

Museum Development London Recovery Projects 2021–22



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Introduction

Museum Development London, with continued, generous funding from The Art Fund, delivered a second year of its Recovery grants programme support and grants programme, to support London's Museum services to recover from the impacts of the global pandemic in 2021–22. The deadline for applications was 05 July 2022 and eight applications were received. All eight applications met the criteria set out in the guidance and an award was therefore made to each applicant. The successful museums were:

Museum	Award
Brent Museum	£4000
British Dental Association	£4000
Bromley Historic Collections	£4000
Guildhall Art Gallery	£4000
Hackney Museum	£4000
Massey Shaw Educational Trust	£4000
Museum of Richmond	£4000
The Cinema Museum	£4000
TOTAL	£32,000

Funding	Amount
Art Fund	£12,000
Museum Development	£20,000
Total Allocated	£32,000

Museum Development England Organisational Health Check

Participating museums were asked to use the Museum Development Organisational Health Check in order to review their operations and identify key priorities for an improvement grant of up to £4,000.

The Healthcheck is a self-assessment toolkit that looks at six themes related to a museum's operation:

1. governance and leadership
2. financial planning and resources
3. people development and management
4. working practices
5. audiences
6. collections

The MDO Organisational Health facilitated healthcheck self-assessments for all 8 museums, each with a team that is as representative of the whole workforce as possible. Health Checks were facilitated, via zoom, each session taking approximately ½ day.

The full MDN Healthcheck has been updated for 2022–23 and can be viewed at <https://online1.snapsurveys.com/6qji2o>

Self-assessment findings were entered into the MD snap chat survey and then forwarded to the MDO.

Advisory Reports

Working from the self-assessment findings and drawing on expertise from specialist colleagues an Advisory Report was created for each museum, setting out three main priorities for the museum and providing tailored guidance towards resources, training and contacts that can help the museum to make improvements. The Advisory Reports formed the basis for discussions regarding the funded Recovery Project.

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Project Summaries



A celebration of Brent's Reggae trailblazers and the classic sound system era, two performance-based events were delivered in partnership with the Brent Black Music Co-op (BBMC), entitled **Conversations With Our Legacy** and focussed on community outreach, connecting directly with the target audience in community-led spaces. Diane White, Director, BBMC, curated and produced both events on 12th and 19th February 2022, held at Theorem Music Complex (formerly BBMC). Each featured panel discussions and interviews with musicians, DJs and key figures in Brent's Reggae scene, such as the owners of Hawkeye Records. Panellists shared stories from their personal experiences, exploring the historic exclusion of Reggae and Black British music from the mainstream and the importance of Brent as a world-renowned hub of Reggae. Performances included live music and DJ sets from well-known and respected local musicians such as Vivian Jones and Lassell James. A total of 105 people attended both events.

Project Consultant, Diane Shrouder-Johnson, gathered feedback from attendees on key stories, figures and objects they would like to see in a future museum display. The resulting advisory report will be used to inform future collecting, displays and activities.

The project began with some positioning and visioning work from which the audience work was developed. Over a series of dedicated and remote sessions consultant Jo Graham worked with curator Rachel Bairsto to develop a draft vision, mission, values and outcomes for the museum. The draft vision is now ready for presentation to the trustees and stakeholders for discussion. Once in a workable format the museum can start on the work to understand and engage audiences which will flow from this.

Visitor research had highlighted the importance of an existing interactive showing vintage film. Working with an audio visual developer the museum also set out to improve the platform for visitors to watch comfortably – including a more user friendly portal with a larger screen to improve the viewing experience and improved navigational signposting. Improved seating and better headphones also improved the viewing experience.

Functionality of the portal was also reviewed and the museum now has the ability to change content relatively easily so that it can now develop the breadth of content to appeal to more users.

BHC employed the services of consultants The Earth Museum and The Revels Office to undertake audience development work in order to establish who current users are, public knowledge of the Bromley Historic Collection and what people would like to see happening with their heritage in Bromley. The project also involved benchmarking how other museums within library services count visitor numbers and compile basic audience profiles.

A team of researchers surveyed the public in the Bromley Central Library, The Churchill Theatre and The Glades shopping centre. Researchers also used the opportunity to record demographic data and general comments from the public.

The resulting report has provided recommendations for how to count visitor numbers and capture basic visitor profile information. Based on the survey findings and case studies the report has also given BHC information on activities and branding which will encourage greater footfall and deeper engagement with the museum collection.



Knowing your audiences research

The Guildhall Art Gallery's (GAG) self-assessment health check indicated the need for audience research to inform future plans, understand more about current audiences and inform an audience development plan. GAG commissioned the Audience Agency (TAA) to undertake a review of all audience data already held and also funded a schools engagement report to complement the general audience review.

TAA created a report and delivered a presentation to Gallery staff on 7th Feb 2022 that outlined their analysis of GAG audience data including:

- Geographic distribution
- Audience segments – Audience Spectrum & Mosaic
- Drivetime & distance analysis
- Population analysis
- Schools analysis

The analysis confirmed existing knowledge of audiences and gave insights that will inform the Gallery's work. Comparing GAG audiences with local populations in other boroughs was enlightening, e.g showing that GAG is not reaching a big part of the potential school audience. A TAA workshop for the team explored how the research can be used to inform future work; resulting in lots of ideas about events for Experience Seekers, and long-term relationship building and participatory projects for the Kaleidoscope Creativity segment.

Worksheet 3: SWOT - with a particular focus on digital / web. (NB: strengths and weaknesses are internal factors while opportunities and threats are external)

Strengths

We have a digital presence

Confident enough not to try and be something we are not (not trying to be the MBL). We have a different voice.

Opportunities

Redevelopment: Fundraising to help test or realise key ideas if integrated into the wider vision

New functionality of COL

Weaknesses

Too many platforms to manage on small staff team

Hard to remove platforms when time and effort has been invested in them

Fear of not being noticed if we are not on xx platform

Lack of coherent digital vision and criteria to assess existing or new platform against

Not enough time to experiment, be creative, or produce original content

Size of backlog of missing images and data from COL

Staff skillset

Council bureaucracy. Limitations on website design.

Threats

No funds for web specialist within the team

No funds for additional capacity within the team

Budget cuts reducing capacity even more

A consultant was commissioned to holistically consider Hackney Museum's 'digital estate' and develop a strategy and action plan to help the museum to focus its digital activity. This in turn would help Hackney Museum to develop relevant skills in identified areas and develop procedures for analysing digital engagement and improving on this.

At a full team workshop on 18 Jan 2022 the team considered where they are, digitally and where they would like to be. From this the consultants shaped a digital engagement strategy which will help the team to recover from the pandemic and cyber-attack (Oct 2020) as well as building for future ways of interacting with the organisation digitally. The strategy is a 'live' document so it can be updated as milestones are completed and new ones added.

This project has helped the team to:

- reconsider how the museum can integrate digital as part of its wider work, without creating too much additional work
- to understand and implement the many data collection opportunities available via search engines
- to focus its digital activity to fewer but more quality based platforms

The Massey Shaw's healthcheck highlighted three key priorities for the Trust:

- The need to research the potential offered by the current location with regards to local businesses and forming partnerships and how a proposed move to a Heritage mooring might impact the situation.
- The need to explore new opportunities and potential for sponsorship and other forms of financial support
- A skills audit of existing Board Members to identify gaps in current skills and local research and identify the skills and experience needed to strengthen the Board.

Consultants Laura Crossley and Becky Jefcoate, carried out an in-depth exploration of the Massey Shaw's current situation and potential future through a start up workshop held on 17 Dec, a survey of trustees and extensive desk-top research of the local area, including the proposed new location of West India Quay.

The resulting report has provided the Trust with a summary of next steps and opportunities that can be used and developed over the short and long term. The Massey Shaw looks forward to making improvements to organisational capacity, developing new partnerships, recruiting more and more diverse trustees and volunteers as well as developing the activity and event offer to appeal to a diverse local audience.



To understand audiences' expectations, post Covid, the Museum of Richmond worked with a specialist consultant to run 3 focus groups, focusing on its core audiences of local schools, adults over 45 and families. The Museum has also been collecting quantitative data in the form of an online survey. This will help the museum to develop its next 5 Year plan, which is due in 2023.

In response to lessons learned from the pandemic the museum has invested in equipment to improve its digital offering. The till system has been upgraded with the purchase of on an iPad, allowing staff to more easily take payments and donations by card in an increasingly cashless society, and to keep a better track of shop sales.

A second iPad was also purchased to be used by participants in learning events and activities, particularly Arts Award Summer Schools. Purchase of a DSLR camera is enabling the museum to produce better quality images for use in marketing and the digitisation of collections.

The Cinema Museum



The Cinema Museum: Digital, Website, Green Development

The global pandemic highlighted TCM's vulnerability in terms of its online presence and with the possibility of the museum being homeless in 2023 the need to make improvements to both the strategic thinking and infrastructure for its digital provision was evident.

Further to completion of the MD Healthcheck self-assessment TCM worked with a digital consultant to carry out consultations both internally and with relevant stakeholders to assess TCM's existing offer and determine where it would like its online digital presence and offer to be.

The museum has, as a result, put together an internal project plan based on its findings and recommendations from the Advisory Report, which for example, includes volunteers signing up to a range of research and learning around digital and website development and using the Digital Culture Compass to refine TCM's ambitions into incremental steps. The resulting website development plan for the museum will be of immense value to the museum, particularly at this time as it has recently secured a 4 year lease with landlords and embarks on a major fundraising campaign to secure its future.

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How did the projects relate to the priorities set out in the Advisory Report?

Identified Priority	No of museums addressing this priority through their project
Audiences	7
Financial planning	1

Audiences was the top priority addressed by all but one of the museums in their projects. This was in line with the priorities identified through the healthcheck process in which 6 of the 8 museums had ranked audiences as their top priority, with another placing it 2nd. Museums clearly felt that their experiences of the pandemic meant that they needed a better understanding of their audiences, particularly in a post-lockdown world. There was also a desire to re-build and grow audiences, both in-person and through enhanced use of digital technology.

Just one project focussed on financial planning at a strategic level and this project also involved some research into local communities and potential partners.

Each of these projects did impact on other priorities identified in the Advisory Reports with Governance & Leadership touched on by two projects, Collections by two projects and a further project including an element of practical improvements to enable enhanced functionality of the museum shop.

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How did the projects help museums to prepare for recovery?

The need to improve on an understanding of audiences and to re-build after the pandemic was a key motivation for most of this year's recovery projects. Themes addressed by these projects included:

- a focus on local audiences and local communities
- a need to diversify audiences and to be more inclusive
- a stronger understanding of audiences feeding into forward planning
- a need for more effective engagement with audiences through digital technology

Museums are actively considering how to engage with audiences bearing in mind how audience behaviours have changed e.g. recognising that many people are still somewhat reticent about visiting but that there have been increased numbers of visits from local people.

'This project has identified that there are segments of the population in Greater London, especially very local to us, who are not engaging. While travel is still seen as risky, it is important to focus on our local audiences.'

'Feedback received highlighted the need for us to use our collection, resources and spaces to open up the collections to more people through participatory activities for people of different ages and backgrounds'

One Recovery Project gave the museum a chance to engage directly with local communities within community spaces. *'As we were able to deliver the events directly within the local community, a more diverse audience was attracted than we would have received if we had been restricted to hosting the events within a Council building.'* The museum is hopeful of building on these relationships to increase physical footfall within the museum and to inform future displays, development of collections and ways to meaningfully engage with communities.

Having a better understanding of audiences and clear data to back that up has helped a number of the museums to develop their plans for the future:

'As we have a much stronger understanding of audience expectations, we can use this to directly inform our planning for our next 5 year plan.'

'This project has helped the museum to reassess its position and plan its future whilst the building was closed due to the pandemic.'

'This project has helped us by giving us an evidential basis for decision-making to focus our plans for recovery on developing local audiences.'

Two of the projects focussed on creating a better strategy for their future use of digital technology so that they can effectively manage the balance between online and in-person audiences:

'The focused goals of the strategy will help us maximise the capacity of our small team so we are able to balance the demand of in-person and on-line audiences as move forward.'

'Covid came first – it forced us into creativity and this project has allowed us to begin to develop that creativity into digital distance-delivery models.'

Just one of the projects identified Financial Planning as its main priority, with an eye to identifying opportunities within the locality. Research carried out by consultants *'provided the Trust with a wide range of contacts in the local area who are interested in building a relationship with the organisation'* The museum has been able to raise its profile locally and is in a good position from which to engage with a range of new partners, make contacts with local Trusts and Foundations and to create new opportunities for local people.

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What has the impact of the project been on organisations and how will they build on its success?

Four of the projects involved audience research that has been useful to inform vision and strategy, provide evidence to support internal advocacy and planning and external grant applications.

‘the feedback from the survey has provided information for potential grant applications in support of a project that can engage audiences in the museum collections and supports the additional gathering of further audience data’

Having the audience development targets articulated in a coherent document enabled one curator to speak with confidence about plans for development and this has contributed to the parent organisation’s work to improve inclusion and diversity and is reflected in the draft organisational values. One museum noted that audience development is now ‘organisation wide’ rather than just confined to the learning team. A commitment to continued data and evidence gathering is indicated in reports and it’s clear that these projects will be used to inform both policies and plans.

A pilot project to connect directly with audiences in community spaces had really positive impacts for the museum:

‘A greater number and more diverse range of people in the local area have gained a better understanding of our Museum and Archives, our service and purpose’

The project has resulted in new relationships and greater trust. The museum has identified key stories and content for future displays that will be developed with direct input from local communities.

Two projects used their Recovery grant to carry out an overview of existing digital capacity and provision, bearing in mind that an effective digital strategy is likely to be a key factor to their future success in an increasingly ‘hybrid’ world. Equipped with a better understanding of the current position and future potential these organisations are now better placed to plan a manageable approach to their digital development including for example *‘a requirement to re-imagine how we think about collections and exhibitions online’* and providing a route-map for progress:

'we could not see how we could go from tadpole into frog in one jump. But the 'assessing your museum's digital capacity' (particularly work done on the digital culture compass) showed us there were incremental steps and we didn't have to do everything, in detail, at scale, all at once.'

Just one project focussed on identifying new partners and stakeholders for the museum, rather than more general audience research. This project, in common with the other Recovery projects led to positive change for the museum, allowing the team to re-focus and energise the governing Trust for future success.