum	£2000
Society of Antiquaries London	£1438
The Freud Museum	£2000
The Estorick Museum	£1950
Bethlem Museum of the Mind	£1814
Brent Museum	£2000
Dr Johnson's House	£550
Total awarded	

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Summary of Grant projects

Museum	Re-opening grant project	
<p>Florence Nightingale Museum</p>	<p>The project sought to support reopening of the museum on a part-time basis from 1 August 2020, until the end of the year, allowing the trustees and director to assess the impact of the pandemic and associated social distancing measures on visitation and on-site secondary spend.</p> <p>The project allowed the museum to safely open and comply with government mandates and industry guidance, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of themed facemasks for staff and volunteers (which were also available as a fundraiser within the museum shop) • Purchase of two bespoke Perspex screens that allowed the staff to work safely whilst interacting with customers at the admissions/retail desk and when operating our 'up close' object demonstration sessions • Purchase of an ipad that supported new booking procedures, engagement sessions and meetings • Supporting the creation of a short video introduction to the site 	
<p>Society of Antiquaries</p>	<p>Purchase of digital equipment to create good quality digital images of collection for use in an online exhibition. The exhibition will showcase 27 objects from the museum, library, and archive, including an early 16th Century portrait of Henry VIII, an early English bible, an original proclamation for abolishing the power of the Pope, and the beautifully decorated 'Booke of Fees and Offices' of Mary I. The high quality images will be used to create a 3D model, 3x page turning journeys, and 'zoom and</p>	

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<p>Freud Museum</p> <p>Return to top</p>	<p>Purchase of signage and interpretation was part of the larger project of reopening the museum. Together the whole project was designed to make the Museum safe for visitors and staff, and improve the overall experience for visitors.</p> <p>The project involved planning and delivering a range of changes, such as introducing an online booking system, Perspex screens in the shop and at the front desk, providing PPE for staff, increased cleaning regimes, hand sanitiser points, new routes through the house, and a revised, downloadable audioguide.</p> <p>The new interpretation and signage was beautifully designed to appeal to visitors, and to make the safety signage noticeable and easily understood. Quotes from Sigmund Freud were used to add some humour to the safety situation and the new rules.</p> <p>New display signage was written and designed to improve the visitor experience. The new interpretation material included for instance a new timeline, information on each room, and a presentation on Freud's major works.</p>	 <p>The image shows two pieces of museum signage mounted on a light-colored wall. The top sign is orange with white text and a black illustration of a porcupine. The text on the orange sign reads: "Please wait", "Please wait until others have left before entering. Maximum number 2.", and a quote from Schopenhauer: "According to Schopenhauer's famous simile of the freezing porcupines no one can tolerate too intimate an approach to his neighbour". Below the quote, it says "SIGMUND FREUD" and "WAITING IN GROUP PSYCHOLOGY". The bottom sign is white with black text and a black headphone icon. The text on the white sign reads: "3 Study".</p>
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Estorick Collection

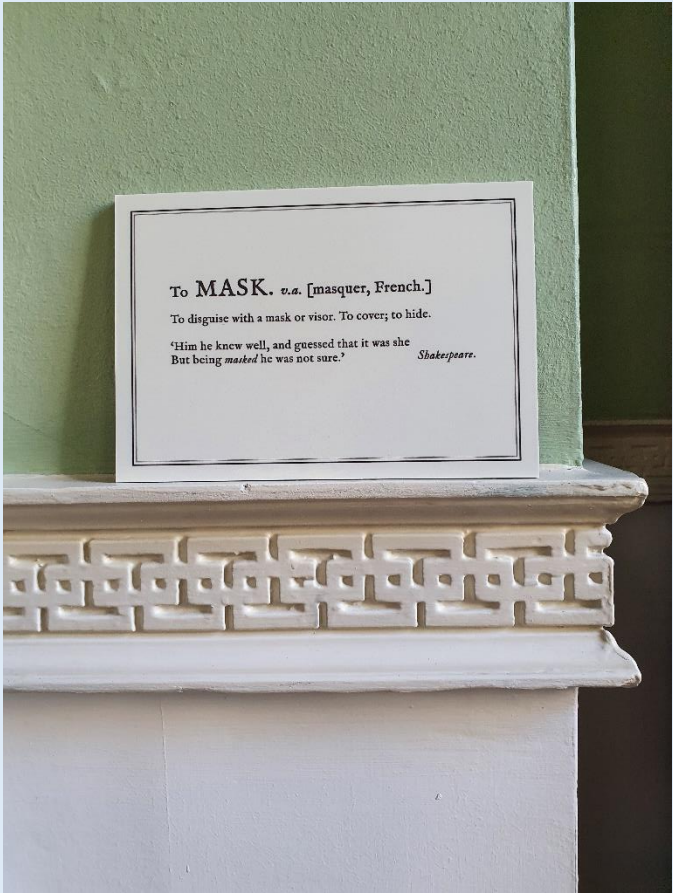
The grant enabled purchase of a laptop to enable the shop manager to manage a new online ticketing system, book tickets for visitors who cannot do so themselves or arrive at the museum without a ticket, and to facilitate remote working from home.

In addition the grant allowed purchase and installation of acoustic fire security door retainers: these allow fire doors to be kept open - thereby avoiding unnecessary touching by visitors and permitting enhanced air flow through the galleries – but in the event of a fire they enable the doors to close automatically so fire regulations are complied with fully.

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<p>Bethlem Museum of the Mind</p>	<p>Bethlem Museum of the Mind closed to public visiting on 18 March 2020, and remained closed for the duration of the first UK lockdown and until 1 August 2020. The Museum reception / shop area, had to be partially barricaded off in order to maintain the social distancing necessary for the Museum to be open, and shop sales that month reduced to one-tenth of what they were in pre-COVID times.</p> <p>The Museum commissioned a bespoke cough2 screen to protect the reception desk at which staff and volunteers sit. The London Museum Development Re-opening Grant, covered 64% of the overall cost.</p> <p>The screen was installed and up and running by 30 September 2020, and an immediate difference to the look and feel of the reception / shop area was noticed; the new screen was recognised straightaway to be both practical and elegant.</p>	
<p>Return to top</p> <p>Brent Museum</p>	<p>Brent Museum purchased equipment create high quality digital engagement through blended learning, which involves pre-recorded films substituting for some of the delivery the Learning Officer would usually undertake and supplementing our stand alone loans boxes.</p> <p>The Museum purchased specialist equipment to film the engagement for the blended learning – Camera, lenses, microphone, tripod and soft box. This equipment allows the Museum to produce clear, easily accessible films which are edited and subtitled to deliver to schools and wider audiences. The schools films created by the Learning Officer are viewable on the</p>	

Return to top	<p>Brent Libraries, Arts and Heritage YouTube Channel. The equipment to will be used to film 360° tours of our upcoming exhibition.</p>	
<p>Dr Johnson's House</p>	<p>On 17 August 2020 staff returned to the museum and were preparing to open two days a week on a pre-booked visit basis with new cleaning, hygiene and social distancing procedures and measures in place for. Reopening, planned for Friday 6 November 2020, was however not possible due to the next London lockdown which came in to force on Thursday 5 November. The House is currently closed and staff are returned to furlough.</p> <p>All the preparation, cleaning, equipment, procedures and training completed/purchased/planned prior to lockdown means that the House is ready to reopen as soon as legally permitted and following further financial review by the Trustees. The London Museum Development grant was a critical enabler of this preparedness in autumn 2020 and everything purchased that will be used upon reopening in 2021.</p>	
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What impact did the project have on museums' ability to re-open?

At the time of advertising the Re-opening Grants in July the first lockdown had already ended on 10 May and it seemed that along with other leisure and recreation venues those museums that chose to would be able to begin to re-open. Few of us foresaw the cycle of lockdown and partial re-opening that unfurled.

Summary of the London lockdowns:

Event	Dates
1 st National Lockdown	26 March – 10 May 2020
2 nd National Lockdown	5 Nov – 2 nd Dec 2020
Tier 4 restrictions introduced in London	21 Dec 2020
3 rd National Lockdown	Began 6 Jan 2021

Of the seven grant recipients the grants directly enabled two museums to briefly re-open, two that had already re-opened were enabled to address issues arising from their re-opening. In the case of Bethlem Museum, which is situated in a working hospital, although the museum is closed the reception desk is still in full use as staff from the hospital are using rooms in the museum building for socially distanced training. The receptionist can safely check delegates in for training. The remaining three projects both invested in equipment to enhance their digital offer to audiences. One of those has already created on-line videos for use by schools and that complement the museum's handling box offer. The other has deferred its main project, to take high quality digital images of the collection until Spring 2021 but has used existing digital images to demonstrate the move to a digital offer, for which it has doubled audiences and massively increased interest in public lectures (up 500%).

"This project was crucial in providing funding to purchase necessary cleaning, equipment and interpretation supplies to enable the House to reopen safely and securely." Emma Shepley, Dr Johnson's House

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“Although we have had to close again, the value of the work done during this project will be equally valuable when the Museum is able to open once more. The new high quality interpretation material that we were able to produce thanks to this grant is an important legacy of the project.” Carol Seigel, The Freud Museum

“The grant has directly impacted on the quality and safety of the visitor experience.” Roberta Cremonici, The Estorick Museum and Gallery.

How did the ability to re-open impact on the museums’ financial position?

Of the museums that were able to re-open three reported that re-opening did enable the museum to generate some income. However it is clear that in each case additional support was needed, e.g. through the Culture Recovery Fund and The Art Fund, or from the parent organisation in order for the museums to stay afloat. The Florence Nightingale museum regarded its re-opening period as a pilot study. This showed that without the foreign tourists that make up 60% of the museum’s visitor profile spend per visitor is significantly lower. This has led to a strategic re-think and the museum will now remain closed throughout 2021, opening only for the occasional open day in order to ensure long term sustainability.

As mentioned above for Bethlem Museum of the Mind the screen was an essential building block permitting the building to be open for essential training and therefore enabling the Museum to generate revenue from room hire. Shop sales also recovered further to reconfiguration of the shop area.

“Even in November and December when the museum was partially closed due to new government restrictions, the Museum was able to generate useful revenue from admissions; a welcome contribution at a very difficult time financially.” Carol Seigel, The Freud Museum

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Two museums did not re-open – one of those, Brent Museum, as a Local Authority Museum is supported by the Council but usually generates most of its income through the paid schools workshop programme. It is therefore really important for the museum to be able to maintain engagement with schools via the virtual offer. Dr Johnson's House was ready to go when the second lockdown happened in November 2020. Unfortunately the House has not been in a position to re-open since that point and the staff are currently on furlough.

What lessons have organisations learned from the project?

Having the ability to re-open enabled organisations to gauge interest and patterns of visitor behaviour. Whilst there is an appetite for visits to museums it would seem, from the experience of the Florence Nightingale Museum, that the volume of visits is linked to Government announcements. The period of re-opening gave organisations an opportunity to consider the strategic options to ensure their longer term financial stability.

Use of systems to pre-book tickets have been successful but do take more staff time.

Museums have demonstrated their ability to re-open safely, with good approaches to hygiene, social distancing and ventilation.

Digital content has been a vital for museums to continue to engage with audiences and to reach new people. Two museums are now building on their re-opening project to develop long-term digital strategies.

Conclusions

These small awards have had a positive impact in enabling 7 of London's smaller museums to address the challenges associated with successful re-opening and operation during the Covid_19 pandemic.

It is clear that the ability to re-open on its own does not provide sufficient revenue to ensure financial viability. Museums are reliant on funding through CRF, the furlough scheme and other sources of emergency funding such as The Art Fund. However,

having the ability to re-open has allowed museums to make an assessment of their current financial position and to plan accordingly.

It has been really useful to note, in the words of once museum manager, 'We learned from the project that it was possible to make speedy and effective changes despite the difficulties of working and planning in lockdown.' These projects have demonstrated the ability of museums to adapt and to make changes to ensure continued engagement, safe re-opening and reassurance for visitors.

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